Fulcrum

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age and the authenticity of cool.

s.szwarcbord

To be cool is to be perceived in a certain way. But this is not enough, you also have to be authentically, nonchalantly cool. It must be integral, you must distance yourself from effort, commitment and emotional attachment.

But, how does one reconcile the apparent paradox between the need to appear as if you don't care while actually caring?

We go to great lengths to buy second-hand clothes, treat other people's cast-off or vintage furniture as more precious than store-bought, and are dedicated to obscure and old vinyl. This seems to indicate we believe an item made in the past is somehow intrinsically valuable.

Ironically, procurement of these items is often more difficult and frequently more expensive than buying the equivalent new.

The conceit goes even further, it replicates old technology: at a gig I attended recently there were only demo-cassettes for sale; many smart-phone applications replicate various antiquated cameras; and chain stores are selling imitation 1950s turntables. None of these necessarily produce a better result, sound clearer or are even a more convenient or accessible format.

To buy new items would demonstrate caring, making a considered choice. Perhaps, through the selection of objects that people coveted in the past but which retain little value today we solve the paradox. A denial of quality and a distancing from contemporary discourse might prove hip-ness through expressing a lack of one's own investment in differentiating the good from the average.

We have been raised in a post-modern world, brought up to believe there is no essential truth, no perfect answer. With all things being equal, we aspire to a past when society was idealistic about its output, when people were optimistic about the future. We now seem to believe that seeking the optimum solution is no longer a consideration. To this end, 'vintage' has stopped being about collecting only what is best from a bygone era. To maintain the appearance of cool the aged object in question does not, or perhaps cannot, be of higher quality, perform better or be of a superior construction – but rather, must validate its owner as cool through its age alone. We reminisce about optimism, because we are too cynical to be optimistic for ourselves.

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pygmy hominids & the printed word.

j.self

In October 2004 I picked up the New York Times to read about the recent Indonesian discovery of a species of pygmy hominid. These 'hobbit men', who only became extinct 12,000 years ago, shared their small island with rats the size of bull terriers, lizards that weighed two tons, and a population of tiny, tiny elephants.

I could hardly have known, as I whistled into my mug 'tiny elephants indeed', that this would be the last time I would ever read breaking news in a paper publication. Since that fateful day not even wholly unforeseeable natural disasters like the Boxing Day Tsunami could beat the speed of the Internet.

In fact, by the time of the Sub-Prime Lending Crisis and Iranian protests I was regularly being informed about world events through Facebook and Twitter several hours before they cropped up on the BBC.

Clearly, the last decade has seen the use-value of the printed word change dramatically; paper can no longer hope to approach real-time. Accordingly, its role has become that of the chronicle. Rather than providing information, paper publications have shifted to providing critique and comment. They contextualise and synthesise, generating their own micro-histories as they go. In a sense, that is the aim of this weekly publication.

Similarly, the anachronistic styling of technology that Szwarcbord mentions is, I believe, largely an inherited nostalgia: yes I have the iphone app that simulates a handheld movie camera – but I don't actually own an 8mm. Why? Because I don't want the technology, I want its sign. Why? Because the cultural inertia of the baby-boomers is still so immensely strong –they still make up such a vast part of our society– it is inevitable I feel that a generation who saw men on the moon and women on the pill must be miles cooler than my own. The reason there aren't apps to simulate lo-res YouTube videos is because, as a generation, the New Millennials are not yet the dominant social demographic. That will no doubt change in the future.

Publications that indulge in anachronistic ornament render themselves ultimately irrelevant, because they relegate their position to the reactionary (by operating within this sphere of inherited nostalgia). As a result, Fulcrum aims to be wholly of its time, embracing the possibilities, & understanding the capabilities, of print media in the 21st century.

Fulcrum takes as its subject the changing nature of our times – specifically our profession (architecture) & our education (the AA).

Jack Self is part of Fulcrum's editorial team, along with Aram Mooradian & Graham Stephen Ives Baldwin. He is also founder of the website millenniumpeople.co.uk.

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