

CHAPTER 1

The Jeaning of America

Of 125 students of mine, 118 were, on the day that I asked, wearing jeans. The deviant 7, also possessed jeans, but did not happen to be wearing them. I wonder if any other cultural product—movie, TV program, record, lipstick—would be so *popular*? (T-shirts were as widely owned, but much less regularly worn.) Students may not be typical of the population as a whole, though jeans *are* widely popular among non-students in the same age group, and only slightly less widespread among older age groups. So thinking about jeans is as good a way as any to begin a book on popular culture.

Let's dismiss their functionality first, for this has little to do with culture, which is concerned with meanings, pleasures, and identities rather than efficiency. Of course jeans are a supremely functional garment, comfortable, tough, sometimes cheap, and requiring "low maintenance"—but so, too, are army fatigues. The functionality of jeans is the precondition of their popularity, but does not explain it. In particular, it does not explain the unique ability of jeans to transect almost every social category we can think of: we cannot define a jeans wearer by any of the major social category systems—gender, class, race, age, nation, religion, education. We might argue that jeans have two main social foci, those of youth and the blue-collar or working class, but these foci should be seen as semiotic rather than sociological, that is, as centers of meaning rather than as social categories. So a middle-aged executive wearing jeans as he mows his lawn on a suburban Sunday is, among other things, aligning himself with youthful vigor and activity (in opposition to the distinctly middle-aged office desk) and with the mythic dignity of labor—the belief that physical labor

is in some way more honest than wheeling and dealing is deeply imbued in a nation whose pioneers are only a few generations in the past, and is, significantly, particularly widespread among the wheelers and dealers themselves.

My students, largely white, middle-class, young, and well educated, are not a representative sample of the whole population, and so the meanings they made of their jeans cannot be extended to other groups, but the process of making and communicating meanings is representative even though the meanings made by it are not.

I asked my class to write briefly what jeans meant to each of them: these notes were then discussed generally. The discussions produced, unsurprisingly from such a homogeneous group, a fairly coherent network of meanings that grouped themselves around a few foci. These meaning clusters related to each other sometimes coherently, sometimes contradictorily, and they allowed different students to inflect the semiotic network differently, to make their own meanings within the shared grid.

There was one cluster of meanings that were essentially community integrative, that denied social differences. Jeans were seen as informal, classless, unisex, and appropriate to city or country; wearing them was a sign of freedom from the constraints on behavior and identity that social categories impose. *Free* was the single most common adjective used, frequently with the meaning of "free to be myself."

An article in the *New York Times* (20 March 1988) quotes a psychologist who suggests that jeans' lack of differentiation results not in a freedom to be oneself, but the freedom to hide oneself. Jeans provide a facade of ordinariness that enables the wearer to avoid any expression of mood or personal emotion—they are, psychologically at least, repressive. This flip-side of "freedom" was not evident among my students, and it appears to be a typical psychoanalyst's explanation in that it emphasizes the individual over the social and the pathological over the normal. Clothes are more normally used to convey social meanings than to express personal emotion or mood.

The lack of social differentiation in jeans gives one the freedom to "be oneself" (and, I suppose, in abnormal cases, to hide oneself), which, of course, points to a telling paradox that

the desire to be oneself leads one to wear the same garment as everyone else, which is only a concrete instance of the paradox deeply structured into American (and Western) ideology that the most widely held communal value is that of individualism. The desire to be oneself does not mean the desire to be fundamentally different from everyone else, but rather to situate individual differences within communal allegiance. There were, as we shall see below, signs of social differences between jeans wearers, but while these may contradict, they do not invalidate the set of communally integrative meanings of jeans.

Another cluster of meanings centered on physical labor, ruggedness, activity, physicality. These meanings, again, were attempts to deny class differences: the physical toughness connoted by jeans allowed these middle-class students to align themselves with a highly selective set of meanings of physical labor (its dignity and its productivity, but certainly not its subordination and exploitedness). Jeans were able to bear class-specific meanings of the American work ethic.

Their physicality and ruggedness were not just inflected toward work, they also bore meanings of naturalness and sexuality. *Natural* was an adjective used almost as frequently as *free*. The informality of jeans in contrast with the formality of other clothes was a concrete instance, or transformation, of the deeply structured opposition between nature and culture, the natural and the artificial, the country and the city. The body is where we are most natural, so there was an easy cluster of meanings around the physicality of jeans, the vigor of the adolescent body, and "naturalness." This meaning cluster could be inflected toward strength, physical labor, and sports performance (for, as argued in Chapter 4, sport allows the middle-class body the recognition of physical prowess that labor allows the working class) for the men, and toward sexuality for the women. Of course, such gender differences are not essential, but they are sites of struggle for control over the meanings of masculinity and femininity. Many women participated in the more "masculine" meanings of jeans' physicality, as did many men in their more "feminine" ones, of sexual display.

These natural/artificial and physical/nonphysical meanings joined with others in a set clustered around the American West.

The association of jeans with the cowboy and the mythology of the Western is still strong. The meanings that helped to make the West significant for these 1980s students were not only the familiar ones of freedom, naturalness, toughness, and hard work (and hard leisure), but also progress and development and, above all, Americanness. As the opening of the western frontier was a unique and definitive moment in American history, so jeans were seen as a unique and definitive American garment, possibly America's only contribution to the international fashion industry. Despite the easy exportability of the Western myth and its ready incorporability into the popular culture of other nations, it always retains its Americanness: it thus admits the forging of links between American values and the popular consciousness of other nationalities. Similarly, jeans have been taken into the popular culture of practically every country in the world, and, whatever their local meanings, they always bear traces of their Americanness. So in Moscow, for example, they can be made sense of by the authorities as bearers of Western decadence, and they can be worn by the young as an act of defiance, as a sign of their opposition to social conformity—a set of meanings quite different from those of contemporary American youth, though more consonant with those of the 1960s, when jeans could carry much more oppositional meanings than they do today.

If today's jeans are to express oppositional meanings, or even to gesture toward such social resistance, they need to be disfigured in some way—tie-dyed, irregularly bleached, or, particularly, torn. If "whole" jeans connote shared meanings of contemporary America, then disfiguring them becomes a way of distancing oneself from those values. But such a distancing is not a complete rejection. The wearer of torn jeans is, after all, wearing jeans and not, for instance, the Buddhist-derived robes of the "orange people": wearing torn jeans is an example of the contradictions that are so typical of popular culture, where what is to be resisted is necessarily present in the resistance to it. Popular culture is deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, race, and the other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences. Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears

within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience. Equally, it shows signs of resisting or evading these forces: popular culture contradicts itself.

The importance of contradiction within popular culture is discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5 and elaborated throughout this book, but for the moment we can turn to a discussion of two of its characteristics: the first I have noted, that contradiction can entail the expression of both domination and subordination, of both power and resistance. So torn jeans signify both a set of dominant American values and a degree of resistance to them. The second is that contradiction entails semiotic richness and polysemy. It enables the readers of a text, or the wearers of jeans, to partake of both of its forces simultaneously and devolves to them the power to situate themselves within this play of forces at a point that meets their particular cultural interests. So jeans can bear meanings of both community and individualism, of unisexuality and masculinity or femininity. This semiotic richness of jeans means that they cannot have a single defined meaning, but they are a resource bank of potential meanings.

Of course, the manufacturers of jeans are aware of all this and attempt to exploit it for their commercial interests. In their marketing and advertising strategies they attempt to target specific social groups and thus to give their product subculturally specific inflections of the more communal meanings. Thus a TV commercial for Levi's 501s shows three youths, obviously poor and of subordinate class and/or race, in a run-down city street. The impression given is one of the sharing of hard living and toughness: the picture is tinted blue-gray to connote the blueness of jeans, of blue-collar life, and of "the blues" as a cultural form that expresses the hardships of the socially deprived. The sound track plays a blues-influenced jingle. Yet, contradicting these pessimistic meanings are traces of cowboyism, of living rough but succeeding, of making a little personal freedom or space within a constrained environment, and of finding a masculine identity and community within the hard living. The ad bears distinct traces of the ideology of meritocratic capitalism that one can, should, make

one's success and identity out of hard conditions; one should not be born to them.

This image of jeans may seem very different from that promoted by an ad for Levi's 505s (Figure 1) that shows a girl wearing them looking up at the sky, where a skein of wild geese is flying in a formation that spells out "Levi's." This foregrounds meanings of freedom and naturalness, and then links feminine sexuality to them. In the two ads freedom, nature, and femininity are directly opposed to deprivation, the city, and masculinity, and Levi's jeans cross the opposition and bring to each side of it meanings of the other. So the inner-city youths can participate in the meanings of nature and freedom in their jeans, as the young woman can take these meanings with her into an urban environment, confident that they will fit easily. All meanings are ultimately intertextual—no one text, no one advertisement can ever bear the full meanings of jeans, for this can exist only in that ill-defined cultural space between texts that precedes the texts that both draw upon it and contribute to it, which exists only in its constant circulation among texts and society. The 501 and 505 ads specify quite different inflections of this intertextuality of jeans, but they necessarily draw upon it. For all their surface difference, their deep semiotic structure is shared, and thus the wearer of one bears, to a greater or lesser degree, the meanings of the other.

Jeans are no longer, if they ever were, a generic denim garment. Like all commodities, they are given brand names that compete among each other for specific segments of the market. Manufacturers try to identify social differences and then to construct equivalent differences in the product so that social differentiation and product differentiation become mapped onto each other. Advertising is used in an attempt to give meanings to these product differences that will enable people in the targeted social formation to recognize that they are being spoken to, or even to recognize their own social identity and values in the product. The different meanings (and therefore market segments) of 501s and 505s are created at least as much by the advertising as by any differences in the jeans themselves.

Designer jeans, then, speak to market segmentation and social differences: they move away from the shared values, away from nature, toward culture and its complexities. Wear-

ing designer jeans is an act of distinction, of using a socially locatable accent to speak a common language. It is a move upscale socially, to the city and its sophistication, to the trendy and the socially distinctive. The oppositions between generic jeans and designer jeans can be summarized like this:

<i>generic jeans</i>	<i>designer jeans</i>
classless	upscale
country	city
communal	socially distinctive
unisex	feminine (or more rarely, masculine)
work	leisure
traditional	contemporary
unchanging	transient
THE WEST	THE EAST
NATURE	CULTURE

Jeans' semiotic shift from the left to the right is partly a way in which grass-roots myths of America can be incorporated into a contemporary, urbanized, commodified society, one where the pressures of mass living and the homogenizing forces that attempt to massify us have produced a deep need for a sense of individuality and social difference. So the ads for designer jeans consistently stress how they will fit YOU; the physicality of the body is more than a sign of nature, vigor, and sexuality, it becomes a sign of individuality. Our bodies are, after all, where we are most ourselves and where our individual differences are most apparent: "Get into great shape, . . . your shape. With Wrangler. The jeans that give you the shape you want in the size you want . . . *A Fit for Every-Body*" (Figure 4) or "Your exact waist size, you've got it. Exact length? It's yours" (Chic jeans). The increasing individualism, of course, goes with a rise up the social ladder. So Zena jeans (Figure 6) are instrumental in enabling their owner (who, in the ad, has just stepped out of them for purposes left to our imaginations) to meet a hunk with a law degree from Yale who's into downhill skiing but hates French films. Jeans have moved into a world where class difference and fine social distinctions within class are all-important.

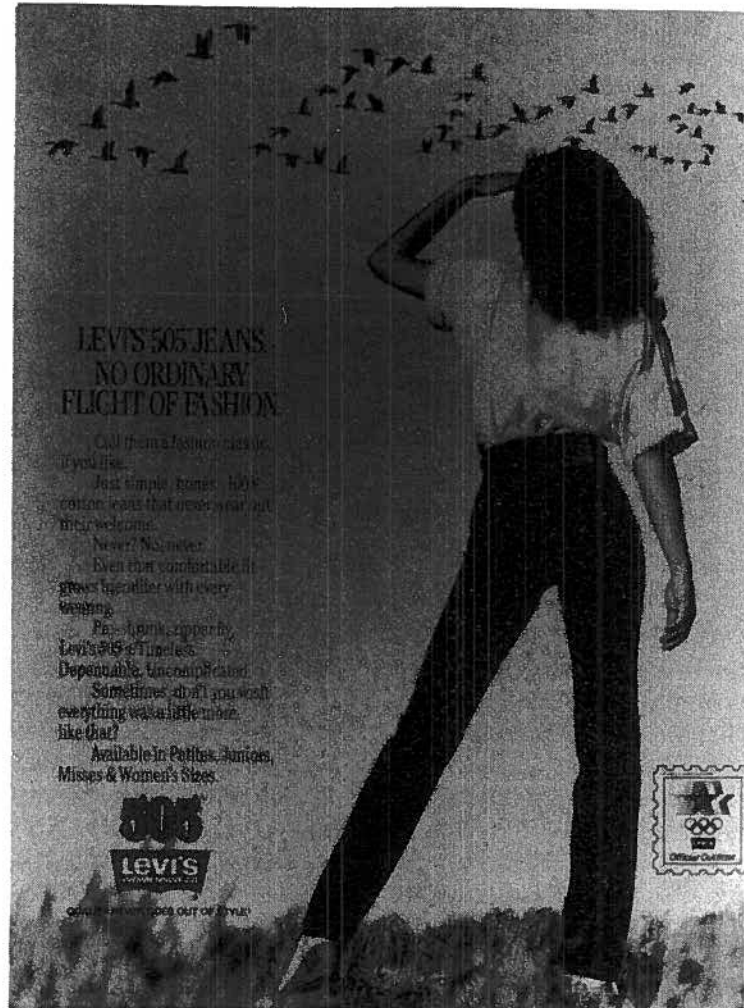


Figure 1. No mere "flight" of fashion, Levi's 505s stress the natural, eternal flight of the geese over the fanciful flights of fashion. Their durability is the material (literally) equivalent of the "timeless, dependable, uncomplicated" values of the heartland, whose welcome, like the jeans, is never outworn, but grows "friendlier with every wearing." These values are rooted in the past, physically and historically behind the wearer, yet she will carry them with her into the future, which she watches the geese flying into. The West is the past and the future, freedom, nature, tradition.

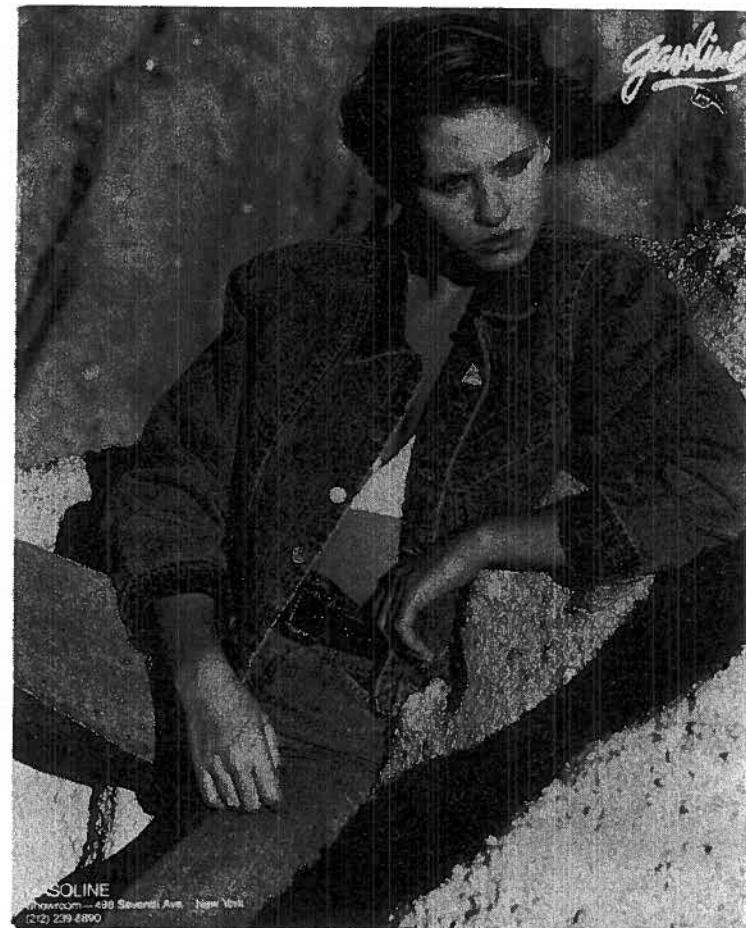


Figure 2. For Gasoline, however, the naturalness of the West is a source of power, its ruggedness is transformed simultaneously and paradoxically into the femininity of the model and the sophistication of the Seventh Avenue showroom. The exclusivity of the showroom, contrasted with Levi's ubiquity, is repeated in the individualistic style of photography contra Levi's comfortable, generic anonymity. The hard rock and the hardwearing denim naturalize the tension of New York life and the toughness of those who live it. Today's sophisticate needs all the toughness of the pioneers: only the frontier has changed. The toughness of the absent masculine body is implied in the sexuality of the feminine—the physicality of denim, of rock, of bodies.

Along with class difference goes gender difference. It is significant how many of the ads for designer jeans are aimed at women, for, in our patriarchal society, women have been trained more than men to invest their social identity, self-esteem, and sexuality in the appearance of their bodies.

Underlying these manifest differences are the more fundamental ones of the differences between East and West, and between culture and nature. The East was where the continent was first civilized (which means colonized by whites), and from this base of culture, nature was gradually pushed back westward until the pioneers reached the West Coast. Still, today, it is common to think of the East as sophisticated (i.e., belonging to culture), whereas the West is relaxed or cool (i.e., closer to nature). The development of "Silicon Valley" introduces a note of contradiction, but does not yet, I think, invalidate the cultural meaning of the difference between the two sides of the continent.

Robert McKinley (1982), in an essay called "Culture Meets Nature on the Six O'Clock News," suggests that the East will always stand for culture for geographical reasons. The time zones mean that news (accounts of the activities of culture) occurs first in the East, which helps to establish the East as the center of culture. The rotation of the earth, which gives the East its temporal advantage, also has another effect: it makes most of our weather come from the West, so the news (culture) moves East to West, and weather (nature) moves from West to East.

The Commercial and the Popular

The relationship between popular culture and the forces of commerce and profit is highly problematic, and it is one of the themes that runs throughout this book. We can begin to examine some of the issues by looking in more detail at the example of torn jeans.

At the simplest level, this is an example of a user not simply consuming a commodity but reworking it, treating it not as a completed object to be accepted passively, but as a cultural

resource to be used. A number of important theoretical issues underlie the differences between a user of a cultural resource and a consumer of a commodity (which are not different activities, but different ways of theorizing, and therefore of understanding, the same activity).

Late capitalism, with its market economy, is characterized by commodities—it is awash with them, it would be impossible to escape them, even if one wanted to. There are a number of ways of understanding commodities and their role in our society: in the economic sphere they ensure the generation and circulation of wealth, and they can vary from the basic necessities of life to inessential luxuries, and, by extension, can include non-material objects such as television programs, a woman's appearance, or a star's name. They also serve two types of function, the material and the cultural. The material function of jeans is to meet the needs of warmth, decency, comfort, and so on. The cultural function is concerned with meanings and values: All commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations. Describing a pair of jeans, or a TV program, as a commodity emphasizes its role in the circulation of wealth and tends to play down its separate, but related, role in the circulation of meaning—a point that will be developed more fully in Chapter 2.

This difference of emphasis (on money or meanings) carries with it a corresponding difference in conceptualizing the balance of power within the exchange. The commodity-consumer approach puts the power with the producers of the commodity. It is they who make a profit out of its manufacture and sale, and the consumer who is exploited insofar as the price he or she pays is inflated beyond the material cost to include as much profit as the producer is able to make. This exploitation, in the case of jeans, often takes on a second dimension, in that the consumer may well be a member of the industrial proletariat whose labor is exploited to contribute to the same profit (the principle remains even if the commodity produced by the worker is not the actual jeans bought in his or her role as consumer).

When this approach tackles the question of meaning, it does so through a theory of ideology that again situates power with

Make your move in P.S. Gitano Power Stretch™ Jeans!

Stretch, dance, sit, stand—now there are jeans as flexible as you are! Only P.S. Gitano gives you the special comfort of Power Stretch™, a unique permanent press memory yarn. And only P.S. Gitano gives you the perfect fit of a truly proportionately sized rise. So, whether you're short, regular or long waisted, P.S. Gitano Power Stretch™ jeans will fit you perfectly—any way you make your move.

And P.S. Gitano Power Stretch™ jeans won't stretch your budget. They're regularly priced at \$99.99 at all Lerner's stores! So, slip into perfect fit with P.S. Gitano Power Stretch™ jeans. It's the fit that feels as good as it looks!

P.S. GITANO
PROPORTIONATELY SIZED FIT

LERNER

Figure 3. The power for P. S. Gitano moves the masculine ruggedness of the West into the feminine fitness center of the city: in the metaphoric shift the power is transformed, not lost. The jeans are the body—power stretching, perfect in fit and feel, the moves you make are yours, you are your moves, you are your jeans.

Wrangler BRAND
We sure fit your style.

Get into great shape with Wrangler. The jeans that give you the shape you want in the size you want. Select from Junior, Misses Regular and Misses Full for a great fit that's all yours.

A Fit for Every Body.

Fig. 4. Wrangler jeans do more than become your body—they give you the body you want, they give you the shape you want in the size you want. Your “great shape” merges physical strength into sexual attractiveness, and allows you access to masculine activity without losing the femininity that men desire. Your “great shape” is sexual for them and powerful for you; have it both ways and smile winsomely as you leave your man (and dog) sprawling in your wake—you know he’ll catch you in the end.

the owners of the means of production. Here, the theory would explain that jeans are so deeply imbued with the ideology of white capitalism that no one wearing them can avoid participating in it and therefore extending it. By wearing jeans we adopt the position of subjects within that ideology, become complicit with it, and therefore give it material expression; we "live" capitalism through its commodities, and, by living it, we validate and invigorate it.

The producers and distributors of jeans do not *intend* to promote capitalist ideology with their product: they are not deliberate propagandists. Rather, the economic system, which determines mass production and mass consumption, reproduces itself ideologically in its commodities. Every commodity reproduces the ideology of the system that produced it: a commodity is ideology made material. This ideology works to produce in the subordinate a false consciousness of their position in society, false for two reasons: first because it blinds them to the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and proletariat (they may well be aware of the difference, but will understand this difference as contributing to a final social consensus, a liberal pluralism in which social differences are seen finally as harmonious, not as conflictual), and second because it blinds them to their common interests with their fellow workers—it prevents the development of a sense of class solidarity or class consciousness. Ideology works in the sphere of culture as economics does in its own sphere, to naturalize the capitalist system so that it appears to be the only one possible.

So how much of a resistance to this is wearing torn jeans? In the economic sphere there is a trace of resistance in that for jeans to become naturally ragged they need to be worn long past the time when they would normally be considered worn out and thus need replacing with another pair. Reducing one's purchase of commodities can be a tiny gesture against a high-consumption society, but its more important work is performed in the cultural sphere rather than the economic. One possible set of meanings here is of a display of poverty—which is a contradictory sign, for those who are poor do not make poverty into a fashion statement. Such a signified rejection of affluence does not necessarily forge a cultural allegiance with the economically poor, for this "poverty" is a matter of choice,

although it may, in some cases, signify a sympathy toward the situation of the poor. Its main power is in the negative, a resuscitation of jeans' ability in the 1960s to act as a marker of alternative, and at times oppositional, social values. But more significant than any other possible meaning of ragged jeans is the fact that the raggedness is the production and choice of the user, it is an excorporation of the commodity into a subordinate subculture and a transfer of at least some of the power inherent in the commodification process. It is a refusal of commodification and an assertion of one's right to make one's own culture out of the resources provided by the commodity system.

Such "tearing" or disfigurement of a commodity in order to assert one's right and ability to remake it into one's own culture need not be literal. The gay community made a heroine out of Judy Garland by "tearing" or disfiguring her image of the all-American, all-gingham girl-next-door, and reworked her as a sign of the masquerade necessary to fit this image, a masquerade equivalent to that which, in the days before sexual liberation, permeated the whole of the social experience of gays (see Dyer 1986).

Excorporation is the process by which the subordinate make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system, and this is central to popular culture, for in an industrial society the only resources from which the subordinate can make their own subcultures are those provided by the system that subordinates them. There is no "authentic" folk culture to provide an alternative, and so popular culture is necessarily the art of making do with what is available. This means that the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them. The latter are far more creative and varied than the former.

The vitality of the subordinated groups that, in various shifting social allegiances, constitute the people is to be found in the ways of using, not in what is used. This results in the producers having to resort to the processes of incorporation or containment. Manufacturers quickly exploited the popularity of ragged (or old and faded) jeans by producing factory-made tears, or by "washing" or fading jeans in the factory before sale. This process of adopting the signs of resistance incorporates



Figures 5 and 6. The movement through this ad sequence from West to East, from the country to the city, from masculine to feminine, from generic to designer, is also a move toward the individual. In these ads the individual has disappeared, leaving an absence to be filled by the unique individuality of (each) consumer. Sergio Valente's jeans "for the way you live and love" belong to the ghostlike figure who has just stepped out of them, leaving them miraculously empty but standing as though still on a body, inviting the body of the reader to make sense of the nonsense by filling the gap. The (odd) plaid connotes tradition and the past, contradicted but not erased by the trendy stripes and cut of the jeans. The freedom is found, in these citified jeans, by stepping out of them (contra Levi's 505s), and by discarding their accessories—



the hobbling high heels, the chain and bangle-manacle, the chain belt: bondage worn like a badge and discarded at will. Consumers are their commodities, yet, paradoxically, are themselves only when they discard them. The absent owner of Zena's jeans invites the consumer to fill her place (in the tub, in bed, in love). Her commodities (jeans, Shetland sweater, ski boots, old, classic radiator) are the feminine equivalents of *his* achievements and discrimination. They are metaphors for the prize they enable her to win, magically, end as well as means, product as well as process.

them into the dominant system and thus attempts to rob them of any oppositional meanings.

This approach claims that incorporation robs subordinate groups of any oppositional language they may produce: it deprives them of the means to speak their opposition and thus, ultimately, of their opposition itself. It can also be understood as a form of containment—a permitted and controlled gesture of dissent that acts as a safety valve and thus strengthens the dominant social order by demonstrating its ability to cope with dissenters or protesters by allowing them enough freedom to keep them relatively content, but not enough to threaten the stability of the system against which they are protesting.

So Macy's advertises "Expressions—Faded attraction . . . the worn out jean from Calvin Klein Sport." "Worn out in all the right places," the copy continues, "brand new jeans slip on with the look and feel of old favorites. And when Calvin's cool white crew neck is added (a soon-to-be new favorite) you're set for a totally relaxed mood." Any possible oppositional meanings are incorporated and tamed into the unthreatening "old favorites." The producers exert their control over the signs of wear by ensuring that they occur only in the "right places," and then use this incorporated and thus defused language of opposition to sell more commodities (the white crew neck) to the people they have stolen it from. In such ways, the theory of incorporation tells us, signs of opposition are turned to the advantage of that which they oppose and fashionably worn-torn garments become another range of commodities: the raggedness of worn-out jeans, far from opposing consumerism, is turned into a way of extending and enhancing it.

Such explanations of popular culture tell us only part of the story; they concentrate almost exclusively on the power of dominant groups to maintain the system that advantages them and thus they assume, rather than question, the success of the strategy. They fail to recognize the social differentiation that still exists between the wearers of "really" old, torn jeans and Macy's customers, and thus overlook any resistances to incorporation that ensure that its victories are never more than partial. Consequently, they paradoxically align themselves with the forces of domination, for, by ignoring the complexity and creativity by which the subordinate cope with

the commodity system and its ideology in their everyday lives, the dominant underestimate and thus devalue the conflict and struggle entailed in constructing popular culture within a capitalist society.

De Certeau (1984; see Chapter 2) uses a military metaphor to explain this struggle; he talks about the strategy of the powerful, deploying their huge, well-organized forces, which are met by the fleeting tactics of the weak. These tactics involve spotting the weak points in the forces of the powerful and raiding them as guerrilla fighters constantly harry and attack an invading army. Guerrilla tactics are the art of the weak: they never challenge the powerful in open warfare, for that would be to invite defeat, but maintain their own opposition within and against the social order dominated by the powerful. Eco (1986), too, speaks of "semiotic guerrilla warfare" as being the key to understanding popular culture and its ability to resist the dominant ideology. This, in its turn, I would argue, helps to maintain the sense of social differences and the conflict of interest within those differences that is essential if the heterogeneity of our society is to be productive and not static, progressive and not reactionary.

Change can come only from below: the interests of those with power are best served by maintaining the status quo. The motor for social change can come only from a sense of social difference that is based on a conflict of interest, not a liberal pluralism in which differences are finally subordinated to a consensus whose function is to maintain those differences essentially as they are.

Popular culture always is part of power relations; it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it, between military strategy and guerrilla tactics. Evaluating the balance of power within this struggle is never easy: Who can say, at any one point, who is "winning" a guerrilla war? The essence of guerrilla warfare, as of popular culture, lies in not being defeatable. Despite nearly two centuries of capitalism, subordinated subcultures exist and intransigently refuse finally to be incorporated—people in these subcultures keep devising new ways of tearing their jeans. Despite many more centuries of patriarchy, women

have produced and maintained a feminist movement, and individual women, in their everyday lives, constantly make guerrilla raids upon patriarchy, win small, fleeting victories, keep the enemy constantly on the alert, and gain, and sometimes hold, pieces of territory (however small) for themselves. And gradually, reluctantly, patriarchy has to change in response. Structural changes at the level of the system itself, in whatever domain—that of law, of politics, of industry, of the family—occur only after the system has been eroded and weakened by the tactics of everyday life.

Until recently, the study of popular culture has taken two main directions. The less productive has been that which has celebrated popular culture without situating it in a model of power. It has been a consensual model, which viewed popular culture as a form of the ritual management of social differences out of which it produced a final harmony. It is a democratic version of elite humanism, which merely resituates the cultural life of a nation in the popular rather than the highbrow.

The other direction has been to situate popular culture firmly within a model of power, but to emphasize so strongly the forces of domination as to make it appear impossible for a genuine popular culture to exist at all. What replaced it was a mass culture imposed upon a powerless and passive people by a culture industry whose interests were in direct opposition to theirs. A mass culture produces a quiescent, passive mass of people, an agglomeration of atomized individuals separated from their position in the social structure, detached from and unaware of their class consciousness, of their various social and cultural allegiances, and thus totally disempowered and helpless.

Recently, however, a third direction has begun to emerge, one to which I hope this book will contribute. It, too, sees popular culture as a site of struggle, but, while accepting the power of the forces of dominance, it focuses rather upon the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded or are resisted. Instead of tracing exclusively the processes of incorporation, it investigates rather that popular vitality and creativity that makes incorporation such a constant necessity. Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to

understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make that ideology work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values. This approach sees popular culture as potentially, and often actually, progressive (though not radical), and it is essentially optimistic, for it finds in the vigor and vitality of the people evidence both of the possibility of social change and of the motivation to drive it.