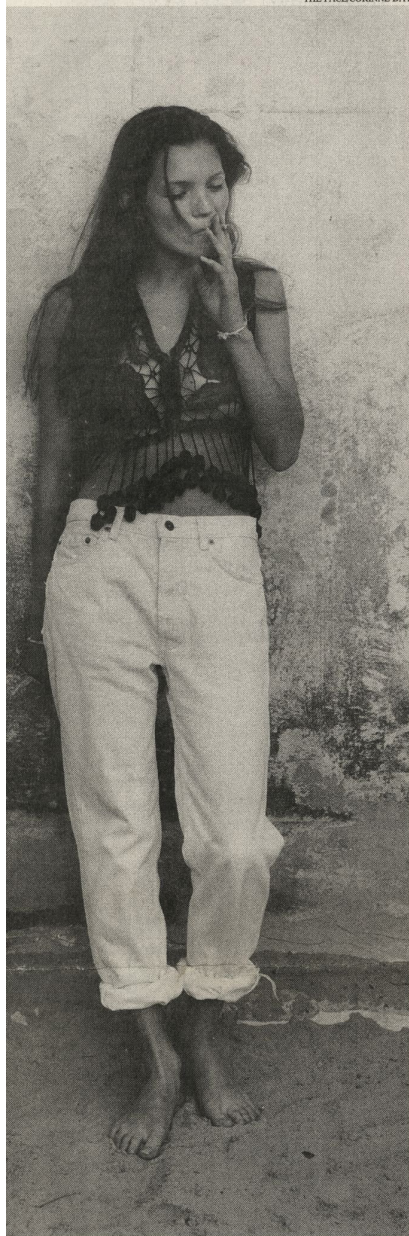


The secrets of eternal Yoof

With the right face, clothes and attitude, just about anybody these days can be professionally young. Report by Geraldine Bedell



THE FACE/CORINNE DAY

KATE MOSS is 16, gawky, and looks like a kid from Croydon. This will probably be enough to turn her into a top model. Gawky Croydon, luckily for Kate, is the look of the moment: she has already appeared twice on the cover of *The Face* (something no other model has done); and there are now plans for her to become its house model — the face of *The Face*.

Draped against dirty walls in hippy revival clothes, Kate looks fetchingly pale and underfed. Corinne Day, the photographer who saw a polaroid of Kate when she was still a Croydon schoolgirl and was at once convinced that she must sell her to *The Face*, says: "Kate is beautiful, but she's also someone kids on the street can relate to. She looks like a normal girl. She's street."

Ever since teenagers were discovered in the Fifties, the media have been searching for that elusive quality, "street", which will enable them to appropriate the values of youth culture and so sell editorial and advertising to the high-spending young. This has led to the rise and rise of professional youth, from the young Cathy McGowan through Mari Belgrano (he of the picture-postcard Mohican haircut) to Kate Moss — people who look and sound convincingly of the moment.

Over the years the route from street to mass media has become much shorter. The rise of the style magazine, the pop video and "yoof" television has created an industry of researchers and photographers, restlessly touring the clubs and the streets in search of the right faces, clothes and attitude. The big question, of course, is whether youth cults which begin in rebellion, rejection and individuality, can survive their translation into the mass media.

Advertising agencies have learnt the hard way that multinational companies pretending to look hip actually just look ridiculous. There is a terror of getting it wrong. Ad executives still shudder at the memory of a rash promotion for L'Oréal Studio hair mouse (St-st-st-Studio), which attempted to plunder the mannerisms of the style press, but misfired, and was satirically revived as St-st-stupid by French and Saunders. "Just because everyone in Manchester's wearing flares it doesn't mean you'll see people in drippy hippy clothes advertising banks this summer," says Adam Lurie, managing partner of Howell Henry Chaldecott Lurie. "It would look like a desperate attempt to say 'Trust us on our fashion sense'. Young people decode ads too quickly. They are too sophisticated to appeal to like that."

"A trend probably takes a couple of years to become sufficiently mainstream to enter advertising. This is partly because people in advertising are out of touch: those who are writing ads now were probably punks, and hate that baggy-trousered look. But more importantly, any attempt to appeal on this level is seen as patronising — like your parents coming downstairs in all the gear and saying, 'let's go down the club'."

Advertising may be wary of high fashion, but the style press has had a significant impact in inspiring an enthusiasm



VINTAGE MAGAZINE CO



Youthful ways to sell (clockwise): Fifties teens went steady on Coca Cola; 'professional' punk Symond Lawes, still in demand on stage and screen; Sony ad tapes the black and hip, and NatWest aims cashcards at cool dudes

for "real" people. In the mid-eighties, *i-D* magazine pioneered the use of ordinary kids in fashion shots. "I use people from every walk of life: I cast on the streets, in the clubs, through friends," says fashion editor Beth Summers.

Grant Fear, whom Corinne Day identifies as the male equivalent of Kate Moss, started modelling like this. Corinne happened to meet him in an office and asked him to take some time off from his jobs as a photographer and running clubs to sit moodily in squat-type rooms for her. Grant is pretty in an ununky kind of way, but Corinne photographs him to emphasise his ordinariness, sometimes in his own clothes. "I like to shoot him in bad light. I feel he's the street boy of now." He doesn't even have an agent. Kate, who does, is

now working constantly, despite being only 5ft 7in, rather than the usual minimum for fashion models of 5ft 10in.

The raw, off-the-street look has been pounced on everywhere. "Yoof" television, with its flashy graphics and weird camera angles, has tried to bring the atmosphere of the style press to the small screen, and the clubs, complete with "real" clubbers, to the sitting room. Initial attempts to be *outré* (*Network Seven*) have been succeeded by the cheerful chaos of slightly inept *real* "yoofs" eraseline with the medium:

Channel 4's *The World* is amateurishness elevated to an art form.

Its presenters are all new to the job: Terry Christian came out of the Manchester music scene, Amanda de Cadanet was a racing driver's beautiful daughter who went out with pop stars and behaved badly in nightclubs, Michelle Collins was an actress. But the audience is made up of genuine clubbers (researchers toured the country giving out leaflets) including some regulars. Over at the BBC's Youth department, black presenter Normski was plucked out of the relative obscurity of photographing the music scene to front *Dance Energy*, a programme which he describes as "like being in a chaotic club, where you're supposed to go on at 11.30 and you're still waiting at midnight".

The audience comes from the clubs: Normski himself gave out tickets at the Brixton Fridge. As the series progressed, real provincials were bussed in from around the country. "Real kids are what you want, not professional dancers," says Normski. "They come dressed in all different styles, and if the look is different on the next series it will be because that's what happening on the streets. In a way the audience is more important than the bands."

There is, however, a call for another kind of professional youth: the one

stuck in a time-warp. Symond Lawes is Britain's last remaining punk. In real life he is a regular guy, in clean jeans and sportswear; professionally he is mean and nasty, with an earring in his nose and four in his ears.

He really was a skinhead once, then a punk; now he's 25, and having the wardrobe is a still a good way of getting work as an actor. His most high-profile job was as a spitting skinhead in Don McCullin's award-winning police recruitment campaign, but he is always getting bad-guy bit-parts. He can also do you a biker and a generalised ruffian. He thinks television producers and advertisers resort to established stereotypes of aggressive youth because they feel on safer ground.

Even so, they get things wrong. "You see skinheads in television drama with three inch turnups, when every skinhead knows that the turnups must be exactly a quarter of an inch," he says. Since he went straight from a black friend's funeral to an acting job, he turns down parts in which skinheads are automatically assumed to be racist. "The middle-class people who make these programmes don't bother to find out about the reality."

Black youth has been crucial to recent street fashion: the current craze for ultra-baggy Chipie trousers is almost entirely led by black 16-year-olds. In advertising too, black has come to equal hip. Agencies are reluctant to admit this, probably because it sounds racist, but they do acknowledge they are now trying to reflect reality rather than sell a dream, and part of that is showing black kids. Howell Henry Chaldecott Lurie went to Joe Public, a casting agency specialising in ordinary-looking people, to find a regular-looking black guy to mis-hear Desmond Dekker's *The Israelites* for its Maxwell tapes commercial, and a white skinhead carpet fitter to mis-hear *The Skids' Into The Valley*.

"We are getting increasing numbers of calls for real people; that's the way advertising's going," says Adam Cameron, a partner in Joe Public.

Britain leads the world in street fashion. In the Eighties, it was packaged up and sold most effectively by the style magazines; in the Nineties the game is the same, though with the emphasis on the street more than the style. But there is something about the rest of the media that threatens to wither street style as soon as it touches it. This is most true of advertising. Chipie (of the baggy trousers) has never advertised in this country; if it did, nothing is more certain than that the craze would at once be over. The advertising industry has largely learnt its lesson, and now opts for images of youth which are quirky rather than hyper-trendy. All the same, the style magazines' passion for reportage fashion has had an important effect, inspiring the current enthusiasm for real-looking people. Corinne Day and her boyfriend took some pictures of a motorbike club in Hackney run by a 71-year-old vicar, Father Bill. Wrangler have just adopted him for their jeans campaign. If you are real enough, these days you can be a professional youth at any age.

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