Blue Jeans. Alterations of a Thing, a Body, a Nation.

Anna Schober

Customer: God created the world in six days, and you can't manage to make me a pair of trousers in six months. Tailor: But Sir, look at the world, and look at your trousers!

"In high school, as it is still the case, while fads and styles came and went, somehow an old pair of Levi’s was always right. It wasn’t a question of fashion, really – Levi’s went beyond that and existed in the realm of what simply was," says Judy Manley, a participant in the Denim-Art Contest in San Francisco in 1974. And the writer Wanda Coleman puts the same object in an more erotic context:

‘We could all use a little horizontal bop.’ Glory sniggered and snapped her fingers. Minette remained uncomfortably silent and I sensed our woman-talk embarrassed her. As if having conjured him up, ahead of us, sitting on the front porch of a single story house, was this muscular mountain of a beautiful young black man. His shoulders were naturally broad, his waist and hips narrow as a weight lifter’s. He was thinly clad in a black knit stretch tank-top shirt and blue denims held up by a thick black leather-belt with a brass horseshoe buckle. He was high yellow and handsome. He certainly caught and held our attention.

Blue jeans here are connected to a male body, slim, trained and half-clothed. The gaze starts with the whole picture, then comes slowly closer, in the end to be caught by the details of the scanty cover below the navel. A 1980s television commercial shows us close-ups of hard-working, tanned sweaty bodies, stuck in tight-fitting jeans, swinging enormous hammers and constructing a huge pair of Lee Jeans which are then collectively, in a festive ceremony, pulled over the twin towers in Manhattan. With their hard and firm bodies the boys constructing these super-jeans are elements of an enormous metallic machinery, while big letters tell us “Lee Original. The jeans that built America” Here jeans are not only connected to a body, but also to a situated body, a city and, at the same time, a whole nation. Pants, men, Manhattan and America became interchangeable links of one chain: these men are their pants,
these men built America, these pants built America, these pants are America, Manhattan is America, etc.

These three small stories of everyday culture, literature and advertising show us that the question of things is inseparable from a question about what they do and what is done with them. Blue jeans appear not as an unalterable material object but as something which becomes visible or palpable only in (or as) its alteration. We are here confronted with sensibilities, desires, wishes or fears communicated via jeans, which are themselves transformed by such a communicative use. In each case, the object is deformed, dislocated from one system to another – and it is by this deformation and by this dislocation that the object’s materiality is produced. Such irregular re-objectifications deform the object, however momentarily, into a thing: “The object assumes materiality, as it were, not because of its familiar designated function but during a re-creation that renders it other than it was.”

The above-mentioned Judy Manley accentuates this by describing a kind of “remembering-force” connected with her jeans garments: “my jacket is for me a remembering of roots, a chronicle of what has been and who I am . . . I wear the jacket the way one carries the things of yesterday into the now.” We are dealing here with what can be called “histories in things.” In describing this “remembering force” Manley is referring to the fact that our feelings, desires, hopes, fears and obsessions lodge in the objects while we are using them. Walter Benjamin describes our modern use of objects in very similar ways. For him, these “histories in things” are, for example, the visible traces of the human act of production and of the historical formation of history, as a history made by man, which normally remain hidden behind the glossy exchange value of objects as commodities; the record of the subjects’ structural formation in modernity; the trace of a collective and unconscious Utopian longing; and an impression of social life recorded on the surface. The term “histories in things” thus refers to a circuit of exchange in which man establishes objects inasmuch as he is established by them. Objects are in this way participants in our intersubjective constitution of reality. They are a kind of “communicator” of our psychological life, prostheses with which we also show each other that which is secret to us. We have to accommodate our fantasies, fears and wishes somewhere, to place or attach them; on the other hand, these things and places provide “images” without which our intimate life would lack a model. In this way we cover our whole cosmos with
patterns of our experience; it is not necessary for these patterns to be correct, they only have to be “equivalent” or “similar” to the tones of our inner spaces. Things like jeans might thus be said to serve as the material condition for subjectivity as such. As Kim McRae tells us: “I love my jeans . . . I feel the most comfortable, the most myself when I have them on.” In several advertisements, the blue-jeans producer Levi personalizes American landscapes with slogans like this one: “The West grew up in Levi’s” (1950). And Denna Jones describes her embroidering activity on jeans, portraying a similar continuity between exterior “shell” and interior worlds, with the following words: “I think the work I did on my jeans is just an extension of me; the way I feel and think.”

Such an intense use of objects as part of the self-culture in modern western societies is something which is itself product as well as agent of historical change. The importance objects have today as conditions of subjectivity and as quasi-religious things is an outcome of a profound change in the history of perception, which, in the end, leads to what we are used to calling “modernity.” The notion of “modernity” and “post-modernity” thus concerns not only the transformation that occurs in the social and economic structures of specific time/space entities but also the ways attention is formed and directed and the ways the performances of the self are staged. As Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel have shown in their seminal works on modernity, and more recently Jonathan Crary has demonstrated in connection with their concepts, there was a transformation of perception in 19th century western cities, which was a result of the new emerging media such as photography and film as well as of new forms of labor organization and new means of transport. Thus, perception is not something, ahistorical, given for eternity. Rather, there is a tension between historic change concerning the structures of perception and that which remains always beyond our attempts to symbolize (a traumatic ahistoric kernel which is the real). Modernity is thus characterized by a new form of perception, a persistent eventful subjectivized seeing, which goes together with what has been called the “postulate of visibility.”

This “postulate of visibility” that modernity has produced implies that our gaze is attentive to all that is visible – it is at the same time distracted and fixed upon details. Visible details are now seen as evident proof of something lying beyond this world, for example, an inner self – and, more specifically, a deviant or normal inner self, an essential
masculine or feminine, an essential American or barbaric inner self, etc. "Eventually," says Martha Jarosewich, "my shorts became my autobiography in denim,"\textsuperscript{13} while Hopeton Morris, a participant in the 1974 Denim-Art Contest, explains this modern belief in a continuity between exterior and interior in a more detailed way: "Clothing need not only be seen, it can also be heard. It is the extension of the person who is wearing it. It should express that personality in more than one dimension. The ornamentation on the denim in my design creates a pleasurable soft 'chime' sound which creates a reaction in the wearer and in the 'audience'."\textsuperscript{14}

Almost a century earlier we could already find this model of personality in the U.S. context, for example expressed in Henry James' novel \textit{The Portrait of a Lady} (1881), where the very "European" Madame Merle and the very "American" heroine Isabel Archer are having the following discussion: "I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things!", says Madame Merle. Isabel Archer disagrees:

'I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. . . . Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!' 'You dress very well', Madame Merle lightly interposed. 'Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society'. 'Should you prefer to go without them?' Madame Merle enquired in a tone, which virtually terminated the discussion.\textsuperscript{15}

Madame Merle seems at a first glance to be the "winner" in this short conversation, also because her argument is supported by the author, whose writing constantly circles around the readability of the world in things. Nevertheless the standpoints of the two discussants are not as far from each other as their words would lead us to believe: because the "naturalness" and "simplicity" so much stressed by Isabel Archer can also show itself — according to the now disseminated "postulate of visibility" — only in visible gestures, for example, in gestures of nonchalance or of the rejection of overcoming conventions and of formalisms or in gestures of a demonstrative "simplicity" — all gestures which will very soon be connected with clothes such as jeans. This
means that Isabel Archer is really the winner of this debate. Because her model of continuity between outside appearance and inner self, which implies the increased importance of the inner world and a devaluation of external appearance, will become predominant in the U.S. at the end of the 19th century and slowly expand itself from there into other parts of the western (and later also global) world.

In modernity, visible details are not only seen as proof of something lying beyond this world, but they have now also become something that triggers memories, reveries and wishes. In visible details we can thus find something that brings us to perceive erratically and persistently and which then ties us again to the image-worlds: "My fiancé was overseas," Denim-Art contestant Louise Coughlin starts her narration about her obsession to embroider jeans with "secret" motifs, on a tour of duty for a year, so, for his birthday I wanted to get him something, that would bring memories of me and home for him.... I began embroidering some of his favorite possessions – his ten-speed bike and his Toyota Land Cruiser. Then I embroidered some strange-looking flowers shaped like stars, the word ARIES, his astrological sign, an Air Force plane amid some clouds, an (eye) LUV U.... But my best idea was the stick figure I formed out of buttons with the name Princess embroidered underneath – his name for me, of course!16

Such ornamental formations in which we transform our things into messages Jacques Derrida calls "fantasmapoetic processes."17 With this term he is referring to a discourse of the fetish which is analogous to the religious world. This means that the perception that emerges in modernity now begins to include a creed that no longer refers to a god outside the world but to the tangible things in the world. Something has to be visible, showable and, in the light of day, to be regarded as true – it has to get the "believer" going, that is to motivate and enthuse us as consumers. Martha Green expresses just such a fetishistic loading in the following statement: "I think of my garments as space wear and I can't help feel superwomanish in them. I view my work with cloth and thread as a cosmic adventure: the finished products contain magical powers."18

Ernesto Laclau demonstrates that in modernity we expose objects and notions in order to indicate a "new," "better" and "fuller" life opposed to the everyday with all its oppressions and compulsions, and he called this process the "production of signifiers of an absent fullness." In the course of this process the object becomes dislocated from its everyday "normalized" use, its meaning is "emptied" and
becomes the incarnation of a more comprehensive, though absent totality. In this way one object can serve as a surface onto which various groups inscribe their conception of a "fuller" life, and the more groups inscribe their wishes, fears, hopes into this very same object, the more it is "emptied" of its "normalized" meaning. As Judy Manley's statement, quoted in the beginning of this paper, shows, blue jeans can thus be brought to signify "pure being": "It wasn't a question of fashion really", she says, "Levi's went beyond that and existed in the realm of what simply was." Like everything else, blue jeans can be brought to function as such a signifier, but at the same time they can — again like everything else — fulfill this function in a necessarily inadequate way: the absent fullness represented by the signifier is constitutively unreachable. On the other hand, every alteration of the object is a misrepresentation, a distortion, but one by which the individual or group producing this alteration gains the fictional coherence of their identity.¹⁹

Laclau also shows that this quasi-religious use of the object should be understood in the context of a history of perception, when he demonstrates that the "production of signifiers of an absent fullness" has to do with an absence of God as a fullness of being.²⁰ In modern secular societies, this fullness is predominantly found among the things in the world, in signifiers. Elements of the visible world now play an outstanding role in this process. On the one hand there is a constant production of images and objects which in this way are brought to represent such an absent fullness. And on the other hand there is an identity-formation of the social and political agents, resulting from precarious and transient forms of identification and dis-identification — processes which occur in a world full of commodities, stars and rapidly changing trends. People create personifications of themselves while dwelling in an object, in a detail or an image.

Blue jeans are interwoven in this history of perception in a particular way. As Daniel Dyan puts it, "le blue jean est un passeport vers le XXᵉ siècle."²¹ On a journey through different social milieus of the western world we can find not only constantly varying alterations of the same object blue jeans, but also a repeated structure of signification — as the previous examples have shown: blue jeans are in different milieus brought to signify a fullness that opposes everything the present lacks. But where exactly in history can we find further examples of such regular-irregular formations of things? Where did such "regular-
irregularities" intrude on the formation of objects to provide some access to what Wanda Coleman has called "a war of eyes"?

One of the first effective places to expose blue jeans to a vast public was cinema. In early feature films made between 1905 and 1916 such as *All on Account of the Milk* (1910), *The Girl at the Cupola* (1912) or *Blue Jeans* (1916/17), we meet these denim trousers medially enlarged, exposed by way of close-ups, contrast, lighting, narration or point of view shots and strictly connected with the leading characters in these films. Such films are closely linked to social-reform discourses, like anti-alcohol or welfare, they were popularizing: all of them set out to show that on the way to an ever-better future it is possible to leave behind the old and to free the "new" by a sudden rupture. These films were at the same time also directed against the opulent historicist European costume-film productions by showing "simple" American characters, "natural" acting and a lot of "modern stuff" now also available in the department stores. Junie, Jack or whatever their names are stand here for "humanity as a whole," and their body language, "natural" gestures and "simple" clothing provide authenticity linking the discourse closely to 'reality'. A detail – the denim trousers – distinguishes this discourse as being "American" as opposed to a general (or "European," "French," "Italian") film discourse, without – and this is important – abandoning its universality. Object, body and nation are linked in these films and the public was medially addressed to identify with this “thing,” the character it covers and the stories it was involved in. In the darkness of the cinema spaces, these denim-wearing characters became doubles of the spectators; alongside their story the public could explore their own feelings, bodily sensations and memories.

But the spectators did not become involved in all of these stories in the same way. For them, the confrontation with these filmic worlds became most intense when they were thereby removed in the "lumber-room of one's own self," as Siegfried Kracauer once put it. Thus the reception of such films can involve a removement, i.e. what Pierre Klossowski, for example, has called the finding of a "resemblance" and the "hearing" of an "only sign." Everybody thus hears some "only sign" behind the everyday codes, and whether this happens or not depends in the first place on how – through the identity which is guaranteed by such a discovery – we find ourselves resembling it. Films can thus provide their spectators with a commentary on their emotions, hopes
and sensibilities. And the spectators can communicate the intensity thus found again only with the unusual use of objects that indicate a difference of identity to the "others," and a secret complicity to the fellow fans.

Such a finding of similarities and such a falling back into the "lumber-room of one's own self" is thus inherent to the act of perception and leads to constantly changing appropriations of the object referring to unconscious fantasies. In this way more or less spectacular bricolages of styles emerge which use and transform arrangements and gestures found in the media. In style-ensembles of very different social milieus blue jeans are thus brought to incarnate the fullness of a thoroughly "new" life. Men and women of an artists' colony near Santa Fé in the early 1920s, for example, confronting a present full of consumerism, exploitation and alienation, wore blue jeans to indicate the desired "new life" of freedom and democracy expressed in the ruggedness, directness or earthiness of the laborer.

In the 30s and 40s photography became the privileged medium in the dissemination of denim myths, and this can be explained with reference to the employment of then jobless but later very famous photographers (such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange or Russell Lee) by the social-management administration of the New Deal such as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the National Youth Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps. In these photographs, close-ups of worn and faded denim surfaces, together with the bodies of solitary sharecroppers, migrants or farmers they cover, again indicate "Americanness" and "humanity as a whole" and make evident the "truth" of all the (hi)stories presented along with these photographs in exhibitions, books and magazines. The consumers of these were mostly members of the urban middle class. In looking at them they were able to experience fears, hopes, but also generosity and inner superiority and could thus construe themselves as the "more progressive," "more modern" and "whiter" part of the same nation. These self-presentation-practices do not imitate the "beggars" and "shepherds" of New-Deal governmental photography, but John Wayne and other Hollywood western heroes. So, the younger generation formed motorcycle gangs and dressed in blue jeans, leather jackets and biker caps to show another "new life," one which is full of intensively experienced consumption and friendship between men, and in this way pointed a way out of a
present characterized by widespread shortages and individual competition.

In the 1950s then, blue-jeans-wearing stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean or Marilyn Monroe crop up in a lot of public sites – in films, fan magazines, or magazines like *Playboy* or the new gay magazines – to popularize another discourse which became socially dominant: the new sexology. Brando, Dean and Monroe demonstrated that sexual drives of “all the people” are “original” and “natural” and tend to seek expression spontaneously, regardless of all the repressive social norms. These films expanded the radius of denim myths widely. In West Germany, but also in Italy, France or Austria, groups of “Teddy boys” now emerge, transforming similarities they found in films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) or *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) in spectacular style-ensembles. And at the same time gay magazines in West Germany, but also in Scandinavia, Italy or France use pictures of denim-wearing boys in tight jeans to indicate a new sexuality, freed of all restrictions. In this was in the 1950s blue jeans no longer built a bridge only between different social groups living in the U.S., but also between the American “new world” and the European “old world.” In all these milieus we thus find a very similar form of signification of the object: wearing these clothes seems to enable the wearer to reject stifling conventions and likewise to demonstrate the “fullness” of a “new” life. This “new” life is, as we have seen, always an individual life, and as clothing is now handled as visible self-expression, it is always the expression of an individual self.

In these reception histories it is also possible to detect the following dichotomy: denim overalls (“Latzhosen” in German) and “waist overalls” (what we call today blue jeans) are linked together in the picture worlds of different historical milieus. Denim overalls are permanently wedded to waist overalls in a relation of inferiority and dependence. They face each other as “soft” and “hard,” “feminine” and “masculine,” “educated” and “educating” bodies, and in this way enter the widespread dichotomous structure of the social imagery of the modern world, where massculture-regression-feminity repeatedly faces modernity-superiority-masculinity. In Modernity objects thus became somehow “gendered” by the visual worlds they became embedded in, and once gendered by such an exposition in media or style they could then function again as a material sign for the marking of sexual difference. Typically, the qualities and the status ascribed to the ideal
user (in consumer groups, film and photography) are transferred onto the object itself and the object is then used to transform one's self, in order to become "similar" to the admired star, or it is avoided because of unpleasant gender associations — as denim overalls were long avoided by young white males because of the "soft," "female" and "childish" image associated with them. The same can also be said with reference to the "national" qualities ascribed to an object, which are transferred onto the object itself, which can then be used, for example, to "Americanize" the wearer or user.

Blue jeans appear in all these histories as a garment with qualities of differentiation as well as of unification. This becomes evident when we go back to the jeans-wearing "common men" we found in most of the western social-reform discourses in the 20th century. Because even if these "common men," "common women" or "everybodies" always appear with different faces and under different names, they assume the unchanging function of universalizing the discourse and linking it closely to "reality." The figures tell us: "this applies to all of us" and "this is the reality of the story." These "everybodies" of the western world typically wear blue jeans or denims. It seems that the fading and the bulges of these clothes and the connotative lines between them and the world of labor make blue jeans and denims particularly suited to providing a discourse with credibility. In the styles of various consumer groups, blue jeans assume also the double function of differentiation and unification: they were chosen as an identity-marker and became thus elevated to a larger universe of taste, which in turn was to signal to others "in the know" a refinement, and to the rest a distance. Groups such as the artists colony near Santa Fé in the 1920s, the motorcyclists on American streets in the 1930s and 1940s and the Teddy boys and gay subcultures in western Europe in the 1950s use blue jeans to create styles with which they enter a struggle, not only about seeing and being seen, defining and being defined, but also about the shape of the present and the future.

All this leads to the conclusion that there are processes of articulation between socially dominant discourses and more marginal practices. Objects are a kind of vehicle with which we express ourselves and which we deal with the demands of everyday life. By using them and exposing them we "share" a perspective with these things as we share perspectives with other people. Such a shared perspective is then also something that constitutes us as people. Stuart Hall understands
“identification” as a never-completed process, where there is always “too much” or “too little” — an over-determination or a lack of it but never a proper fit: “Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them.”

Discourses can address us successfully also by giving us the opportunity of finding spaces where we can find a distance to the actual coordinates of our social existence.

Regardless of this, it is important to recognize that there is not always an equivalence between a social-reform discourse and the practice of the streets. In the everyday productions of the streets blue jeans are only integrated in style-ensembles when they become connected to a “fullness” — wishes, fears, desires, problematizations, disavowals, Utopias, — otherwise they remain outside of any attention horizon. This also means that hegemony is not universal, “given” to the continuing role of a particular class, but has always to be won, reproduced, sustained and is thus a kind of “moving equilibrium,” containing relations of forces favorable or unfavorable to this or that tendency. There is always a struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within the realm of ideology and myths, and it is always a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to the most mundane areas of everyday life.

But why was it blue jeans and not some other form of clothing that acquired such a prominent role in western representations and self-representations? Why does a “dressing down,” a gesture still connected through connotative lines with a world of “hard work,” become, in different milieus, a signifier of a “fuller” life? This question brings us back to the history of perception. The importance such figures as the “new common man” and the “new common woman” occupies in modern discourses has again to do with the already described processes of secularization: because the Other, to whom the discourse is addressing itself, is now no longer God or the muse but the anonymous person, “all of us.”

Modernity is not only characterized by this new form of perception, that is by a persistent, a voracious eye, but — as I have previously
mentioned – also by a procreation of images, an expansion of representation, which is not so much a “democratization” of the image as a displacement in the gaze-relation of antagonistic social groups: between the bourgeois and the proletarian, man and woman, white and black, etc. As an answer to the threats emanating from the social antagonisms in the U.S. immigrant cities of the 1910s, the denim-wearing worker becomes medially (by criminology, the police, social reformers, poets and filmmakers, for example) transformed into the above-mentioned “new common man” or “new common woman.” Such social imbalances and antagonisms inherent in social formations trigger displacements at an ideological-mythical level.  

To wear blue jeans thus became a gesture which was completely isolated from every historical context but nevertheless indicated meanings such as “hard work,” “democratic” or “American.” In the process of reception of these discourses, these isolated, medially enlarged denim-wearing common men and women then usually became either a mirror of the self of the spectator, i.e. a figure by means of which one can reflect and dream about oneself, or they became somebody essentially “other,” i.e. somebody who is banished to the margins of humanity and with whom the viewing “I” has no business at all.  

In the first case, one can experience the inner self as free, liked, privileged, full of history and connected to the future; in the second case one is marking out a sharp difference – for instance vis-à-vis the fears of social decline, the ghosts of psychological incoherence or the disgust of one’s own self. 

This massive representation of a gesture of “rough work” in connection with the self-representations of different milieus, obviously does not mean that these discourses and these milieus accept the rights of the workers more than others or that this is accompanied by greater democracy. What the previous examples have shown is that in the social context of modern cities, where a multitude of implements, tools and forms of work-drill act upon bodies, signifiers are emerging that indicate a “fullness” – but a fullness that is again a fullness of productivity, of work, of fertility, of power and consumption.

Since the late 60s we have witnessed a change concerning blue-jeans-myths. This change announced itself with the emergence of a lot of new commodities covered with blue-jeans surfaces and with an increase in the range of social groups wearing jeans. In the department stores of the 60s, 70s and 80s we can find a lot of goods whose design
(or the design of the package) shows denim myths: for instance the Jeans-VW, "Denim" perfume, "Johnny" cigarette packets (which imitate a jeans-pocket), exercise-books, key-cases and many other things that are quasi-magically transformed into blue-jeans surfaces. At the same time, more and more groups from different milieus are using blue jeans to express their model of a "new" and "fuller" life, such as the feminists, the alternatives, the punks, the Italian city-Indians, or the metropolitan cowboys. Jeans are now embroidered or decorated with appliqués, paintings, patchworks, feathers or other found objects. They are ripped up, faded and combined with garish colors and materials. Through such visible "productive" styles of wearing jeans consumers have been trying to be part of the crowd again — down to earth and different at the same time: "Once upon a time — anywhere, anytime — wearing a pair of Levis was wearing your heart on your sleeve. A pair of Levi's said younger generation, flexible person, still growing — not like your parents. . . . Levi's now must be decorated, made distinctive from other people's jeans and even from your own five-six-seven or more pairs. What is next? Maybe only nudity can reach what wearing a pair of Levi's meant once upon a time, then."

The enormous success of blue jeans in modernity as a surface on which very different statements against convention and for a ever different "new life" have been able to inscribe themselves leads in the end, in post-modernity, to a crisis of this very concept. Since the 1970s several of these myths have lost their obviousness, become fractured and have sometimes also been regarded with skepticism. Which does not mean that they are no longer also effective: we are still looking out for garments to clothe our longing for a better and fuller life. Maybe in this respect we are in the way of becoming more playful again, less interested in the question of what we "are" behind all our layers, but wishing to use clothes as powerful, temporary and, sometimes, not too serious statements in our everyday performances.

Notes

5 American Denim, 10.


7 On the notion of “similarity” see Pierre Klossowski, Die Ähnlichkeit (Bern: Gachnang & Springer, 1986) 13f.

8 Quoted in American Denim, 73.


10 Quoted in American Denim, 73.


13 Quoted in American Denim, 73.

14 Quoted in American Denim, 14.


16 Quoted in American Denim, 132f.

17 Jacques Derrida, Marx’ Gespenster (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1995) 249f.

18 Quoted in American Denim, 14.


21 This process of passing-on is demonstrated in detail in Anna Schober, Blue Jeans. Vom Leben in Stoffen und Bildern (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2001).

22 Siegfried Kracauer, Theorie des Films (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 90.

23 See Klossowski, Ähnlichkeit, 13f.


26 “As long as there is still one beggar around, there will still be myth,” Walter Benjamin tells us in this respect. See his The Arcades Project, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P, 1999) 400.


28 American Denim, 38.
Picture 1: June (Viola Dana) as every-woman in Blue Jeans (1917)
© Cinemazero, La Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona, Italy.
Picture 3: The re-discovery of the sexy body: Marlon Brando. © Filmarchiv Austria, Audiovisuelles Zentrum Wien
Picture 4: The finding of a "resemblance". Teddy-boy and -girl in West Germany. © Collection Wenske, Hanau, Germany.