

# From rebellion to the runways

by Deena Kinarthy

When Avril Lavigne, Canadian punk rock star and poster girl for today's youth punk scene ditches her trademark rebel image to join the Chanel haute couture runway show this winter, one has to ask: has she sold out, or simply grown up?

And what does "selling out" really mean? According to many fashion critics today, punk is just a relic of the past. Today we have what is called pop-punk or chic-punk. The Lavigne crowd (those of us born between '83 and '89) base their style on another sub-punk movement known as emo-punk or California skater-punk. Essentially, it's all about the image and the music.

Many runway fashion designers in the industry today have picked up on the "rebellious" fashion, taking the edgier clothing from the streets or working class and turning them into high fashion.

In turn, clothing that was intended to be different, rebellious or alternative appears as trendy or popular items in the shopping malls and department stores across Canada and the United States. The *Martlet* interviewed several outlets in town that sell specific punk-inspired fashion and asked the salespeople what they thought of this trend.

Stitches at the Bay Centre, for example, sells some items that are

punk-inspired, such as rhinestone belts, T-shirts with skulls on them and ripped jeans. They even have a T-shirt on their rack that says "punk I am".

Other more independent stores, such as Backstage, display more hardcore items such as combat boots, jewellery for facial piercings, and spiked leather wristbands and collars.

However, all the storeowners and employees we interviewed agreed that punk is basically still about individuality and self-expression.

"For punks it has always been a visual statement. You want the world to look at you and realize you are different, you are choosing to live your life a different way," said Jen Storey, manager of Backstage on Broad Street in downtown Victoria.

"Everyone is just so overwhelmed and inundated with incoming media and images, messages and movies and posters and everything. It is kind of weird that you have taken that to the point where you are almost like a walking TV or billboard yourself," said Storey. "Everyone walks around presenting something to another person. People put on a certain image."

She suggested that the media might be overloading our culture, so that clothing becomes a way of distinguishing ourselves from the urban masses.

Her store sells key punk items



PROVIDED PHOTO

## Avril Lavigne, queen of the pop-punk crowd.

such as patches, studded belts (for only \$80!) and the infamous black hoodie, with images of bands on the front. Bands such as Nirvana, Bad Religion, and KISS stand on the same shelf as The Killers and Sum 41.

Some of the original punksters from the '70s and '80s (the Sex Pistols generation) think the punk movement has lost some of its edge. Punk as a fashion originated in England where class differences are much more pointed and political. It started with the music and grew into an entire counterculture.

When asked about what our youth is fighting for today, first-year student Kim Dillon mused, "Do we even have anything we are fighting

for? Come on, it's Canada."

Owner of Old Nick's on Johnson Steet, Jesus Bonehead, said, "The original punk came out of England and was angrier and more defiant. It was political in Europe, but in Canada it is a fashion statement. Canadians have it easy."

Bonehead is a member of the 25-year-old punk band Day Glo Abortions, and lived in England in the '70s. "The best way to fight society is to go with it . . . and fight from within," he added as he looked around the store:

Suzanne MacDonald, owner of Sideshow, a store that makes local punk rock performers and local artists' outfits with the customer's creative input, as well as custom-

made items, shared some insights into the origin of the plaid bondage pants, a key punk fashion identifier.

She said these pants came from Scots who rebelled against the English, who would not let them wear their kilts, a cultural fabric of the Scottish working class.

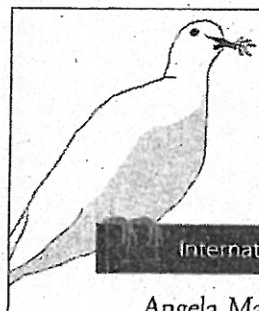
Compared to the hippies, this hardcore look is thought to be an affirmation of existence rather than a politically based reaction against society. We do not see groups of punks with picket signs protesting outside the Legislature with their issues, we see them in the street, in the shopping mall and at university.

Today there are dozens of rebellious "looks," and the real issue is maintaining true individuality because if everyone joins the counterculture, it becomes the culture.

When there are as many tribes to belong to, clothing gets changed very rapidly from season to season, and many clothes get destroyed and wasted. In bestseller *The Rebel Sell*, authors Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter make plain, with biting clarity and concrete examples, how every era has had a counterculture that tried to fight "the system." But our system is the fight. Rebellion is an old concept, fashionable in today's capitalist society because it is just another choice in a sea of choices for consumers.

"It is not just a fashion, it is a lifestyle," said Suzanne. She refers to designers Vivienne Westwood and Betsy Johnson with respect. Johnson is known for her edgy designer fashions—the "safety-pin chic" look is one of the highlighted features of her fall 2006 runway show in New York. She is also a regular guest designer on America's Next Top Model.

Maybe Avril should have gone with her on the runway.



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