

***the flag  
of  
supreme  
is  
the flag  
of  
my  
enemy***



On Monday, August 13 2018 Supreme “collaborated” with the New York Post’ creating a sort of crazy meta uber-new york cover wrap (i.e. advertisement) for the day’s edition. I was researching and writing the first draft of this essay as it happened, a couple time zones away in Japan. Not that it matters much, but do you know how many Supreme stores there are in the world? Do you know how many of those are in Japan? Eleven and six, respectively. What does this say about consumerism? The consumers (or as one poll put it: “most desirable brand for upper-income teens”)?

If there is one thing I’ll grant to Supreme it’s that the brand has somehow transcended the borders between blatant corporatism, culture appropriation, and super-consumerism. In the process it has become somewhat immune to a coherent critique. Anything negative or confrontational about the brand is absorbed, deflected, even re-purposed into another selling point. The way we talk and write about the store and its power seems to always be in the exceptional; SUPREME CAN DO NO WRONG.

For my part, I’d honestly rather not waste the breath. Plus, as they say, all press is good press, and in this case just printing the word seems to already improve their ever-fertile situation.

But the reason I want to discuss it and analyze its authority is because like any other well-oiled machine of shameless greed, vanity, and waste, it deserves to be dismantled. And I think that the most apt group to do this is the same one that let themselves be so embarrassingly duped and appropriated in the first place; skateboarders themselves.

Just think about this; James Jebbia did not and does not, skateboard. From the very start (and by his own words) he used skateboarders and skateboarding because it was the “cool” thing at the time. If you think this fact is superfluous just try to picture the brand minus the skateboarding. Its ongoing popularity and staying power is due in large part and perhaps entirely to the creative energy, style, and culture of street skating. This includes of course the countless skaters, skate photographers and videographers who have and continue to contribute to what is basically a never-ending “street culture” advertisement campaign.

All this despite the fact that skateboarding is not even on the fringe or periphery of mainstream culture anymore. This isn’t really an opinion. There’s no other reason the Carlyle Group sought and bought a 50% stake in the brand. Skateboarding is hot. But it’s also so cool. And a brand like Supreme that tries so incredibly hard to appear like it is not trying so incredibly hard is by all accounts the coolest.

The Carlyle deal was kept under wraps out of fear for damaging the “street cred” Supreme boasts. But honestly, does it even matter? Are there really street credentials to damage if it never came from the streets in the first place? Chains like Zumiez sell skateboards and skateboard related soft goods too, in fact they carry much of the same exact product. So why do we, as skaters, readily mock and boycott the likes of such chains while putting Supreme on a pedestal? Essentially, they operate with the same business acumen, no? They just use the image of skateboarders and skateboarding to sell it to the herds.

With our generations’ unquenchable lust for more, with our cynical and ironic dispositions about everything and everyone, where all news is fake news and the cult-of-self dominates, Supreme is the shining red reflection of our infantilized, drooling selves.

So if skateboarders still possess any sense ideas like “rebellion”, “anti-establishment”, or at the very least “independence”, doesn’t Supreme represent the antithesis? Isn’t the only sensible way to talk about Supreme to start with “Fuck Supreme”? Why do we need some fashion-minded kook to

dictate and perpetuate “drops”? Or some mindless celebrities and ultra famous artists to lend their “collaborations”? Why do we need perfect wooden bowls to be constructed as set pieces inside of stores and given access only to the most exclusive? Since when did skateboarding become so exclusive anyway?

Skateboarding can be and still is subversive. It can undermine the system, break the rules, and threaten the status quo. It has nothing to benefit from Supreme while conversely, Supreme has everything to gain. So let's take back skateboarding from the brand. Let's make that distinction again; on one side us, the skaters, and on the other them, the poseurs. The flag of Supreme is the flag of my enemy. Put that on a t-shirt.

1) Reading about the New York Post thing and its subsequent media reverberations was a bit much. I felt disgusted and exhausted. Every time I clicked on a new Supreme article I felt like it was assisting the brand somehow. It's clear what a circus this whole thing is. The way we write about Supreme is utterly absurd and surreal at the same time. There's touches of religious fanaticism, juvenile obsession, and passionate subjectivity. We get it. You think everyone thinks its cool. Anyway, this original writing was planned to be much longer but I felt I was not getting anywhere. Hence the visual essay that follows.

2) As in: “According to WWD's sources, the deal was kept under wraps because Jebbia feared if the sum became public knowledge, it could hurt the street cred Supreme has meticulously cultivated since its establishment.” This is the same street cred that, for example, tried to wash and clean away their tagged Lafayette storefront after being confronted with an honest challenge from graffiti writer Kidult the night before. From Kidult: “Supreme likes the streets and graffiti? I put them the test. Graffiti, street culture, is taken out of its context. Today, these brands make it luxurious and superficial, pointless. They try to intellectualize the practice by eliminating its crude essence, and that's too bad.”

2018年8月13日月曜日、SupremeはNewYorkPost\*1とのコラボレーションでメタ・ウーバー・ニューヨークな表紙(いわゆる広告)を飾った。ちょうどその頃私は日本でこのエッセイのためのリサーチと最初の草稿を書き進めていた。たいして驚くことでもないが、世界中のSupremeの総店舗数のうち日本には何店舗あるかをご存知だろうか? 計11店舗のうち6店舗が日本にあるという。この数字が世界の消費主義について語ることは何だろう。日本の消費者について? または高所得の若者にとって最も望ましいブランドについて?

Supremeに関して強いて言うなら、露骨なコーポラティズム、文化の流用、超消費者主義の境界線をどういうわけか超越したブランドだということ。後について回る批判に対してもいくらか免疫がついたのか彼らは動じない。ブランドに対する否定的・対立的なものもは全て吸収され、歪められ、それどころかブランドの新しいセールスポイントとして再利用されたりもする。意義を持って彼らについていくらか書いたり話したりしたところで例外扱いされてしまうのだ—何があっても「正しいのはSupremeだ」と。

正直言って、私も息の無駄遣いはしたくない。「すべての批評は良い批評」と彼らが言うように、ここで私が自分の言葉を印刷したところでその肥沃な土地にまた水を与えるようなものだろう。

しかしそれでも私が彼らについて議論しその権威を分析したい理由は、油を注いだ機械のように暴走する恥知らずの欲望、虚栄心、無駄の塊を解体する価値は確実にあるからだ。そしてその役目を果たすべきなのは他でもない、初めから彼らに騙され利用されることに身を委ねたスケートボーダー自身だと私は思う。

考えてみてほしい。Supremeの創設者ジェームズ・ジェビアはスケートボードをしたことがない。彼は当時の“クール”なものとして最初からスケートボーダーとスケートボードを利用したのだ(実際に彼自身がそう語った)。この事実が過剰だと思う人は果たしてスケートボードの要素を取り除いたSupremeを想像できるのだろうか。このブランドの継続的な人気とパワーの理由はおそらく、いや完全にストリートスケートのカルチャーが持つ創造的なエネルギーやスタイルが大部分だと言える。これにはもちろん、終わりのないストリート・カルチャー広告キャンペーンに貢献する数え切れない数のスケーター、スケートフォトグラファー、ビデオグラファーの活躍も含まれている。

スケートボードは今やメインストリーム・カルチャーの周縁や周辺にあるものではない。これはもはや意見ではなく、事実だ。カーライル・グループ(アメリカの大手投資ファンド)がSupremeの株50%を購入した理由が他にあるだろうか。スケートボードは最高に“ホット”で“クール”なのである。中でも必死に“必死じゃないふり”をするSupremeのようなブランドが今一番かっこいいのだ。

カーライル・グループとの取引はブランドが持つストリートの信用<sup>\*2</sup>を傷つける恐れがあるため、あまり公にはされていなかった。しかし正直なところ、今更何を隠す必要がある？そもそもストリートから来ていないのに、ストリートの何を守りたいというのだろうか？スケートボードや関連グッズの大量生産品を販売するという点ではZumiezのようなチェーン店も同じだ。なぜ我々スケーターはこのようなチェーンは簡単に嘲笑しボイコットする一方で、Supremeを崇めたて続けるのだろうか。本質的には同じビジネスじゃないか？彼らは大衆相手の商売のためにスケートボーダーとスケートボードのイメージを利用しているだけだ。

フェイクニュースと過剰な自己愛が支配するこの世界で、我々の世代は抑えられない欲望にまみれながら全ての事に対してシニカルで皮肉な姿勢を取ることしかできない。Supremeの存在はヨダレを垂らしながら幼児化していく我々自身の姿を映し出している。

だからこそ思う。もしスケートボーダーが「反乱」「反体制」あるいは少なくとも「独立」のような感覚やアイデアをまだ持っているならSupremeはそれら全てとの対立を表していないか？Supremeについて話すのならば“Fuck Supreme”で始めるのがもっとも道理的なのでは？なぜファッション志向の変人が指示するグラフィティが必要なんだ？あるいはくだらない有名人や超有名なアーティストとの“コラボレーション”が？なぜ完璧な木製のポウルをセットピースとして店内に建設して上流の人しかアクセスできないようにする？そもそもスケートボードはいつからこんなに排他的で高級な存在になった？

スケートボードは依然として破壊的だ。システムを弱体化させ、ルールを破り、今ある現状を脅かす力を持っている。Supremeから受ける恩恵は何一つとして無いが、Supremeはすでに全てを手に入れているのだ。彼らからスケートボードを取り戻そう。もう一度その違いをはっきりさせよう。我々スケートボーダーと、目立ちたがり屋の彼らとの違いを。Tシャツにはこう書こう、「Supremeの旗は敵の旗だ」と。

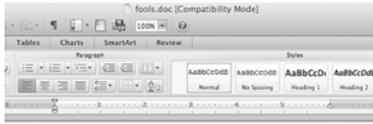
バカはおしまい。  
Stop being stupid.

Supreme



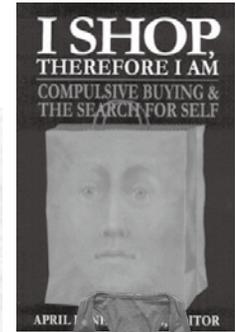
\*1 New York Postの話題とそれに対するメディアの反応はちょっと過剰だった。私はうんざりして疲れてしまったし、Supremeについての新しい記事をクリックするたびにこのブランドを何かで支援しているような気持ちになった。この騒ぎが全てただの“サーカス”であることは明らかだ。世間がSupremeについて書くときはいつでもまったく不条理で現実的じゃない。宗教的な熱狂、子供っぽい執着心、情熱的な主観性ににじみ出ている。もうわかったからそろそろ勘弁してほしい。誰もがそれを“クール”と感じると、思っているんだろう？とにかく。この執筆を始めた時はもっと長くなる予定だったが、結局どこにも行き着かないと感じたため、このあとは視覚的エッセイで終わろうと思う。

\*2 WWDの情報源によると、ジェビアは総額が公になりSupremeが設立以来慎重に耕してきたストリートの信用に傷がつくことを恐れたため、グループとの契約を未公開にしていた。彼が信じるストリートの信用とは何か？それは例えばグラフィティ・アーティストのKidultがニューヨークのSupreme店頭に率直な挑戦状をスプレーで投下したその翌日に洗ってきれいにしようとした彼らの行動をよく考えてみればわかるはずだ。Kidultは言う。「Supremeはストリートやグラフィティが好きだって？私は彼らをテストしてみた。グラフィティやストリート・カルチャーは、もはやその言葉の意味を失っている。これらのブランドが贅沢で表面的で無意味なものにしまったのだ。彼らはその純粋な本質を取り除くことによって知性化しようとするが、それはひどい」



*What a ridiculous clusterfuck of totally uncool jokers.  
I make my work about this kind of sadly foolish farce.  
I'm waiting for all of them to sue me for copyright  
infringement.*

*Barbara Kruger*



“The line is the new community,”  
Glancing at them furtively, one pe-  
titioner stammered:

“I can’t talk to you. I’m going to get  
thrown off the line.”



“You can’t find this stuff at Blooming-  
dale’s or Macy’s,” said a 40-some-  
thing, suede-clad man at Supreme,  
too press-shy to provide his name.  
“I like the exclusiveness of people al-  
ways seeing me and saying, ‘Wow.’ It’s



kind of like being



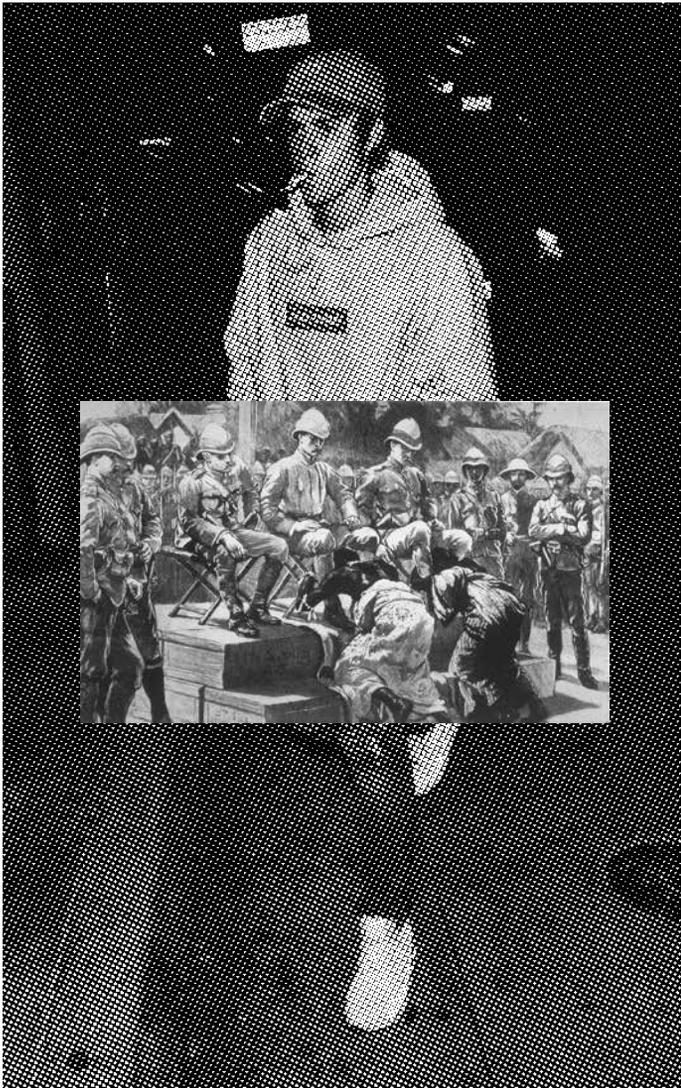
“The pos-  
sibility of  
never get-  
ting in is  
exciting,”  
Warhol  
mused.  
“But after  
that, wait-  
ing to get  
in is the  
most ex-  
citing.”  
Traveling

in packs has additional perks.

“The death of the shopping center has  
created this void in kids’ lives,”



a movie star.”



So I was like, "Okey, cool, maybe I'll do a skate shop." It cost me, like, \$12,000 to open the store. Rent was two grand. It was like, "Hey, if we do five grand a week, then great!"

The store began to grow in popularity and Jebbia's decision to stick to using skaters as staff worked in his favour. They were arrogant and cocky, but just the right amount of it. **Does James Jebbia skate?** No, but what does it even matter. He has created one of the best businesses in the world thanks to his commitment to sticking



to a strong aesthetic and vision based on skating, and people love it regardless. "we just want to make really great-looking clothes that are well-made, fit well... that you can skate in. It's just about rebellious youth who are into cool shit."

**Supreme was founded in 1994 by**



James Jebbia and is catered to skaters. There's an air of mystery about the brand, and Jebbia gives few media interviews. Nike, Adidas, and Vans are all well represented in the shoe rack. These are the three most popular brands among younger consumers, and it's further evidence that Supreme is plugged into what's hot.

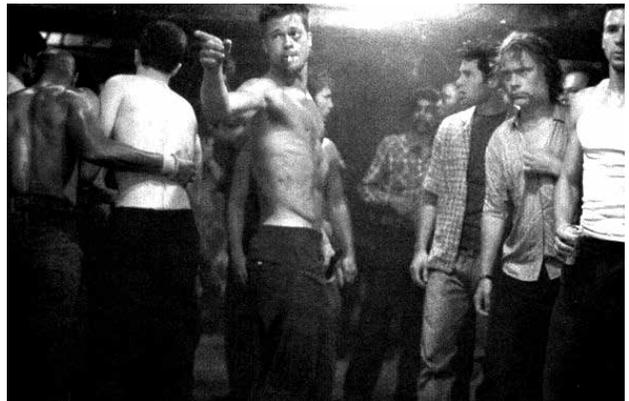
The shop also sells skate gear like decks and trucks – an obvious nod to its roots serving skateboarders.

The experience of shopping in Supreme kind of feels more like a parody of a store, and I can't help but feel that's by design. There's no way to tell who is in on the joke, but with Supreme's new \$1 billion valuation, it no longer matters – Supreme is demanding to be taken seriously.

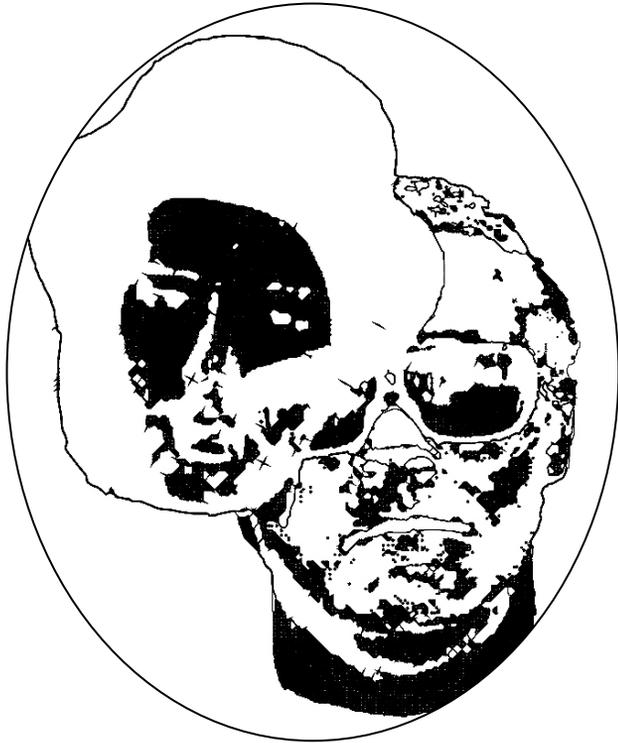


This was New York pre-internet, pre-mobile phones, pre-gentrification... Pre Rudy Giuliani bringing out the NYPD street-sweepers and cleaning up the city. Aaron Rose was showcasing the emerging new generation of stateside art and photography talent in his Alleged Gallery. That summer, photographer Larry Clark documented the downtown tear-aways in his epochal movie Kids, scripted by a teenage Harmony Karine. It was also the year James Jebbia opened the doors to his Supreme skate store on Lafayette Street in downtown Manhattan, in its own way also an incredible NY moment. Without realising it, Jebbia managed to bottle the energy of the city and the style of the streets with his skate and fashion brand.

The brand's effortless logo - a Barbara Kruger-influenced red box surrounding a white block typeface - is an iconic emblem for a worldwide gang as recognisable as the LV monogram or Hells Angels' rocker for those who know.



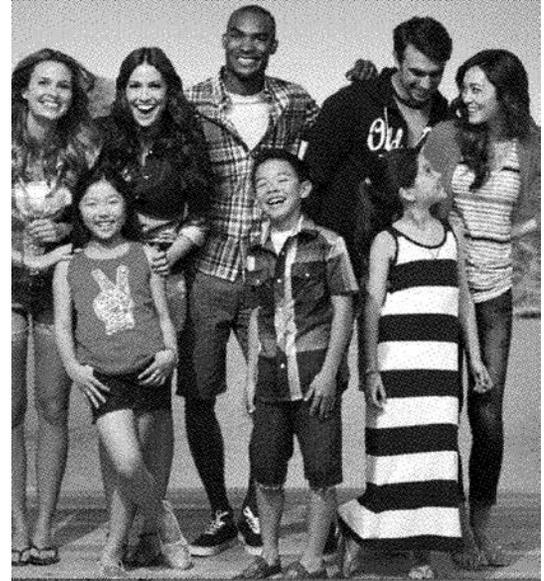
“We’re big fans of Radiohead, and we like a bit of art,” said Mr. Gamble, the preening owner of a “pill shirt,” a Supreme item influenced by a signature artwork by Damien Hirst.



“One time I saw a guy with a three-piece suit,” Mr. DeLeon said. “He was wearing immaculate Moscot tortoise-

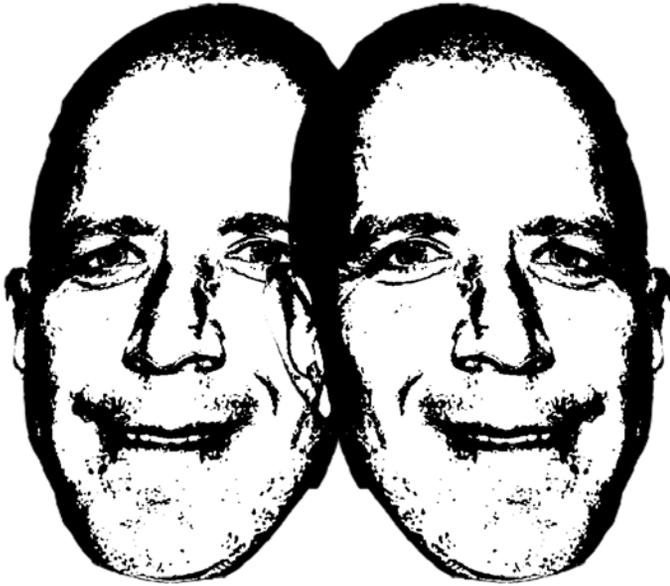
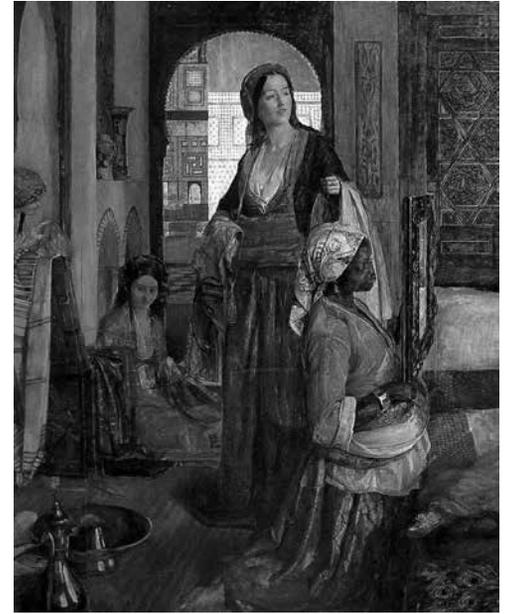
shell glasses. He told me, ‘I’m a lawyer meeting with a client, but I want first to get a sweatshirt here.’”

“I like Supreme,” he said, shrugging, “but

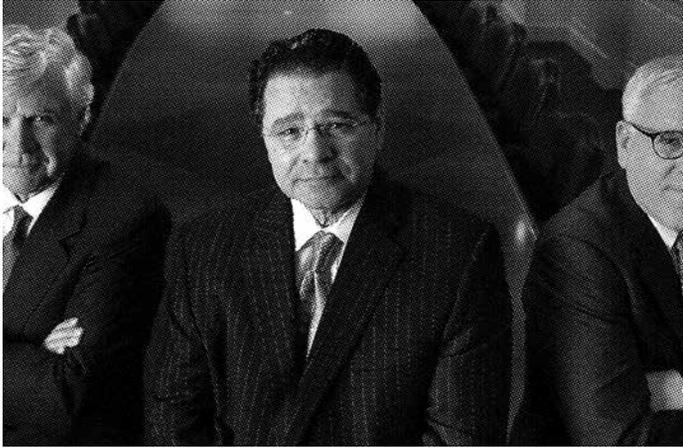


they could be Old Navy as long as it helps pay my rent.”

**The peak experience: going social with your trophy.** “Once you have it,” **he said**, “you get to snap it a couple of times on Instagram.” **And after?** “It’s on to the next thing,” **he said**.



# Supreme THE CARLYLE GROUP



The New York Post is a Rupert Murdoch-owned, right-leaning newspaper that has lent its support to several of Donald Trump's policies in the past. Compare and contrast that with Supreme, which recently donated a percentage of T-shirt sales to families affected by the president's anti-immigration policies. In this year's collection even, Supreme paid tribute to former Democrat president Barack Obama with a selection of colorful beanies.

Now, by plastering its logo over the Post's front page, you could argue the skate brand has essentially taken a piss on a publication it stands ideologically opposed to. A bit like graffitiing a right-wing mural. In this dynamic, Supreme is

the heretic interloper that has penetrated the establishment. Additionally, Supreme would have been aware of how coveted the newspaper would be upon release. The fact that it's managed to turn it into a commodity could be read as a veiled barb at Trump's brand of capitalism.

It also raises the age-old question that has plagued Supreme from the start, but especially since the brand's \$1 billion valuation just under a year ago: is the brand the high-concept fashion-meets-art-meets-skating project that its most loyal fans claim it is? Or is it simply a cynical albeit brilliant marketing play on Supreme's part that speaks to James Jebbia's prescient knowledge of the current and future media landscape?





Last but not least, the collaboration gives everyone (in the Big Apple at least) the chance to finally own a Supreme product. In comparison with this week's run, last year's MetroCard activation almost seems like a playful experiment. While



that collaborative product was only available at a few subway stations across the city.



"He told me he needed more," Mr. Ali, who sells the paper for \$1 on weekdays, said. "I told him 'I don't have any more!'"

"We knew that this would be a collector's item," said Jesse Angelo, the paper's publisher.

"Supreme is such a cool brand and we have so much affinity, to the design kinship of the logos, to being bold, and never shy, and New York-based." Mr. Angelo was hesitant to say who from the secretive team behind Supreme had approached the newspaper.

"I just want to make sure we don't want run afoul of our new friends and partners," he said.

Monday's New York Post could be picked up at nearly every newsstand and bodega in the city — provided you were quick enough.



Monday's New York Post could be



“Slap a Supreme logo on it, and it will fly off the shelves, literally no matter what it is.”





I really liked all of the hard goods—the decks, the wheels, the trucks. But all of the clothing that the skate companies put out was crap. These companies had to sell to a wide range of people, and a lot of them were very young. When people think of skaters, they think of, like, the 12- or 13- or 14-year-old kid. But in New York, it was the 18-to-24-year-old hardcore kid who wasn't wearing any skate stuff. They'd wear a hat or whatever, but they wouldn't wear the clothing, because it would fit badly and was bad quality, and skaters want to look good and pick up girls.

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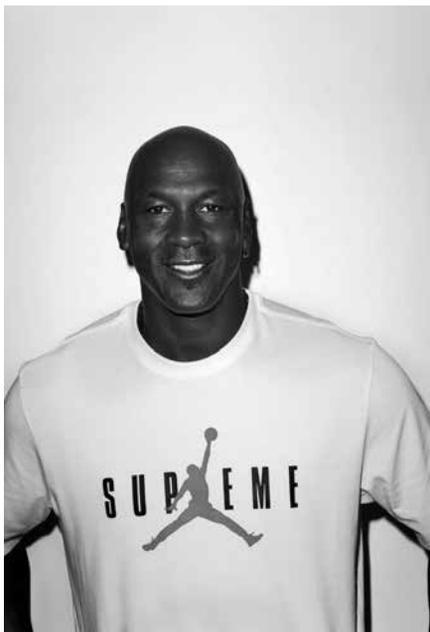
GO: How did you get big in Japan? Was it Japanese kids coming here and then taking stuff back with them?

JJ: Yeah. Do you go to Japan much?

GO: I used to go a lot. I'm dying to go back.

JJ: I go maybe once a year and I always get inspired. I think what happened was, right when we were starting, there was a little scene building up in Japan. There were a few new Japanese brands starting up for young people. Now, they don't need any more product out there, but if it's something that's legitimate, then I think they're very keen to embrace it. So our eyes were never on Japan. It was more like—

GO:



They found



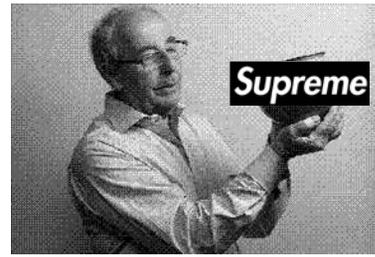
you.

**JJ: Yeah. We never pandered to the Japanese customer. We still don't. It's more like we're just trying to make stuff for that real pain-in-the-ass, picky New York kid. And I think that the kids in Japan could see that and say, "Okay, yeah, that's legit. There's nothing else quite like that going on."**

GO: Japanese connoisseurship is so interesting. There's this great, educated taste. Last night, I was lying in bed with my wife, watching the football game. She was on



her laptop and she said, "The Japanese are ruining the ceramics market!" I said, "What?" She's really into modern design, and I guess a lot of the modernist stuff she collects has gone through the roof because the Japanese are buying it now. She said, "Our plates have gone up five times in price!"



When we opened in Paris, we opened in the Marais. And when we opened in London, it was in Soho. These aren't,

like, edgy places. These are places where people—and young people—hang out. We don't like to be in places where people don't go. Elsewhere, Jebbia explains to Supreme's followers the reasoning behind not opening up more company stores. "We're here for the long haul. A big shop in Manhattan would feel like we were betraying our roots." When James Jebbia opened Supreme in 1994, he didn't think his little New York skate shop would become the globally recognized streetwear powerhouse it is today. "I also didn't expect Trump to be fucking president," he says over the phone, hours before he'll open Supreme's eleventh freestanding store in the world—just its third in the United States, and second in New York City. "But honestly, most people I know either skate or ride a bike across the bridge anyway."

So when I do see  
a line in front of  
the store, I'm like,  
“Cool. People still  
like the stuff.”



Text quoted from the following at random:

<https://theidleman.com/manual/life/who-is-james-jebbia/>  
<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/supreme-james-jebbia-interview>  
<https://www.interviewmagazine.com/fashion/james-jebbia-is-supreme>  
<https://hypebeast.com/2017/10/james-jebbia-supreme-brooklyn-interview>  
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