



Written by Jamie Clifton for VICE, July 18, 2016

The logo for Seycove, featuring the word "Seycove" in a white, sans-serif font centered within a solid red rectangular background.

**What inspires someone to spend £2,000 on a secondhand jacket?  
Why do people build Supreme shrines in their bedrooms? What does  
Supreme have that other brands don't?**

**Please read and answer the questions at the bottom.**

It's 9AM on a Thursday and 300 young men are lined up along a street in Soho. The guy at the front of the queue, 18-year-old Nick from Wembley, lets out a sort of pissed off yawn when I approach him. He's been waiting here 23 hours, he says, trying to sleep on one of the camping chairs now piled up across the road. The guy at the back of the queue, 17-year-old Werner, flew into London this morning from his home in Finland, just to stand in this line for the rest of the day.

In about an hour the doors to Supreme's London store will be opened, and everyone here – tired Nick; patient Werner; teenagers from Cardiff, Newcastle and Canterbury; the guy wearing a Supreme sleeping bag like a slanket – will get their chance to walk inside, past the sculpture of a smiley white ghost, and flick through the first batch of caps, coats, hoodies and T-shirts released this season.

The majority of queuers are heading straight for the shirt featuring a photo of gloomy vegetarian Morrissey. The photo **he didn't want Supreme to use**, he said, because they once collaborated with a burger chain – and also just because he didn't like the face he was pulling. Werner knows he isn't getting the Morrissey shirt; it'll have sold out long before he makes it inside, along with all the other stuff he actually wants. But that's fine. He's happy to pay for a flight and a hotel – and then queue for six hours – in the hope he'll find anything in his size, even if it's just a pair of boxer shorts.

This is completely normal. Every time Supreme releases chunks of new stuff at its ten stores across Europe, America and Japan – which is every Thursday from the start of each collection – hundreds of people skip school or work to get first dibs. A couple of weeks after my visit, the London shop manager tells Supreme's British disciples that if they're planning a pilgrimage they'll need to start

queuing on the Thursday morning – instead of the Wednesday night – because the weekly influx of rough sleepers in £300 trainers is rankling the local council.

No other clothing brands command this kind of devotion. Ralph Lauren had its "**Lo-Lifes**", a group of guys from Brooklyn who spent the early 90s stealing as much Polo as they could. Sneaker-heads tend to be Nike lifers. At some point down the line, your mum might get extremely into Boden. However, by Supreme standards, these are all middling brand obsessions – their followers the fair-weather fans to Supreme's ultras: the kids who queue, the adult men who'll pay silly money for vintage Supreme-branded incense sticks.

The fandom is essentially a subculture in itself. Europe's largest Facebook page to buy, sell, trade and chat Supreme is SupTalk, which, with nearly 60,000 members, surely outnumbers the continent's lesser-populated youth tribes – cyber-goths, say, or **people who are deadly serious about vaping**. In this group you'll find the many denominations of Supreme devotee, from ageing hype-beasts and 13-year-old rich kids to skaters, Insta-celebs and the stamp collectors of the streetwear generation: the guys – and they are always guys – who'll buy up every colour of one specific cap, or the full set of Supreme x Stone Island jackets, or each and every T-shirt featuring the brand's iconic box logo.

Before each "drop day", SupTalk members discuss their favourite upcoming items – the Morrissey T-shirt, for example, or the snakeskin shoe from an Air Max collaboration that's released a couple of months after I visit the store. Online, these hyped up pieces sell out in milliseconds – for £100 you can buy a "bot" that purchases your desired piece as soon as it appears in the e-store – and Supreme produces limited stock, so when it's gone, it's gone.

Until, that is, it appears again, on SupTalk or eBay, for considerably more than its original price. Some items go for twice what they cost on the rail, some for the sort of mark-ups more commonly applied to cinema popcorn. This is especially true for the last couple of years, as interest in the brand seems to have shot up exponentially. A £160 pink denim jacket from SS16 is flipped for nearly £2,250 to a buyer in Kyoto. On Grailed, a high-end clothing resale site, you'll often find old Supreme for the same price as a plane ticket to Bangkok. Where privileged schoolboys once spent their parents' dividends on PlayStations and plasma TVs, turning their noses up at fashion, they're now paying "proxies" to queue up on drop day and buy them £130 pullovers.

So why all this hysteria? Why do people build Supreme shrines in their bedrooms and not get embarrassed about it? Why are teenagers buying plane tickets to pick up a pair of boxer shorts? What kind of neurochemical reactions drive you to buy eight near-identical versions of the same very expensive T-shirt? Why, fundamentally, do so many people become so obsessed with Supreme?

Hype is the most cited reason: that the buzz around the brand is what sustains that same buzz; that a sighting of Drake or Kanye in Supreme is what inspires people to bid themselves into bankruptcy when the same item appears on eBay. But there has to be more to it than that. Surely humans – the

most evolved of all land mammals, creators of space stations and two-man umbrellas – aren't that easily swayed?

Equally, if you're the kind of person who actively worries about what's cool and buzzy, it follows that you'd lose interest in Supreme the more popular it becomes – yet the brand doesn't seem to be shedding any diehard followers as it continues to grow (bar a few cool-guy commenters in SupTalk who'll slag off anyone who only started wearing Supreme this year). You could also argue that the brand just produces really nice clothes – and, for some people, that's undoubtedly why they'll dip in and out. But for others, the levels of devotion have to be provoked by something more than cotton and thread.

In 1994, Supreme opened as a skate shop in lower Manhattan. Press-shy founder James Jebbia declined to be interviewed for this feature, but told Interview Magazine that skate companies in the early-90s catered more to 13-year-old suburbanites than older skaters in cities like New York, who wanted to avoid dressing like awkward man-children in the hope girls might pay them some attention. To remedy that problem, the shop started making T-shirts in small runs; and then hoodies and sweaters; then shoes in collaboration with Nike and Clarks, coats with The North Face and Stone Island, hoodies with Comme Des Garcons and jeans with APC. New T-shirts featured the work of freaky surrealist painter H.R. Giger and pioneering hentai artist Toshio Maeda, skate decks the designs of contemporary artists like Richard Prince, John Baldessari and Jeff Koons. Supreme morphed from a bricks and mortar hangout for downtown skate kids to a cult global brand whose eclectic output rivals that of some of the world's most established fashion houses.

Through all that, Supreme has continued to make a limited amount of product. This, says Jebbia, is because "we don't want to get stuck with stuff nobody wants". But considering the online shop sells out minutes after anything new is added, being straddled with a warehouse full of dead stock doesn't seem too much of a worry. Instead, your GCSE Economics teacher might argue, ploughing into your life to weigh in on Supreme's business model, keeping supply low is an effective way to create demand. At his home in West London, Musa Ali, a Supreme collector, explains: "In some regards, what makes people want to buy Supreme is the competitive, social aspect – to be able to go out in public and feel like you're less likely to be wearing clothes that everyone else is wearing."

But why? Why do we place so much value on unique stuff? Who is actually going to be impressed that your kitchen tiles are one of a kind? Nobody. Nobody gives a fuck about your bespoke kitchen tiles. But then, really, it's not about other people; it's about you.

"In evolutionary terms, we all collected," says Dr Dimitrios Tsivrikos, consumer psychologist at University College London. "We collect articles or resources to survive, but survival doesn't only rest upon what we need physically. We need, psychologically, to distinguish ourselves. In the past, tribes would decorate themselves with feathers or precious stones to set them apart from other tribe

members and attract potential mates. In the same way, collecting Supreme really allows people to build their identities with rare objects."

Thing is, the average Gary and Sue aren't going to realise your ultra-rare, **Sopranos-inspired** box logo tee took you eight months and £900 to secure. To them, it's just a T-shirt, like the ones you get in H&M or on the telly. However, in psychological terms – says Tsivrikos – that's of little importance: "Millennials in particular are very aware of different consumer tribes; they look to inspire or impress peers who share the same kind of interests as them, who will recognise that particular T-shirt. So really, we do it for a very small group of people."

Back in the queue on the first drop day of the season, this couldn't be more obvious. Everyone's come dressed in their Thursday best: the kind of ultra-rare coats, hoodies and T-shirts you'll often see described as "grails" – as in "highly coveted" – by SupTalk members. "The appeal is all in the exclusivity," admits 19-year-old Londoner Nelly, waiting for his proxy to deliver the Morrissey T-shirt he ordered. "If it's got a box logo on it, people will buy it. People want to be seen to be wearing Supreme, and there's no better way to communicate that than with the box."

Taylor Prince-Fraser, one of SupTalk's administrators, agrees. "You see kids spending hundreds of pounds on something that has 'Supreme' plastered all over it," he says over the phone. "And I think that's less for the design aesthetic and more to let everyone know that it's Supreme."

That these kids are keen to let everyone know they're wearing Supreme represents another important psychological factor in the brand's success. "They've got a lot of things going for them," says Jonathan Gabay, author of *Brand Psychology: Consumer Perceptions, Corporate Reputations*. "But importantly, Supreme was started in the right bit of New York by skaters. That makes it authentic, or seen to be authentic. The fact that they've brought in other designers over the years is irrelevant; it all goes back to the fact that the original people who wore this stuff were authentic – they weren't wearing it because it was trendy."

Over the past decade or so, a huge amount of importance has been put on "authenticity", both by **brands** and individuals. We're terrified of being exposed as fakes; being called a poser can be hurtful to some because it implies they're living a kind of false reality – that they don't have ownership over their own self. Granted, that sounds a bit strong in a discussion about a clothing brand, but psychologically it all plays a role.

"A brand is an extension of one's self – psychologically, in terms of how you want the world to see you, or what you want the world to believe you are," says Gabay. "But deeper than that: what you believe you are, through that brand."

Jebbia **told** the Business of Fashion that "what we do is a mindset", and if Supreme represents authenticity, for certain fans, even subconsciously, the obsession likely comes down to exactly that:

it's as much about what the clothes represent as the quality and design of each item. Wear those shiny white Armani trainers and it implies you like blowing money on bottle service. Wear Vetements to tell the world you're chill with spending £1,000 on a hoodie. Wear Supreme and you're part of their club, and everything that entails. When they release clothes featuring the faces of Dipset, William Burroughs and Raekwon – all traditionally Pretty Cool Things – you Get It (even if you don't). Wearing a box logo T-shirt implies you have the same breadth of cultural knowledge as those behind the brand; that you're as authentic as the brand itself (even if you're not).

In the space of six years, Palace – a British skate company – has become another streetwear heavyweight. That's in part due to the hype, the right people wearing it and the fact their design plays into the sportswear revivalism thing currently going on in the UK. But it also has to do with the fact it's a brand that comes off as inherently authentic: started by and worn by skaters in London who weren't concerned with the fact it was trendy to do so. There's a video on YouTube of a clearly moneyed teenager saying he prefers Palace to Supreme because it's "more road", which kind of tells you everything you need to know: lots of people buy this stuff because it helps to project a version of themselves they want the world to see. Perhaps the obsession – for some, at least – starts when this projection has to be maintained.

For others, like collectors Musa Ali and his brother Akbar, the obsession comes from a slightly different place.

"I've never felt obliged to like the brand for its roots," says Musa. "I can just about cruise around on a skateboard, but I haven't been on one for at least a couple of years. For me and my brother, it's more to do with the designs – the consistency; the fact they put out a lot of nice stuff and will collaborate with all these varied people – and the collector's habit. We've been collecting things from a young age – we still have all our *Yu-Gi-Oh* cards – and have always been very competitive about it."

To illustrate what he means by "the collector's habit", Musa pulls out a coat Supreme made in collaboration with Public Enemy in 2006. "I first bought this in the red and was wearing it a lot," he says. "So I thought, 'Why don't I get it in another colour?' The yellow version was hard to track down because it was such an old jacket. When I eventually got it, I thought, 'I've got two out of three; I might as well get the third one.' I did the same with this shirt: got the burgundy one, then the yellow, then thought, 'Well, it would be rude not to get the others.'"

While Musa and Akbar wear a good portion of their collection, about a third of it – mostly the T-shirts featuring box logos or the faces of celebrities like Mike Tyson and Kate Moss – stay wrapped in their original packaging.

"Every Thursday for the four or so years I've been into it, Supreme has taken up all of my time every Thursday morning. I thought to myself, 'I'd like something to show for this, and something that holds

its value," says Musa, explaining why the T-shirts have never been worn. "The gold box logo shirt – the one they released when they opened the store in Nagoya – I saw that it went all flaky when people wore it and washed it. Another T-shirt we have, which was released in 2001 or 2002, I'd hate to wear it and for it to get marked."

This may sound counterintuitive to some – spending months tracking something down, or hours queuing for it, only to keep it stowed away in a cupboard. But view a Supreme stockpile the same as a collection of fine china or rare coins and it makes more sense. You're not going to eat pasta off a bone china plate or buy a pint with a 17th century guinea, but that doesn't stop you from collecting them.

"There are people out there who have warehouse spaces for their collections, and it's almost like their second bank balance," says Musa. "They rely on all this cotton that's aged, essentially, like a fine wine to eventually sell to someone who's ready to start their journey into collecting Supreme, which – for collectors – can be endless. It's endless for me."

Supreme has its detractors – those who, bizarrely, get very offended by what other people choose to wear, and then kick up a fuss about it online. But that's not stopping waves of new fans from developing an obsession with the brand, whether it's via that subconscious hunt for authenticity or because, like Musa and Akbar, they're psychologically pre-disposed to hoarding with a purpose. What's left to be seen is how long Supreme holds out.

Physical growth has been intentionally slow: the brand has only opened two new stores in the past six years. But if Supreme continues to reach more people at the rate it's been reaching them, it will be harder to maintain the sense of exclusivity and authenticity the brand's been so successful at trading on. "I can't help but feel that's already deteriorating a little," says Musa. "Especially since the opening of more stores."

### **Questions for Logo Sketchbook assignment. To be handed in as a .pdf**

**Please complete the following, and submit electronically as 1 file.**

#### **Part 1:**

- 1. What are 6 of your favourite logos? Include the logo, and describe what you like about each one.**
- 2. Do you believe in brand loyalty? Why or why not? What brands, if any, are you loyal to?**
- 3. Is there a difference between blind devotion to a brand, and brand loyalty. What is the difference to you?**
- 4. This article speaks a lot about “authenticity”. What does this mean to you, and why is it important?**
- 5. What is the opposite of “authentic”. What brands are no longer “authentic”?**

6. So, who does spend \$3000 on a jacket? Would you? Why or why not?

**Part 2:**

1. Complete 4-6 sketches of a logo that you have created for Seycove, or for your graduating year. Of course, you may also choose to do a design completely outside the realm of the Logo. Scan these and include them in the same PDF as Part 1.