

Formatology / Tokens of a Self-Imposed Exile

By [yaffo23jerusalem](#) / [November 10, 2011](#) / [Yaffo+](#) / [One comment](#)

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20150831120246/http://yaffo23.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/formatology61.jpg>).

Dick Hebdige, in his seminal book *Subculture*, starts his account of style with a description from a Jean Genet novel of how a confiscated tube of vaseline can represent subversion and revolt. He suggests that "the most mundane objects – a safety pin, a pointed shoe, a motor cycle ... like the tube of vaseline, take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile".

The virtualisation of cultural products makes it more difficult for objects to stand for ideas like these. Durutti Column could design a record with a sandpaper cover to destroy all the others in your collection, in homage to Guy Debord's *Mémoires*. What would you have to do today to have the same effect – Infect your mp3s with a virus?

The DiY designs in this exhibition are **tokens of a self-imposed exile from an industry that is itself in decline**. And yet they stand for the perverse aspiration of DiY music to both belong to a medium that is reproducible and mass-marketed and at the same time to reject the market rules by which it plays. Hand-made packaging represents a democratic demand to appropriate the means of production, to make your own damn music rather than be a passive consumer, and yet at the same time, by virtue of its singularity, it limits access to those few fans who end up with the goods, making it actually quite exclusive.

In this context, something interesting happens to the cardboard packaging. It was meant to be nothing but a cheap, light yet surprisingly strong material to shelter an object from a sharp, abrasive, damp world. But then cardboard became a design material in its own right, covering books with post-industrial skins, turning the simplest everyday objects into branded commodities in 'no-brand' chains like Muji, decorating art installations with readymade architecture and protecting fancy retro Christmas toys from eager shoppers.

The CDs (but strangely not the vinyl records) that came inside the cardboard, made of a material that looked like a shiny gift from the future only 25 years ago, are all but obsolete. Their guts spilled all over the internet as mp3 downloads or compressed inside tiny nano players, they seem as heavy and ancient as a typewriter. **It looks now like some kind of weird and singular cardboard packaging around the CDs** senses that the future they promised will soon be replaced by leaner, more efficient futures.

When a new social order finally arrives, it is possible that **we will be better off with cardboard that could shelter us from the rain**, and stuffed into our shoes, could keep our feet warm. We remain hopeful that there will also be a place, though, for these relics of a different age, with its paradoxical faith in the liberatory value of DiY culture.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv
(London-based artists, writers and curators working in collaboration)

Exhibition Program

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20150831120246/http://yaffo23.org/2011/10/27/today-at-formatology-dj-lior-ashkenasy-8pm/>).