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## Post Hipster

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Media grouchies have spent much of the past couple years getting their skinny jeans in a knot over hipsters. But anti-hipster bile has definitely seen its day; it peaked around 2007-2008 with "hipster-must-die" cover stories in Time Out New York and Adbusters. These days, there is a relative lull in hipster dialogue; people are simply not talking about them as much. What happened — have hipsters disappeared? A more prescient question might be: where have they disappeared to?

Infamous Adbusters pundit Douglas Haddow seems convinced that there is something new and sinister about hipsterdom. In his Adbusters story, he compares hipsters unfavorably to previous counterculture movements like punk rock. He has two arguments: one, that there was a driving cause behind punk bigger than just looking trendy, and two, that punk used new style ideas instead of ironically chewing up discarded relics of the past. These arguments may ring true with the punk example, although they have been criticized for idealizing punk after the fact. But they are pretty indefensible when extended to punk's sister subcultures of skinhead and mod. Both of these subcultures, like hipsterdom does now, chewed up discarded aesthetics and subverted them for their own purposes. The skinhead movement used a no-nonsense working-class aesthetic to react to the comfortable free love of the dominant hippie subculture of its time. Mods, who preceded punks, reacted to the grungy James Dean look of the 1950s by dressing sleek and modern. Is the hipster movement equally reactionary? Time will tell — it'll be a few years before the hipster history books get written. Don't be surprised if hipsterdom gets pegged as a reaction to the lo-fi grunge of the 1990s. It's a bit harder to identify than the mod style's reaction to the "50s greaser look," since hipsters don't really vocalize any disdain for grunge. But the difference in ideas is obvious. Lo-fi was an unpretentious display of vulnerability, while hipsters, like mods, returned to using irony and image to mask saying what they meant. Over the past few years, the hipster movement has started to give way to a different ideal. Irony is out; authenticity is back in. This shift is chronicled wonderfully by culture blog Hipster Runoff, which, despite its name, almost never refers to "hipsters," and has gone so far as to rebrand itself as "HRO." This death of the word "hipster" suggests that hipsters, at least in the traditional sense, have died out. HRO still has opinions on those who many of us would refer to as hipsters, but refers to them as "alt" — as in "alternative," which is basically "counterculture." While hipsterdom was pretty ephemeral, alts are still around, and have always been. Punks were alt. Mods were alt. Hippies were alt! We're watching the emergence of a new term in our cultural lexicon. It's catching on fast; the Globe and Mail notably used it in referring to new Toronto alt hangout Jamie's Area. Its popularity might just come from the fact that it has three fewer syllables and 11 fewer letters than "counterculture." But maybe it's simply a more accurate term. HRO's deliciously snarky writing style gleefully uses "txt-talk" to dissect the current countercultural zeitgeist. Posts range from the epic "What does 'space' mean 2 u?" to the mundane "Should I blow off my iPhone?" It describes itself as "post-ironic," which is a pretty apt description — it's so ironic, it's gone past ironic, and gone back to authentic again. In an extremely "post-ironic" manner, HRO refers to itself as authentic, gleefully poking fun at this newfound obsession with eschewing irony for authenticity. Authenticity, of course, doesn't really tell the whole story, and HRO realizes this. Its tone is too detached for anything on the site to be taken seriously, and perhaps that's the message — we never really know if we are being authentic or ironic, hipster or lo-fi — but we do fall under that big patchwork blanket of alt.