

The top half of the page features an abstract background with a vibrant red and orange color palette. On the right side, there are glowing, ethereal light patterns that resemble energy or data flow, with bright yellow and white highlights. The overall effect is dynamic and futuristic.

PAPER TWENTY-EIGHT

Coolhunting with Aristotle

Welcome to the hunt

Nick Southgate,
Cogent

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Introduction

The uncertainty of the future is the client's greatest curse, and prescience the greatest promise a researcher can make.

Coolhunting gained celebrity as a research technique because it seemed unerringly shrewd at predicting the future – and with that most ephemeral, fickle, willo-the-wisp of qualities, cool.

Coolhunting offered, therefore, a great and glittering prize. Cool is the anvil on which many brands are made or broken. Cool is the currency all brands can profit from when they trade in it. The profits are highest for those brands that play at the high-stake brand tables of sports apparel and fashion.

The role call of big brands that had brought in the Coolhunters confirmed this: Reebok, Adidas, Nike, Coca-Cola, Levi's, Converse, Nokia, Gap, The North Face, Pepsi and so on. These brands were either perennially cool, or widely admired for their ability to rediscover and re-ignite lost cool. Meanwhile big brand factories like Unilever, Coty Beauty and Seagrams all managed to get their taste of the cool as well.

Coolhunters acquired the reputation for having the magic touch, as being marketing's first true alchemists after generations of charlatans and frauds. In the New Economy bubble of the late nineties, when the Brand was imbued with an insane and spiralling amalgam of religious, mystical and even messianic possibilities, the ability to harness cool was a mighty power indeed.

In this climate the Coolhunters flourished. They were the high priests of cool. They alone understood cool's abstruse, obfuscated and opaque rules. They alone could tell who was cool and who was not. They alone could divine the distinction between an amateur's punt and the cool avatar's discerning pronouncement. The arcana of the cool became the esoterica of the Coolhunter. If we paid sufficient attention (and money) to them they might just let us in on the secret.

Why we should all care about the hunt

This mystique and hubbub meant that although Coolhunting touched few of us in the research community directly it touched us all indirectly.

Some of us are blessed to work with large clients with large budgets to match who can afford the luxurious services of a Coolhunter. However, mostly most of us work with clients who do not have these resources. Yet these clients read of Coolhunting and saw that it was good. They wanted the cool too – and so Coolhunting became a benchmark for all of us to deliver against. Coolhunting was living proof that there were smarter people out there doing things in a smarter way.

Likewise, as researchers, we were captivated by the glamour of the Coolhunt. No longer did we want to be the egghead with the charts and graphs. We wanted in on the action, we wanted to be part of the hunt, because we knew when we bagged our first piece of the Coolhunt's big game we too would be cool. It reminded us of younger dreams before they were tarnished by long nights of dull focus groups.

Coolhunting also attracted considerable attention outside of the realms of research, advertising, and marketing. The Coolhunters became the new Hidden Persuaders.[1] Weren't the Coolhunters the people our parents warned us about, playing with our emotions, reading our thoughts, and programming our minds?

A brief overview of this paper's ambitions

This pervasive influence of Coolhunting is the motivation behind this paper. Being touched by the Coolhunt raised legitimate questions. Client and researcher wanted to know if they should be Coolhunting, or at least doing something similar. The critics (and the public they spoke for) wanted to know if they should acquiesce in the role of quarry in the hunt.

What follows is an analysis of how the Coolhunt works. It looks to both question and interrogate Coolhunting's explicit and implicit assumptions.

Key amongst these assumptions is the belief that cool is in some sense beyond analysis. Cool is ineluctably recondite. It may be described but any attempt to develop prescriptive criteria must necessarily be jejune and insipid.

Central to this paper's argument is the contrary claim that cool is open to analysis.

Where exactly does Aristotle fit into this?

To provide an analysis of cool this paper will turn to a maybe unexpected

source, Aristotle.

Aristotle's notion of cool is to be found in his ethical writings, most particularly the Nicomachean Ethics. A more extensive argument will be made later. However, a brief introduction to Aristotelian Cool will be furnished here.

Aristotle holds to, indeed can be said to have founded, a school of ethical thought known as Virtue Ethics. This means that correct behaviour is judged in comparison to virtues such as courage, temperance, generosity, wit and truthfulness.

According to Aristotle the correct pursuit of life is happiness. We can only be happy when we exercise each of the virtues in moderation. Thus, we must not lack courage, for this would make us cowards, nor have too much courage, which would make us foolhardy.

One might, therefore, typify this approach as one of taking an appropriate response to one's situation.

It is this idea of appropriate response that finds rich parallels with the ideas central to the notion of cool.

People who are cool are making the most astute decisions about their lives and their environments.

This approach will later be used to show how it is possible to do research to develop brands and communications that can be inspired by the cool without having to join the Coolhunt.

The Ways of the Hunt

It is true to say that Coolhunting agencies do not necessarily embrace or welcome the term 'Coolhunting' themselves.

Though being a cool hunter sounds, well, cool, trend analysis companies consider the term derisive, applying it only to hired hands [...]. Cool hunting, the firms say, doesn't require sophisticated analysis of why an item is cool, a service that the research firms provide. One firm, Sputnik, refused to discuss the topic without a guarantee that the words "cool" and "hunter" would not appear in the article.[2]

Of course these agencies provide interpretations of the data they provide – but that is hardly uncommon or distinctive.

Offended as they might like to be about the title, it is the ability to spot the cool and put a finger on trends that brings them business. This ability comes down to one thing – enabling clients (who are a priori uncool) to vicariously or directly contact truly cool people. This is not delivered by interpretation alone.

The Methodology of the Coolhunt

The Coolhunt Methodology is typically three-layered.

At the bottom sit The Cool. These are the small number of enlightened individuals in the general population who are cool and know cool.[3]

In the middle are the Coolhunters. These are the Coolhunting agency's Foot Soldiers. They are on the street, in the club, hanging in the hood, acting as the eyes and ears of their masters.

At the top are the executives of the Coolhunting agency. They take reports in from the Coolhunters and then follow them up as they see fit. Most also pursue a dogged Coolhunt all of their own.

All three groups are united by one thing: they are all cool.

What makes Coolhunting intriguing as a methodology is that it boils down to a sophisticated recruitment procedure. Important as interpretation no doubt is the interpretive framework seems neither radical nor differentiated from other forms of trend analysis (e.g. little different to the Henley Centre's Social Trends publications). On the other hand the recruitment procedure is both new and central to the success of Coolhunting. Shaping the recruitment procedure at every turn is the alleged elusiveness of cool itself.

The methodology is born of the most central assumption of the Coolhunt: only cool people can understand what is cool. The executives of a Coolhunting agency gain their power by brokering this transaction between the glistening language of cool and the mundane language of the befuddled and uncool client.[4]

Coolhunters are explicit about the inability of the uncool to function in the elevated and exclusive realms of the cool. Malcolm Gladwell, one of the foremost documenters of the Coolhunt and himself uncool, documents this exchange between Queen of the Cool Dee Dee Gordon (then of Lambesis, producers of the L-Report, latterly co-founder of Look-Look) and her colleague Piney Kahn:[5]

Piney and Dee Dee said that they once tried to hire someone as a coolhunter

who was not, himself, cool, and it was a disaster." You can give them the boundaries," Piney explained. "You can say that if people shop at Banana Republic and listen to Alanis Morissette they're probably not trendsetters. But then they [the neophyte but doomed Coolhunter] might go out and assume that everyone who does this is not a trendsetter, and not look at the other things." "I mean, I myself might go into Banana Republic and buy a T-shirt," Dee Dee chimed in.

Indeed this implies the uncool are in a double bind. Demonstrably they cannot recognise the cool. Moreover, the very same act when performed by the cool is cool, but when performed by the uncool is uncool.

As it is impossible to give rules for what is cool the usual understanding of recruitment is completely upset. There is, instead, much talk of 'instinct', 'a sixth sense', 'gut feelings' and 'people who just know'. [6]

Of course, in all forms of research we extol the virtues of good recruitment. We all know that bad recruitment can completely undermine a study. Nonetheless writing recruitment specs is often left to the more junior team members while recruitment itself is executed by recruiters who are a long way down the traditional research world's chain of respect and reward.

By its own arguments Coolhunting simply cannot afford to proceed this way. Although recruitment is done by a mysterious laying on of hands as one cool person identifies the next the sagacity of these decisions will need to be constantly monitored.

This, of course, is the source of sensitivity about the interpretive credibility of the Coolhunting agencies.

Traditional research suggested that ordinary people saying ordinary things could be interpreted to be actually revealing insights about what they actually wanted brands to suggest to them. This led, in its extreme form, to the research made famous by The Hidden Persuaders. Agencies aimed to sell to us by harnessing impulses we were entirely unaware of and would never consciously or spontaneously voice.

Conversely, Coolhunters talk to extraordinary people saying extraordinary things. The coolness of the respondents makes their pronouncements de facto predictions. One could easily feel that one would only have to write these pearls of wisdom down and the job would be done. [7] Indeed the subscription reports offered by Coolhunting agencies seem to draw much of their weight from simply aggregating the pronouncements of the cool. If enough cool people say the same thing this critical mass makes it a foregone conclusion the trend will

break.[8]

The implication is that researchers no longer need to probe universal human truths to find insights. Coolhunting has discovered a segment of the population who will serve up tomorrow's trends if not ready digested then certainly heavily chewed.[9]

Cool Today, Mass Tomorrow

In this way the congenital ignorance of the uncool is dealt another indignity. Despite not being able to recognise what is cool the uncool will be doing tomorrow what the cool are doing today.

We are all familiar with the precepts of the model that divides the population into Innovators, Early Adopters, Later Adopters, the Early and Late Masses, and the Laggards and Luddites at the end. It has become a common place in research, brand and advertising agencies the world over.

In his role as both theorist and documenter of the Coolhunt, Gladwell points out that this model is based on sociological studies in 'Diffusion Research'[10] the most famous of which studied the spread of a new seed variant on Iowa farms in the 1930's and 1940's.[11]

The risks of crop failure and a strictly seasonal opportunity for adoption make choosing a new seed variant seem dramatically different from buying a pair of trainers. Nonetheless Coolhunters (in common with many far less cool researchers) have hungrily adopted the diffusion model as their guide. However, it has not been adopted because it is a useful description of how an innovation spreads through a population. For Coolhunters, diffusion theory has the strength and power of a law of nature: universal, all encompassing, and irresistible.

This completes the damnation of the uncool. Once cool people have an idea a chain of events is started that means the rest of us (even the uncool) will come to adopt it. Naturally by the time the uncool masses have adopted an idea it will have become necessarily uncool.[12]

The elusiveness of the Cool combined with the inevitability of today's niche cool becoming tomorrow's mass uncool underwrites the Coolhunter's power. Clients needed them because as an inevitable consequence of the way markets worked what was cool amongst the coolest would be mass, if uncool, tomorrow and only the Coolhunters could guide them to these few individuals who determined all our futures.

Putting the heat on the Coolhunters

However, taken together these two points create a quandary for the Coolhunter and should be pulled apart. When this is done one arrives at a rather different view of what is cool. With this different understanding of what is cool we can take a very different approach to using cool as a guide and inspiration in building better brands and communications. We can also feel better about using the supposedly leaden traditional research methodologies we mostly do use and know well.

If cool was indeed so impenetrable to everyone except the cool a paradox would engulf the Coolhunter. Their model relies on people who are not cool adopting examples of cool practice and cool behaviour. The motivation for this cannot be just that the uncool believe that these things are cool – remember the uncool do not and cannot know the cool.

Instead there must be universal and shared desires and goals that both the cool and the uncool respond to.

The uncool must, therefore, be driven to adopt previously cool behaviour while dealing with some universal problem that cool people have already solved. This adoption doesn't, and cannot, make them cool, but it does spread the trend.

The Coolhunter, therefore, has to explain what these parallel concerns are that both the cool and the uncool share.[13]

Cool & Authenticity

The truest hallmark of cool behaviour according to Coolhunters is Authenticity. Authenticity is a quality itself worthy of lengthy discussion. Nonetheless, we can gloss it here to equate to the desire people have to have ownership and autonomy over their own identities.[14]

Grounding their enquiries in authenticity suggests due profundity and seriousness on the part of the Coolhunter and suitably beguiles the client. However, the concept is rather too abstract for the Coolhunter's practical street-level purposes. Therefore, a further more concrete translation is needed.

The favourite candidate is self-expression. The cool are always looking to express themselves in ever better, clearer and more evocative ways.

This drive for self-expression, Coolhunters claim, is a natural part of what it is to be cool. Cool people need to be outwardly expressive and socially engaged.

This is unarguably true of the teenage and twenty-something audiences that Coolhunters pre-occupy themselves with. These life stages are pre-eminently

about social engagement and the kudos necessary to achieve successful and fulfilling engagement with one's peers while commanding their respect.

Malcolm Gladwell is correct when he writes that the nature of this respect has shifted since the Second World War:

It has to do with personal influence, influence within specific social networks. It has to do with the influence held by those who have the respect and admiration and trust of their friends, and not with a kind of status envy, which is, to me, a notion that comes from the 1950's. It's a notion that's not relevant today, and also happens to be a notion that I find personally distasteful.[15]

This much seems true, particularly in the States. Status can only be derived by consumption if one can have more than the person next to you. It was good to be the first person on the block with a TV, then a Colour TV, then a VCR, and so on. Latterly, goods have become so ubiquitous and of such consistent quality that only taste could help one choose.

Social status and success could no longer come from merely consuming, but had to come from how one consumed, and how one consumed was not directly related to how much money one had to spend (although, as will be discussed later, one telling criticism of the Coolhunt is its curious preoccupation with how the very poorest in society consume).

The Cool are, on this analysis, on a hiding to nothing. Their status depends on their authenticity, an authenticity that can only be proved by self-expression. As we have already seen, the value of this self-expression will be chronically eroded when its ways are adopted by the mass. The cool person is given no choice but to move on. This gives another defining quality of the quarry of the Coolhunt: the Cool are driven by (and to) an endless quest for novelty.

Cool & Novelty

A fine but important distinction needs to be drawn here. The kind of people who drive trends will tend to be drawn towards and fascinated by novelty. These are exactly the kind of people Coolhunters observe. However, the choice of observation here is loaded with bias. Coolhunters are interested in discovering new trends and the identification of new trends with what is cool should not be a foregone conclusion.

It is one thing to say that Cool people often set trends. It is another thing to say that trend seeking is a necessary condition of being cool. Coolhunters provide no argument for this being the case.

The problem lies at a deeper level. Ironically it is also a product of the very success of the Coolhunt.

Brand owners, brand owners who ultimately make their money by selling things, pay the Coolhunter.

The Coolhunter, therefore, is not truly interested in understanding or documenting what Cool is. The Coolhunter is instead interested in documenting Cool Consumerism.

Hopefully it goes without saying that consumer behaviour is only a subset of all human behaviour.[16] It is possible to be cool in all of one's behaviour. Therefore if one limits one's search for cool only to when it is demonstrated through consumption, or something that can be made consumable, then the remit of the Coolhunt will fall short of a full investigation of all that is cool.

In the interests of balance it should be noted that Coolhunters do claim to record behaviour that is cool without being consumer behaviour. The accusation here is not that Coolhunting amounts to nothing more than poking through the shopping baskets of those deemed cool.

The objection stems from the belief that all research methodologies however well grounded, however well conducted, and however well intended are prone to be corrupted by both practitioners and clients through the simple attrition of day-to-day usage and immediate commercial and practical concerns.

Coolhunting's paradigmatic employment is in the development of trainers.[17] The methodology is reduced to its simplest here. Take a shoe, find the coolest kid you can and ask them if it's cool or not. The only thing differentiating this from a classic hall test is driving to a rough neighbourhood to find suitably cool kids and the intuitive and instinctive recruitment criteria, i.e. whomever the Coolhunter declares cool enough to ask.[18]

With the best will in the world it will be hard for both researcher and client not to see this sort of information as the crux of Coolhunting research. The 'cool or not' read out is the result of the research. All the background, the interpretation, the inspirational thought, the methodological back up, the intellectual framework and its (alleged) rigour will be quickly forgotten. This is the inevitable fate of all research methodologies.

The Coolhunt, therefore, is connecting with Cool Consumerism. It is not connecting clients with any deeper understanding of cool. Given the way all research techniques get worn down it could not achieve this higher aim unless this was its sole, explicit and stated aim and exactly why clients buy it in the first

place. Neither of these is true.

It is this nature of the Coolhunt that attracts the ire of so many critics. It is also the reason why we, as researchers, should be looking at the Coolhunt and asking ourselves some searching questions about what we're doing all this research for in the first place.

The Coolhunt Saboteurs: Critics of the Coolhunt

The complaints of the critics of the Coolhunt fall under three subheads.

First there is an emotional rejection of the very idea that cool can be hunted down and mounted up as a trophy on the Corporate Boardroom wall for the suits to enjoy.

The second complaint is that Coolhunting is the most pernicious form of marketing that Corporations engage in today. This school of criticism has made Coolhunters the demonic poster boys of the anti-brand backlash, just as Vance Packard made the 'depth men' the whipping boys of *The Hidden Persuaders*.^[19] Finally, the third complaint grows from this accusation of exploitation by brand owners. These critics level the complaint that brand owners who wish to profit from cool would both make more money and more friends if they went to the effort of inventing new kinds of cool rather than manipulating and hijacking existing forms of cool.

This final criticism is of most interest to us as researchers because we are the people who could be charged with providing the inspiration and insight for new kinds of cool. However, the nature of this objection is best understood in light of the second criticism of Coolhunting's pernicious and exploitative nature.

Hands Off My Cool, Man!

The first objection is probably the most widespread and commonly felt. People like the idea that Cool is a naturally occurring thing, and so don't like the idea that it is manufactured. Often this is a baby-boomer objection, in part born of the fact that baby-boomers are pretty sure they invented cool in the first place.

Indeed sympathising with this objection is likely to make one sound like an old hippie. So it is no surprise to find Detroit Free Press columnist Mitch Albom writing like, well, an old hippie:

Now, I hate to sound like a 60's burnout here, but wasn't cool supposed to be the antithesis of marketing? Cool was that small FM station that you discovered first, or a shirt that nobody else had, or the way your favourite

singer wore his hair. It wasn't meant to be dished out like birdseed – especially not by corporations.[20]

Albom's objection is partly blunted because he confuses issues of the spontaneity of cool and the ownership of cool.

Cool people frequently appear to be spontaneous – but this is just appearance. If Albom thinks his favourite singer was born with that haircut on his head, that the cool DJ didn't worry long and hard over the choice of music or rehearse his laidback quips, that Elvis didn't perfect that snarl in the mirror or anyone of a million other hard-earned contrivances of cool were in fact completely spontaneous he is sadly mistaken (not to mentioned suckered in by the posturing of cool people who would like to have you believe it is all spontaneous – they lie).

What is important, though, is that these cool contrivances were conceived by individuals and without marketing gain in mind. While this remains true, cool can be said to belong to us all. When only corporately sponsored cool can spread this stops being true. This explains this instinctive and visceral objection to the Coolhunt.

More importantly, thought, this gut instinct grounds the other two, better articulated, complaints.

The Perniciousness of the Cycle of Cool

Naomi Klein punctures Coolhunting by arguing that Coolhunting is a euphemism for something rather more unpleasant:

As designer Christian Lacroix remarked in Vogue, "It's terrible to say, very often the most exciting outfits are from the poorest people." Over the past decade, young black men in American inner cities have been the market most aggressively mined by brandmasters as a source of borrowed "meaning" and identity...The truth is that the "got to be cool" rhetoric of the global brands is, more often than not, an indirect way of saying "got to be black." Just as the history of cool in America is really (as many have argued) a history of African-American culture... for many of the superbrands, cool hunting simple means black-culture hunting.[21]

On this analysis the Coolhunter is a stooge of white-corporate America making sure that even if Black Culture is going to influence what Americans wear, the profits will still flow where they always have done.

This accusation also has a sting in the tail for those Coolhunters who might prefer to hide behind the more respectable titles of anthropologist or

ethnographer. For anthropology has for decades struggled with the ugly truth that much anthropological study was done to help colonial powers understand how to contain troublesome indigenous populations. Naturally it doesn't surprise the critics to find the agent provocateurs of Cultural Imperialism looking to Colonial Imperialism for role models.[22]

For critics like Klein and Kalle Lasn, founder of Adbusters, what is to be lamented here is the destruction of public space and ideas. We should demand an arena of argument and discussion that broaches no invasion of 'content' from corporate sponsors. Lasn sees this as part of a broader problem that he dubs "The Ecology of Mind".[23] The corporate invasion and colonisation of ideas results in a decline of 'Infodiversity'. Coolhunting is guilty because it co-opts ideas and force-feeds them to us, reducing their chance to flourish and our chance to choose. Lasn writes:

Cultural Homogenisation has graver consequences than the same hairstyles, catchphrases, music and action-hero antics perpetrated ad nauseam around the world. In all systems, homogenisation is poison. Lack of diversity leads to inefficiency and failure. The loss of a language, tradition or heritage – or the forgetting of one good idea – is as big a loss to future generations as a biological species going extinct.[24]

Coolhunting can hardly consider itself let off the hook because other graver sins are being committed.

This problem of Coolhunting killing the very thing it studies has not escaped the attention of Coolhunters themselves – although they feel differently about the problem.

The ever quotable Gladwell dubs this problem "the First Rule of the Coolhunt: The quicker the chase, the quicker the flight" and continues:

The act of discovering what's cool is what causes cool to move on, which explains the triumphant circularity of Coolhunting: because we have Coolhunters like DeeDee and Baysie, cool changes more quickly, and because cool changes more quickly, we need Coolhunters like DeeDee and Baysie.[25]

In fact Coolhunters should be worried because this cycle will ultimately be bad for business.

The reason is simple. The cycle that is being accelerated is not the cycle of cool itself, but the cycle of cool consumerism. The faster the cycle of cool consumerism becomes the more expensive it is for brands to chase it and more expensive it is for consumers to keep up. Something will give.

Could it be possible that cool itself will stop being cool? Those of us who cherish the notion of cool in our hearts need not worry that this will happen. However, what will happen is that consumerism will stop being cool. The substantial sales that writers like Naomi Klein, Michael Moore, Thomas Frank, Kalle Lasn and Douglas Rushkoff achieve surely serve as proof that this is in fact happening.[26]

Cooler than Cool?

Coolhunting's perniciousness, especially when viewed from both sides, seems an open and shut case. It is destructive of the very thing it is supposed to help propagate, that is a healthy world of Cool Consumerism, and the tools it uses to carry out this destruction are at the very least distasteful if not politically, socially and morally outrageous.

The response to this brings out the third objection. The Coolhunt has failed the notion of Cool and we deserve something better. Maybe surprisingly this objection finds its most articulate voice in the words of Douglas Rushkoff, normally one of the most gloves-off critics of contemporary marketing. Rushkoff is persuasively clear both as to what the solution is and the extent to which we are all being let down by not rising to the challenge. As it would be difficult to find a better way of putting these arguments Rushkoff is worth quoting at length:

Instead of dedicating your budgets to exacerbating this problem by drawing ever-tighter circles of teen research, have you considered spending it on designers, instead? Let your own studios and workshops become the locus of discovery, not some photographs on a trend-watching website. Dare you lead, instead of follow? Instead of identifying a trend and then mass-producing it before it has had a chance to mature into something of depth, why don't you develop some trends of your own? Spend your scouting money identifying new designers and then fostering their talents. If you simply must capture the vitality of youth, why not bring in kids as interns or apprentice designers? Let them learn from your best senior people, so that instead of re-inventing teen fashions every season, you build a legacy. How can teens develop their own culture when each new idea is co-opted and sold back to them before it's had a chance to mature? I know your revenues depend on staying ahead of the curve, but that curve has come full circle. The very coolest thing in a world where nothing lasts is continuity itself. That's why 60's, 70's and 80's clothing revivals are happening with such disarming regularity. Kids are aching for something with more longevity than the current cycle affords them. Don't adults have anything to offer them besides a mirror?[27]

The closing sections of this paper will be an attempt to rise to Rushkoff's challenge.

Cool for Cool's Sake

First, it is useful to try to define cool apart from the concerns of the Coolhunter, i.e. to separate cool from cool consumerism.

Second, an analysis of cool will be offered using Aristotelian Ethics as its basis.

Finally some concluding remarks will be made to suggest how we can change what we do so we can make use of what we have learnt about the cool.

Defining Cool

Existing academic studies of cool coincide on several points. Cool emerged in the twentieth century and is a peculiarly American phenomenon, and particularly an Afro-American phenomenon. This would certainly be the opinion of Stearns in his instructively titled *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth Century Emotional Style*.

The exact use of the word 'cool' appears to emerge around the Second World War. Cotton Club Orchestra leader Cab Calloway published a glossary in 1938 rather wonderfully entitled *Cab Calloway's Cat-ologue: A Hepster's Dictionary*. Although the glossary contains terms like 'hep', 'jive', 'groovy' and 'square' it does not contain 'cool'. Nor does 'cool' appear in Dan Burley's *Original Handbook of Harlem Jive*, a 1944 publication.

Cool appears to be pre-eminently a jazz term. The saxophonist Lester Young is credited with coining the term's use in jazz circles. Certainly its currency was wide enough for Miles Davis to coin one of the greatest album titles of all time, *The Birth of The Cool*, in 1957.

More important though than the use of the word is the prevalence of the attitude the word describes.

Marlene Kim Connor is explicit in connecting the cool attitude and the post-war Afro-American experience in her book *What is Cool?: Understanding Black Manhood in America*. For Connor cool is the silent and knowing rejection of racist oppression, a self-dignified expression of masculinity developed by black men denied mainstream expressions of manhood.

Certainly many of the obvious early figures of cool are black jazz musicians: Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman and the exception that proves the rule, Billie Holliday. Further the early white figures of cool, Beat writers like Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg and the Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock, were revealing dubbed by Norman Mailer as "White Negroes" in a 1957 article in *Dissent* magazine fully titled 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster.'

However, while Cool certainly has its roots in the Afro-American experience it would seem wrong to confine it to being a purely historical moment (unlike the attitudes and behaviours of the Surreal or Dadaist, which do seem to be confined to a certain historical situation). Nor does it seem right to confine Cool to one particular ethnic group or gender. The relationship of Black Americans to cool and to Coolhunting is, as we have seen, a pertinent one. However, this paper will progress on the assumption that the fundamentals of the cool attitude can be distilled beyond any specific cultural or ethnic roots.

Indeed, it is one of the premises of this paper that although cool may have its greatest fruition in Post-War America the cool attitude is very much older – indeed if Aristotle is the father of cool, over two millennia of cool pre-history exist.

Nonetheless, the above brief survey is useful because it provides a checklist for the credibility of the parallels between well-documented cool and the putative Aristotelian Cool.

Aristotle & the Cool: Contextual Parallels

Before looking at parallels between Aristotelian ethics and the cool attitude it is worth remarking on the parallels between Aristotle's social context and Post-War America.

Aristotle played a significant role in ancient Greek society. He was involved in the Lyceum in Athens, and also spent time in Macedonia. In this time Macedonia was a military powerhouse, a sort of ancient superpower. Aristotle's connections were impeccable as he was engaged as tutor to Alexander the Great.

The society Aristotle lived in, and had in mind when he composed his ethical writings, was therefore the most wealthy and powerful in the world at that time. This is, of course, the position post-war America has enjoyed.

Aristotle's ethics are intended as practical instruction for the sons of the wealthy and well connected. This is why there is considerable concern with the exercise of wit and the correct attitude to money in contrast to the rather more austere concerns of modern ethical enquiries.

It is true that the converse appears to be true of cool's origins as a code of behaviour for the marginalized in society. However, like Aristotle, cool is concerned with practical responses to one's situation, e.g. how to react to the day-to-day indignities of oppression with one's (masculine) dignity intact. This practical concern means that cool behaviour affects even the minutiae of

behaviour. This is also true of Aristotle's ethics, which are more concerned with practical execution than with providing immutable and overarching rules.

As America became relatively more prosperous and more equitably cool changed and the parallels becomes stronger. Cool moved from an attitude for the genuinely marginalized to an attitude for 'lifestyle' outsiders. Aristotle writes for an audience who would have enjoyed the ancient world's equivalents of ubiquitous consumer plenty. Notwithstanding the vast inequities within American society, it is still the richest in the world and cool, as Stearns suggests, its pre-eminent emotional style.

Aristotle & The Cool: Theoretical Parallels

For the purposes of this paper the theoretical parallels have been limited to the four most important. To draw further parallels would involve more Aristotelian exegesis than is either practical or frankly palatable.[29]

Parallel 1: Cool & The Life of Reason

The aim of human life is to pursue happiness. Happiness will be achieved by pursuing what is good for human life. According to Aristotle the good of something is best served when it acts in its most characteristic way. For example, a good wheel is perfectly round, a good athlete runs well.

The defining characteristic of humans is having and exercising their facility for reasoning. Happiness, therefore, is to be achieved by correct exercise of the reason in accordance with the virtues.

This finds its parallel with cool because cool responses are always appropriate. Consideration of the context an action must be made in is what informs appropriate action. Consideration is, of course, the correct exercise of reason. One should remember that consideration of context does not have to imply deep, reflective thought on each and every occasion. One can know what the right thing to do is because one is well attuned to what is necessary in a given situation. This is why doctors can train to work under pressure, or karate experts can learn to anticipate an adversary's moves. Prior consideration produces the correct action later.

This parallel is also reflected in our use of language. We talk about people 'keeping their cool' when they act appropriately. Conversely, when people react badly, we talk of 'losing one's cool'. People who act well are cool people. This sense of acting well can be extended beyond moral actions. This is why we feel it is cool when people know exactly what to wear, or admire the cool wit of someone who has just the right words when they need them.

Parallel 2: Holistic Approach to Life

Although concerned with practical guidance, Aristotle is also concerned to weigh and balance individual virtues. He is not, therefore, overly concerned with the worth or otherwise of individual actions. He is interested in how these actions add up to a life well lived. Indeed the ancient Greeks took this to its logical extreme insisting that a man could not have been said to have lived his life well until he was dead, and only then if he was remembered well by others.

Likewise, the cool is concerned with an overall approach to life. This has the apparently paradoxical affect of forcing concerns of the cool into every possible aspect of life. However, when the overall picture is one's concern anything can make a difference, so this is to be expected.

Again this fits in with our notions of cool people. To be truly cool is to be cool all of the time, not just part of the time. Part time cool makes no sense at all.

Parallel 3: Importance of Friendship

Aristotle is unusual amongst ethical writers for discussing friendship at some length. Modern ethical writing is almost silent on the subject, much preferring abstract rules and generalities.

Likewise, cool is deeply concerned with personal relationships. Cool people can only be cool by defining their relationships with other people in a cool manner. Usually this means choosing cordial and respectful relationships with those around one. However, cool people will always engage in appropriate resistance. Cool people stand up to the bully. Mohammed Ali increased his cool by resisting the draft. Hermits can still be cool if the terms of their withdrawal are also suitably cool (withdrawing through anger would be uncool, withdrawing for contemplation can be cool, hence the high cool factor Zen Buddhist monks enjoy).[30]

Parallel 4: Emphasis on the Practical Wisdom

As already noted both Aristotle and the cool are interested in practical pursuits. This emphasis on the practical is constantly evident when we talk about cool people because we nearly always talk of cool people 'knowing what to do' Cool is a body of practised knowledge.

Cool & The Virtues

As already explained the judgement of correct behaviour is made in Aristotelian Ethics by judgement against the virtues. The virtues discussed in the Nicomachean Ethics are listed in table 1.

Virtue	Sphere of Exercise	Discussion in NE
Courage	Fear & confidence	III.6-9
Temperance	Bodily pleasure & pain	III.10-12
Generosity	Giving & retaining money	IV.1
Magnificence	Giving & retaining money on a large scale	IV.2
Greatness of Soul	Honour on a large scale	IV.3
[Nameless]	Honour on a small scale	IV.4
Even Temper	Anger	IV.5
Friendliness	Social relations	IV.6
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself	IV.7
Wit	Conversation	IV.8
Justice	Distribution	V
Friendship	Personal relations	VIII-IX

Table 1. The Virtues as discussed in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

The only virtue that would have to be added to round out a modern notion of cool would be one of Aesthetic response. One of cool's concerns is the elegant expression of good actions, which demands an aesthetic sense. Equally, being able to discern the beautiful is also an important part of being cool (particularly given the large number of artists we regard as cool).[31]

Nonetheless, allowing for this one absence Aristotle's list of virtues is remarkably complete and flexible.

Using the virtues to harness the cool

As should have become clear cool is a quality of people, not of objects. Objects can only be said to be cool in as much as cool people use them.[32] We do not, therefore, have to worry about how a trainer could be said to exhibit the virtue of courage. This is fortunate as it would be absurd.

Instead we have to consider how our target audience feel about the exercise of each of the virtues. Aristotle urged that each virtue needed to be exercised in moderation. However, what changes from person to person and group-to-group is where this point of moderation sits.

It is easy to understand how courage finds a different point of mean expression for young men in their twenties who follow football teams, than it might for teenage girls interested in high street fashion. What the brand owner needs to consider is how their brand can reflect the way their target expresses a virtue. The more it helps them do so, the cooler the brand.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Stone Island is a cool cult brand amongst

hardcore football fans. The label's distinctive logo is attached like a military insignia, suggesting a martial expression of courage. On the other hand confidence for teenage girls is frequently concerned with finding a comfortable expression of their burgeoning sexuality to experiment with. So one finds that Miss Sixty, with its apolitical updating and blending of summer of love motifs, strikes the right tone of cool confidence for many 16-year old girls.

Generosity and magnificence are clearly virtues of interest to the financial services sector. American Express found that younger consumers rejected the brand values of the classic Green Card. They found it stuffy and pompous and loaded with suggestions of an entirely anachronistic approach to money. For young people the Green Card failed to meet their desired expressions of generosity and magnificence.

Amex's response was the Blue Card. The Blue card captured an entirely different tone and approach to money. It caught the way a new, less openly status driven, generation wanted to express their generosity and magnificence. Consequently it became Amex's cool card.

Go is (or was) arguably the coolest low-cost airline. It allowed an upmarket audience to mark the mean point of several virtues in a new way. Air travel had been caught up with expense, and was therefore an expression of magnificence. Indeed, business travel advertising is full of sumptuous imagery attempting to appeal to our desire for magnificence. By taking price out of the equation the transaction was relocated to one of generosity – the everyday management of money. Air travel became related to a completely different virtue. Go was also witty and with its retro birth of the jet age imagery evoked a sense of the democratic hopes and possibilities of air travel. Go therefore also tickled its audience's sense of justice and helped them feel good about that weekend to trip to Nice.

These examples all show how brands reflected their audiences. It is hopefully self-evident how a brand owner could use their brand to provoke and suggest responses in people's virtues they might not otherwise anticipate. In this way one can respond to Rushkoff's challenge.

If one thinks that sport should be democratic, then develop a sports brand that is about justice (arguably where Nike started, but not where they have ended up).

If you think fashion is too magnificent rediscover its generosity. If fashion is too witty, use it to tug at justice. If fashion dealing with justice is too rich for you, reassert its friendliness or truthfulness. Each will create new ways of being cool and maybe find an audience.

To make these judgements one needs to locate and contemplate the judgements one's target audience about the virtues. This can be done with traditional research techniques.

Unlike the Coolhunt it is not important to ask the trendsetters. The challenge is not to discover which virtues will be fashionable in the future. This is absurd because the virtues are always relevant at all times. They are neither in fashion nor out of fashion. Nor is the challenge to spot how the fashionable mean point will move. The challenge is not to reflect what people are expressing. The challenge is to give people new ways to express that virtue.

With the Coolhunt difficulties occurred because although the hunt could tell you what cool people were doing today it couldn't tell you what they would do tomorrow. This was because no analysis of the cool was offered. Cool people's next moves seemed arbitrary.

Virtues, however, do offer an analysis of cool. If expressing friendliness is important to your target it is surely more inspiring to think of new ways of expressing that virtue than it is to try to guess what will replace Cajun-Tex-Mex Fusion Cocktail Bars as the trend de jour.

One may discover that what is important to the target audience simply can't be convincingly addressed by your brand. Maybe your ketchup just can't instil a sense of justice; maybe your soap-powder will never deliver a sense of even temper. The answer here is not to try. Make your brand respond to the virtue appropriate to it and make people respond to that virtue. It could just be possible that people will like a brand that knows its limits and doesn't aspire to brand and intrude on every aspect of their existence.[33]

Conclusions

Even if one never gets to saddle up and ride out on the hunt analysing the Coolhunt is ultimately worthwhile because it points up the broad and eternal challenges research faces.

Cool brands allow people to live their lives well. This is not (nor should it be) the preserve of a few trend hungry teenagers. Ultimately one can observe people as closely as one wants, and labour with ever more ingenuity to observe an ever-smaller number of the right people. However, this alone will never provide the inspiration we want and need to help ourselves develop more responsive brands. By looking elsewhere we can build more cool brands for more people.

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- [1] This being the now standard abusive sobriquet for the corrupting adman after the eponymous Packard (1960), although the wide media coverage of Coolhunters meant they were anything but hidden.
- [2] Furchgott, Roy. (1998) 'For Cool Hunters, Tomorrow's Trend is the Trophy'. *New York Times*, Sunday 28th June 1998. The term 'Coolhunter' was coined by Gladwell in Gladwell (1997). I follow Gladwell in writing 'Coolhunter' as one word, partly through fidelity to his coinage, but also because it looks cooler that way. For their part Sputnik describe themselves thus "Sputnik interprets and distributes Cultural Intelligence, focussing on the experienced and emerging thinkers who address important issues shaping our global society" (<http://www.sputnik-inc.com/vision.html>) Elsewhere they are happy to proclaim "The brain is the new real estate." (<http://www.sputnik-inc.com/mindtrends/mosaicsofthemind.html>) Does this make them Cool Cerebral Estate Agents?
- [3] Apparently about 20% of the US population (3% are 'Innovators' another 17% 'Trend Setters') according to Gordon & Lee (2001a)
- [4] Malcolm Gladwell dubs this the Third Rule of Cool. See Gladwell (1997).
- [5] If Gladwell wished to add a Fourth Rule of Cool he could have well made it that one cannot have a straightforward name, q.v. Baysie Wightman, Tru Pettigrew, Faith Popcorn, Kara Ngo, etc. Piney, one intuits is pronounced 'Pie-Knee' not 'Pin-Knee' as she is named after a tree, an expression of her parent's cool, and apparent part explanation of her own preternatural cool.
- [6] Interestingly these instinctual qualities are also often evoked in traditional research to explain why someone is good at interpreting data, e.g. 'X has a great instinct for mining the data'. My suggestion is that we should be untrusting of instinct wherever it is appealed to in the research process – but that is another argument for another day. Suffice to say, Coolhunting has enshrined instinct more than any other research methodology to date. Dee Dee Gordon is not just instinctive to the point of psychosis, saying "I love scouting out all the trends. I'm a true obsessive compulsive." Grigordias (1999). Jane Rinzler Buckingham appear to feel Coolhunters don't even need to nurture this rare instinct "It wasn't just about her taste – it was that she didn't care about trends yet naturally anticipated them". Furchgott (1998).

[7] Sharon Lee goes as far as to say, "The judgement of whether it's important or not comes from them." 'Them' in this case is Look-Look's Coolhunters. See Gordon and Lee (2001b).

[8] For example the L-Report from Lambesis appears to work this way. Agencies like Y-Access and Look-Look use online forums to generate enough cool teen comment to aggregate into substantiated trend prediction - Gordon claims 10,000+ respondents in Gordon & Lee (2001b). The extent to which this is automated or achieved by a researcher reviewing and interpreting the data is something I remain unclear on.

[9] For more discussion of the desirability of this approach see note xviii.

[10] Although elsewhere Gladwell is damning about sociology's worth noting "the rise of the coolhunter is about a triumph in the mass culture. It is reflection of the academic shift from sociology to anthropology, which is the great academic shift from the 1950's to now. Anthropology... the idea that you would go out and very reverently and respectfully observe the culture of someone else seems more fitting now than sociology, which seemed to sit back and create theoretical paradigms to describe social interactions and behaviours." Gladwell (2001). For a rather different view of this shift and its worth see Frank (2000) chapter 7, especially pg. 272-5.

[11] Gladwell (2001) see also Gladwell (2000) for greater detail, chap. 6 and especially pp. 196-9.

[12] The importance of the early adopter to many markets has become such a staple of contemporary research and marketing speak that challenging it may quietly be the most iconoclastic notion in this paper. What is suspicious about the model in general application are the ceteris paribus assumptions that accompany it. In a market with perfect distribution of both information and product one may well see the classic bell-curve of adoption unfold. This would appear to be the state of affairs that obtained in Iowa (all farmers could have the seed, all knew it was better than what they had). However, a lot of marketing, either by accident or deliberately, does not have perfect product and information and distribution. A small manufacturer can only supply a small number of people, whatever demand may be. Choosing to seed (!) a product with limited distribution is shrewd but self-fulfilling marketing as far as testing the model is concerned. In recent history compare the spread of digital radio, which until recently has only had one small supplier (Pure Digital) producing an affordable set and the Gypsy Look that swept women's fashion last summer. To what extent was the Gypsy Look created by the massive distribution and push fashion

retailers collectively gave it? To what extent is digital radio's limited spread to do with distribution and availability or the fading appeal of radio? Such factors need to be accounted for to prove the universal validity of the early adopter model in marketing (for example, these factors would have to be accounted for to prove effectiveness to win an IPA Advertising Effectiveness Award – and many argue that is not a very stringent test). One also suspects that its appeal is in part an ideological one because it helps suggest that markets are organs of democratic choice perfectly reflecting consumer choice. It is more convenient to believe that a trend didn't catch on because it wasn't cool enough, and not because near monopolistic corporate power crushed it (we should reflect on the lessons of Alec Guinness' very cool Man in the White Suit). To have the myth of market democracy exploded in a thousand and one different ways read Frank (2000).

[13] Once again Gladwell is the most concerned to explore this difficulty. See Gladwell (2000), especially chap. 6. In *The Tipping Point* Gladwell uses the spread of disease epidemics as his model. While this leads him to make some insightful discoveries he would himself be the first to admit it is only an analogy. While viruses are living things that reproduce as a matter of nature, ideas are not. So (again) we should not treat the spread of ideas as being governed by laws of nature and a paradoxical tension remains at the heart of the Coolhunting model that claims both exclusive ownership of the cool by the cool and mass adoption as an inevitable outcome.

[14] Authenticity is a peculiarly American obsession, and maybe the desire to find authenticity explains why Coolhunting first emerged in the USA. American art and culture are obsessed with authenticity. The outcome of this obsession is that every cultural expression tends towards autobiography and ultimately solipsism. One clear demonstration of how this manifests itself can be found when comparing popular music of the 1960's from both sides of the Atlantic (relevant here as such music is widely accepted to be cool). In the States acts like The Grateful Dead, The Doors, and The Byrds even in their most psychedelic moments remain deadly serious. Compare this with the outright whimsy of The Beatles Sgt. Pepper or The Kinks Village Preservation Society. Jimi Hendrix embodies the divide: an American who could only find success by taking his music to the UK. One obvious candidate cause for all of this is the USA's relatively lack of history – but this doesn't seem entirely satisfactory as an explanation.

[15] Gladwell (2001). Arguably Gladwell's point can be expanded. Status-envy in the 50's was ultimately an adult pursuit because it demanded economic capital. Cool, however, demands only social capital. This expands the chance to be a mover and shaker to a whole range of previously excluded groups.

[16] One has to say 'hopefully' in the face of pronouncements about cool kids like this one from Sharon Lee, "And what makes them great consumers, is that they're such free thinkers, for the most part because they don't have to worry about rent, they don't have to worry about car payments yet. They are not burdened by all these realities of adult life." Gordon & Lee (2001b). This logic would seem to suggest that the greatest cost of the loss of childhood innocence is that it makes one a worse consumer. Janine Lopiano-Misdrom of Sputnik paints an equally unnerving picture when she talks of "A youth culture tired of social 'shadows' and ready for the pleasures marketing can provide" (<http://www.sputnik-inc.press/NBT01.html>).

[17] Such an episode is described in minute detail in Gladwell (1997). At this early stage of his involvement with Coolhunters Gladwell's tongue seems to be pretty firmly in his cheek. Compare this with his more respectful tone in Gladwell (2001).

[18] In Coolhunting video ethnographies made in the States one is struck by the high-degree of articulacy that the young cool of America demonstrate. In my own experience of interviewing youth in the UK such articulacy is rare. One has to wonder if America contains any cool yet inarticulate kids. This raises the question of whether Coolhunters tend to choose more articulate kids to interview, and whether this skews the sample. It also inclines one to believe that attempts at interpretation of the data will inevitably be minimised because the methodology appears to select respondents who can speak for themselves. This, of course, rests on the fallacy that because a respondent is articulate they are also accurate and perceptive.

[19] Packard (1957) especially pg. 27ff. Thomas Frank is explicit in connecting Coolhunting and Packard's writings in his uncomfortably savage and acute attack on account planning. See Frank (2000) chap. 7, the specific passage is on pg. 266.

[20] Albom (1998)

[21] Klein (2000) pg. 73-4. The Christian Lacroix quote is from "Off the Street...", Vogue, April 1994, 337.

[22] Douglas Rushkoff simply uses anthropologist as a term of abuse. See Rushkoff (2001)

[23] Lasn (2000) pg. 9-27

[24] Lasn (2000) pg. 26

[25] Gladwell (1997) The Baysie is Baysie Wightman of Mullen.

[26] All will no doubt enjoy the paradox that the early adopters for their books were often the very advertising and marketing executives that they lambaste. One is unclear whether one should enjoy being the source of this paradox.

[27] Rushkoff (2001)

[28] This section is deeply indebted to MacAdams (2002), especially pp. 11-30.

[29] The practicalities of keeping it short will make it dramatically less palatable for Aristotelian scholars, to whom I apologise. The sketch here rides rough shod over many key debates that keep students of Aristotle justifiably busy. The research community (and account planners most of all) are regularly guilty of being intellectual window-shoppers, picking out the sparkling highlights while never actually buying into any theory wholesale. My only defence against this charge is to assert that Aristotle's role as a cool precursor could be argued coherently to a scholarly standard – which is scant defence.

[30] For an account of the Zen Buddhist D.T. Suzuki's cool impact in the States see MacAdams (2002) pg. 145ff 'The Bodhisattvas of Cool'.

[31] Aristotle did discuss aesthetics at vast length elsewhere. His works are compendiums of lectures put together by his students. Had Aristotle himself compiled a deliberate self-contained ethical volume for history one can speculate that the list of virtues would have been expanded to include aesthetic concerns.

[32] Presumably the same thing could be said of services, yet It is notable that service brands are conspicuous by their absence from the client lists of Coolhunting agencies. Coolhunting has made a contribution to the restaurant industry as Oetzel (2001) attests. However, the coolness seems to attach to the food more than the service. Surely pure service brands can be cool? While it is true that youth audiences buy less insurance and other classic service products, the absence is still mysterious. However, the virtue analysis provided here can quite easily be used with service brands.

[33] Virtue driven branding would see the end, I think, of the conceit many lifestyle brands have that they could brand every conceivable category. The virtue analysis exposes this because it makes it evident that a life well lived, a cool life, just couldn't all come from one place. How could that have involved sufficient exercise of reason?