
IS THERE A “DEEP MAKING?”

So how does a deep approach to fashion deal with design and making? Isn't the very process of making and designing the curse of fashion? The very process of producing something new pollutes not only the natural environment but also the social and mental environments. Don't we have enough of “new” stuff? Why “make” more stuff? We may want to add some passion to this dark world, but aren't the problems of fashion of its own making?

We can of course live in the shell of the old world, in old clothes, repairing and updating them. But materials break down too - so of course we need to replace them. But we need to make sure these things are well distributed; to the people who need them the most. It is easy to keep, repair and update your old things if those things are exclusive, such as royal castles, Rolls Royces, and Hermes bags. It is not hard to be sustainable if you are rich, making sure your daughter inherits your Birkin bag. But nobody

wants to inherit hunger or poverty, and probably not your old ripped H&M bag.

Making new things can create avenues for hope and progress to those dependent on social mobility. People from the margin need new paths, as the old ones are blocked by inherited positions and riches. Fashion plays a role there, and we need to make sure it works for those who need it the most. But this requires a fresh take on who we really design for, as most designers ideally hope to make stuff for those already on the top, entrenching their positions with more exclusive stuff. “Fast fashion” for the poorer is not so glamorous, and it has come to bear blame for being unsustainable. Poor people in rich countries are condemned for the working conditions of poor people in developing countries.

If fashion designers are to engage in making, it needs to be both critical and deep. Critical in the sense that it questions the condition of the world in

“Real beauty is so deep you have to move into darkness to understand it” Barry Lopez

making beyond being “productive” or “critical”

which it operates. It must stop and think, deny the dogmas of consumerism and mature in its inquiry. Not only propel the status quo. But it must also be critical in the sense of being polemic, oppositional and take a position. It must stand against exclusive consumerism which only reifies social hierarchies.

Making must also be deep. It must dig deeper, to address the radical roots of the social conditions. It must be deep in the sense of being more accurate, find the pivotal positions that add leverage to the ones who need it. Not only ask questions while supporting the strong. But there is also beauty at the uncharted depths. Like author Barry Lopez says, “real beauty is so deep you have to move into darkness to understand it”.

But as with “critical making” (Ratto 2011) there is a need to focus on the processes of making, not merely the outcomes or stuff. How does the processes and abilities of making also become more deep and not only result in more “critical” waste? How is making more analytically attuned to the context and situation it tires to affect? How is making more deeply anchored in the urgent political needs at hand, and not only into hacker spaces, galleries and art bien-nales? How does criticality move beyond shallow positioning and self-promotion?

This becomes especially important today where the very processes of making have become corrupted under what cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han (2015) calls the “achievement society.” Here all forms of being are perverted into new competitive performances of entrepreneurial selves outmatching each other in the efforts to become the most productive. Both our self-worth and the economy demands productivity; “Be creative! Be different! Be yourself! Be an individual! Make stuff!” Making and DIY was supposed to make you free, to become your own master. But now the master himself has become a compulsively laboring slave. “One exploits oneself. It means that exploitation is possible even without domination.” (Han 2015: 19)

So making and DIY is not enough. It needs to do deeper, to go darker, to dive into the murky bog of being and self-worth. Deep fashion needs to address the deeper underlying forces of inequality and inequity, the structures and cultures setting the tones of being. It needs depth also in the sense of contemplation and reflection. But do not despair. There is also beauty down in the depths.

References:

- Han, Byung-Chul (2015) *The Burnout Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Ratto, Matt (2011) “Critical making: Conceptual and material studies in technology and social life.” *The Information Society*, 27(4), 252-260.
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