
TOWARDS A DEEP FASHION PRACTICE

Most of us think fashion as apolitical. That it is all about surface and shallow aesthetics. But all life is political, as our surrounding world is shaped and responds to our actions. In parallel with casting the ballot, we vote with our everyday actions, the way we act, obey and command others. Words, gestures, presence; all affect our surrounding.

If we are to think of fashion as representing social and political values and practices, we must also see how fashion can be an arena for civic training. We can practice good civics by practicing good fashion. This could be what we call a “deep fashion.”

Yet, a deep fashion, quite like a good society, must learn from the past. A “depth” of freedom must challenge corrupting social and political processes, otherwise it quickly turns into new forms of elitism, exclusion and oppression, of being free at the cost of another. The history of fashion is full of collapsing factories, double-dealing standards and broken communities, not to mention social violence and bullying.

A deep practice of fashion must challenge some of the basic parameters of fashion. At best, a deep fashion practice of fashion may mitigate some of the real imperfections of civic life and act as an arena for civic discourse, practical and responsible freedom.

Some approaches to deep fashion practice can be informed by lessons learned from other fields. This may be a start of a list:

> **Challenge the hypnosis of the new**

Don't be a slave to the new. The current is a current that can easily drift you off from your course. Strive to move out of the flow, be untimely.

> **Play with anticipation, don't submit to it**

Expectations and anticipation are keys to desire. Don't let others control the parameters of your desire and valuations of success. Break habits, play with your desires.

> **Look for context**

Much of fashion and consumerism strives to fracture our sense of cohesion, pulling our attention away from what matters. Even if calls for "transparency" are good initiatives, be careful what the brands want you to pay attention to. Pay attention to as much of the context as possible; production, use and disposal: who gains, who suffers?

> **Separate yourself from the Internet**

It is hard enough to think independently in everyday life, even harder when in the middle of a crowded chatter of peers. It is

almost impossible to think when under siege by anonymous trolls whose only social purpose is to make reasoned reflection impossible. With all its charms, entertainment and social value of keeping up with friends and the latest trends, the Internet is also a cesspool sucking you deeper for every moment. Find ways to get out of the vortex of shit. Disconnect, strive to get perspective. Take up an old book: there is a chance a classic author may have as much wisdom as that celebrity advert you just read.

> **Never quantify approval**

Nothing corrupts emotional growth and self-esteem like comparison with peers. When you start counting approval and "likes" you start counting ON the approval of others. Once you get into such dependency it is hard to form own opinions and stand strong on your own.

> **Unpack moments of rejection**

It only takes one moment of humiliation to enable a lifetime of submission. The bullies know this, and the best way to stifle opposition is administering terror through public rejection and gossip. Many of us carry baggage, uncertainties and fear from the past. Even the subtlest

forms of bullying seep under our skin, and we start to adjust behaviors and looks from anticipation - “what will people think?” becomes our leading star. Unpack these moments, challenge the old bullies, prepare yourself and refuse to submit in advance.

> **Create a private sphere**

It is often hard being courageous in public and most thinking and reflection need a private space to happen. So don't document and broadcast everything, but create a private practice, a room to train and test ideas alone and with close friends. Use the privacy of the four walls to carve out a room of your own. Invite friends and test new looks, experiment and play. The public does not need to know.

> **Affirm others, support courage**

Seeing people dress in unconventional ways may set them aside and it may be tempting to ignore them or gain a few “cool” points by making fun of them. Do the opposite; support their difference, celebrate and boost their courage, give complements. Not only does it give you new friends, but it builds a more exciting environment to live in. It challenges you and your peers to play more daring and grow courageous yourself.

> **Observe language and images**

Just like photo editing happens to most published images (don't believe them!) also language gets manipulated. We may know that perfect looking model is probably not so good looking every day, yet we still compare ourselves to them. Buzz words like “transparency” and “conscious” are words that all too often signify the opposite - so be aware of how people try to trick you.

> **Be aware of cynical criticism**

Whereas critical distance and perspective on the world is an essential outlook on the world, be careful to not end up in cynical positions of domination where your main pleasure comes from pulling the carpet from underneath your peers. Critical cynicism often masks a wish to remain inactive and feel cool and better than others. As social vampirism, this ends up as bad as uncritical affirmation. Don't go there.

> **Be aware of constructive criticism**

While it may come almost natural to designers to strive for a constructive position, be careful what framework your construction affirms. If people ask you to be constructive, they often mean that you should force your imagination into an ac-

ceptable format that does not challenge their power, position or privilege. Thus, being “constructive” means accepting the basic framework one works under and can thus bolster a repressive system or structure. Be careful with your creativity.

> **Challenge the coma of progress**

It is far too easy to lean back and think that “progress” in general will take care of things. Moving society towards betterment is not linear and irresistible, it requires work and commitment. Justice is a conflict that needs to be fought.

> **Don't be seduced by the end of fashion**

When the latest fashion hits or new “drop” arrives, we often tell ourselves this look is not only new but will last a long time. We always tell ourselves the latest look will be the “last fashion” or the end of fashion. Don't fool yourself; no fashion lasts. But don't seek the look that lasts long, that is often too boring. Instead, seek that which keeps recurring, an edge or fringe attitude that keeps giving you a kick of aliveness.

> **Build connections**

At its best, fashion connects people, opening passages of desires and passions, amplifying energies of aliveness, togetherness and pleasure. Connect people, let them play together, build courage together.

> **Stand out**

Following the crowd feels safe and few of us are strong enough to take an entirely separate path in life. But be careful. It is “normal” also to be silent in the face of oppression or collaborate with occupiers. What is considered normal can be very violent, and what “everyone” else does often turns into an excuse for bullies. Standing out can be good training, practicing to stand up for oneself as well as others, and for values one holds dear. Challenge yourself. Standing out with clothes is a simple everyday practice to also be ready for other separate actions.
