

ANIMAL LABORANS

THE LABOR OF FASHION

The Fashion Praxis Collective



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Work is love made visible

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About this book:

The Fashion Praxis Collective is a temporary alliance of fashion practitioners, researchers and activists, joining forces for a “book sprint”. This text reflects the mongrel mix of their thoughts on the topic and the final mix may in some cases be paradoxical and represent perspectives that not all contributors individually would fully support. However, we hope the sum of the mix may produce a platform for further discussions, larger than our individual thoughts.

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*Six questions followed us through the book sprint.
Some of our answers are shown at the back of the book.*

Ask yourself,

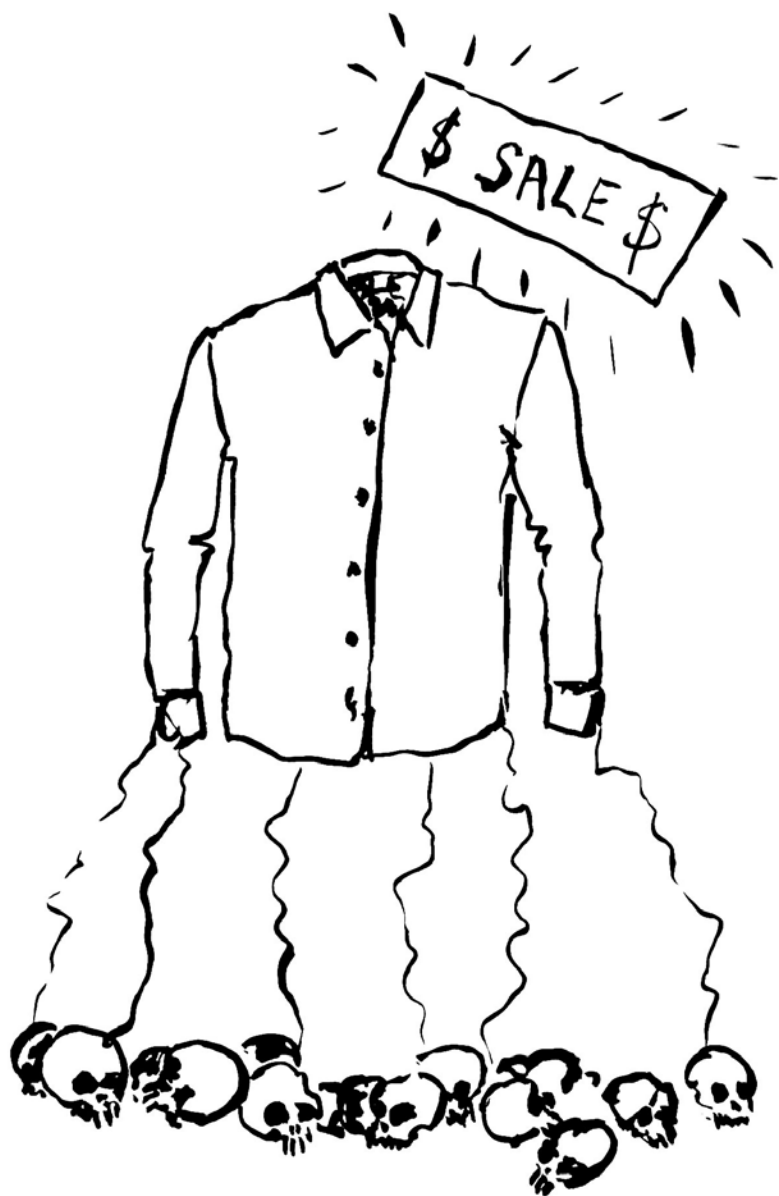
1. Who makes fashion?
2. What labor is involved in attending to or using fashion?
3. What type of labor in fashion interests you?
4. How is the labor of fashion made visible or invisible?
5. How do you see labor change or move?
6. How does the labor of fashion feel as it is lived?



A flag for the laborer

In February 2016 the Fashion Praxis lab at Parsons began work on a flag to draw attention to the plight of garment workers in developing economies. The flag references one that the NAACP used to fly from their Fifth Avenue window in the 1920s and 30s each time the news broke that a man had been lynched, reading “A Man Was Lynched Yesterday.” The NAACP had their office a few blocks from where Parsons is today, and on a famous photo of the flag the central buildings of Parsons can be clearly seen in the background. Several faculty and students from The New School contributed to the flag during spring 2016.

On the third day of working on this book in May 2016, news came from China and Bangladesh of two factory fires that killed at least 11 people (the few media outlets which report on such “accidents” give different numbers). Our hope in February was to never fly the flag, as it reads “A Garment Worker Was Killed Yesterday”. However, the need to do so arose during the writing of this book. With the flag, the process of writing and sewing became an explicit reminder of fashion’s precarious relationship to text and matter, labor and life.



Introduction

One of our colleagues at another university shared an anecdote some years back, of a recent fashion design graduate working as an assistant designer at a large American firm. He was required to ‘design’ 200 stripe patterns each day on Adobe Illustrator - draw lines of various spacings and color them in - and print them out for the design director to choose the best ones from. It was perhaps poor judgment on the company’s part - was this the best investment of someone who had just completed four years of rigorous education? - however by no means is it an isolated example.

A former colleague of Timo Rissanen said her first fashion design job in the UK required her to design 40 pairs of trousers each week, again for the design director to choose from. In both examples fashion design is reduced to an unskilled labor of simplified tasks, which perhaps a computer could be tasked to do. Hilary Carlisle’s PhD, completed in 2002, included developing an algorithmic software that created textile prints based on a set of numbers input by the ‘designer’, or whoever had access to the software. While many are not aesthetically pleasing, occasionally the software spits out one that the designer may deem attractive, or inspiring to the designer.

Reflecting on these examples one may ask, at what point does menial design labor transform into the creative work of a genius? What stripes does a designer have to produce from creative labor as a rite of passage, in order to earn the position where his or her labor counts as real “design?” What are the stripes the designer has to earn to legitimize his/her labor within fashion?

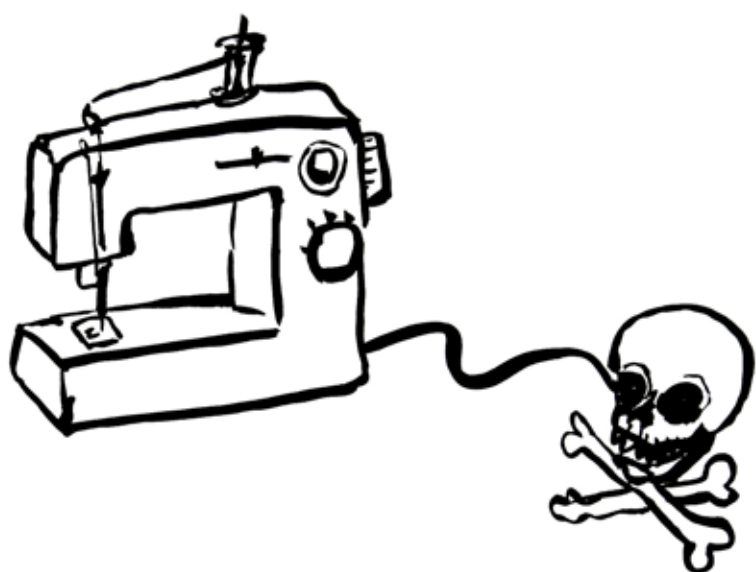
When we encounter design in media, in the stories designer tell about themselves, or in the advertizing for design school, as well as in the world of “design thinking”, design is seldom recognized as a form of labor. On the one hand, it often appears as a glitzy seductive profession, a work of passion or genius. Or on the other hand, design is portrayed as a do-good save-the-world endeavor where designers act as some socially engaged superheroes setting out to save the citizens of the world from bad, unergonomic or un-

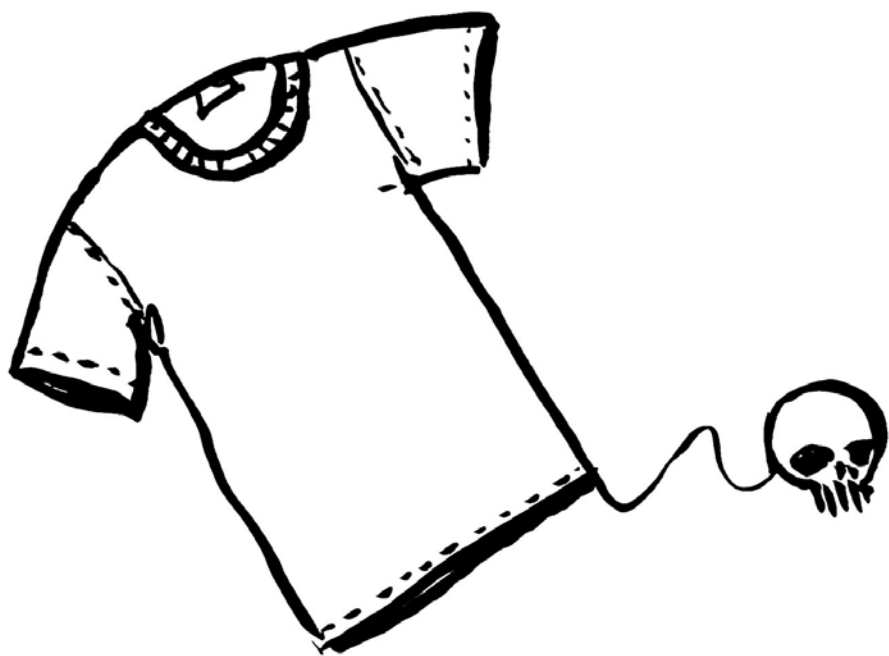
sustainable design, not through hard work, but by the clear purity of their virtue.

These two depictions may be caricatures, but they dare to ask us what does design do and enact in the world, and how is labor connected to design as a process of enactment in the world?

According to cultural theorist Vilem Flusser, design could be seen as a lever, an invention producing leverage (Flusser 1999). As Flusser puts it, a machine is a device designed to deceive and bend the forces of nature; a lever, for example, cheats gravity, and the whole field of “mechanics” engages with trickery, of moving heavy bodies with weaker forces. But as we examine design as labor, we must ask who is having leverage? Who gains more strength?

If design is the work of “form follows function”, what is the function of labor, of “making a living”, other than laboring for sustaining status quo? Or is the function of everyday design simply to maintain the form of social hierarchies and injustices? If design should put leverage into the world, making the weak stronger, the lever seems to be broken.





Why Fashion and Labor?

So why discuss labor in the world of fashion, this glamour domain of pure pleasure and expenditure? In its everyday form, when we see fashion in media, on billboards or in shop windows, fashion seems far removed from labor. Perhaps fashion is indeed the epitome of Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, as fashion is so ephemeral it must per se lack history. It is always new, even when a popular style "returns": the zeitgeist has transformed it into meaning something new.

Labor in fashion is always hidden or veiled: it always is at work under cover. Labor being under cover does not mean it is simply a matter of ignorance from the consumer side. No, the hiding of labor in garment production and in the wider system is not merely a lack of media coverage or interest from consumers, but it is a culturally and systemically induced ignorance. Such active veiling of knowledge is called "political agnotology" by historian Robert Proctor, where agnotology signals the social construction of ignorance (Proctor 1995: 8) As Proctor suggests, agnosis, to "not know", or something to be "unknown", is a cognitive lacunae or doubt that is culturally induced, actively obscured or kept dark. Just like knowledge is an act of unmasking, to veil and keep things unknowable, is also a labor, and this deceit is a "vicious problem" endemic to fashion (von Busch 2016b).

On a similar note, the fashion media, which is basically propaganda and spectacle sponsored by the brands, is not taking it as its role to examine power and abuses within the industry, seeking to hold those in power responsible. Factory fires and the working conditions of the people who produce clothes are considered something for the daily press, not for the magazines which are specialized in reporting on clothing and trends. But also the many other forms of labor are ignored, from the hard struggles of perfection amongst models or the unpaid work of the countless studio interns, to the appropriation of cultural symbols and active conditioning made by peers that in the end makes fashion such powerful social tool.

If seen from the design perspective, also the production of fashion is usually portrayed as quite unproblematic. Production of fashion is a "black

box”, not too unlike the desktop printer, which only concerns the designer if it fails to deliver the right goods or somehow breaks down. Production happens “out there”, beyond the walls of the studio, and is like another world.

The tendencies to overlook labor in relation to fashion have been a concern for the Fashion Praxis Collective for a long time. Thus we took on to examine the many forms of labor involved in fashion, trying to unpack the many forms and forces of labor, and seek to purvey it to fashion designers, seeing how labor permeates fashion on so many levels.

There may of course be a paradox of designers at Parsons discussing labor, and particularly labor in developing economies, without a factory laborer in the conversation. The absence of that voice highlights the privileged conversation of discussing labor at an expensive design school. A voice that made a deep impact on us was the young Bangladeshi factory worker Shima in the documentary *The True Cost* (Morgan 2015). Into our conversation (not by any means a replacement for a real face to face conversation, however useful in context of a five-day book sprint), we often came back to her statements: “I believe these clothes are produced by our blood... I don’t want anyone wearing anything, which is produced by our blood.” Shima also says: “I don’t want my daughter to have to work in a garment factory like me.”

However, our task of the sprint is not primarily sociological or critical; the critique of labor in sweatshops overseas is already mediated and available “out there,” even if often ignored or actively silenced. What lacks is an overview of the many forms of labor required to make fashion available and ready-at-hand. But we also seek to give an insight into how designers may try to better shape the processes of labor and production. Using Hannah Arendt’s terminology, the aim could be to make design more of a praxis than labor, that fashion designers may seek to influence the processes making fashion real, and make this a work of creative liberation and joy, rather than drudgery and exploitation.

On another note, we imagined this book sprint, much like the previous one which resulted in *The Fashion Condition* (2014), to be an adventure in a more egalitarian, explorative and daring academic writing process. As cultural theorist Gerald Raunig suggests in *Dividuum* (2016), the act of writing is traditionally done in a way that strengthens the scaffolding and limits around individuals, claiming ideas as if they center around one mind, who in turn is climbing up a rung on a “lineage ladder.” This is done in a competitive as well as alienating process of advancing rungs to build the myth of yet another individual authors (the individual genius, untainted by peers and friends, yet some may be thanked in the acknowledgment section). A process of collaborative writing, on the other hand, is by necessity a compromise. But one could also see it as an exchange of gifts, and thus the sprint is a form of communitarian writing: it calls for a sacrifice to the *munis*

(the duty or bond between peers), that is, one has to give something to a pool of exchange. As Raunig suggests, we must imagine more collaborative and gift-like ways of creativity, beyond the self-contained individual genius; “the entire conceptual line of the commune, the community, the common, even communism itself, to the extent that dogma and pressure to confess have been and are practiced in its name, are then cast in the dubious light of a double genealogy of identitarianism and reduction.” (Raunig 2016: 82)

In our collaborative work, we also hope some of this gift-giving and communitarian way of writing, challenging the academic labor of lineage text, also may reflect itself into an analysis of fashion and the “machinic capitalism” of its production. “Community is grounded on sacrifice and debt,” Raunig suggests, “relinquishment, rendering, surrendering. The band, the binding, the bond decreases singular capabilities. In the desire to become more, community implies becoming less. The munus is a minus.” (Raunig 2016: 84) In our collaborative work of “dividual writing,” we hope readers may find both more and less insights as well as desires - and also ways to escape the divisions of labor that echo throughout all forms of machinic enslavement that cuts through the realm of fashion on so many levels.

What do we mean by “fashion”?

There are many forms and definitions of fashion, and it is easy to get dragged down into distinctions between fashion, clothing, and overall cultural imitation, struggles for position, aesthetic competition and sociality, and especially how all these phenomena intersect with capitalism, mass production and social mobility. Today, it is hard to imagine fashion without the connection to mass production, self-production through consumerism, and the dynamics of social mobility, image production and aesthetic rivalry.

However, as we would like to posit, fashion allows us to wear sin and virtue, aspiration as well as honest commonality in personal distinction. In the Fashion Praxis Collective (FPC) we have before framed fashion as a form of aesthetic togetherness, and affirmative social and aesthetic expression, thus not putting emphasis on “the system” but on fashion as a lived practice.

“Fashion as a mode of action and speech is inherently plural yet unique, it always emerges from the particular and the specific, it happens as a movement sparked by singular events; moments of inspiration and resonance, reflecting the impact of this uniqueness in renewed singular events.” (FPC 2014: 17)

At another place, we have argued that,

“fashion can be seen as a living force of human togetherness. It happens between us, it is alive, it triggers us, makes us feel alive. Yet it is also a life force that is controlled, fought over, profited upon, violated and used as a mechanism of subjugation.” (FPC 2014: 35)

As it is most often perceived today, designers often ignore how to or fail to utilize fashion's full potential, or they may even corrupt it, as it is funneled it through economic, industrial and medialized systems.

Fashion, often materialized through garments, is an action that happens between attentive people. It is "objective" in the sense that it is "thrown out" (*ob-jacere*: thrown in the way of) in-between us as a worldly matter. But as such, it is also something of *inter-est*, it lies between people and its essence is of being in-between, mediating between us. Fashion relates and binds us together. Like music, it can make us dance together, even though we are separate and individual listeners or musicians. As such, as much as we may think fashion is personal, or expressing the "who" that we are (rather than the "what"), fashion is about our worldly objective reality, disclosing us as acting and expressive agents of our shared world in which we are all affirmatively distinct. *At its best, fashion is a form of distinct aliveness and authentic relatedness to the shared world, and a quality of human togetherness that we cannot experience alone.*

However, as we all know, this affirmative notion of fashion is not shared across the field, and in many ways, the everyday notion of fashion may signal an exclusivity which is not inclusive, and also a form of individuality cult of certain celebrities which does not capture or cultivate self-knowledge and self-esteem. If fashion is at the heart of capitalism, as Elizabeth Wilson (1985) argues, then we must perhaps expect fashion to also be the epitome of exploitation, oppression and status anxiety, as well as a world of dreams and liberation. That puts us even more at the task of asking how we can unpack the many forms of labor in fashion, and we must ask what labor of persuasion is needed to produce interest and compliance to a value system which may be rigged against you?

For a study of fashion a central question emerges which in some sense could be a tangent to Rousseau's famous sentence about power in *The Social Contract* (1762): "The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty." How does fashion appropriate sources of labor, culture and creativity and turn desire into obedience? But also, what form of labor is involved in the production of aligned aspirations, compliance, and obedience? And does this obedience to the decrees of fashion also offer an uncritical trust in one's right to judge others as well as a sense of abdication from responsibility? Is it even this sense of obedience which abjures criticality and reason for the unsustainable consumer culture in everyday fashion?

Attempting an Arendtian perspective on fashion

According to Hannah Arendt, the formal equality of modernity produces a realm where “the social” is guided by conformity and bureaucracy, and citizens engage in calculated “behavior”, under a “rule by noone.” Under such uniforming conditions, fashion becomes an escape into complicity, in image and imitation rather than unique individuality. Fashion, as a modern behavior, means to isolate and conform rather than be together, perform deeds and excel.

However, as Arendt points out, as humans we are doomed to live in plurality, in a multitude of uniqueness, and we need not conform,

“Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.” (Arendt 1958: 8)

We thus need to do away with the popular conception that what is considered “public” is an arena of uniformity and conformity. Yet, fashion is per definition a public expression. While many forms of making and craft may happen in solitude in the workshop or studio, fashion is a mode of togetherness, it is a relationship between people and, as such, it cannot exist in private or in isolation.

“In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man’s capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human.” (Arendt 1958: 38)

On a similar note, fashion is not “fully human” if it takes place without opening up a new channel of communication or affect to others. Imitation is not enough: to be human means to make new connections (and please note that when we say ‘man’ we are using Arendtian language to refer to all human-kind). There is however a paradox here, as today we don’t think of privacy as something deprived, but instead as perhaps the richest and wealthiest part of life. It is in private one can be unique, in one’s own thoughts and reflections.

As Arendt notices, in modern society, it is in private life we can dig into our personal wealth and have access to the full romantic sensorium of our “inner emotions” or “true self” which we today identify with deeper personal flourishing. The private has become the domain of accumulation, of richness and pampering, and a domain of the deepest and most romantic side of the self. To be private no longer connotes to be “one’s own” (*idion*) or outside the common, an “idiot”, but instead the private is where one can “be

oneself” - yet this oneself is still an utterly lonely and isolated being, with no bonds to the world and separated from the dependencies of togetherness. To Arendt, this is an equality of atomization and “social behaviors,” far removed from the fullest human life in common. Today, we often thus confuse having a private, or an “own style,” with being true to “oneself.”

Arendt highlights how slaves, as they have no household of their own, have no option to have neither privacy nor the privileges of public political life. Yet today, privacy is also a privilege. Those who don’t feel they have to do self-promotional, self-branding labor on social media, for instance, are often those whose power is not dependent on these platforms, but in fact, move in invisible ways or have other vectors to manifest authority or position themselves. They might be private because they *can* be private. They don’t need put themselves out there to gain influence or control. They have it via other means. Just take the example of how the rich make themselves and their homes “disappear” from google maps and social media.

This reduction to privacy produces a false sense of equality. It casts us into a resemblance of shared life but which is a reduction to the lowest denominator of common life, not the celebration of distinctness, plurality and action. Fashion, like modern equality, always risks becoming a mere expression of conformism, imitation, repetition.

“This modern equality, based on the conformism inherent in society and possible only because behavior has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship, is in every respect different from equality in antiquity, and notably in the Greek city-states. To belong to the few “equals” (*homoioi*) meant to be permitted to live among one’s peers; but the public realm itself, the polis, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*). The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were.” (Arendt 1958: 41)

Fashion, in this sense, could be the place where the individual can be fully engaged in producing one’s public persona, or even one’s full self. Yet, it must be done by action, courageous deeds. One can never become oneself through conformity. This courageous action in fashion, is what Fashion Praxis Collective earlier called “fashion strength” in *The Fashion Condition*: “the individual charismatic capacity to act fashionably, in confidence and presence, without fear, and in a sense of dressed reciprocity. It is thus not the ego-seeking recognition of ‘look at me’ amplified through the industry” (FPC 2014: 48f) Fashion strength requires courage and character, making dress an aesthetic deed of distinction, experienced in public.

Action and Epic fashion

However, it is important to notice that “fashion strength” is not an individual quality that musters its energy from within like the heavy lifting of a weightlifter or the material manipulation of a craftsman. Like Arendt posits, “action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act.” (Arendt 1958: 188) The strong person cannot “make” anything really public in isolation: institutions and laws cannot be made like tables and chairs, and thus the strength of action should not be confused with individual toughness. Fashion strength is *charismatic*, that is, social. It is a favor or grace that is mirrored in others, a shared quality, yet it acts with courage, distinction and determination, rather than in complicit cowardice.

As Arendt argues, in the polis, ‘the virtue of courage [was] one of the most elemental political attitudes.’ (Arendt 1958: 35) Courage moved the actions of the citizen beyond the necessities or urgencies of bare life, making the public and ‘good life’

“not merely better, more care-free or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different quality. It was ‘good’ to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process.” (Arendt 1958: 36f)

In accordance to this, a “hero” was an ordinary citizen, or a free man about whom a story could be told, utilizing freedom at its fullest and most distinct form of shared action. The hero’s courage was,

“in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak [...], to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s own. And this courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences; courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one’s private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one’s self.” (Arendt 1958: 186)

Applying such perspective onto fashion, “fashion strength” is the courage that transcends the cowardice of conformity, of hiding privately in the masses, and being a “slave” to fashion’s dictates, to instead fully and fearlessly engage in the aesthetic realm by exposing one’s self. This may entail putting oneself at some risk in social settings ruled by anxious conformity. In some sense, this courage the opposite of being “sartorially scared,” of conforming out of anxiety and the need to simply blend in. Not too unlike how action breaks with the condition of slavery, fashion strength breaks through the mechanisms most of us have been socialized into, where we are throughout

childhood and adolescence shaped into compliance and conformity, where we come to misuse the potential of fashion as expression to instead only perpetuate it as a form of submission to the lowest denominator of clothing: jeans, hoodie, t-shirt.

In similar vein, it is action, praxis, the deed, that makes humans fully human. The action transgresses the individual to become public, to make action a shared property. Fashion praxis is thus the fashion that does not isolate but brings people together into action, producing a togetherness of unique multiplicity, not the conformity and repetition we usually mistake for fashion.

It is however also important to notice that action, or the deed, also places itself in a specific temporal realm, which slightly breaks with the linear flow of fashion, or its circular return-of-the-same. As noted by literary scholar Adam Nicolson (2014), the classic Greek deeds neither exists in the realm of memory, which normally only lasts about three generations, nor in history, the objective and linear administration of past events. Rather, the deed is epic;

“Epic, which was invented after memory and before history, occupies a third space in the human desire to connect the present to the past: it is the attempt to extend the qualities of memory over the reach of time embraced by history. Epic’s purpose is to make the distant past as immediate to us as our own lives, to make the great stories of long ago beautiful and painful now.” (Nicolson 2014: 3)

The epic has a specific eloquence, it is a form of “winged words”, *epea pteroenta*, the words are “feathered”: light, mobile, airy, communicative, making meaning take flight (Nicolson 2014: 4). The epic is a retelling of deeds which is an “extraordinary visualization of poetry,” it is not misty but “has an undeterminable other reality” to it (Nicolson 2014: 4).

“There is a deep paradox here, one that is central to the whole experience of Homer’s epic. Nothing is more insubstantial than poetry. It has no body, and yet it persists with its subtleties whole and its sense of the reality of the human heart uneroded [...] Nothing with less substance than epic, nothing more lasting. (Nicolson 2014: 4)

The epic time frame may also reveal something about lasting styles, or rather, why certain deeds in the realm of dress stay iconic. Very few garments have a lasting aura of fashionability, even as their style, cut and silhouette comes back in vogue. The garment itself often appears dated in material and finish, if not in its material condition.

Some older garments are infused by memory, and they may have long-lasting affectional value, such as garments documented in Kate Fletcher's *Craft of Use* (2016) or Emily Spivack's *Worn Stories* (2014). Yet even such garments, infused with memories, may still lack the poetic affection of the deed, the quality of making a distant past immediate and uneroded. On the other hand, some "lasting styles" such as an old suit, a little black dress, or a white shirt, may all last across seasons and be "sustainable" in their style, yet they exist in history merely as documents of a long-lost *Zeitgeist*.

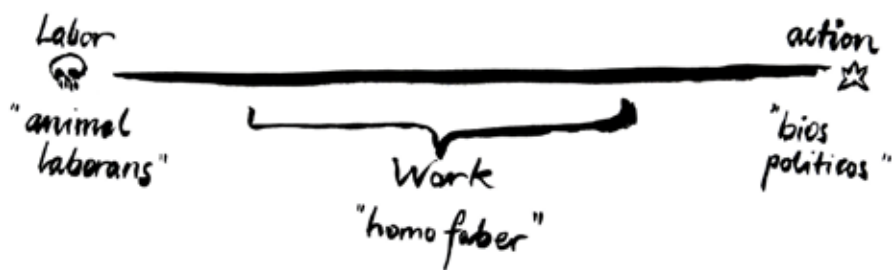
Garments that are infused by deeds, on the other hand, are epic. They carry attitudes and substance, which are not created in distance but as timeless elements within us. Certain garments keep carrying a spirit, a rocker edge, a timeless sophistication, a temper beyond time. They exist not *then* and *there*, but continuously *now* and *here*. They sail through time like Odysseus, not through the Mediterranean, but through the fears and desires of a mortal man's (or woman's) life, as timeless and epic deeds. A *Craft of Use* interviewee still wears a denim jacket adorned with Sex Pistols badges bought in 1978 (Fletcher 2016: 148). With some garments the spirit is perceived as universal, or at least national. Jacqueline Kennedy's refused to remove her blood-soaked Chanel suit after her husband's assassination, until the following morning. The suit has never been cleaned and apparently is held at a secret location within the National Archives, perhaps suggestive of the spirit we collectively assign to her refusal to remove it, to show "what they have done to John".

In its most utopian sense, fashion offers a promise of fully human individuality through the dressed realm, an outlet and marker of individual expression, draping sin and virtue into affirmative sociability and togetherness, and materializing such statement into actions. At this utopian end of the continuum, fashion offers the subject power over the social realm, agency to utilize and co-author the performative expression of individuality, that is, the *ability* to be *fashion-able*. Not a fashionable ready-to-wear garment of a certain time, but an action space, an aptness for sartorial deeds. The ability of fashion does so by offering the authority over oneself, the autonomous voice to be part of the decision-making process of social meaning, that is, a *right* to be "oneself" by utilizing one's abilities for expression. However, instead we see in the everyday the opposite form of interpassivity, submission and obedience: people instead often turn towards the private realm to "be themselves" instead of cultivating fashion strength. As much if the fashion system opposes their agency to instead designate ready-packages identity-kits, people surrender their abilities and fashion becomes a too scary place to enact experiments to "be oneself." The social realm of dress becomes a place which is inhabited by judgmental "fashion victims" who either back-talk or victimize you.

This points to a possible definition of “fashion victims”. Fashion victims may be people who have been subjected to the violence of fashion: they may have been the victims of unjustified hierarchization, judgment, shaming, bullying, etc. They are thus exposed and subjugated to the power of fashion, yet they still are out here performing, trying to utilize fashion to promote their position, and thus stay dependent on the hierarchization of fashion and their own subjugation. They are victims in the sense that they keep following and need to utilize a vehicle that keeps hurting them. To put it differently, they are addicted to a substance they know is hurting them and others. It is perhaps a sad irony then that they still have a “passion for fashion” even though they are its victims. This also raises the question of how to escape or stop becoming a victim? Must one refuse to submit? Transgress those rules? Should one drop-out? Or connect on levels beyond the commodity? On levels of trust?

If there can be an epic quality to fashion, an other form of praxis of design and use, we can return to the discussion of Flusser, and ask how fashion praxis can produce real leverage, and not only cover up conditions of exploitation, violence or alienation. As engaging in praxis, we ask how design can help the weak become strong, while also asking, what does it mean to be “strong” in the realm of fashion?

We may not be in total agreement, but our ideas point towards a praxis that can oppose, mitigate and dismount the mechanisms that make some people weak when facing fashion. We suggest that this strength is not necessarily an individual trait or muscle mass, but an affect which encourages others, a deed, an action. Such courage could possibly strengthen the particular and the specific, and help form a *munis*, a bond of reciprocal duty, as an authentic relatedness between peers: a daring bond tied through dress.





Labor/Work/Praxis

Fashion is always fetishized in some form - fashion is always judged as image, as ready-to-wear, a replacement of the specific with the symbolic and fantasized. Fashion promises something about the future, and even if it has a history this is projected as an abstract quality deprived of subjective and shared meaning to instead become an aesthetic or monetized commodity.

To most of us, “work” appears as a quite neutral term, signifying a day job or simply the everyday endeavor of getting about and getting something done. We work in the kitchen, or in the garden, or getting sweaty as we “work out.” But by distinguishing between work and labor may help us recognize some different situations and mechanisms, which pull work in various directions and making it enact and interact with other societal forces.

In the realm of dress, also clothes do “work.” By this we don’t mean it in the sense as TV show Project Runway, where the mentor to the designers, Tim Gunn, famously asks designers to “make it work.” This would connote producing an aesthetic assemblage which expresses the idea of the designer. It would also mean putting the work of the designer into alignment with the Zeitgeist: that the design “works”, that is, produces and enacts the contemporary values, references and connections: the values which makes something “fashionable,” that is, it *speaks of and to our time*.

Praxis can also do such “work”, but it does so through the deed, through action, and in a spirit of togetherness which transgresses the private and isolationist. Yet labor is at the opposite end of the continuum.

Over the last years, there has been an academic shift with a renewed interest in labor, a move from concerns gravitating from identity towards inequality. Partly, this can traced to the “Piketty effect”, emerging from the high-profile social scientific work presented in economist Thomas Piketty’s book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) which has brought about a renewed focus on inequality, and the rising concentration of wealth and privilege. What happened with Piketty and the emerging “inequality turn,” was an essential shift in the debate from predominantly politicized and normative positions,

towards empirical, technical and historical data, thus putting privilege into focus without necessarily mobilizing the classic Marxist-inspired conceptual machinery. Merged with recent attention to material culture, labor and its reified output has become a key to understanding contemporary socioeconomic politics of distribution and agency.

Labor is not connoting the same neutrality as “work”, but puts the focus on the socioeconomic relationship between actors, worker and employer, or agent and system. Labor connotes that someone is gaining from labor - the word implies an asymmetric power relationship, a potential for exploitation.

With labor, we must ask, what does one labor *for*? For a gain, purpose, system, another? Labor connotes a loss of agency or control, that even if the labor has a purpose, it is inherent in its power dynamic that it may always be capitalized upon by someone else or some more abstract organization of agency or distribution.

As Arendt suggests, in classic times to be a full and free citizen one needed to escape necessity and labor, in order to be fully present in the public realm. Only slaves and craftsmen engaged in labor. In history, slaves are “shadowy types rather than persons,” who only emerge into history through freedom or notoriety. (Arendt 1958: 50) In accordance to this, labor in many European languages connected to giving birth, pain, working the body:

“All the European words for ‘labor,’ the Latin and English *labor*, the Greek *ponos*, the French *travail*, the German *Arbeit*, signify pain and effort and are also used for the pangs of birth. [...] The German *Arbeit* and *arm* are both derived from the Germanic *arbma*-, meaning lonely and neglected, abandoned.” (Arendt 1958: 48)

Following industrialism, labor has often been set in masculine terms, the male heavy lifting and machine-like drudge of production, even if especially the textile mills and sweatshops have been mainly populated by women and children. The gender distribution of labor has been reexamined over last decades to also include female/feminine labor, female access to paying occupations (adding to the “workforce”), but also the more abstract and often unpaid labor of care, reproduction and the labor of maintenance. What are the labors that occur beyond the wage clock, the space that Marx never seemed to recognize, outline, or study? What to make of the labors that occur inside the proletarian household, those unrecognized “wageless” workers who must care, cook, clean, and provide the necessities and subsistence of survival, creating the basis for a superstructure in which migrants may look for work?

When labor is discussed in relation to fashion, it has, at least in popular media, mainly focused on the sweatshop factories or work in the fields, the industrialized image of the factory or the agroindustrial complex, for example in the forced labor of school children on the cotton fields of Uzbekistan.

What we aim to do in the following section is expand the notions on labor in the realm of fashion, adding a more complex picture of how labor is distributed in the production of fashion.

Distinguishing between labor, work and praxis

The purpose of using and slightly perverting Arendt's distinctions between labor, work and action, is to make more apparent a *continuum* between labor and praxis, or between full alienation/exploitation, and full self-assertion and fashion "heroism." Few examples can inhabit any of these two extremes, but by drawing a line between the two may help us place various forms of fashion practices.

On the one extreme of the continuum, labor is a "degrading" form of work, as Arendt frames it in classical times it, close to slavery. It is the bodily labor of oppressive necessity, turning man into the "animal laborans." On the other extreme is praxis, the action of human excellence where man is fully human, free, autonomous, and virtuous, the "bios politicos" where man is a "political animal", that is, a social being concerned with the higher goals of human culture. In-between the two extremes are the many forms of work of "homo faber", man the maker. Here, humans use their hands to produce human artifice, that special world of cultural permanence and "world-building."

Using, or perhaps even bastardizing, the ideas of Arendt, is meant to help reveal the extremes of work in fashion. On the one hand, fashion is exploitation of factory workers, but also on a more abstract plane, cultural and temporal appropriation and art of propaganda. Too often this may be the case. But on the other hand, fashion can also be the apex of cultural togetherness, a full sensual richness of community, sharing and aesthetic excellence.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt opens her book with a series of distinctions:

"Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.

Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders

each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.” (Arendt 1958: 7)

To Arendt, labor derives from necessity and reduces human efforts into slavery, and modern society, where people must “make a living” reduces almost all forms of waged work into socialized serfdom. Under the condition of labor no real freedom can subsist.

“No man-exerted violence, except the violence of torture, can match the natural force with which necessity itself compels. [...] It was the arts of violence, the arts of war, piracy, and ultimately absolute rule, which brought the defeated into service of the victors and thereby held necessity in abeyance for the longer period of recorded history.” (Arendt 1958: 129)

The necessity of labor, of “making a living” not only demotes bodily efforts and menial work into mere obligation and submission to authority, but it also reduces expressions where it is not dominant into fruitless “hobby” or “play.” Only the artist seem to be allowed to escape the force of necessity, and permitted a space for unnecessary “art for art’s sake”, thus irrelevant and marginalized, where the studio and gallery becomes a theme park of exotic but irrelevant non-labor. As Arendt notices, the artist is “strictly speaking, the only ‘worker’ left in a laboring society.” (Arendt 1958: 127) Under this condition,

“not even the ‘work’ of the artist is left; it is dissolved into play and has lost its worldly meaning. The playfulness of the artist is felt to fulfil the same function in the laboring life process of society as the playing of tennis or the pursuit of a hobby fulfils in the life of the individual. The emancipation of labor has not resulted in an equality of this activity with the other activities of the *vita activa*, but in its almost undisputed predominance.” (Arendt 1958: 128)

Perhaps on an ironic note, as fashion has over the last decade raised into prominence as a more “serious” cultural expression, newsworthy industry, and academic study, and not only a lifestyle “play,” it comes with a laborious baggage: we hear all the more about worker exploitation and deaths, abused models and unpaid interns. The more fashion is reduced from being a “hobby”, the more it is infused as a form of labor and drudgery, and even as it is called an “art” it is an art of capitalist spectacle and monetary

speculation rather than a societal praxis of liberation or socially engaged and recognizable deeds.

Labor/Work/Praxis in Fashion?

Departing slightly from Arendt, and to make things slightly clearer, we would argue the distinctions between Labor/Work/Praxis may reveal some different aspects of fashion production;

Labor is alienated, exploited, always “down the stream” (in its iconic forms in fashion: farmhands picking cotton, sweatshop production, unpaid interns, models used by their agencies etc) The laborer sells his or her productive output fit into larger systems of wage-labor, moving from the slavery to human Masters to the slavery to Aestheticized Capital, and in the realm of fashion often under ambiguous yet oppressive aesthetic standards. As Andrea Dworkin notices, “the essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice.” (Dworkin 1981: 149) Something similar appears the labor of fashion, where work often is processed through criteria of success set from market forces or elites within the fashion system, or by people who by definition defend their privilege by setting ever-higher standards with lower pay, reward or potential to alter the basic premise of their participation.

Work is where we would put most design-work, at least in its imagined independent form, where the worker or artisan holds onto the locus of control, unalienated work such as entrepreneurship, “being one’s own boss.” This may be the grand illusion of the “gig economy” as it makes labor appear like work; “do what you love and the money will follow.” To the individual, work may today have a tendency to appear empowering, engaging and fun to the worker, not harrowing or exploitative. But seen from a systemic or abstract perspective much “work” is reproducing competitive culture and alienating notions of success, subjugating the worker and feeding the outputs of work into a “vectorial” organization of exploitation (Wark 2004).

An example is celebrity tweeting to build a following to get more endorsements and fame is ‘work,’ it seems: endorsements in the form of likes, emojis and tagging. People are becoming objects with agency. The internet is understood as the platform to validate and estimate success. To measure and calculate consumption. Fashion bloggers tweeting to gain endorsements is an activity that also seems to be work, as it is not self directed in the same way, even though it definitely promotes the grand illusion of the gig economy. The “glamour labor” of fashion models, as Elizabeth Wissinger (2015) calls this type of aesthetic work, is determined by the demands of the indus-

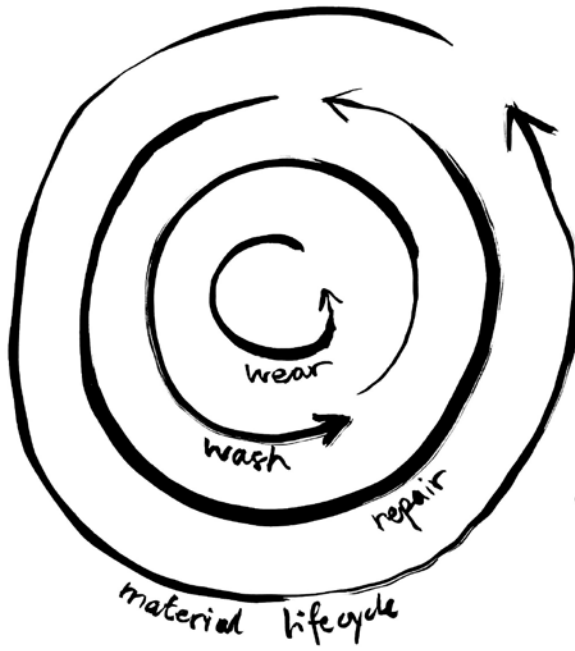
try for models to construct their ‘look,’ which includes tweeting as a way to gain followers and therefore become eligible for jobs. It becomes another illusion of freedom and fun, used to cover exploitation and elicitation of free labor to build brands. In this way, this type of glamor production may be a case of working for free rather than free labor, as some agency and control is still kept in the hands of the model, leaving some lasting results which may also be translated to other forms of future empowerment.

Praxis/action is what design and fashion could be, but seldom is: virtuous action for the “common good”, embracing human plurality and enacting the traits of equality and distinction. Even if it is not a heroic or courageous deed, as Arendt would have it, it breaks out through conformity, accumulation and private properties and does not feed into a culture of fear and anxiety. It is a mode of engaging with fashion work that can only take place in the public realm, asserting unique individuality of the “who”, that is properly that of the unique citizen. It is an existential and aesthetic action, a mark of excellence and the purpose of the “vita activa” and the *inter-esse* of being affirmatively together in the world. In the world of design it could mean to engage publicly for the virtuous deed in a sense of togetherness, to produce agency/leverage for the weak to become strong.

As we see it, our conception of fashion praxis (or perhaps it should be merged into a word; *fashionpraxis*, just like nonviolence) breaks with some of the basic mechanisms of the everyday conception of fashion:

- it fosters courage and excellence rather than fear and conformity,
- it focuses on the communal and collaborative rather than the individual and egotist,
- it is ethical and virtuous rather than competitive and corrupting,
- it shares fashion as a mode of action rather than as accumulation of stuff,
- it is equal and distinct rather than repeated and mass produced,
- it is unique and in a condition of natality, rather than prepared and packaged

After distinguishing between many forms of labor in fashion we will propose a series of ideas of how to turn fashion labor into more virtuous action.



garment
labor
metabolisms



The many labors of Fashion

In the everyday notion of labor in fashion, it is the factories and seamstresses that come into mind, the manual laborers producing garments and accessories, often overseas. But we would like to expand and unpack the multiplicity of forms of labor that are involved in fashion. This means we must also look towards the media, distribution, and consumer ends, where there are many forms of labor involved in the production of what we conceive of “fashion,” beyond the material production of the garments themselves. These types of labor may not result in the explicit exploitation and death of factory workers, but it is still a form of labor that designers can affect and engage with, reducing its necessity, alienation and levels of exploitation and suffering.

We axiomatically think of most labor as manual labor, or factory labor, where alienated workers struggle and are exploited. Broader definitions of labor often still absent - the domination of “fast fashion” has moved labor overseas and made it less palpable and globalized production chains have obscured flows and made labor itself hard to grasp. On a similar note, the recent disasters in Southeast Asian factories have put a spotlight on a certain type of fashion and sweatshop labor. Also movies, such as *China Blue* (Peled 2005), *Made in L.A* (Carracedo 2007) and *The True Cost* (Morgan 2015) have put faces on the suffering occurring in this type of production. But the labor of fashion does not only happen on the side of garment production, but is disseminated across the whole industry and amongst users and consumers.

Fashion labor beyond the sweatshop

Many forms of labor have become outsourced along globalization, perhaps most obviously as garment production and sweatshops have moved overseas. But a similar move of outsourcing can be recognized in other parts of the fashion industry. For example in branding, where part of the image production is disseminated to celebrities and bloggers, with “gifts” or product placement in movies and music videos. The image of the brand is thus not so much produced in-house as much as orchestrated and dispersed as

a form of curated labor, using famous or emerging icons as vectors. Here, everyday fashionistas with many followers on social media become clients in various forms of “viral” or “rhizomatic” branding strategies. The brand has thus no longer one stem from which one type of value is dispersed, instead the brand-boosting labor is outsourced to what we could call “aesthetic mercenaries.” These fashionistas do not only share the pleasures of seeing and popular as the reward of being associated to a brand, but these “brand ambassadors” are also employed to do the “dirty work” of fashion, the competition, rivalry, appropriation - and are hungrily followed by paparazzi and scandal media. Thus fashion companies use a form of privatization of fashion branding, tapping into and manipulating individuals who compete for attention. They fuel the street-level aesthetic rivalries to further their own interests, thus making users, bloggers and celebrities pawns in a larger game - and where abstract social processes of competitive sexual or natural selection are hijacked by fashion to turn into a “labor of allure” (von Busch 2016a).

The fashion media is today continuing a tradition of unpaid and gendered labor, from the sweatshops overseas to the “passion projects” of fashion bloggers that is a more recent and highly medialized type of free work for corporate brands. In much blogging the “attractiveness” of the blogger moves to front stage, yet the labor behind the attraction is hidden, from regimes of diets and training, to product placements and professional photographers and retouch work in photoshop. Everywhere we see people or peers who “make it,” making the suggestion that “anyone” can, yet we seldom see the informal connections and money which launched their careers. These forms of labor relate to the discussion on aspirational labor (Duffy 2017), aesthetic labor (Warhurst and Nickson, as well as Witz, on some of the papers/books), promotional labor (Alice Marwick), feminine self branding work/labor (Sarah Banet Weiser uses the terms interchangeably), and a paper that is forthcoming on reputational labor, as well as Patrick Aspers’ work on that form of labor as well. It would be interesting to parse out the similarities and differences between them, and how they relate to precarity and Tiziana Terranova’s ideas about free labor.

This is part of the labor that is *never acknowledged as labor*. It happens outside the industrial value chain, and becomes a site where fashion is produced as a form of socialization process, and often in “glamorous” form. These may also include highly emotional forms of labor, perhaps not arduous or exploited in the same ways as sweatshops, but they are processes of subjugation and alienation, and labor nonetheless.

The question of labor and aesthetics and the bodily labor of wearing clothes in factories makes me think about the work of Carla Freeman on women working in data factories in Barbados. Where the choice of dress is in some sense a performance of a certain kind of classed worker identity.

Today's many platforms of social media has seemingly evened out the social playing field, making the social realm appear virtually as "classless." But this game of illusion takes for granted that minds and bodies could be separated and thus neglects the conditions of social inequality: how has access, who has time to continuously update all the accounts, who can be at exciting places and meet famous people that will further propel the popularity - none of this issues are classless. Similarly, having many "followers" does not pay the rent... Instead, the followers have to be capitalized through online advertisements, endorsing stuff online and the selling of events (or being paid for being present), thus revealing the subjugation of the "virtual" laborer under the real conditions of the industry.

As noted by sociologist Johan Söderberg, this type of online also peer-labor exposes a rupture in sociological method, as what may seem as empowering from the localised and situated perspective of science-and-technology-studies (STS) or from actor-network-theory (ANT), may turn into exploitation on a more abstract level of class (Söderberg & Netznén 2010). What was hailed as the "liberating" qualities of the network economy at the beginning of the Internet has turned into what is today popularly called "platform capitalism" (Olma 2014). Examples appear across many fields of creative digital labor, with perhaps the most obvious being the music industry or journalism, where larger platforms are cashing in the big money whereas the small creators are competing against each other in a race to the bottom.

In this way, this argument about the "liberation" of labor may be a little misleading. As also Arendt highlights on the relation between labor society and consumption society, it is important to see how both are concerned with abundance and squandering, that production and consumption are part of the same dispossessed cycle where people have no possibility of participating in a true way in addressing the conditions of their relationship to their behavior: production is alienated in a similar vein to how consumption is. A more work-oriented type of consumption is more related to DIY activities, where putting things to use is building relationships which has permanence and are part of larger processes of shared world-building. On a related note, we find Daniel Miller's ideas of "consumption as labor" has a tendency to hide as much as reveal (Miller 2012). Where Miller suggests the act of shopping as a form of work, we see a danger collapsing labor and consumption. There may be some agency in shopping, but it is also a great difference from labor where workers are dying in factories. There may be overlaps of course, and one example is, in its extreme perhaps, the Black Friday Death Count: (<http://blackfridaydeathcount.com>)

Even the many forms of invisible labor does not escape the sexism of other forms of labor. According to the New Economics Foundation, men in the UK do 2.5 hours of unpaid work per day, while women do 4.5 hours. Sexism also exists in the invisible labor of fashion: the individual designer, often a man, is credited with the invisible labor of many, often women.

So there are many types of labor involved in the production of fashion, some abstract and others more concrete and material, some visible and some invisible. Some are more exploitative and victimizing than others. We will try to frame some of them below.

Labor of Conditioning

A constituent component of labor in fashion is the production of making fashion matter. What are the forms of socialization that makes us even care about dress? This is the invisible labor of conditioning people to become not only willing participants, but also make sure players of the game desire and become dependent on the feedback loops of the game: that we start craving the recognition we get from being seen.

On the one hand, dress and appearance may appear as part of basic human culture: to imitate and impress on others, leading to further competition and rivalry as many start competing. But fashion is also an industry tapping into and fuelling this social trait, adding more symbolic “weapons” to the competition, fuelling the arms race. A labor as conditioning could be divided up into several overlapping mechanisms:

- the social production of making fashion “matter”, make it count socially, the interpersonal processes of rewards and pressures which make people care about clothing and to “make it work”. It is in the interest of fashion to make us all care and make sure we push our peers to also care about their appearance.
- the conditioning of the sociopolitical agenda in favor of appearance, equating power and looks, popularity and adoration with obedience and willingly “following” the aesthetic leader. We speak of designs, the allure of the newest things and gossip about stars and how they look, thus orient our attention to the leaders, and make sure we also push the attention of our peers in this direction: to follow the aesthetic leader is rewarded not by the leader but through the interaction with our peers. (-Woow, did you see that X has the latest clutch?)
- the labor which shapes people’s wishes as a “third face of power” (Lukes 1974). As Lukes suggests, this means influencing, shaping

and determining the very wants and thoughts of the subjects, even making them want things opposed to their own self-interest (thus often an invisible aspect of power). This is similar to what Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964: 3) calls the “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom” made possible by contemporary technologies, which in turn produces a “society without opposition” making sure people stay uncertain what really is on their minds, yet still craving to fill the void with positive passions and affects: which is of course what a good fashion brand supplies. We are guided towards “retail therapy” after a tough exploitative day at work, and you know your recreation is good if it is expensive.

These forms of conditionings act in unison to frame the very possibilities and limitations of our everyday, and even if many of these forms of labor are invisible they are not absent, even if some of the locus is always outsourced to peers, and in the manipulation of structures and the values promoted within (sub)culture. Perhaps an example of this could be in Umberto Eco’s eminent essay “Lumbar thought” (Eco 1986), how his use of the new fashion of jeans changes his body and cognition. Eco notices that the garment puts a pressure on his body, altering his attention and relation to his body, posture and thinking in general. This in turn plays along with the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and his observation that society, in material as well as social processes, comes to condition our whole being (not only our mind) and thus give shape to our “character armor” as a bodily/muscle constraints which locks in neurosis into the body itself. We start walking like mannequins, seek the rewards of mannequins, and form our soul after a mannequin: we become the desires of fashion.

An example of fashion conditioning may be the cult of “health”, merging two forces, ex-corporation and in-corporation, which splits the subject’s body:

- **excorporation**, moving the subjects “locus of control” outwards from the subject’s body, making the subject dependent on the approval and acknowledgement of others (and seeking safety and reassurance in the “system”) and also transferring of risk to others (following leaders, rather than taking the risk of being too “unique”)
- **incorporation**, internalizing values, forces and pressures from the outside, taking onto one’s own body the quest for perfection and purity of social norms. One typical example may be how we, through gyms and surgery, produce a “corporate body” through technologies/quantifications of the self (and training cults like SoulCycle and Les Mills), fuelled by Labor of Rivalry and Co-veil-

lance. To “work that body” at a post-secular cult like SoulCycle is a labor of alienation from one’s body, pushing it to conform with the healthy ideals of how a body should look in a fiercely competitive and totally unhealthy world under the regime of a precarious working environment (“I feel like shit, but I am in good shape”).

To “work that body” becomes a labor where excorporation and incorporation meets: the subject’s body labors at SoulCycle, while it merges the internal brand of the self with the external cult of a capitalist notion of “health” (that is, not being “sick”, which in turn means being unable to sell one’s labor to an employer). The body is in itself sold on the market of public acceptance, being a “proactive and good employee,” yet still the subject does not own his or her own time, health and well-being. The corporation’s demands have been incorporated into the body of the subject, and the rush of adrenaline is no longer serving the pleasure of the subject, but the employer, insurance company, and shareholders.

Labor of Expectations

The labor of conditioning also resonates with how fashion produces a special perspective on the future, on what we can expect from the next moment. Fashion always promises something: beauty, popularity, living into an imagined/projected future rather than in the present (the use of fashion). Thus much of fashion labor is immaterial/value/myth/buzz of narratives about the future, about the next party, the next movie, the next star, the next “big thing.” This production of a special perspective of the future is tightly interwoven with the ideal of progression, that not only society is in continually modernizing process, but also that we are part of that trajectory: we as consuming subjects get more educated, better paid, in better shape, etc, and we spend our money on the journey towards the expected future.

Advertising is all about producing these expectations, that we will look better, we will be more popular, we will know what nobody else knows: these are all popularly known “secrets” that brands build our participation on. The last decades trend on “viral marketing” also includes many forms of “viral labor,” no unlike the production of buzz in William Gibson’s novel *Pattern Recognition* (2003).

If we are to think of fashion like money or stocks, we could think of the value being in its imagined use and it would thus require many forms of labor to produce both security (things mean and represent what they mean, the value is backed by the brand and the celebrities the brand has in its “stable”). But like stock, it would also require the production of anticipation, that the value is on the rise. Even if we buy “retro” there is an expectation

that this retro is not only old-looking, but old-looking in the right way, a way that raises the credibility of our appearance and perhaps “cultural capital” as Bourdieu would have it (Bourdieu 1984). Fashion brands produce this in the launch of the “new season”, with all the forms of labor synchronized to raise its value: the catwalk launch, the grand opening, the red carpet, the bought celebrities, the gifted goods to bloggers, and all the way to the curation of the coming sale (or no sales, but rather cutting up the leftovers by the staff in the store).

One way to imagine this form of labor of excitement is to take the word “buzz” a little bit more literally. That buzz is a dance of bees, bodies moving, conveying to the other bees where the nectar is. Buzz is indeed a production social nectar of “hype,” it mobilizes attention and builds anticipation, making people eager, licking their lips, ready for the new sugar kick. The labor of buzz-production is thus to produce the anticipation of desire (rather than pleasure itself), that our mind is getting kicks already as the bell rings.

However, there is a paradox here, as fashion lives on unfulfilled expectations: if we were happy and all our expectations fulfilled, we would need little fashion. We must always hunger for more, and fashion thrives on the experience that one is never good enough, beautiful enough, rich, slim, tall, white enough, etc. The roots of expectations is also aspirational labor, in which the workers aspire to something better, so pays their own way to try to get there, displaying the passion for consumption on instagram in hopes of gaining attention and then invitations for endorsements that would make that passion pay off, if we are to riff off from communication scholar Brooke Erin Duffy’s work on the topic, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love* (2017).

Labor of Capture

Fashion thrives on stealing and packaging the expressions of others. The appropriation of subcultures or ethnic symbols is so ubiquitous it is hardly noticed anymore. This may of course also be a foundational gesture on most cultural practices, from classic music stealing from folk music, to artists tapping into other scenes for inspiration to steal and plagiarize.

In vernacular style, we could call the process of capturing as a “flat packing” or “freeze drying” of fashion in order to be put to service of hierarchization and a capitalist order. But let’s examine it a little closer.

To Deleuze and Guattari (2005), “capture” is the mechanism by which an abstract entity becomes imprinted, coded and regulated to become part of an economy, by ownership, monetization, taxation, or circulation. The hunter may chase it, the state may tax it, the bank put credit on it, capi-

tal monopolize it, military fight over it, etc. In a case of fashion, the prime example may be the rebel street style which becomes part of a collection, branded and commodified. Deleuze and Guattari frames a “three-headed apparatus of capture” or what they call a “trinity formula” to exemplify the basic modi of capturing processes (2005: 443ff). In this formula, Territory becomes Land (to be rented and controlled by the landowner), Activity becomes Work (to be profited upon by the entrepreneur), and Exchange becomes Money (to be taxed by the banker). The three modes of capture, Rent, Profit, Taxation, becomes a “megamachine” with three distinct capitalizations of power (2005: 444), which in turn unites the landowner, entrepreneur and banker into an amalgamated power-circuit which all capture value of various forms of labor and work to make sure these resources stay available for further coding and capture. Thus capture is not occurring after the event, but a process totally incorporated into the function of the market, “the mechanism of capture contributes from the outset to the constitution of the aggregate upon which the capture is effectuated.” (2005: 446)

Fashion as becoming overcoded through the Fashion-Industrial-Complex, becoming a signifying commodity, bound up by references to cultures, celebrities, events. This act of coding, of capturing, could be referred to the Deleuzoguattarian term of “territorialization”, of symbols, signals and milieus becoming molar and controlled. The designer brand codes and territorializes expressions, making them a branded mark, or indeed marking the subject in a similar way as the “branding” of cattle. The brand becomes a sign of ownership, of an asymmetric symbiosis where labor is displaced onto the consumer, who thought he or she was free of labor in this transaction, but instead becomes the life laborer. From the perspective of the consumer it is a submission to the brand which looks like a favorable alliance, of becoming part of the “crew,” while for the brand the consuming subject becomes yet another viral vector, an outsourced agent doing the branding labor on the street by the very act of living and aesthetically impressing his or her peers.

The living flow of life, on the other hand, or what we have also called “living fashion,” tends to decode such mechanisms of capture, to set free signifiers, blend, hybridize and short circuit coded messages. In its most utopian form, it is a desire for connection between people, to act out and dare to live, which in itself can refuse to become coupled and branded. Here, we are not idealizing a “free” or “revolutionary” form of fashion, but a living fashion without exploitation and captured labor.

Even if the coded mode of branding has close connotations to the current economy, none of the two above is in our perception necessarily more “capitalist” than the other, but the capitalist economic order operates with several machines of capture. The coded flows easily turn into commodities, but also new ideas are released and formed by curated decodings. The

very act of orchestration and curation is to form decoded flows and funnel them into territories where they can be captured. New tunes are captured into contracts, recorded and streamed, possibly signed and attuned to give street cred yet another event and festival. Any rogue style is given its 15 minutes of fame through the vectors of platform capitalism, most probably with a link to its own feed and sales site.

In this way, the basic element of fashion, the act of imitation and copying, can become a crime against the controlled order of capture. The powerful is allowed to capture the “uncoded” expressions (often from the “street”) - but the new coded styles become protected with ever more intricate formulas of legal and state-sanctioned capturing. This enforces itself in a way similar to how Deleuze and Guattari put it;

Crime [...] is a violence of illegality that consists in taking possession of something to which one has no “right,” in capturing something one does not have a “right” to capture. [...] State or lawful violence always seems to presuppose itself, for it preexists its own use: the State can in this way say that violence is “primal,” that it is simply a natural phenomenon the responsibility for which does not lie with the State, which uses violence only against the violent, against “criminals”—against primitives, against nomads—in order that peace may reign. (2005: 448)

It is the people who copy the coded commodities who are the “criminals” while the brands who capture decoded styles become “genius” and “on trend.” Thus the very process of subjectivization, the organized societal processes by which the individual shaped the conception of self, turns into a regime of social subjection and subjugation under the regimes of capture (2005: 451) The very actions of “becoming oneself” are captured in many forms, coded and commodified: not only the stuff we buy or wear, but where one lives, what school one attends, where one goes for vacation, what one cooks, do workout, nightclub, partner, children - everything is already captured, coded, and stratified by status.

Deleuze and Guattari also criticizes the Freudian reflex of letting the Oedipal apparatus capture all sexuality to mean only one thing, always coding sexuality into the Oedipal economy, of the genital, reproductive and familial, reducing sexual desire to a “family secret,” rather than releasing it as a potentially cosmic force that is tied to the very core of organic life-affirmation. A similar critique could be drawn to the capturing mechanisms of fashion, how so many forms of dressed togetherness in tune with the *Zeitgeist* are apprehended and harnessed by economic forces and tied into the production machinery of labor. Indeed, this may be the fate of fashion-as-we-know-it: doomed to be captured into the machinic frameworks of capitalism and the lifestyle identity economy, where the only aim is “being popular.” In

such settings fashion is bound to the competitive social game, and reduced to a zero-sum game between those who are “in” against those who are “out.”

(But we must also ask, could a praxis possibly avoid this doom? What type of engagement must we set off to cultivate fashion as a cosmic (and perhaps positively sexual) force, a magical and liberating dynamic, owned not by abstract machines, but by all those whose dreams and bodies are boundlessly desirable and free)

Like the fine arts, fashion packages the “dark matter” (Sholette 2010) of wider lifestyles and cultures into a collection of goods, and commodities, sold through the branding of the “stars” and celebrities of fashion. Sholette uses a metaphor of astronomy to highlight the distribution of creativity and recognition in creative labour, where the unrecognized amateur scenes are the “dark matter”, or invisible mass, producing the recognizable cultural economies, trends and media celebrities, or “stars.” These stars are produced through the unrecognized dark backdrop of endless unnamed amateurs.

This appropriated amateur work is what Sholette calls the creative “dark matter” is, like the astronomical equivalent, approximately 96 per cent of the creative economy. It is a culture that is commodified by a few artists, who in turn are lifted up as geniuses as they ride on the free labor of passionate amateurs. The art stars of biennials and galleries piggyback on the work of the amateurs, vacuuming ideas, expressions and processes developed by unrecognized and unpaid amateurs, and poach the fluid gift economies for their own (and the market’s) interests. Thus the “dark matter” also captures all forms of artistic resistance, and “other social [non]productivity,” even the forms which attempt to “free itself from even attempting to be usefully productive for capitalism (or for Art Inc.)” (Sholette 2011: 188).

The harnessing of “desire” for labor puts pressure to induce artists with the “spirit of entrepreneurship” into a new “Taylorism of the mind” (Sholette 2011: 35). Like in fashion, “the ‘cool hunters’ infiltrate gallery openings, nightclubs and other Bohemian environs hoping to catch wind of the latest fashionable trend” (Sholette 2011: 39).

The work of sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato reveals how consumer creativity and engagement are the central components of what he calls “im-material labour”, which is the “activity that produces the ‘cultural content’ of the commodity” (Lazzarato, 1996: 132). Lazzarato sees this type of labor as an extension of the workplace to also include “series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’ – in other words, the kind of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” (Lazzarato 1996: 132). What today counts as “production” is not only the manufacturing of

commodities, but the very act of capturing life processes into capital-producing events, where one “has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth” which in turn all can be turned into labor (Lazzarato 1996: 134).

Work can thus be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become ‘active subjects’ in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command. We arrive at a point where a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity, because it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones. (Lazzarato 1996: 134)

In a similar way, immaterial labor produces scenes, arenas and cultures where every form of interaction can be captured and funneled into the consumption of goods and services, or the (re)production of capital.

The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labour (its essential use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather enlarges, transforms, and creates the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer. This commodity does not produce the physical capacity of labour power; instead, it transforms the person who uses it. Immaterial labour produces first and foremost a ‘social relationship’ (a relationship of innovation, production, and consumption). (Lazzarato 1996: 137)

Under these conditions, even the cultivation of “empowerment” entails the production of loyal consumers and creatively engaged unpaid workers, tapping into their “passions”, and thus willingly working committed and long hours as well as fighting for their passions against rivals and competitors, thus furthering the interests and investments of their “facilitating” brand agents. As fashionistas seek new forms of “cooperations” between cultural producers, artists and brands, DJs and reality stars, sneakers and hackers, they all in turn end up reproducing an endless chain of new commodified relationships where the very act of collaboration becomes a dynamic of turning life into labor.

On another note, we must also see how capture in the form we usually call appropriation, harvesting and dislocating cultural symbols from their rightful owners can also be applied to forms of temporal appropriation, thinking through terms of George Wallis’ “chronopolitics” of cultural transitions (1970), or Paul Virilio’s “dromology” or logic of speed (Virilio 1986). Cultural symbolism, heritage and memories are stripped from those who produced them and old codes and styles are taken over by new forces. This is not necessarily a bad thing: every generation reinterprets and rein-

vents some of their relationship to the past, but the question is who gains control and power, who profits and who is stripped of cultural coherence and disenfranchised by the very structure of such process of capture. Whereas some may complain that “I wore it first,” a chronopolitics of temporal appropriation must also take into account the asymmetries and dynamics between those who lived through the codes and those who now approach them as something fresh and exciting. Fashion designers have a lot to think about (and do) here, rethinking the relationship to the “new.”

Labor of Authenticity

The labor of authenticity today seems to be a struggle over living wages; it is so granted that ordinary goods do not pay the maker a living wage, so a layer of aestheticized truthfulness and (not rarely colonially coded) transparency has to be added to products to raise prices. This production of the “aura” of truthful labor, often used nature and ethnic expressions as tokens of their own (moralizing) honesty. At its perhaps most explicit form, we see bearded, tattooed and crafty-looking hipsters in flannel shirts, working out of a post-industrial space in Brooklyn, making “craft”-this-and-that, while the authentic honesty of their labor fails to acknowledge that most subcontracting is done under veils of obscurity: coffee pickers in poor conditions overseas or in industrial slaughterhouses in the south operated by migrant workers. It is as if every layer of authentic “transparency” that is lifted to be viewed by consumers, there is yet another produced further down the line, and pushed further back.

With the rise of authenticity as perhaps the prime label for sustainable fashion, there has been a fetishization of labor. We see images of solemn people handweaving, mending, handknitting, often in slightly exotic settings, either domestically or internationally. The focus on the hand as the palpable conveyor of truth carries almost sacramental proportions: in a time when all images can be or are in some way manipulated, what we touch and feel becomes almost religious, that is, supernatural. Or rather, so truthful we worship it and cling to it as a last hope of some inherent meaning manifested in the world.

In her book *Routes and Roots* (2007) Elizabeth DeLoughrey highlights the fluidities of culture to invoke a cyclical model of how identities move and manifest. By using the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean, or “tidalectics” between land and sea, DeLoughrey exposes many founding myths of what we often consider “authenticity,” such as the male traveller crossing feminized oceans and lands, to finally be harbored naturalized by planting their own “seeds” which claim a new connection to the truthful-

ness of rock and soil. Similar strategies can be found in the production of authenticity in fashion.

In order to support the struggles to claim the most authentic position, a lot of labor goes into producing “roots,” a quality usually seen as pre-conditioned and historic. Every big brand is supposed to have an archive and a museum, which in turn is part of producing heritage, often also travelling into art museums to make sure the brand manifests its culturally significant position. A brand like Hermes typically builds on this craftsmanship mythology, and perhaps Chanel is the prime mover when it comes to museums, exhibits, and movies about the history of Chanel, of course heavily censored and curated to leave out the cynical pragmatism of the time, such as Coco Chanel’s collaboration with the Nazis.

Together with the labor involved in producing authentic roots, there is also a production of “routes,” but even if these may not suggest a historically manifested truthfulness rooted in Being (I was here first) they still suggest an authenticity of process. If we are for example to use Chanel again as example, it is her transformation that is the authentic route of her story, the ugly duckling transformation, which also indicates the use of the narrative today: you can also be transformed with Chanel.

At the same time, we can also see what political scientist Victoria Hattam calls the “disneyfication” of labor, where labor becomes highly performative. Cafes expose part of the bakery for us to see their labor, or fashion stores like Nudie Jeans, putting their repair sewing machine in the window not only to advertise their service, but to expose the manual labor as performance of labor. At its best, we can learn about value from seeing the time and effort taken to put food on our table, yet we must also see that these fully orchestrated and curated situations are made to look real, yet reveal nothing about the true conditions behind it. If we look more carefully we may witness segregation and injustice right before our eyes, the people of color dishwashing, or the “unattractive” people cleaning, while the white cool kids take the front stage.

This also highlights some of the many problems of our idea of the “authentic” - whose hands are supposed to do what, and get paid what price? Often the National appears as a specific, yet vague quality. Not only does “made in Italy” or “made in USA” not tell anything about the labor involved, and at what stage (what part of the labor chain is required to take place at a specific location in order to qualify for the label) - but also the condition or nationality of the hands stays unstated. And under this “homemade” earmark, there exists an unspoken hint that white hands produce more honest labor. In the market of authenticity, “made in China” signifies not only a lower quality, but a lack of authenticity, even for goods with an outspoken tradition in China, not least silks and porcelain. The “authentic” has to be

produced, and most often so circulate through a western brand in order to get its quality stamp.

Labor of Exclusion

A basic definition of fashion is the distinction between “in” and “out.” This is the demarcation which makes exclusive also mean it is excluding something else (the “out”) - so a troubling discussion for fashion, as it tries to be more inclusive, is how to deal with the very idea and value of the exclusive and the mechanisms which (re)produce the excluding processes.

In this way, fashion is always a form of elitism, even if it may appear inclusive and accessible. Even out of mass production it still attempts to make things seem unique and make the user/wearer use mass-produced goods as an essential part of creating an individual self, a self defined by what it is not, “the other”, the excluded, and part of the process of “fashion supremacy” (von Busch 2014).

One such example can be the process of creating the “self,” which according to scholars like Giddens (1991) is foundational process of the modern self, a self authored and modulated, a process Simondon also called “individuation” and he frames this process with our use of technologies (Chabot *et al* 2013). Especially today, we can see such development of self with the technology of the CV, a list of properties of the self, but also in social media, with the “timeline” in facebook being basically a progress-line by which we can trace our own life story. Even more so, if we see how image-based social media, merged with the “smart” camera phone has propelled the popularity of the “selfie” as a form of self-documentation and self-distribution.

The very idea of the selfie is to frame oneself as part of a background event, to include the viewer as a participant actor in a scene which in turn is part of the definition of self - “I am here!” Yet the very framing of the lens also makes the camera capture an excluding form of “selfing”, not unlike the traditional family photo (which seems almost like a historic genre now obsolete). The questions raised, like with the family photo is who fits inside the frame, who belongs in your story of the self, who is broadcasted together with you - who is your real friend, who is the mirror of your own self? In such process, fashion plays an eminent part in the attention economy of the self: if appearance is all, make sure you yourself have excluded the ugly and repulsive. As you grab your selfie, fashion has just outsourced the exclusion to you!

The same mechanisms are common in the production of special events, such as Fashion’s Night Out, which has had the explicit aim to “make fashion accessible” for one night. But who has access to the right events, who

“drops” the right collection at the right place, and who knows, who is invited. All these parts are essential to the curation of scarcity and exclusivity. For example making limited edition Nike sneaker, not so much more expensive than the usual ones, but limited in the know, or how Zara fast fashion produces cheap goods in unknown quantities so you never know if the garment will still be there if you don’t buy it right now. In its more cruel sense, this can be noted in how for example Gap sells its larger sizes only online, which in one way is inclusive, but is also does so “to keep the fat people out of the stores.”

The curation of the store is an important part of merchandising. Moving merchandize between spots with high turnover means a lot to how a brand shows what it wants to sell or highlight, and many use heat sensors in stores to see how people move or how often something gets touched. Also H&M has its changing rooms closer to register at the new flagship store at Times Sq to take away time to regret purchase. Another example can be the cases when they are providing cosy blankets to customers sleeping outside their stores before an official opening: it is open to all, but you have to sleep outside to get what we have to offer. The contents of the store thus also sorts people making some included and some excluded. When Zara in Harlem has a different assortment of clothes, styles and sizes than its downtown stores, it speaks also to different clientele, but may potentially also sort between people and in this process demarcate wanted from unwanted customers.

All stores cannot carry all sizes and styles, and something and someone will always be excluded, but if designers are to address these issues, they need to train to see these mechanisms.

Labor of rivalry and co-veillance

As Arendt would have it, in the “behavioral” social condition of aesthetic obedience, no deeds or actions are encouraged. Conformity rules, yet also divides and isolates, as every being is kept limited within the statistics of economical determination and socialized, mediated and constrained behavior. Without deeds there is no substantive distinction between individuals, only difference on the level of image.

Today, especially through social media, the dressed social self has come to merge with the mediated and “Quantified Self.” We merge “likes” and “hypes” and “friends” with the many other gamified values of our digital and analogue existence. Not only do we seek to measure and compare our own performance, but also our relative status and competitive position. We are drawn into asserting control of our life through quantification, mediation and continuous increase in performance, all tracked and mediated through social technologies (Lupton 2013; Neff and Nafus 2016; Nafus 2016). The

phenomenon of the video “haul” or the instagram update in a new garment has become the performative equivalent of the FitBit data of today’s training session and calorie burn. Like the data-driven performance quantification, the subject brings the future into the present, the expectation of perfection into a tangible gesture, comparing, revising and calculating developments and progress. Parallels between fashion hauls and image updates are not too unlike how Ian Hacking saw the emergence of personal control culture as a subjective tool for “taming risk” (Hacking 1990). In my continuous flow of style updates, I know I am keeping up, I know I am moving ahead. In Gary Wolf’s popular text ‘The Data Driven Life’ (2010), Wolf sees this self quantification as a Neo-Taylorist cult of self-optimisation, but this optimization is equally translatable into fashion purchases showed off into translating into “likes” or “hypes” online. In a culture of social media rivalry, fashion itself becomes a Neo-Taylorist optimization of identity production.

As introduced by Mann *et al.* (2003), “coveillance” is the panoptic practice of peers surveilling each other side-to-side through social media and quantifications. As a parallel term to *sousveillance*, coveillance connotes citizens willingly engage in peer-to-peer competition and gazing as part of consumerist society and conspicuous consumption (Palmas 2015). The competition for performance is replaced by a perpetual race for position as one is continually reminded of peer-performances. Using a “lateral” gaze, users mix play and identity formation, and “friends” quickly become digital competitors. Thus the “system” has no need of using subjugation, discipline or control, as much as setting users against each other, only making sure the gamification of social relationships is rewarded by small bonuses of updates and attention (making the competition impossible to ignore in the news feed).

Under such conditions, “democratization” of fashion and social media also turns towards enhancing competitive aspects of social life, especially under a economized culture (as part of neoliberalism) where exchange between equals is more and more turning into competition between self-maximizing individuals in an environment producing scarcity in a time of abundance (cf. Brown 2015)

In such culture of quantified and commodified competition the quantified qualities of “what” comes to replace the personal and unique qualities of the human “who,” closing the feedback loop between monetary and aesthetic expenditure. It merges labor of consumption and labor of production, and also produces a culture where the labor of controlled and self-surveilled conformity is an essential part of the labor of aesthetic individuation.

Labor of “love”

It is perhaps easier to see the explicitly exploitative forms of labor in fashion, sweatshops and suffering, but we may also recognize how the fashion industry today so successfully taps into the passions and “love” of fans and customers. Indeed, it may be this form of dedication that is the very currency of the fashion economy: to make customers seek the love of the brand (or at least as reflected in the recognition from their peers). We may call this “The New Spirit of Fashion,” how fashion companies today are harnessing the labor of our own “passion for fashion”, in turn echoing sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello ideas of a *New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005), which we will discuss below.

When we say we have a “passion for fashion” most of us usually mean to say we simply like to spend our time, attention and money on clothing. But being passionate is also being possessed, unreasonable, unreflected, to be consumed by emotion/desire. Manipulating the passions of consumers has a long history in marketing, not least so expressively captured in Adam Curtis’ eminent BBC documentary *The Century of the Self* (2002). Following the footsteps of this psychologically driven advertising, today the field is also including neuromarketing which aims to make consumerism tap into the very neural architecture of our brain: reward mechanisms, dopamine kicks and addictive behaviors. It is indeed this manipulation of our “love,” tapping labor into passions, and manipulating desire, which is the frontier of outsourcing of labor in fashion: to make users the co-producers of the value of a brand and style - to make us feel “part of something” and thus promote and live within the domain of a commodified lifestyle. Here, the labor is not direct manipulation, but to indirectly make peers use “viral” and mimetic desires to compete in subjugation in a race to the bottom. Every fashionista becomes a hyper-working laborer, not distinguishing between labor and leisure, frantically instagramming and tweeting about their passions, all in correspondence with the strategic aim of the brands, making people desire to work more on their passions and become all the more “manic” workers (Martin 2007).

Boltanski and Chiapello examine the shift in conditions of labour from industrialism to the post-industrial or post-Fordist economy in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) where they trace an explicit change in the organization, interests and values of labour. Boltanski and Chiapello highlight how the demands of autonomy, authority and creativity in 1968, which at the time attacked the discipline, bureaucracy, hierarchical power and social regulation of industry, turned into new forms of deregulation and fluidity. These “liberated” modes of production, which may in part have sounded utopian in the 60s (but for different reasons) had by the turn of the century turned into the dominant logic of capital, which in turn became

the instruments to dismantle both the welfare state and the union-protected labour markets. Parallels can be drawn to Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1983) and Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), perhaps the classic analyses of fashion, works which were still heavily anchored in the industrial paradigm, whereas new forces and dynamics in labour and style stratification are at work today. The linear distribution of trends radiating from the fashion capitals, has been replaced by new non-linear forces, and the strict division of labor between production and consumption has been dismantled.

The same forces, of a "fluid" fashion system, has undermined the rigid aesthetic stratifications of the old times, yet undermined labor organization as well as critique of the current "desire-driven" forms of labor, such as unpaid internships, blogging, product placements and viral marketing. Sociologist Richard Sennett sordidly notes that, 'The goal for rulers today, as for radicals sixty years ago, is to take apart [society's] rigid bureaucracy' (Sennett 2006: 2), a comment that also applies well to the hierarchies and organization, as well as labor-protection, of production within the fashion system.

"The New Spirit of Fashion" puts desire-production at the center, indeed fulfilling Alvin Toffler's idea of the "prosumer", or "producing consumer" (Toffler 1980). Yet this is done under the disguise of user-agency, which in turn makes users become seemingly emancipated laborers, where brands can harness their "passion for fashion" to extract more viral and precarious labor from the very act of identity-production.

Berardi (2009) posits a transformation of labor over the last decades from alienation to investment, where the "soul" is invested into work. As Berardi notes, much "new" labor has moved from being in a condition of disconnected drudgery, where wage-labor is just something a citizen has to commit too to "make a living", and he or she lives for the spare time and leisure, and today workers are supposed to invest their soul into their labor and become entrepreneurs, making sure they put their whole life project into their work, and thus, as Berardi puts it, putting the "soul to work". In a similar vein, media scholar McKenzie Wark traces a transition in from "culture industries," the media production that aims to extract value (payment) from consumers by tapping into their leisure time, to what he calls the "vulture industries", the media platforms which takes rent from users as they are asked to entertain each others (Wark 2013).

Today we also see a fetishization of "disruption" or an ideal of very radical innovations, with the implicit aim to undermine established paradigms, yet also resulting in new forms of labor and exploitation as the new labor is not "counted" in labor laws. Uber can be a typical example of this, pushing drivers to become "liberated" employees, yet without insurance or protection, and all the money they earn actually feed the promotion of

driver-less cars, undermining their own future employment. Also in fashion there is as an ideal in the start-up world - the idealization of entrepreneurship and already in fashion school “making a brand of oneself” with the ultimate goal of disrupting the industry. So we must ask; What disruptions are good and empowering? How do designers problematize their promoting of new Uber-type of innovations in the organization of labor?

Even poorly paid or unpaid work can be a source of self-actualisation for young fashion designers (McRobbie 1998). Does this, however, make young designers more vulnerable to exploitation? Does the pursuit for self-actualisation and satisfaction lead to destruction, by inability to provide for oneself? McRobbie’s study was conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is a much larger mass of young fashion designers today than there was 30 years ago searching for self and survival.

The firing of Alber Elbaz from Lanvin and resignation of Raf Simons from Christian Dior in 2015 raised questions about the performance expectations placed on those rare fashion designers whose work is lauded as that of a genius. Could Simons’s resignation be seen as a privileged rejection of labor, of being a laborer? As Diane von Furstenburg said on the commencement speech at New School in 2016, the ultimate fulfilling work today is the collapsing labor and life, to make work “have a purpose.” But does “purpose” mean the same as praxis?

Labor of Internment (Internship)

The reality of internships is an unfortunate example of how abusive structures are perpetuated and promoted: as much as we know about this, we don’t necessarily do anything to change this situation, in fact, we promote our students to intern for free in several companies / labels.

One channel collecting statements from interns is the blog “Interns Anonymous,” a site dedicated to share the experiences of UK young interns working for free, and it also compiles shared issues common amongst unpaid interns. Some of these include working over 8-10 hours a day and even on holidays (specified in a signed agreement), not receiving any compensation or form of payment (no meals, transportation, money, etc.); being required to perform “mindless” or non-educational work (such as tidying-up); and the list keeps on going. Especially today, many education institutions are basically conveyor belts for unpaid labor to brands, making sure every new year a new cohort of young eager and not-yet-disillusioned design students are ready to hit the studio floors, fighting for the few positions (if any) that are opened as regular paid jobs.

Perhaps the one thing that strikes the most around all the issues around internships, beyond the obvious fact that this is a persuaded/con-

sented form of exploitation, is that many interns refer to the fact that they even weren't thanked for their work:

"This is not only about no wages, but about bad immoral treatment, modern day slavery. I was treated with no respect and it made me feel worthless, even though I know they have gained so much from the work I have done for them. Is this humane? Is this legal? We need to put an end to this! Please monitor internships and set-up a representative that fights for or rights and black lists such companies! Also graduates suffer – they don't find any paid jobs because of all the free labour... To whoever sent this email in – do get in touch (as anonymously as you like) as we'd like to help you out"

Internship and experience is always an important part of vocational education, to live in the reality of one's calling. To be an "intern" means to be inside the lived experience of labor, but how can one have a healthy and wise relationship to this inner or "inter" experience. How can one give shape to internships that foster more journeys towards the within, and how can we avoid they come at a high cost in workplaces based on hierarchy and alienation?

Labor of Sustainability

Perhaps we must also recognize that much of the emergence of a new wave of sustainability thinking in fashion also thrives on many forms of labor, often not discussed by designers and authors. The topics of sustainability today often contain many forms of unpaid and unregulated labor, shuffled between brands, production chains and consumers.

For example, if brands are meant to be "transparent"; who will seek out the right information from this transparency reports, who will transmit this information to customers in a critical way, and who has the time to pay attention to this new "good" information? And if we take on critical glasses, What does that say about class, status, work, wealth, etc?

There are many points designers must keep in mind as they address sustainability from a perspective of labor. Take for example transparency of tracking in the production chain, where is that detective labor of tracing globalized production coming from? Most firms have a bad overview of where their materials and labor is sourced from, and even if you visit the factory, what can you know about the conditions of labor there? The very detective work of transparency requires a lot of time and knowledge, and who pays for that?

If we go for more conspiracies, we must also see that a lot of labor goes into manipulating corporate responsibility to fit various labels and standards, adjusting numbers and squeezing quotas to look better and more sustainable. But this manipulation also happens in the more ethical produc-

tion of what is supposed to be a “conscious” collection; what and who is counted, what perspective is taken, who is “conscious” to whom, etc?

Even as we take on the labor of care, with repairs and mending, we the questions emerge around that labor of care; is it a feminized and underpaid labor, is the user supposed to do this, and who has the time to do such labor (in a time when it is cheaper to outsource it)? Yet we may see some paths opening, at least in governments reworking the structural incentives of consumption versus repair, such as the Swedish new rules on lowering the VAT on repair services.

On the other hand, we see a rising consciousness about these issues which gives hope. At Parsons we have co-arranged a few “fashion revolution day” events, which have been a great way to raise the attention of students to the issues of environmental sustainability. But awareness is not enough, and the avenues of action for students to make a difference may seem limited as they face the industry. Perhaps the basic level of sustainability in fashion is and will stay being greenwashing, which means the troubling questions around sustainability keeps falling on consumers where their efforts to live a an ethical life will stay being a labor of trying to be “good” in times dictated by greed.

But the question of sustainability in fashion still remains: *what is worth sustaining in the realm of fashion?*



Fashion Praxis: Transforming the labor of fashion into action

It may be a little disheartening to go through the many forms of fashion that is turned into labor, and how so many expressions and instances of dress can be exploited. If the many forms of labor discussed above turns laborers into victims, how do we labor for “liberation”, that is, how do we turn the realm of dress into an arena of action and empowerment? What forms of labor can fashion be part of that produces more agency, and leverage?

The key questions for us is: *After going through all these forms of exploitation, what is worth saving in fashion? How can we work for the particular and the specific, for the moments of inspiration and resonance, to cultivate that distinct aliveness and authentic relatedness to the shared world, that dressed human togetherness that we cannot experience alone?*

Following Arendt’s ideas on praxis, could we imagine there being a “heroic” labor in fashion? Like Hercules’ cleaning of the Augean stables, The labor of Hercules, which should be done in a day, was both humiliating and considered manually impossible, since the divine livestock produced enormous quantities of dung and the stable had never been cleaned before. Yet, as Arendt posits, such heroism of labor does not entail any courage, even if it is unique and excellent, “but unfortunately it is only the mythological Augean stable that will remain clean once the effort is made and the task achieved.” (Arendt 1958: 101) On a similar note, fashion, per definition, most often has a only a temporary impact on the world, but the task of praxis could be to mobilizing “heroic” practices in changing the fashion system.

Perhaps we can imaging the work towards “excellence” of virtuous deeds (which according to Arendt can never be called “labor”) as a form of social praxis in fashion design. This would mean not fulfilling the standards of success set by others, but to excel in courage and virtuous performance for others, to perform well, that is strive for performance, not position;

“Excellence itself, arete as the Greeks, virtus as the Romans would have called it, has always been assigned to the public realm where one could excel, could dis-

tinguish oneself from all others. Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors." (Arendt 1958: 48f)

Part of what can be done as praxis may be creating room for reflection and politics, and using fashion education, the pathway towards getting into the industry, as a space for critical inquiry, more explicit social engagement and mobilization in order to pursue civic forms of fashion praxis.

Education is a revolutionary force for intellectual curiosity, shared discourse, questioning and capacity building, producing an environment of critical examination and inquiry. Excellence in this realm is not that of producing papers and "hypocritical" theory (Wark 2013), but of shaping civic discourse as a form of attention to the world by which public politics can be shared and collectively shaped. This however, requires quite a change to mainstream fashion education and the evermore streamlining of education to produce "impact" and vocational applicability to make students "make a living" with their education.

Fashion allows for a certain level of performativity, social mobility, performativity, expression beyond "what is given" (set by social norms, heteronomous traditions etc). Fashion covers and reveals so many sins and virtues, and it is an interface by which to seek contact with others in subtle (or expressive) ways, so we must not deny the power of speaking through fashion, the communication which can be both truthful to our aspirations and inner life, sometimes more honest than we dare to speak of or acknowledge to ourselves (or to friends). Clothing can in that sense be a form of confession of subjugated or denied inner desires, and just like we can be anxious about dress, it can be explicitly liberating to dress up/down/in/out.

However, as we have noted throughout the discussion above, it can be difficult to step away from and see beyond the dominant capitalist context for fashion. That is why examples of fashion praxis may be forms of fashion that exists on the fringes or outside the main industrial or medialized forms of fashion. So we must ask, what is a labor of fashion that produces praxis/actions/deeds that promote the "good" in fashion - which can make fashion a real "labor of love?" What is a fashion labor that fosters togetherness, courage, self-esteem, self-determination and excellence in care?

Labor in my fashion community: Timo Rissanen

My view of factory work is colored by nostalgia; it most certainly is not abstract. I worked in a shirt factory in Sydney around 2003-2005. Workers at the factory took great pride in their work, in turning out a perfect shirt collar, a perfect cuff. They were a tight community of mostly Greek and Italian immigrants, clearly enjoying coming to work each day. This was somewhat in contrast to the dominant image of the oppressed, silent garment worker, and for me the contrast is still vivid. The factory has since closed as the company moved production overseas to reduce labor costs.

Yoshiyuki Minami of Manonik has made his own labor a key facet of his outward-facing practice. In creating each garment, he times the weaving of each garment component and the sewing by hand of each seam, and shares these through beautiful visuals on Instagram. One could argue that the garments are beautiful celebrations of the often invisible labor in fashion. But is it not a privileged labor, in the same way that Timo spending hours repairing his shirts is a privileged labor? Can this privileged labor nonetheless be a catalyst for revalorising (invisible) fashion labor more broadly? Or has labor in both cases become a mere fetish?

Since 2012, I have worked with Finnish artist Salla Salin on '15%', a performative installation. The work is a 'garment factory' within a museum, with a 'garment worker' manufacturing white t-shirts during opening hours. During the Helsinki performance in 2012 this amounted to eight hours a day, six days a week for three months, while the 2013 New York City performance was six hours a day, seven days a week for four weeks. Needless to say, on both occasions this was a straining experience for the performance artist, Janelle Abbott. Placing a representation of a garment worker, usually hidden from view in a faraway developing economy, in a gallery aimed to catalyze thinking among the viewing audience.

On occasion concrete evidence of this was uncovered, for example when a museum visitor in Helsinki offered to pay more than the 4.95 euro for the t-shirt; the price was copied from H&M, as was the t-shirt itself. In New York City, following a disagreement about compensation, Janelle went on strike for a day. Several viewers assumed this to have been a planned aspect of the performance. For us, the artists, the strike created a new space to consider their multiple roles as creators and as oppressors. While it is worthwhile to ask questions about the privilege of presenting representations of labor (as opposed to real labor), it seems that such representations do potentially create entry points into deeper inquiries about the nature of labor in fashion.

Friends of Light : The productive activity of production

'Friends of light' is a New York based weaving, design and production collective producing hand-woven garments on hand-made looms from locally grown, processed, and spun fibers. The four founding members of 'friends of light' are Pascale Gatzen, Mae Colburn, Nadia Yaron, and Jessi Highest. Our first series, 'with light,' consists of five jackets woven to form using yarn produced in collaboration with Buckwheat Bridge Angoras, a wind and solar powered fiber farm and spinning mill in Elizaville, New York. Each jacket is made to order, and is developed for a specific person. Each one takes approximately 150 hours to make.

In this conversation we reflect on a series of questions that recently arose within the group about our relationship to production, and the possibility of displacing production so that we can focus our energies on the research and development of new jackets.

Our inquiry starts with the slight hesitation that has been felt within the group around production, production referring to the reproduction of sample jackets that we present at salon-like sales events. The adjustments that we make for each client relates to size and fit. In one case a client asked us to integrate inherited fabrics from her grandmother into the weaving. Separate from these modifications, production involves the reproduction of predetermined designs.

Our initial reaction to the hesitation felt toward production was to consider displacing production and form an entity separate from ourselves that would produce the jackets for clients, leaving research and development as our core activities. Upon reflection, we have come to recognize that this strategy would produce a form of displaced labor, and reproduce mechanisms of estrangement that are inherent to the functioning of our current capitalist paradigm. Having identified this, we feel a need to explore how we might consider and shape production so that it remains at the center of our activities.

- What is the perceived challenge of production as reflected in our initial response?

> Our current mode of production consists of reproducing predetermined forms and methods. The challenge that we perceive is that this mode of production may not directly allow for spontaneous activity of the brain and the heart. That is, it takes time away from actively engaging in the creative process and developing new forms and shapes, i.e. other potentialities.

- Why have we chosen to reproduce the forms and methods that were established in the sample jackets?

> We recognize that these methods do accommodate a wide range of needs. One consideration for consolidating the design of the jackets into prede-

terminated methods and forms was based on our desire to ensure that the process remains accessible to people who wish to participate in the production process without compromising the integrity of the design. The aesthetic decision to use plain weave within all our weaving methods allows for people to learn quickly. The skill to be mastered lies in the haptic understanding of the tensions of both warp and weft towards precision in form. Another consideration was based on our desire for continuity and consistency in the product for our clients, and a desire to provide a product that transcends the fashion sensibilities of its time, substantiating its monetary value and imbuing it with the possibility of becoming an heirloom piece.

Every aspect of each jacket, from the yarns to the finishings, is carefully considered from a rooted understanding of both the history and the construction of garments. This positions our jackets within a certain domain of fashion in which our hand labor is recognized, valued and accounted for within a contemporary western economic context; it substantiates the price point in relation to the labor involved, allowing for fair compensation of the members of ‘friends of light.’

- What does this practice of production bring to the members of group, what does it generate?

> The repetition of our production activities through time creates a sense of place, of familiarity and belonging. The monotonous and familiar rhythm of our production activities, and the focus and presence that they engender bring about moments of silence, meditative reflection and engaged conversation.

As we repeat, we become familiar with the tactile dimension of the garment, we move beyond skill and start to sense. It is no longer skill and perfection that produces the woven cloth, but an intimacy; each weaver starts to manifest their own connection and sensibility to the activity of relating the weft to the warp, the weft to the weft and the warp and weft to the form. Heart and hands unite speaking a language beyond design and form.

Because our production practice is arranged around repetitive activities, we are able to identify the approximate time it takes to weave each component and as such allocate a fixed payment amount. This allows us to weave without measuring our progress in time, and base our pay on the completion of an individual component. As such, each of us can determine how much we earn according to the time we have available. This gives us autonomy in relation to our income and allows for a flexible work schedule.

Our sales prices at this moment don’t allow for the time required to teach and to learn, so by default this process, the transfer of knowledge, is included in the piece price that each member receives, regardless of their level of skill or the speed with which they produce.

- *How does the relationship with our clients impact the relationship we experience with production?*

> Early on we decided to not offer our garments for sale in shops, but to work directly with clients. To more and lesser degrees, we are in contact with our clients throughout the production process, and this personal relationship and interaction with our clients has a substantial impact on our experience of production. Our clients up until now are attracted to ordering a jacket because they relate to the garment, it's presence and the values it represents, from their own unique perspective, knowledge, and context. This creates a dimension of exchange and identification with a shared reality throughout the process of production.

All clients present a possible world of movements, actions and activities that the jacket itself might inhabit, and as we approach production, the kinship, trust and exchange that we experience with our clients become sources of focus, attention, confidence, love and care. These interactions, the promise of continued interaction, and the anticipation of the jacket entering the client's world, resonate as we progress through production; the jacket itself embodies a relationship.

- *What does it mean to place production at the core of our activities?*

> One of our intentions is to be the producers of the products we have designed and developed as a collective. But we may ask, *What is the potential inherent in this intention?*

Building and sustaining relationships, human relationships, is at the core of our identity as a cooperative. Every aspect of our value chain represents a human relationship of mutuality and exchange. As we produce, we actively engage with our customer and their unique qualities. They emerge in the individual choices we make and in the sense we apply when we produce their garment.

Since our process of production envelops time as it naturally unfolds, it allows us to be present with the customer in duration. It is in the lingering and living in the presence of that the customer emerges within the product; as time passes, unexpected variations are woven into the garment, aesthetic and functional variations that add to the intensity of the design. Because the design of the jackets, the materials used, and the methods applied are so intricately connected, the process of reproduction allows us to experience intimately the specific intersections where the materials, the methods and the form produce the design.

As we become rooted in this process through repetition and difference, the cohesion of the original design begins to ease and cracks emerge, cracks that emerge as potentialities, at first quiet, like whispers, becoming more and more commanding as time passes. These potentialities start to

materialize themselves, first as ideas, fragile and powerful at the same time, then as sketches and drawings, material explorations and methodological experiments, until they manifest as full garments, becoming the next iterations in the process of design.

Refuge in Restoration: the social threads of repair

“Taking refuge in restoration” was a repair workshop Otto facilitated together with the Craft Lab from California College of the Arts at the Green Gulch Zen Centre in San Francisco. The theme of the workshop was to explore repair beyond the original, to think of the ritual of repair more as a social activity than as an act of material restoration. Thus the participants had to bring garments in need of repair or alteration, but also had to “sacrifice” a part of this garment in order to make a patch for someone else’s garment. Thus, across the participant’s garments, a community exchange was instigated, exploring how exchange of care and mindful practice can infuse mended clothes with values of community, equity and mindful devotion. Each repaired garment was mended with a patch from someone else, a patchwork not possible without peers surrendering a part of their own to the other.

When we usually think of repair, we focus on functional, historical or aesthetic qualities. We restore the functionality of an object, patching and fixing it, or we return the look to its origin. This latter part of repair is paradoxically something fashion has a very ambiguous relationship to as style and “authenticity” often needs to express the beauty of ageing, that a certain status is put in authentic patina, as such patina moves the owner from “new money” to “old money.” A more contemporary example can be the artificially aged jeans or counterfeit antiques, but also in other designs. As noted by ethnographer Robert Willim in his studies of urban regeneration, repair, just like restoration, is an act of balance, or “patina management”, where too much updating will ruin the poignant character of seniority (Willim 2008). Repair and restoration is heavily policed by political symbolism as it immediately asks whose history and heritage counts, who is left out and who really “owns” the past.

But if we argue that repair does not need to be ruled by function or authenticity, we could think of the act of repair as a form of community work, a ritual of togetherness. This was an explicit starting point of the project, and the idea was to explore what theorist Arnold Pacey calls a “participatory knowledge” (Pacey 1999). This is an active form of knowledge, an engaged form of involvement, accumulating embodied memory, where the maker and user, the same person, is both reiterating, appropriating and co-producing meaning and action. It is not a knowledge primarily of disinterested reasoning, but of embodied cognition, employing richer sensibilities

than just the subject's thought process. In this case, the idea was to make repair part of a knowledge that needed a community, and also a process of surrender.

In Pacey's work, his examples range from the aboriginal songlines of Australia, melodic map exchanged as songs between nomads to simple DIY techniques, each having their own rhythm and technical pattern as a form of ritual. For Pacey, the "participatory knowledges" are special technologies of creation in which the user is part of the technology in a conscious way, adapting and assembling a new lived environment as he or she works. In the project, that lived environment was the sharing of a need, repair, and a communal ritual of offering each other support in the form of patches and sewing techniques.

Taking inspiration from the Buddhist practice of mindfully sewing the Buddha's robes, the workshop approached the agency in sewing and repair through the mindset of devotional co-creation. Here, co-creation was approached through various means; spiritual companionship, acknowledgement of previous owners, experienced materiality witnessed by wear and tear, sharing of skills and the communal "sacrifice" of garment fabric to each other as a way to express gratitude and recognition to the virtuous community of co-practitioners.

In zen-practice, the student is sewing their own "rakusu", the miniature or symbolic robe that hangs around the neck by straps, as a preparation before the taking the precepts. The rakusu made of 16 or more strips of cloth, sewn together into a geometric rice field pattern (Selkirk 2005). In historic times, the pieces were scavenged from the robes of deceased monks, as a material memento mori, but also as a proof of lineage. The student is not alone, but wears the tradition, lineage and community as a second skin.

Restoration and spiritual work is a common cultivation of virtues and shared skills. It is not a process of isolation and only inner contemplation, but a community work. Collaborative work, building something together, is a transcendence of the self, an experience of togetherness that cannot be experienced alone. It is a way of sharing a common spirit of work, a shared practice in resonance. It is similar to that of the Sangha, the spiritual community which shares one's path in Buddhism.

Sewing and restoration can be seen as the realisation of ultimate reality, as in Zen master Dogen's focus on the mindful practice of daily life as enlightenment in itself. Repeating the phrase "Namu kie butsu", I take refuge in Buddha, for every stitch, turns the act of sewing into a mantra and mindful practice in itself. A concentration in every step and stitch, returning to the true life of the self, the self which is one with the universe (Selkirk 2005: 18). Even though almost every stitch is the same, it is also in those stitches that "the whole earth seems to burst in flames" (Selkirk 2005: 18). Through each

stitch we express “faith, devotion and love through the medium of sewing” (Hartman 2005: vii) In every stitch of restoration another sensibility is made manifest.

Could there be fashion’s of togetherness, ways of being a designer that tie people together through emotional deeds, saying “I am here for you.” We must ask why we have so few experiences of that in education and everyday life. Does all forms of entertainment and sociality be forms of consumption?

In every stitch we could experience surrender through co-creation, a shared world bursting in flames: the work of togetherness.



robotic labor

A concert of voices: Q&A

We asked a series of questions to our participants:

1. Who makes fashion?
2. What labor is involved in attending to or using fashion?
3. What type of labor in fashion interests you?
4. How is the labor of fashion made visible or invisible?
5. How do you see labor change or move?
6. How does the labor of fashion feel as it is lived?

Otto von Busch (Parsons)

1. I think we, the users, make fashion more than we would like to think. Of course with some influence and with materials provided by the fashion industry and media, but we make fashion in our heads and on our bodies. I think it is important to place the agency of the phenomenon onto the users, otherwise we will be at the receiving end of power. We must see that people make fashion, people at the bottom, not the elite. And we need to acknowledge the workers who actually produce the things we wear.

2. If labor is a form of extracted work, to work for the profit of another, there are many forms of labor, from the cotton fields and factories, to the studios, shops, bloggers and street photographers - and all the way to the people who wear and then also repair their garments.

3. Right now I am very interested in the many discussions concerning repair and updating of garments. It is easy to romanticize it, but who has the time to do it, and how do we do it to the right garments. It is easy to think repair is sustainable, and sitting before the TV stitching is nice quality time, and there may emerge many forms of meditation, wellbeing and environmental goods from that. But as repair services start emerge, how do we avoid repro-

ducing new forms of underpaid labor, new forms of exploitation of domestic styles of labor?

4. I think we have seen many hyped movies lately exposing many forms of labor in fashion, from True Cost on the side of sweatshop production to the neurotic glamour of The September Issue, but somehow I feel movies like these still reproduce fashion as a spectacle, and we fail to notice how we are sucked into it on an everyday scale, that we all become collaborators in a dynamic that is sinister on so many levels - and that everyday violence is kept effectively invisible.

5. Whereas not much seems to happen overseas in the betterment of working conditions, so much of labor in fashion design related fields seems to be more and more infused with “glamour” and goodie bags, limited editions and the promise of 15 minute celebrity. The idea of “pleasure” is more and more infused in labor, and while it is not bad in itself (I don’t think earning a living must be a painful drudge) I am concerned that the pleasures hides much more sinister arrangements. It may not be a zero-sum game, but a move towards pleasure in labor may be covering up suffering at another end.

6. In its everyday worn form, I like to think fashion as an emotion in the body, and it is a mix of pleasure and pain - we may get boosts of esteem with appreciating attention from others, but we may also feel devastated if we “fail” in dressing. So at its best, I feel alive, connected, a sense of vital growth. At its worst it is a painful realization of my hurtful slavery and submission before others, of not trusting myself enough to be proud of my aesthetic failure.

Nivedita Chandrappa (founder, Wishwas)

1. People make fashion

2. Physical labor, creative labor, technical labor

3. Creative labor

4. Made invisible by randomly producing them in factories, loses uniqueness. Made visible when designers hit it off on the run way.

5. Labor can be mechanized, using less and less human being and more and more technology. Which is change. Move? It is moving to Africa I suppose! Meh!

6. Sustainable

Alessandro Esculapio (PhD candidate, University of Brighton)

1. I think fashion is made at different levels. At a social level, everyone has the potential of making fashion. I am thinking of fashion as individual and collective creative expression and endeavour. At an industry level, on the other hand, the making of fashion is segmented and highly specialised. The people who make the clothes, those who market them, the so-called tastemakers, the people who sell them and consumers are all making fashion in a way. This, however, is fashion that relies on industry-implemented choices and strategies. In turn, these form and sustain a system which delimits those who make fashion, and the meanings of 'making,' and, perhaps more importantly, those who do not make fashion.

2. Different kinds of labor are involved in attending or using fashion. I think what most of them have in common is the fact that they are invisible. I am thinking in particular of the physical and the emotional labour involved in every aspect of making fashion. We often take both for granted or we do not even think about them at all, especially nowadays where visibility is a key word.

3. Going off the previous question, I think I am mostly interested in the emotional aspects of labour because you can find traces of it in every moment of the process of making fashion. It is connected both to the material action of making, wearing and altering clothing and to the more abstract level of meaning-making.

4. I think labour in fashion is made visible or invisible by those who have agency. In the fashion industry, as in all hierarchical systems, agency is distributed unequally. This means that those who have power determine what to make visible and what to leave out. The executives of a fast fashion company, for instance, will deliberately decide to make cheap labour invisible and to highlight other aspects of the clothing they sell, be it fashionability or very low prices. An independent designer, on the other hand, may strategically decide to make the labour that goes into the making of clothing visible. Another example could be consumers. A lot of us decide to see, unsee or ignore the labour of fashion when we buy or think about clothes. Others may decide to mend or make their own clothing instead and wear the material traces of their own agency. The list of examples could go on and on, but generally speaking I think visibility, agency and power always go hand in hand.

5. As most labour is invisible, I generally I see it change or move when a crucial event happens. It's usually something of historical proportions. Examples could be the consequences of the collapse of a factory or migration. In everyday life I notice it when I talk to people who work in the fashion indus-

try or when ordinary practices suddenly become visible or change—for instance when someone decides to mend something or hand-wash a garment rather than put in a washing machine or have it dry cleaned. In the future I am hoping to see labour increasingly recognised, dignified and rewarded, financially, socially and emotionally.

6. The labour of fashion feels demanding and rewarding, but also largely ignored outside of ‘fashion circles’ if you will. However, because it is generally overlooked I think unveiling its structures, politics, agents and creative potential is both necessary and fulfilling.

Kate Fletcher, (Professor of Sustainability, Design, Fashion, London College of Fashion)

1. I do. You do. We all do.
2. Lifelong labour. A labour of care and attention. A practice of noticing. The labour of hands and eyes and bodies and smiles.
3. Visible and invisible. I like to see it. And I also like to imagine what I can’t see.
4. Oh with the answers to q 2
5. In my wardrobe it moves towards companionship and towards knitting together the surroundings and the clothes into my appreciation of a single piece
6. It feels friendly, warm, and like a glass of sparkling wine

Paul Kuniholm Pauper (artist)

1. Fashion is made in the mind, in the time-based art of creation and by the hands of makers.
2. Styling, logistical labor, packaging, the modeling industry and etc.
3. Labor that empowers a collective vision from fiber source to fashion product treating all collaborators fairly.
4. Labor at the highest level of production value must appear innocuous, if so intended, contingent upon the conceptual merit of said production value. In didactic, labor should always be explicitly noted. This notation provides visibility for the role of labor should the product itself make itself invisible through conceptual restraint.

5. Labor is inextricably linked to technology. Movement can virtually be traced categorically to technological discoveries. Fiber sources sometimes cause change in labor inputs, geographic advantages in the growing of fiber crops or sources of cheap labor.

6. At its best, transcendent, at its worst, harrowing.

Timo Rissanen (Parsons)

1. Anyone who puts clothes on. And those who don't.

2. For me, laundry, mending, cutting, sewing, and the worst of all, shopping. (The privilege of the last point is not lost on me, but the experience of shopping in a mall with thousands of others makes me wonder if that is really the best world we as humans are capable of creating. What if there were something more?)

3. All of it.

4. Disasters make fashion labor visible: women jumping out of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory windows, bodies crushed in Rana Plaza, charred bodies in the Tazreen factory. Globalization can make labor more invisible, and generally we mask most labor in fashion. Labor rarely makes for a sexy story, except when blond Norwegians are sent to work (for a 'reality' TV show) at a garment factory in Cambodia.

5. Automation will continue to make some types of labor obsolete and hopefully that creates more time for contemplation, reflection, meditation and intellectual advancement of humanity. I fear it creates more time for staring at selfies on social media or advertisements for antidepressants on television.

6. My own labor is an experience of flow. The labor of others in the clothes I wear is mostly abstract, except when I look up to remind myself where exactly Nicaragua is.

Julian Roberts, (fashion designer)

1. People with ideas and skills, with referential limbs and bodies, dexterous hands and fingers (mostly). Some machines and robots are also involved. Everyone else just hypothesises or consumes it. As there is more rubbish fashion than good, I'd also say that fashion is more often than not made by people who are wasteful, delusional or self-obsessive.

2. From plant growing and harvesting, or chemical manufacture of fibres

into yarns and threads, to spinning and weaving, dying and finishing fabrics, printing, embroidering, and knitting, cutting patterns and prototypes, fitting and adjusting shape and form, grading and cutting out garments in multiple fabric lays, fusing, sewing, pressing, labelling and finishing them, styling and photographing them, showing them to buyers and press, styling them, merchandising them, making them desirable and available. And then the garment becomes worn, lived in, made intimate, shared, put on and off, washed, dry cleaned, hung out to dry, stored away, rediscovered, adjusted, mended, dispensed with, made second hand, or shredded into dusters or pulped down into fluff. There is a huge amount of labor in every garment product, accessory, media representation, and store.

3. Construction, manufacture, communication and teaching (ie. the practical skills of pattern cutting, sewing, styling, photography, film/video making, exhibiting and showing, selling and teaching).

4. Labor in fashion is self evident when you are involved in the process of construction and manufacture, but the majority of these processes are made invisible from the consumer.

The fashion designers team and manufacturers are most often made invisible. What is visible is fashion looking desirable, on models, suggesting taste and status. Visibility is a trick or illusion. Invisibility is the reality of making.

5. Labor often moves abroad or far from home in fashion, and severs a connected design-construction-manufacture-communication process. The makers are more often made remote, and the audience more often made cosmopolitan.

6. The maker being often departmentalised and disconnected from the whole process, works with tunnel vision and obsession. There are myriad viewpoints on fragments in a jigsaw puzzle which all combine together. Some feelings are fun and pleasurable, some tricky and torturous, some physically demanding, some highly complicated and confusing, some easy, some enlightening and educational, some worrying, some calming, some monotonous and repetitive, some people feel enriched by fashion, and some people feel undervalued or unfairly treated or paid. There are many feelings in fashions labor.

Gloria Yu (designer/entrepreneur)

1. Designers, photographers, editors, craftsmen/women who put them together, and the people who wear them.

2. Labor in their conception, labor in communication (PR), labor in their production and labor in wearing shoes difficult to walk in...
3. All of the above. But the type that concerns me most is labor in production.
4. The sweat and sometimes blood of labor are made invisible (intentionally or not) by flashy PR campaigns with focus on aspirational end use of fashion. Made visible by people speaking up.
5. Human rights issues in fashion labor would change by individuals giving a sh*t. Individuals like designers, journalists, entrepreneurs, corporate CEOs, teachers, lawmakers, consumers. But that is not enough. For any real massive change to happen globally and industry-wide, something needs to be changed about the current state of market fundamentalism which is superb at setting prices and incapable of recognizing costs and is detrimental to the health of both our planet and our humanity. Exactly how, who and in what ways is another book in itself. But I guess that still starts with individuals. Lots of them.
6. Is fulfilling for me and should be for everyone involved!



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BETHEARD



OFF TO WORK!

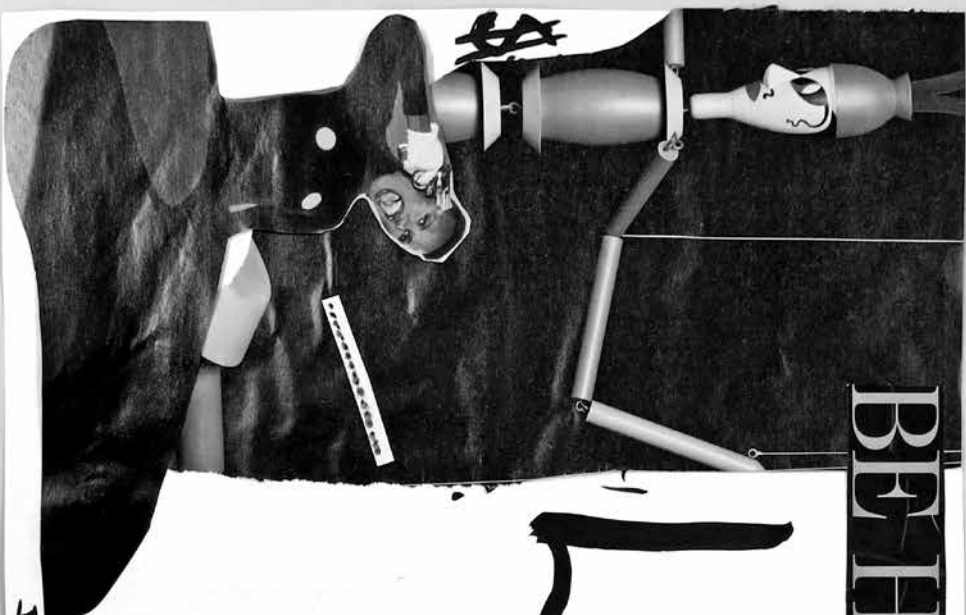
LABORING

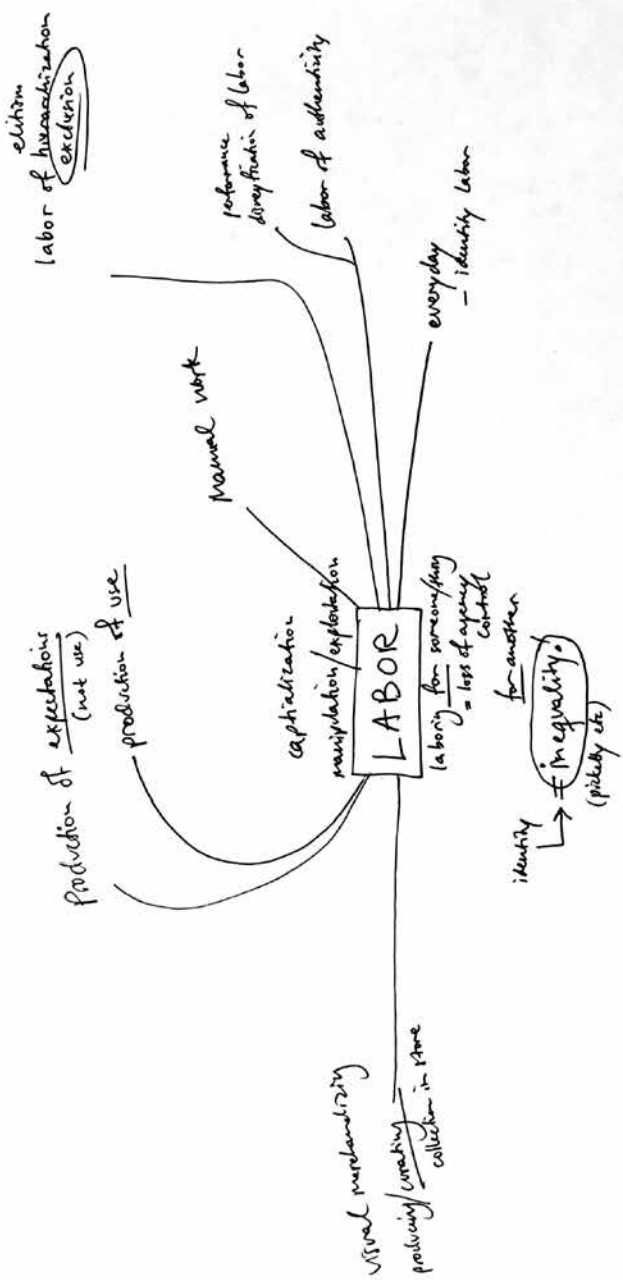


IT'S UNSAFE. IT'S ILLEGAL. IT'S IRRESPONSIBLE.

INTERN FOR '08

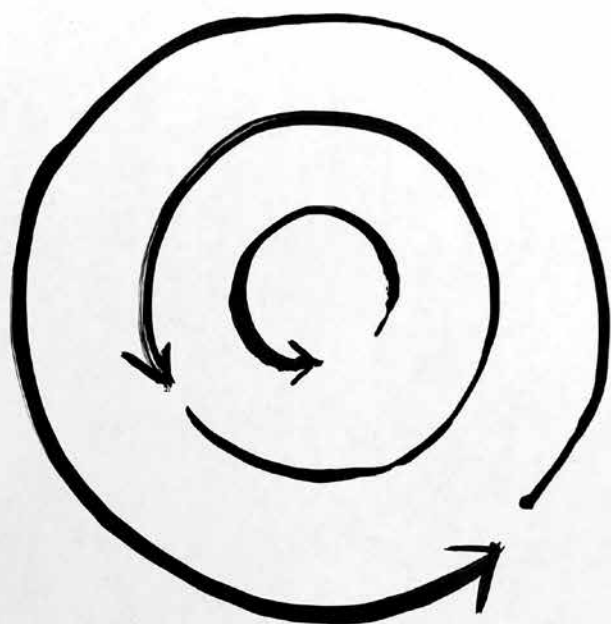
FREE
INTERNSHIPS



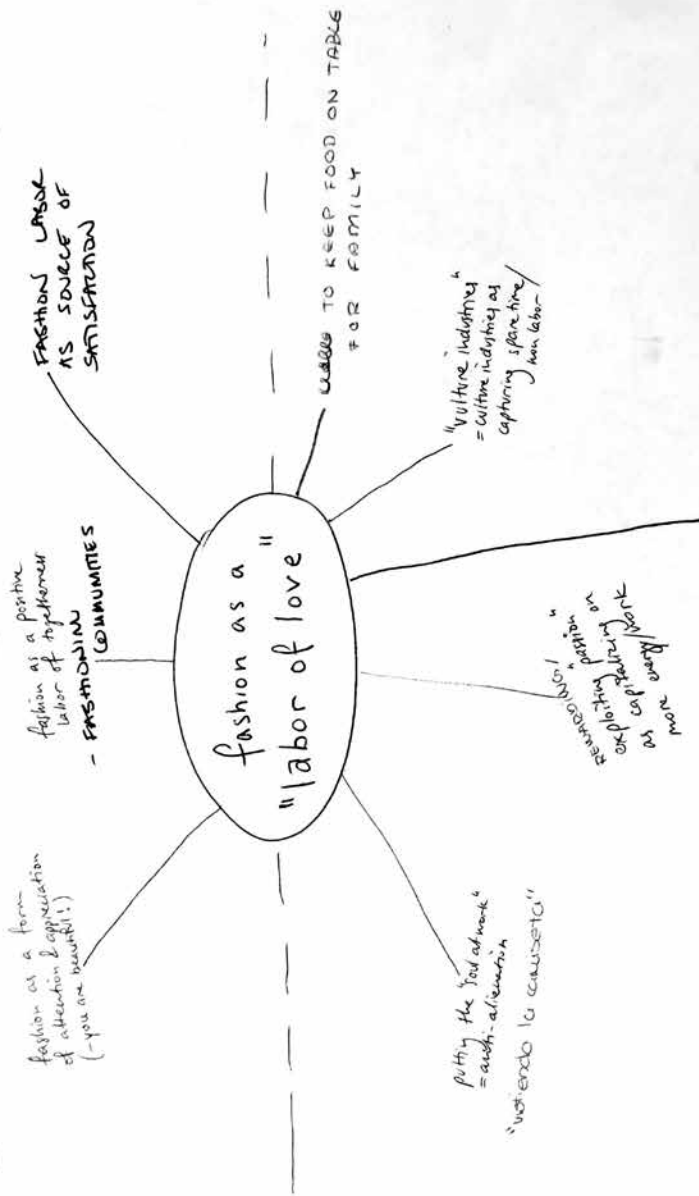


"the cotton road" movie
 "the stuff of politics" book
 min phan "reconstruction"

labor of love
 labor of consumption
 } passion labor



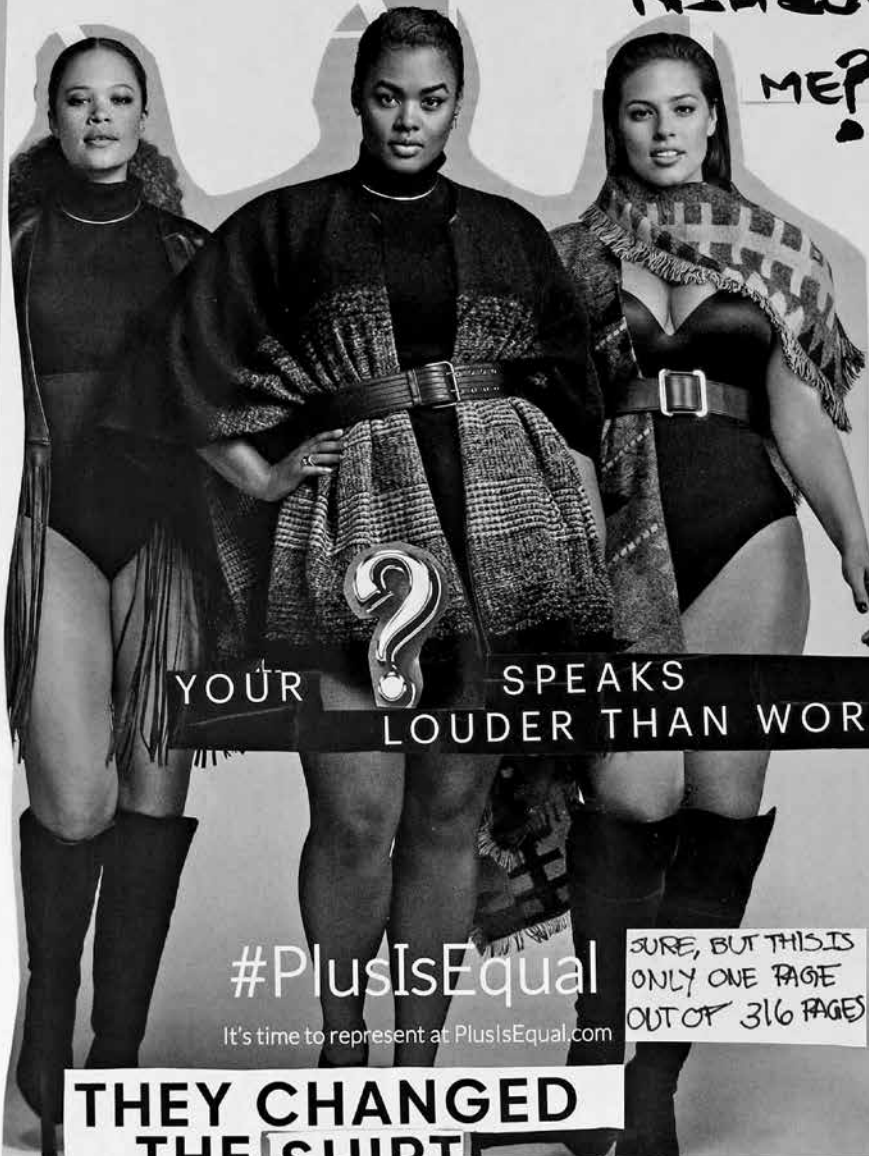




FASHION

REWARDS CARD

DEVELOPED BY
MAKING. ~~MAKING~~



#WORKIN

ME?

YOUR



SPEAKS

LOUDER THAN WORDS

#PlusIsEqual

It's time to represent at PlusIsEqual.com

SURE, BUT THIS IS
ONLY ONE PAGE
OUT OF 316 PAGES

THEY CHANGED
THE SHIRT
NOT THE

WORLD #WORKIT

#MAKEITWORK #WOTROU

Invisible labor

DO PEOPLE CARE
TO KNOW WHAT THEY
CAN'T SEE?

possibilities / limitations

— FREEDOM AND LABOR
FOR → LABOR !
INGERCERATED
FASHION INCARCERATED

invisible
spaces of fashion
work: factory,
studio, home
eg for piecework

THE INTERN
ARMY

— MASKING INTERSHIPS
w/ "FELLOWS PROGRAM"
AT CONDE' NAST

THE FASHION MICROWAVE
— DENYING TIME NOT MUCH
LONGER THAN MICROWAVE
POPCORN

— eaten before the
advertising ends
before the movie
even starts ...

"behind the scenes" (these scenes)
the labor behind the labor...

WHO DO WE HOLD
ACCOUNTABLE IN
DESIGNING OUR
CLOTHING?
— 2 designers outsourcing

"boundaries" of dress

invisible where?
how? extent?

— work and
rest
conditions
invisible

— invisible / unaccounted for?
on holiday / commuting?

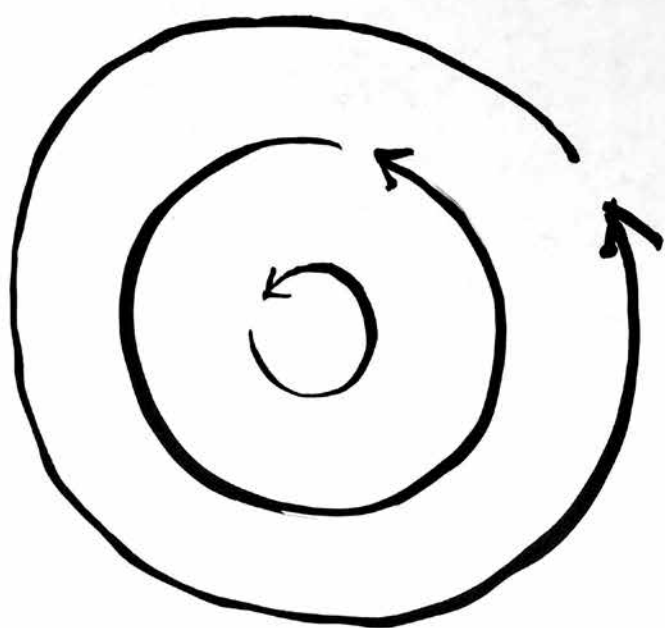
"if fashion is working for 'the Man'
- who is 'the Man'?"

$\frac{1}{3}$ sold at full price
 $\frac{1}{3}$ sold at discount
 $\frac{1}{3}$ incinerated / unworn
 \Rightarrow indeed, who & what
for?

who/what does
fashion labor for?

the "system"?
 \hookrightarrow what system?

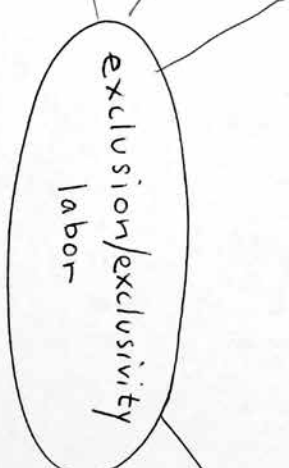
"we become more sustainable"
to make the system sustain itself
(not change anything within it)



the "total" labor of fashion = all encompassing social values
— "what" instead of "who"

IMMIGRANTS IN
US UNDEGRADED
IN NYC GERMANY
DISTRICT... PROBLEM
ISN'T EXCLUSIVE TO
OVERSEAS

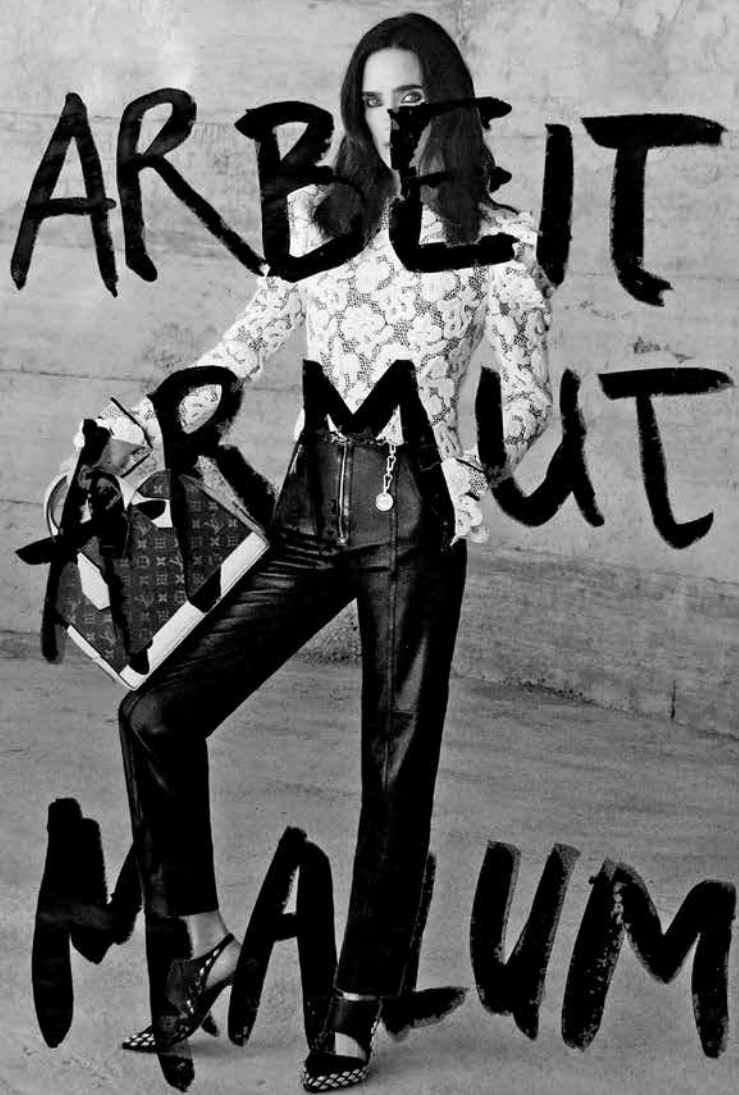
fashion as tourist (many)
taking/throwing on fashion
= making culture/perpetuating
appropriating codes of 'other'



LABOR ON THE
FRONT ROW

THE TRADE:
WHO DECIDES
WHAT IS FINE?
WHAT DO WE TRADE?

"If you're not in fashion you might as well be dead!"



LOU TON

If you're not in fashion you might as well be dead.

Hazel's mom

Fashion, like magic, requires rituals as much as labor. And just like successful magic, the labor in fashion is always hidden or veiled: it always is at work under cover, or it might lose its seductive power. However, labor being hidden does not mean it is simply a matter of ignorance from the consumer side. No, the hiding of labor in fashion is a culturally and systemically induced ignorance: some part shipped overseas, others hidden under the gilded varnish of glamour.

This book aims to provoke new perspectives on the many forms of labor engaged in fashion, from sweatshops to interns and bloggers. But the book also suggests other concepts by which we can understand the production of fashion, perspectives which may open new forms of fashion praxis.

