



Suffering in style

A discussion about fashion, addiction,
and endless aesthetic cravings

Josh Korda & Otto von Busch,
with illustrations by
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This book records a discussion on the subject of fashion and addiction, and a Buddhist approach to recovery. The discussants are Otto von Busch, fashion scholar at Parsons School for Design in New York, and Josh Korda, a Buddhist teacher at New York Dharma Punx. The illustrations are by artist and Buddhist chaplain Jesse Bercowetz.

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What does it mean to be a “slave to fashion?” The idea that consumers are subjects to some forms of submission and aesthetic power may not be inaccurate. However, the framing of the relationship as master/slave may shy away from the complex social relationships fashion and consumerism flourish in. “I was absolute master in my old dressing gown,” as Denis Diderot famously had it, “but I have become a slave to my new one,” as he felt the need to update his whole wardrobe because of one new piece.

Perhaps we come to a more clear understanding of fashion’s role as psychosocial mediator and social interface if we turn towards other popular notions to fashion and consumerism, away from slavery. What aspects of fashion can be revealed through notions such as impulse buying, retail therapy or shopping addiction? Fashion would in such settings become less a symbol of submissive signification, and much more a site for tension, anxiety release and soothing from stress. Could we even say fashion, especially in its cheap, accessible and “democratic” form, has something to do with other compulsive engagements in rewarding stimuli, such as addiction? And even today, as we cannot escape the news of



environmental impact of mass consumerism, how come we keep shopping, even despite the adverse consequences? Is there really, as Buddhist ecologist Stephanie Keza argues, a “sickness of consumerism,” a spiritual disease of unquenchable consumption, poisoning and denial?

But don't we celebrate fashion also because it is a little forbidden? In most consumer societies, the cultural memories of war-time frugality have been washed away, yet it may still feel a little forbidden to engage in full-on binge-shopping. Some shame is still bound to the blatant egotism of fully and flamboyantly celebrating one's desires, which may still be the model of orgiastic pleasure. Indeed, isn't fashion partly about the pleasure of challenging virtue, gluttonous delight and a thrill in greedy jealousy, to envelope ourselves in virtuous sin? We shop, dress up, feel the looks of our peers, and the brain's reward system runs on the highest levels.

Fashion loves the forbidden, it draws us into the allure of the pleasures that ensnare us. We dress in the hides and furs or animals, dance to the sounds of sirens, and carouse as heroes of self-deception. If we are slaves to fashion, we sing songs of mutual seduction in our gilded chains.

Fashion may be the epitome of “guilty pleasure.” And it is not uncommon to frame one's relation to fashion in terms of addiction. As John Waters has it in his book *Role Models*, when he encounters the cool crew dressed in Comme des Garçons,

“Suddenly I felt like a drug addict who takes his first shot of heroin. I was about to become addicted to Comme des Garçons and maybe, if I worked hard, Rei



Kawakubo could be my dealer. I left the store feeling like a king.”

Through consumption, grasping generates both the safety of identity as well as the thrill of becoming anew. As I consume my sense of identity becomes tightly knit to my feeling states. As what I acquire arouses me, I am also seduced into believing I am what I consume. The mantra of consumerism is *Become your Greed*.

Neuromarketing has become the term for how advertisers and brands manipulate the functionings of human cognitive and affective responses to marketing. The task of any brand is to make shopping an entertaining, absorbing and compulsive activity. In the current pace of fashion, this happens through never-ending offers of comparatively cheap and frequent thrills and satisfactions. “Shopping is a way that we search for our selves and our place in the world,” author April Benson argues, “a lot of people conflate the search for self with the search for stuff.” As I wear sophisticated Japanese designer-clothes, my whole cognition speaks to me as if I am a sophisticated person. I want to feel like a queen or king again, and I crave more.

In the April issue of GQ magazine 2013, author Buzz Bissinger confesses his addiction to shopping expensive clothes. In a glistening piece of writing, he divulges the rich sensual experience of getting drawn into the Gucci orbit, spending very extensive sums of money on clothing, especially leather.

“I have an addiction. It isn’t drugs or gambling: I get to keep what I use after I use it. But there are similarities:



the futile feeding of the bottomless beast and the unavoidable psychological implications, the immediate hit of the new that feels like an orgasm and the inevitable coming-down. [...] It has taken a while to figure out what works and what doesn't work, but Gucci men's clothing best represents who I want to be and have become — rocker, edgy, tight, bad boy, hip, stylish, flamboyant, unafraid, raging against the conformity that submerges us into boredom and blandness and the sexless saggy sackcloths that most men walk around in like zombies without the cinematic excitement of engorging flesh."

Bissinger is sitting front row at the Gucci Milan fashion week men's show, and his experience of the new collection takes him aback.

"I see the collection, and the pheromones of hot clothing defeat the part of the brain that rations rationality — there is the deliciousness of desire overcoming, shall we simply say, overdoing it. I have to have it. I don't have to have it. I need it. I don't need it. I can afford it. I can't afford it. It is the cycle familiar to anyone who fetishizes high fashion. [...] I can't resist for the very reason I can't resist."

As Bissinger notices, the experience of clothing can be something more than mere symbolism:

"I wanted the power that sex provides, all eyes wanting to fuck you and you knowing it, and both men's and women's clothing became my venue. [...] I love looking at myself in the mirror when I buy something new. I love the sexual rush to the degree that I wonder if it has become a replacement for actual sex. But just like fuck-



ing, the magic of new clothing wears off quickly, and you can't resist the cravings for new purchases."

But even if we usually think so, addiction is not something that merely affects the subject, the addict. Addiction has social consequences and tears through the social fabric. As it produces as well as relieves anxiety, it also has viral properties which affect others. Happiness may be contagious, but so is violence. Not only may the passions or social moods spread like germs, but the addict starts treating others as mere instruments to fuel the reward cycle, making others invisible, superfluous, or even disposable.

Does fashion make us treat others in a similar way, as mere mirrors of our own desire to be seen, thus making us crave for fashion, and covet our gilded chains? And does fashion also offer itself to be the safe screen from behind which one can judge others, hiding our own desire for addictive stimulus, thus making fashion effectively a zero-sum game: as I am seen and adored someone else must be rejected and ignored?

To better understand the possible connection between everyday fashion and addiction, I turned to Josh Korda, recovery therapist and dharma teacher at the New York Dharmapunx. We started a discussion on fashion, consumerism, addiction, and what a consumer could do to deal with a destructive cycle of obsessive aesthetic affirmation and compulsive shopping.

/OvB



Emotions

Ob: These days, words that before seemed to signal various forms of personal challenges and problems have entered everyday slang concerning fashion and consumption, and it is not uncommon to hear of “retail therapy” or “shopping addiction.” This may of course be just a play of words, but it may also signal how we today turn to fashion and consumption for some very basic human needs. This may be especially tempting in today’s “fast fashion” when clothes can be as cheap as a coffee or other forms of easy leisure.

Many of us use fashion consumption to deal with our emotions, getting ready for a party, date, or job interview, as well as dealing with the emotions afterwards, to “move on.” Similarly, we use fashion as we seek social affirmation and the feeling of control we crave, and there is often a social pressure to keep up. Perhaps we need to start our discussion at the very basics: what is addiction, how do we recognize it and how do you usually address it?

JK: In my view, addiction is an attempt to sidestep the vulnerability of establishing open, authentic, empathetic connections with other people.

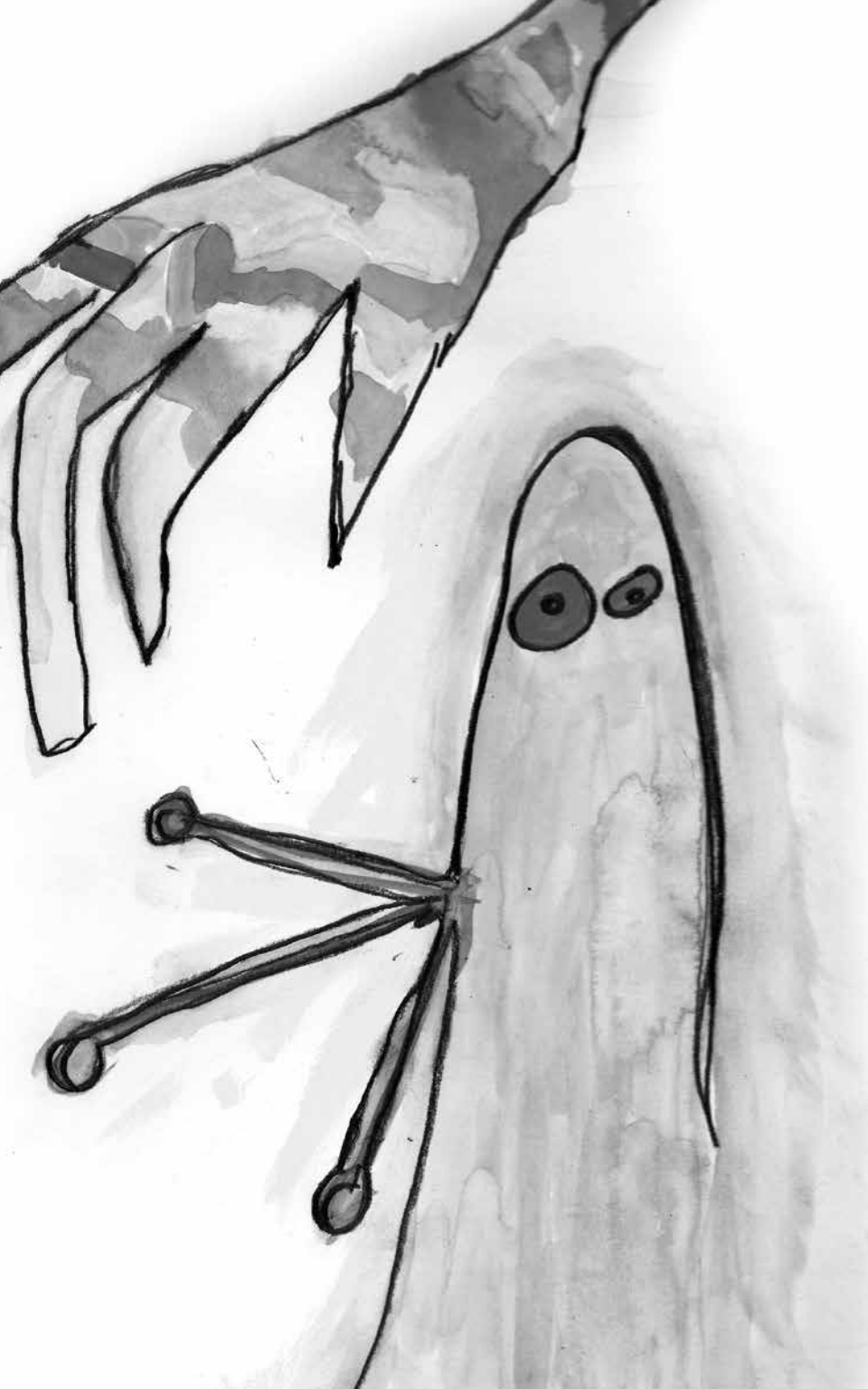
Human beings are social beings. Our survival advantage doesn’t accrue from running fast, digging holes or scamper-



ing up trees; we don't have shells that can protect us. But what we do well is connect others, and in multiple ways. We can bond through language, telling stories about ourselves and sharing plans, or through the emotional displays of facial expressions, laughter and tears, body language, tones of voice. When I convey my frustrations through nonverbal means, and you empathize by reflecting the back through looks of concern or appreciation, we connect on a much deeper level than language, and you help me 'normalize' or 'process' my emotional.

When we experience difficult emotions, part of the process of being with that emotion is being able to express it to other people safely—without fear that they'll reject us, shame or criticize us. We all need this process to 'handle' our emotions; without it our emotional activations become increasingly unstable, unmanageable, turbulent. (Note how quickly most adults, when imprisoned in solitary confinement, will experience psychosis.)

Of course, many of us grow up in family systems that fail to provide reliably tolerant emotion regulation. Or, during our socializing years in schools, we are traumatized by bullying or institutional shaming; peers mock our vulnerability, our awkwardness, our authentic expressions of feelings. When this occurs we lose faith that other people can be relied upon to help us process certain emotions—our loneliness, frustration, sadness, anger and so forth. So we'll seek behaviors or substances that numb these affects, seeking to regulate emotions without relying on other people. Unfortunately addictive behaviors and substances only alleviate



emotions briefly, through suppression, rather than lastingly through empathetic interpersonal connection, which is lasting.

Addiction, from my perspective, always leads to disconnection. It ingrains the belief that we can't safely express certain emotions. Retail therapy—the swipe of the credit card—temporarily relieves feelings of powerlessness and lack of fulfillment.

This is quite disheartening, as in the world of fashion we often think of fashion as a way to “express oneself.” We tell ourselves that we shop fashion to connect to others. But as you say, addiction leads to disconnection, and a fear of certain uncontrolled emotions. I sometimes think of fashion as a sort of exposure similar to that we can experience in love, and some of the worst experiences we go through in our emotional life is that of unreturned, scolded or mocked love.

In popular culture, and not least in Robert Palmer’s endlessly covered 80’s song, there is a saying to be “addicted to love.” Are there some similarities between addiction and love, in emotions or behavior, and how does it differ?

Ha, given the lyrics I always assumed the song “addicted to love” about sex addiction, not actually about love. Love I would define as a reliable, committed intimacy that is shared with another; it is one form of connection—along with caretaking, friendship and the therapeutic alliance—that provides emotion regulation, the necessary support for ongoing psychological health.



I see no similarities between addiction — which seeks to replace other people — with love — which is based on the authentic, vulnerable expression of self to another.

If, in the course of a relationship, a couple ‘bi-solates,’ or loses connection with other friends and people outside the relationship, then they can experience what some call ‘co-dependency’ (a term I consider to be of limited psychological or therapeutic value). In such a circumstance the relationship can take on addictive qualities — pushing others away, isolating — but the relationship by definition is no longer healthy, or truly ‘loving.’

But how is it with the experience of the addict? Is there something in how we experience love that could possibly make us mistake addiction for love?

Certainly the physical sensations of fear and desire/attraction are notoriously similar, as they both entail excitatory hormones and neurotransmitters that change one’s physiological state — heart pumping, changes in breath, digestion switching off — and one’s level of mental alertness (both involve raises in acetylcholine, which helps the cingulate focus awareness) and so on down the line. The brain finds both stress and craving quite addictive, as both states entail the release of ‘thrilling’ chemicals that make us feel alive and powerful.

Love is quite a different kettle of fish altogether, as its associated with inhibitory neurotransmitters — serotonin and oxytocin — which don’t activate the brain, but actually inhib-



it excessive processing. One's physiology isn't placed into a 'ready for action potential' but rather a rest state.

So desire and fear are similar; love is quite different.

And how is it with the type of desire that seeks new desires, new satisfaction. The world is in motion, things change and so does our desires. Many argue things change faster today than before, and that may be especially true in the realm of fashion where collections in some stores change every week or even more often. In his book on fashion theory, Lars Svendsen argues that it is a human trait to enjoy the new, that we have a "neophilia", and that it especially apparent in fashion. Why do you think we are so interested and drawn to the new?

Consumer appetites are virtually unappeasable, whether the hunger is for recurrent sales events, or for 'newness' in the form of monthly deliveries of fresh products; I gather that its common for apparel items stay on a sales floor for only a few months before they are marked down and quickly passed on to third party resellers; rack space is constantly in demand.

At the heart of this 'thirst for the new' is certainly what is commonly referred to as the 'dopamine reward system' (or mesolimbic pathway in clinical terms) which lies at the heart of addictive craving. Simply put, the significant brain regions involved with pleasure and reward, such as the nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental, release dopamine—feelings of power and invulnerability—as we hunt or shop for the new. Humorously, I've read that the fMRI



brain scan of someone shopping online for clothes looks virtually identical to that of the cocaine addict. No doubt, tens of thousands of years ago, spotting a new tool made all the difference in our fore bearer's chances of survival. Newness holds the promise of survival advantage, even if its 'man leg-gings' or emoticon imagery on accessories.

Alas, the rewards of dopamine are all too brief and leave us hoping to acquire more, creating what we Buddhists might call a 'samsaric' cycle of dissatisfaction. Certainly the Buddha noted that the 'beautiful and new' (subha) was a convenient distraction that kept us from perceiving deeper, more important considerations: The impermanence of life, the surety of old age, sickness, death and separation from the loved. The beautiful and new keeps us entranced; meanwhile societal practice is to conceal the old in assisted living facilities, the sick in hospitals, the dying in hospices and so forth... reflecting on the fragility of the human condition is the great 'craving suppressant' for consumers; few feel the urge to consume while reflecting actively on death and impermanence.

So the Buddha took time to urge his practitioners, including his son Rahula, to avoid fixating on the 'beautiful and new' (subha) and to "meditate on the foul" that which is old and decaying; even dead bodies. (Rahula Sutta sn 2.11)



Passion

It seems a common cliché today to have a “passion for fashion.” A passion is a strong and intense emotion, barely controllable. It is often put as the opposite of reason, of being reasonable. Passion is an enthusiasm for something, or desire to get or acquire something, or a state of being “entranced” as you mentioned. How do you think passion operates as an emotion in the psychology of today’s consumer society?

In early Buddhism passion was known as ‘raga,’ which was one of the three core defilements, along with hatred and self-centered fixation. Passion for material goods was seen as a ‘bewildering’ diversionary impulse that kept us locked in futile attempts to accumulate or acquire happiness; whereas the Buddha believed that happiness was not something that could be purchased.

From a psychological perspective, I’d submit that passion is a survival impulse based on goal-directed arousal. What is the nature of this arousal? Survival. Consumer’s develop a passion for a product or experience as it placates, if only momentarily, a felt sense of anxiety. Emotionally the new pair of shoes alleviates an underlying feelings of vulnerability which is constantly produced by our trigger happy amygdalas (the brain’s alarm system); even in times of war and global warming we are living in a very safe time to be a human being, but our brain’s fear mechanisms haven’t caught up with the fact we’re now the dominant species on



PEICE

PIECES OF YOU LOOKING BACK AT YOU

the planet. We continue to live, in terms of midbrain fear activations, as if we're out in the wild, with predators hunting us down. So, on an emotional level, purchasing the new pair of shoes hits the deepest chords in the brain: "I want to survive and prosper."

The idea of bewilderment as a route to survival makes passion seem less agreeable and perhaps more ruthless or even savage, so perhaps the title of the famous Alexander McQueen show at the Met, "Savage Beauty" exposed a deeper phenomenon of fashion.

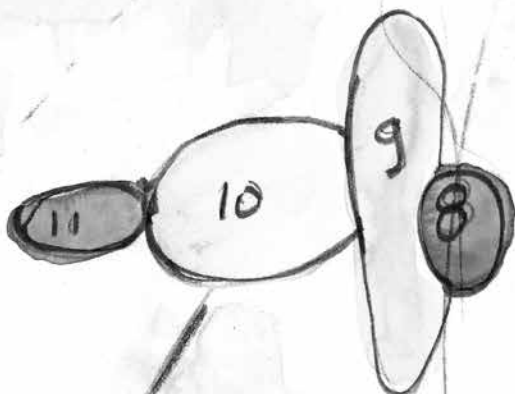
It got me to think of the East Asian myths of the "hungry ghosts", with their big bellies and tiny throats. They look savage and can never be satisfied. Could they be a metaphor for addiction in Buddhism and help us understand suffering and addiction?

Well, hungry ghosts are a northern Buddhist concept rooted in Chinese folklore; the Buddha doesn't mention the idea, though it is certainly a fun metaphor.

The idea is that people who—perhaps due to stress, emotional pain or harrowing memories—live lives driven by addictive craving for escape live in a state of constant 'hunger' that can never be truly satiated, and act in ways that are morally compromised. Obviously, the idea that their daily behavior, a ritual of seeking and consuming intoxicants or addictive behaviors, transform beings into ghosts with big bellies and tiny throats after death; the myth encapsulates the idea that addiction creates Sisyphean repetitious cycle that cannot provide lasting satiation; addiction actually in-

Foot

UEO



BREAST

volves: 1) agitation and dissatisfaction, 2) craving, 3) short term relief, then back to step 1) agitation and dissatisfaction. The neurotransmitters we seek to trigger via addiction, such as dopamine, opioid peptides and GABA, only remain synaptically available for limited periods, then are reabsorbed, leaving the addict back in their original state, stressed and craving.

Coming back to passion, how does Buddhism deal with the entanglement between pleasure as suffering? For example those savage drives we sometimes playfully call “guilty pleasures”? It seems like a complicated feeling, where the two intersect or form some paradoxical unity. Is there some pleasure inside suffering, and suffering inside pleasure? Is there a risk of reducing pleasure by also reducing suffering, or how do they intersect or entwine?

The semi-conscious awareness that most forms of pleasure contain stress is a constant theme in the dharma; in the Lokavipatti Sutta (Drawbacks of Worldly Pleasures) the Buddha refers to the ‘eight worldly winds’ that blow us about through life: seeking sensual pleasures, we must also experience pain; seeking financial gain we must experience the emotional stresses of financial loss; seeking fame we bring about obscurity; seeking approval from friends we submit to criticism as well. This is, of course, due to the impermanence of such states.

It’s essentially as straightforward as the most basic dialectics: you cannot have the idea of “left” without “right,”

NEGATIVITY BIAS



nor “good” without “bad.” As Hegel and Derrida amongst others explained, in chasing one condition we create the nagging awareness of that which it negates, its opposite. Whenever a state—for example pleasure—defines itself by an adverse state—suffering—the adverse state will remain naggingly in the back of our mind: for example, we crave vacations, but once we’re on vacation we’re constantly aware that the vacation will end, and we’ll return to regular life.

Furthermore, we could once again bring to bear the mechanics of dopamine: sensual pleasures release the pleasure neurotransmitter which, when it runs out, easily triggers the release cortisol—so, when feeling disappointed by life, we may eat comfort food or shop to release dopamine and feel a spike of power, but once the dopamine is no longer synaptically present we’re back in the original disappointment.

There is a solution though: The Buddha stated that open, spacious awareness that accepts everything—both pleasure and pain without identification or repression—has no opposite, and thus doesn’t contain the nagging stress of knowing it will ‘come to an end.’ The key of liberation is that in removing craving we don’t identify with any impermanent state; as states come and go we reside in an awareness that’s larger and undisturbed. Liberation isn’t pleasure or pain, its that which observes pleasure and pain without taking any of it personally.



“Liberation” within consumer culture seems to be available in two ways: on the one hand advertising and popular narratives in media thrive on the vulnerability and threat of not keeping up with one’s peers, and on the other they offer a sugar-coated reward promising enchantment and the feeling of aesthetic invincibility. As with fashion, it offers both stick and carrot. Is there a special relationship between these two emotions?

There’s a clear relationship between the two: Threat versus Reward based marketing plays into the two principal motivational circuits of the midbrain: limbic circuits that trigger cortisol, or stress activation, during threatening situations, versus mesolimbic circuits that reward us with dopamine when we acquire survival advantages. In terms of survival, we obviously need to balance both impulses: fear compels us to seek safety from predators and dangerous encounters, reward motivates us to risk leaving our shelters to find food. These two core impulses are crucial, though I’d argue that today our fear settings are needlessly reactive.

Having grown up in the shadow of the advertising industry—my mother was a successful advertising creative—I learned quite young that fear gets people’s attention quickly, but it doesn’t sustain attention for the long haul—people eventually discern that their worlds won’t fall apart if they don’t purchase this or that commodity. To sustain attention marketing campaigns eventually gravitate towards messages that suggest the rewards and pleasures of a product.



Rivalry

Coco Chanel famously argued that beauty is a weapon. In social relations, especially in today's mobile, unstable and highly competitive world, fashion thrives on our status anxiety. We are surrounded by rivals, and many "arm" themselves with goods to enhance qualities which are socially recognized as attractive or prestigious. Even if it is not a fear for our life, it is a fear to our social position, to recognition, appreciation and sense of self-worth. How are we to relate to this kind of fear?

Well, of course, this is a large and important question, one that deserves at least a chapter length, 10,000 word exploration to any justice, which is out of our present jurisdiction. So what follows is less an 'answer' than a summary of what came to mind when I read the question.

I suspect that we often use clothing as a way to protect our traumatic histories, to keep ourselves from being re-wounded. Heterosexual men wear sports team jerseys not only to proclaim their allegiance to the club, but also as a way to 'protect their masculinity.' In early school yard experiences boys taunt other boys over their masculinity, threatening physical abuse and social banishment if boys don't prove their strength, prowess, machismo. And so, from this point on, boys grow into men who secretly fear their 'manhood' being questioned, and protect it by wearing a hockey jersey.

People who don't 'fit' into the bland and predictable gender expectations can find themselves expelled from dominant



FOLICAL

groups in schools and other institutions. To be banished is traumatic; we are social beings, and any form of exclusion activates feelings of fear and vulnerability. Perhaps those who have been 'evicted from the dominant hetero-normative club' may:

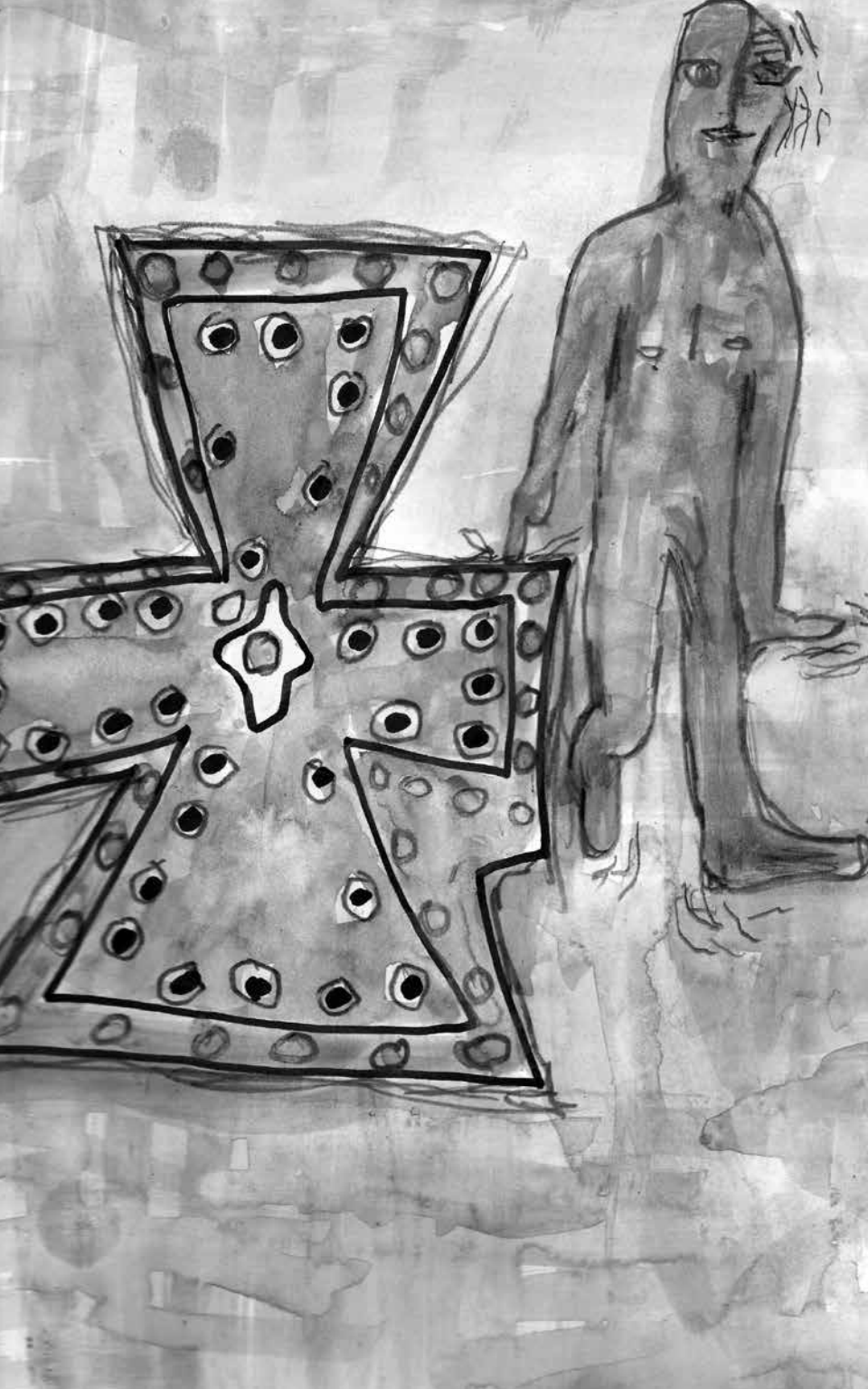
- adapt fashion as both a social marker to connect with other people who've been expelled, as feeling securely attached is essential for mental health;
- use fashion as a way to protect themselves from being wounded again, by overtly acknowledging difference, we can say "See, I'm not trying to be a member of your idiotic club anyway."

I feel a personal connection to these strategies, as, having had numerous threatening encounters with jocks and thugs in the late 1970s, I gravitated towards punk attire when I was a teen as a way to connect with other members of the subculture and to state my distaste for the dominant culture.

I suspect the above doesn't properly addresses your question, but those are the thoughts it provokes...

As you're saying, conceptual formations such as beauty or "manhood", coolness, or authenticity, are all acting on us socially. They become excuses for taunting those who divert from or contest these ideals and demarcations.

Likewise, fashion may as you say act as an armor, to protect, or to say "I don't care." But an armor acknowledges one is a target, and may thus also offer a chink in the armor. Rivals may use it against each other. How should we understand the vulnerability of the "self" produced by consumerism or fashion?

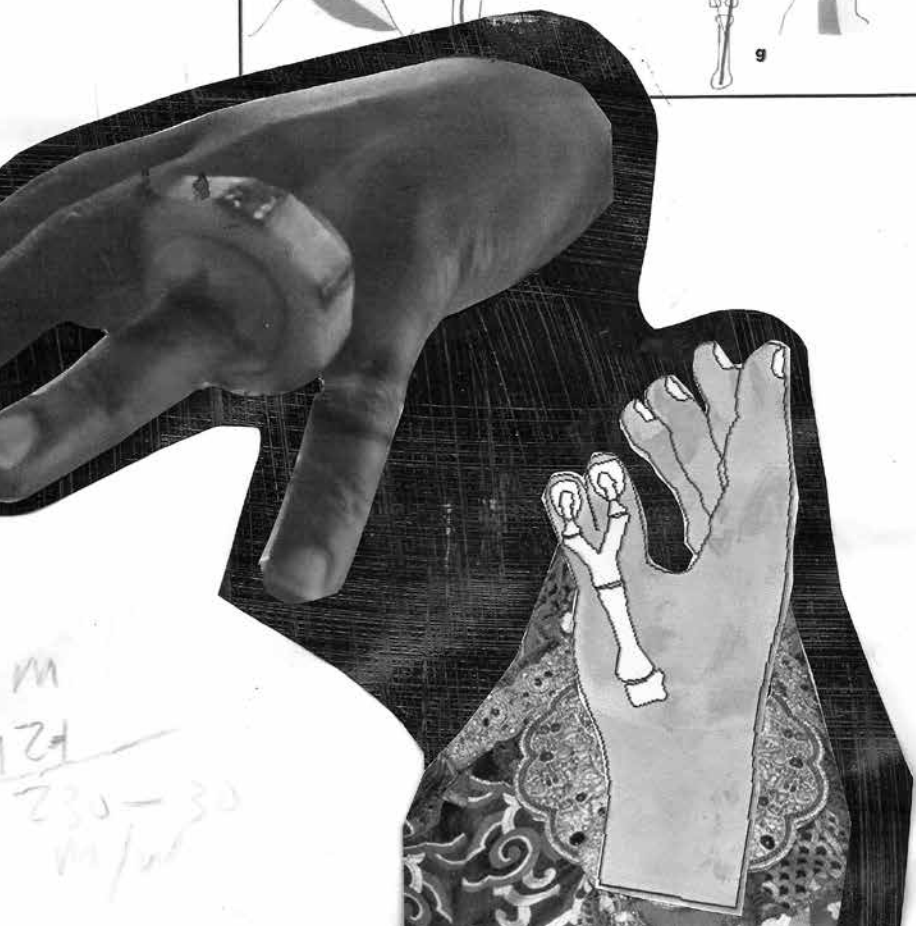
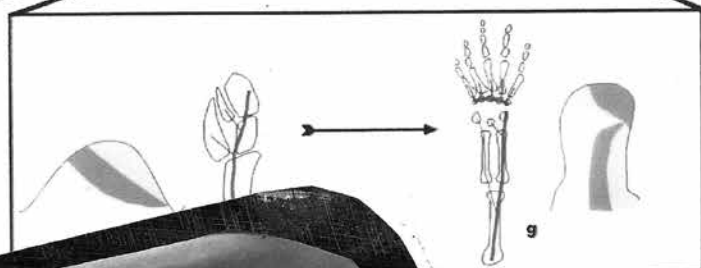
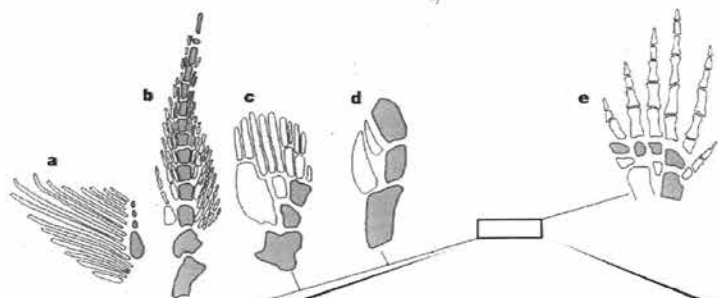


And to follow up on that, what do you think are the mechanisms that strengthen or undermine the armor of the self in a time that puts so much value on appearance?

I would argue that the vulnerable self is not produced by consumerism, but is produced by shaming, rejecting or abusive relational experiences. We are social beings; we survive and thrive because we connect well, through language (left hemisphere) and emotions (right hemisphere). Vulnerability, as all negative affects, are produced by disconnections.

The sense of self is a recent event in evolution, and only would have appeared if it provided a survival advantage—which it does: it provides us with a profoundly useful way to connect securely with others. What I mean is that a sense of self doesn't exist to differentiate ourselves from others, but rather it is an assemblage of markers, or dominant attributes (for example "I am artsy" or "I am an intellectual") which are employed to locate other people who share the same attributes—the intellectuals seek the intellectuals, the punks seek the punks, and so forth. For example, my teenage self, a young punk who grew up with a violent, alcoholic father, was constructed of self-beliefs—anti-authoritarian, victimized, marginalized—that provided me with the 'identity badge' that allowed me to connect with other punks.

Its interesting to note that the neural circuits—largely situated in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPfc)—that activate when we describe our 'self' coincides with the same region that is influenced when we process what other people's think about us. To put it another way, the same



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region that constructs my idea of 'me' is what processes other people's thoughts about 'me.' So the self is a product of social influence than it is a personal domain. So many of my identity views are in fact constructed by other people... We could further surmise, as the cognitive psychologist Matthew Lieberman and others have, that from a neuropsychological perspective there is no such thing as a nonconformist, as the construction of the individual "self" is always a socially influenced process.

To bring this all back to fashion, I would suggest that its a kind of external signs, or social messages, advertising our core attributes and self-beliefs, in essence an advertisement of ourselves to others, which eventually provide a uniform that solidifies our membership within the tribe that provides us with protection. Until we have secured our membership, we may shift and change styles, or explore different 'looks' until our messages are received and we are securely connected.

Yes, consumerism supports us to do is build a self on accessible goods, connecting to others with the acquisition of stuff, shopping together, displaying our new "hauls", using consumption as a form of shared entertainment. This is a type of self that is promoted through fashion, a self on the move, continuously becoming anew, updating itself visually, grasping onto acknowledgement. Does this approach to the self differ from other forms of building a self, based on other forms of more lasting or challenging investments, such as mastering of skills, like learning to play an instrument well?



Indeed, there are many ways to construct a sense of self, or lasting, secure identity. In some cultures identity is constructed via the intersection of all the groups one belongs to, for example, "I belong to this family, went to that school, work for this company, support this sports team, etc." I've worked with many people who, over years of therapeutic counseling and psychotropic meds have created a self based on an array of pathologies/diagnosis: "I have PTSD and dysthymia, along with reoccurring anxiety disorder, etc."

A self based on the acquisition of apparel or other consumer goods might seem to be a shallow misrepresentation of identity, especially when contrasted with a self constructed from skills that have been slowly mastered over a period of years, such as artistry, craft, athletic prowess and on. And indeed, competence, dexterity and ingenuity do display the mark of an individual more than simply purchasing an array of products; curating one's ensemble is a hallow endeavor when compared with leaving one's mark in a creative endeavor.

Yet its worth noting as well that all forms of self-construction, as the Buddha noted, can set oneself up for disappointment and deprivation, for skills that are mastered can erode. For example, the great pianist can develop arthritis; someone who designs and creates lovely, unique, one-of-a-kind quilts can lose their eyesight. In such cases, what happens to one's 'self?' The dancer's fluidity of movement can be eroded with time. It might be tempting to create a self based on the cleverness of our thoughts, but even our reasoning can be stripped away in the processes of aging or mental illness.



So from another perspective constructing a self from what one purchases is just another desperate grab for a feeling of solidity amidst the fleeting; and if it provides those who feel marginalized with a supportive connection with others, membership in a clan, it might even have benefits that the isolated artist, working alone in studio, might find beneficial.

Right, also the more lasting part of our self is doomed, also those based on group identifications, like friendships and family-ties and so on. A paradoxical emotion fashion offers is this feeling of a sense of belonging: that one is part of a group, and distinct from another. It is like going to a concert and everyone dances to the same music: we are all apart, but in unity, moving in concert. Is there also a neurological trait that also rewards us for joining the right group, or a feeling of unity?

Absolutely. We are social animals; we didn't become the dominant species because we run particularly fast, dig holes or climb trees with alacrity; we thrive because we can bond deeply with our families, friends, tribes; our brains have sophisticated systems that connect us with others. In the past, tribes comprised of individuals willing to share their resources with each other would survive, while tribes comprised of individuals that would jealously hoard their food and shelter would perish. Eventually we developed anterior cingulate cortexes that highlight not only physical pain and pleasure, but also the shame of social disconnection and pleasures of secure tribal membership. The hardwiring of the emotional brain compels us to inhibit selfish impulses at

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MES... ALLUDING TO THE
AD ALONE - AS IF SHE HAD
BODY

SODOM +
GOMORAH

TAKE
FRIGHT

SCARED
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DEER
IN
HEADLIGHTS

PILLAR
OF
SALT
Lot's
wife

GORGON

MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR



The 'Lot's wife' sea-stack, Marsden Bay



perseus turns court to stone

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that's triggered
terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include
flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about
event.

times, while urging us to consider what benefits our connection to others (note the work of clinical psychologist Matthew Lieberman).

For example we can mentalize, meaning we can read each other's emotions and discern, to a certain degree, each other's motivations, which allows us to sync our actions with one another. Even our deepest sense of self is linked to regions (namely the ventromedial access) that are activated by what other people think of us. So our emotional activations, such as pride, shame, joy, remorse and loneliness are constantly interweaving with the basic impulses of fear and reward. Were it not for pro-socializing emotions, we would spin only between fear and selfish pleasure hunting.

Chasing

So, as you mentioned, there is a neurological pleasure in shopping, even similar to that of taking cocaine. In this kind of pleasure hunting, it sometimes feels we are triggered by the pursuit of goods — the sensation of wanting something, and sometimes the expectations of the coming pleasure (planning and fantasizing about the birthday party is sometimes better than the party itself). Sometimes the acquisition, what reasonably should be the climax, only delivers a feeling of exhaustion. How does the excitement of the hunt relate to the pleasure of accomplishment?

THE BAPTIST



CAPITAL

APOLLODO

②

SHE WAS
A "WILD
WOMEN"
FROM THE
LIBYAN
DESERT -
CAUSING
TROUBLE
SO PERSEUS

KILLED HER >

"CRAZY MAN
IN WILDERN

Revolutionary

see John the Baptist (born a

①

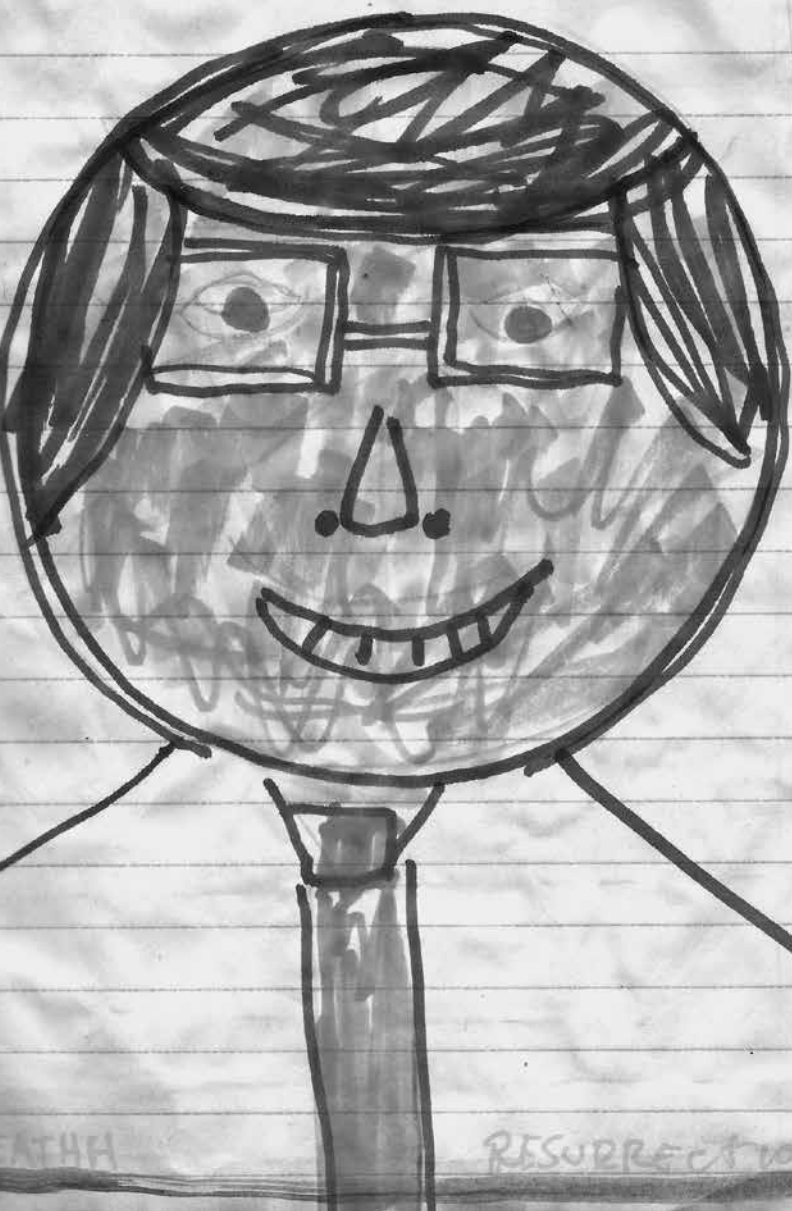
Our brains synthesize and expend dopamine to operate; along with glutamate its an essential neurotransmitter that supports voluntary movement, sustained cognition, the desire to attain survival advantages, working memory, the ability to learn and much more. Dopamine is the fuel that charges the neural circuits that create the urge to acquire things; these are the circuits (ventral tegmental area, striatum, etc) that results in impulsive urges to consume goods, drugs, food, sex and all other addictive behaviors.

To varying degrees all brains have circuits that regulate dopamine, hopefully at levels that don't result in addictive behavioral patterns. But, of course, many brains have shortfalls in dopamine regulation; as levels increase so do compulsive acts.

As your question notes, while dopamine is referred to as a 'reward' neurotransmitter, it is principally released during the hunt for goods, and diminishes quickly once we actually achieve our goal; dopamine is a pleasurable sensation that easily masks ambient feelings of anxiety, boredom, sadness. So its quite natural to prefer online shopping over feeling lonely; looking at hundreds of images of shoes on an e-commerce website releases dopamine throughout the search, but once we click the 'buy' button the dopamine charge diminishes and any negative, underlying feelings masked by the dopamine release, reemerge to consciousness. This is the behavioral loop beneath all addiction:

Feeling a Negative Affect (sad, lonely, bored, etc) →
Activating Dopamine Charge (shopping, eating, sex) →

FIG. 2F THE PAPER PLATE



looking in the mirror can change your life
drawing your own portrait can change your life

Diminishment of Dopamine (acquiring or ending a shopping expedition)→

Return to feeling Negative Affect (sad, lonely, bored, etc)

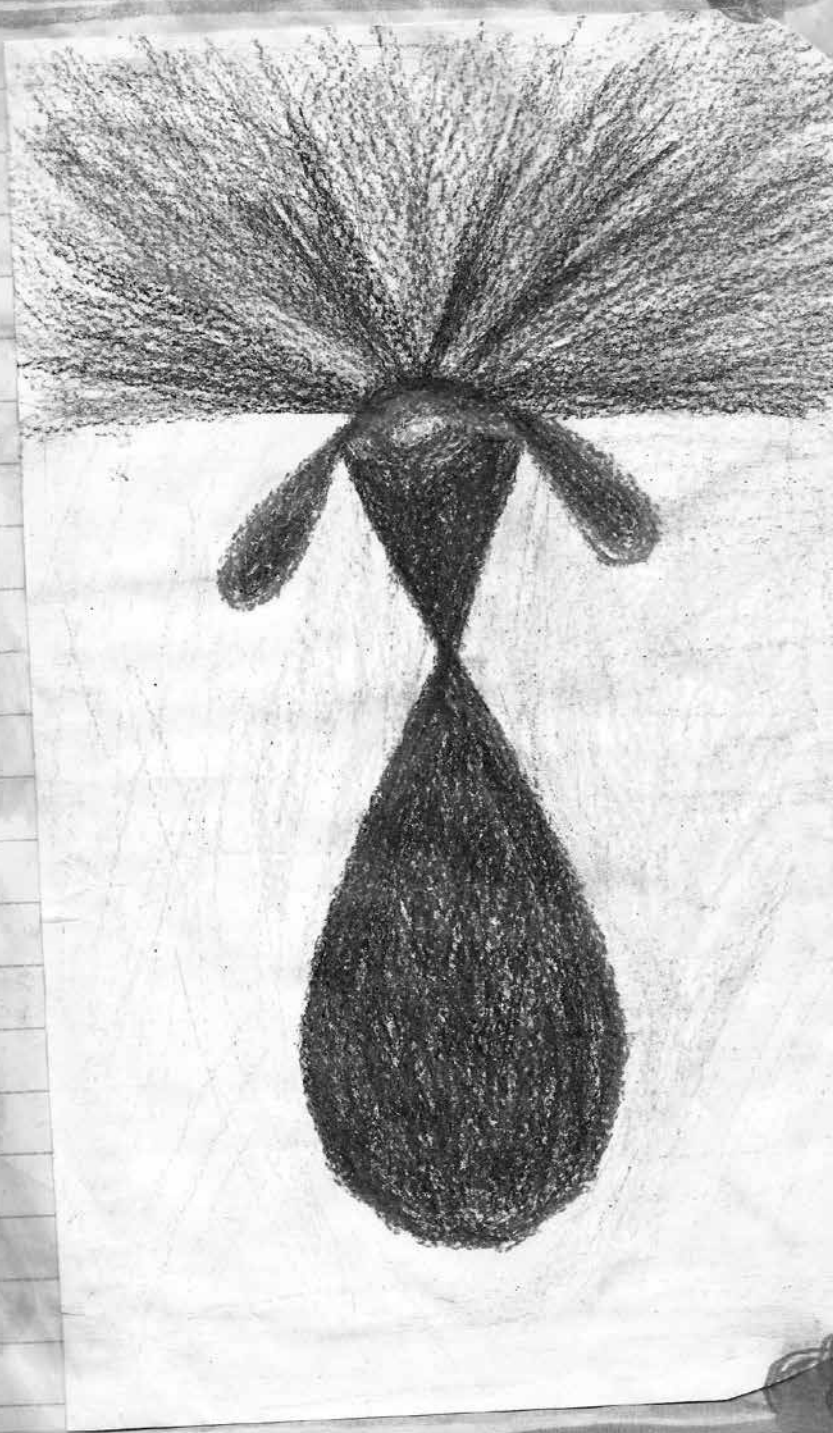
At heart, our addictive cycles are not about the objects (shoes, apparel, food) we acquire, but an unconscious desire to conceal from awareness negative feelings.

I'd like to note here that the Buddhist dharma separated Tanha, which we know as the dopamine fueled charge to accumulate, from Upadana, the stressful, less pleasurable states the follow, which involve clinging to our pleasures, living amidst thoughts of self and others. So the distinction between the single-minded pleasure of wanting, versus the diminished unquiet of owning was made. 2,500 years ago, when the Buddha noted the universal role of craving in suffering, the cycle of addiction was in full flourish.

The solution, of course, is to learn how to tolerate and process the negative feelings we conceal by shopping, so that the addictive fire that drives us to consume will be discharged. The original role of mindfulness, or sati, was to meet this requirement for mental health: it shows us how to create a safe container for negative feelings and mind states.

Once we learn how to tolerate negative affects, it doesn't mean we'll stop purchasing goods altogether, as the Buddha noted human beings have requisites necessary to survive—enough clothing to keep us warm, food to sustain activity, means to communicate—but hopefully it will result in behavior that isn't bound by reckless consumption, the kind

DOPE AMING FOCKS YOU UP

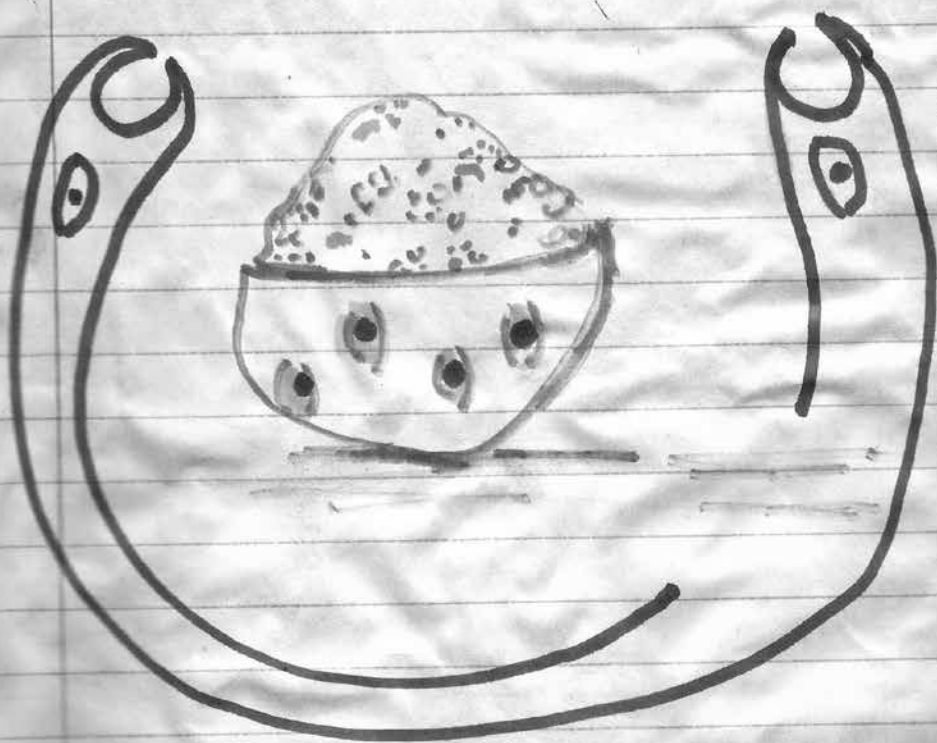
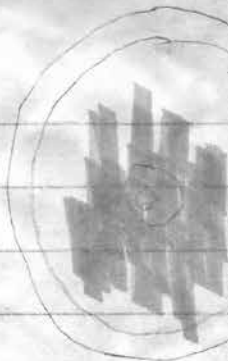


that needlessly depletes both natural resources and personal bank accounts.

Yes, when studying design you quickly start noticing how designed all elements in a shopping experience are, that every part has been created to gently nudge or manipulate the consumer into the pleasure of consumption. So it is quite easy to see how we get “hooked” on the dopamine charge of shopping. I guess it also happens to everyday routines such as checking for likes on Facebook and such: they are after all systems designed to seek our attention and offer micro-rewards. In a similar vein, shopping is staged to be like a hunt, with pop-up stores, limited editions etc, a form of continuous cycle of excitement and boredom. Does this neurological priming for the hunt relate to other forms of entertainment, such as gambling? Can the brain get bored of its own reward opiates, those that are released for example by anticipation, thrill, risk or fulfillment?

Absolutely; drugs that imitate the effect of dopamine on the brain (for example those that treat Parkinson’s Disease and restless leg syndrome) are well known to trigger gambling, compulsive sexual appetites and shopping, which is not surprising as they involve the same striatal neural pathways.

As for ‘getting bored of its own reward opiates,’ I’d slightly change the focus: the brain doesn’t get tired of dopamine, but it gets used to the sensations and experiences that activate dopamine; i.e. we don’t get tired of feeling great, we get tired of the things that make us feel great. This is referred to as ‘desensitization’ and ‘habituation,’ in essence the diminishing responsiveness of the brain to the external conditions



that trigger pleasurable feelings... Desensitization can lead to compulsive food binging, as one experiencing diminishing rewards will consume more and more to get the same level of satisfaction. Generally speaking, in the absence of neural imbalance, the root cause of desensitization is overconsumption: we consume too much of a good thing. Over years people have to purchase more apparel, take greater business risks, watch more porn or take more cocaine to get the same buzz, as it were.

This is one of the fundamental flaws of basing our pursuit of happiness on career ambitions, sex or consumerism: dopamine rewards are short lived and increasingly challenging to activate; meanwhile serotonin, the neurotransmitter at the heart of wellbeing and contentment, doesn't appear in thrilling roller coaster rides; it rises in long, smooth, gradual inclines; it takes its time to appear and disappear, which is why serotonin based drugs (SSRIs) can take weeks to kick in; the brain doesn't habituate to the external cues that produce serotonin—most reliably connecting securely with other people. In short, lasting peace of mind is more likely to be found in the gradual rewards of friendship and volunteerism than acquisition or attainment.

By continuously pushing new garments and styles out there, it seems fashion is doing its best to be immune to desensitization or habituation. It also feeds a social pressure to conform and adapt these new styles with rewards or recognition and attention. You mentioned earlier the behavioral loop of negative affect, then activating dopamine charge, its diminishment and then a return to start, and fashion seems to fit perfectly

Rockerfeller
Charity

only Return
what has been
stolen
charity
St. Vincent
De Paul

INTERNATIONALISM

Cornel West
Jill Stein

James Com
Calm
Coen

Who does
West
Support

Religion
C. West

BLACK PAGES in
High Place) is not truly
LARRY



VERSACE

Crush Painful CRUSH
The type of obsession that
can make you seem creep
Wanted sense of Boundries - Limited Reality

into that. But fashion is also endorsing a binge/purge behavior, especially today, with a surplus of cheap and accessible fashion. Those with a habit of shopping cheap clothes need to get rid of their surplus, the average wardrobes being simply too small. That is why so many brands discuss “sustainability” today, the system suffers from fashion bulimia: with anticipation, fulfillment, waste, and start again. Are there also addictive behaviors connected to binge/purge patterns?

Yes, but let's take a step back and start at another end: As we are beings weighed down with an existential awareness of our own vulnerability, living towards the looming inevitability of death, it's natural to seek some form of rescue from the inevitable: aging, sickness and loss. In other words, we hope to ward off the despairing thoughts that our efforts to establish an exemption.

Our brands come to the rescue. We brand ourselves to stand out from the “crowd.” The crowd, after all, are those who other people will grow old, feel pain, die and will be quickly forgotten: the walking shadows, strutting and fretting their hour upon the stage, then heard no more. So the ‘great escape’ is to get everyone looking at us, to stay in the center stage, caught in the spotlight of the world, to be seen as powerful. The dopamine rush of attention makes us feel invulnerable.

And yet we are also social animals, deeply conformist. Alone in the wild we perish, we've prospered due to our twin frontal lobes that allow us to connect in so many ways: language, facial expressions, body language and a variety



of cultural signs, or brands, it's hard written into our neural networks to do anything, to please and conform to win admittance into a pack. In addition to behavioral imitation, we use brands towards this aim.

So identity expressed through mass manufactured brands is the perfect example of the human condition: we seek the perfect identity to win connection; we want other people see and affirm us, to reinforce our existence through admiration.

Brands bring us such attention, which make us feel solid, substantial, loved, even though the act of purchasing and wearing requires little bravery, heroism, inspiration or insight. A brand simply announces we belong to a tribe, a tribe that we'd like to believe is important and memorable.

While I may connect, on an unconscious level, with other guys who wear Dickies pants or Carhartt caps, it also plays into an underlying desire—born of the anxiety that my life doesn't matter—that I am smarter than the next fellow who doesn't wear Dickies.

But to come to your question: The binge and purge pattern can be seen in different lights. One obvious perspective lies in our feelings of powerlessness, shame and social isolation. Essentially we consume for the 'I feel amazing' dopamine rewards, all providing the experience of power and invulnerability. Eventually feelings of guilt or remorse set in, for when we over consume we worry that we'll be seen by others as indulgent and lacking control. So we purge; throw out or expel the evidence. Of course, the shame that arises

VT 8/15
VSC

Bricks w/ DOLLAR Bills
pasted on + Letters
fainted



CARVED
Cucumber



in the wake of bingeing can activate despondency, which in creates the conditions for future binges; in essence a 'sam-saric' cycle is established.

Another perspective is psychological: we interject regulating, shaming, socializing voices: what Freud called the Superego or Jung the Imago. These internalized sub-personalities push us to achieve and accomplish; their the internally chattering voices of 'you're not doing enough.' Note: while inner chatter is associated with social regulation, feelings and impulses are largely associated with what Freud called the Id, desires for gratification, catharsis, release. So, to get some relief from overly self-regulating Imagos we develop compulsions that allow us to indulge cathartically. So bingeing can be viewed as a form of sexual sublimation, or compensation to the self-denial required to survive under late-capitalism. From this perspective bingeing not only enables capitalism to flow smoothly, but allows us to perform as workaholic automatons.

Belonging

I think this 'I feel amazing' dopamine reward you mention is essential to the positive relationship to fashion, but also the ambiguities of social regulation, how some ways of feeling amazing is more intense than others. Getting a positive comment or a look of recognition from someone we adore may give a more intense reward than a positive comment from just



Plant fossil



Sea lily

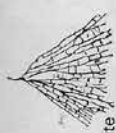


Cup coral

Seaweed



Worm



Graptolite

Plants and animals,

Climate mainly mild. Sea life from land at end of period. and animal life entirely marine; trilobites dominant.



anyone. In a similar way, fashion is about imitation, and we imitate and seek the approval of people who we relate to in a positive way. But perhaps more importantly, this form of imitation mainly happens unconsciously, as we copy the behavior of others. As social scientists Nicholas Chistakis and James Fowles argue in their book Connected, a lot of our social behavior is tacit and inert; “students with studious roommates become more studious. Diners sitting next to heavy eaters eat more food. Homeowners with neighbors who garden wind up with manicured lawns.” Is there some relationship between what we have discussed concerning addiction and rewards, and that of imitation?

No, I’d say there’s a clear delineation between addiction and imitation.

Albert Bandura’s pioneering research in social cognition and learning, which started at Stanford in the 1950s, has established that we learn and connect implicitly, via unconscious mimicry. As human beings are pack animals, we seek to establish secure connections—which is the very foundation of our survival after all—via several processes:

- language allows us to share views about the world, goals, stories, etc.
- emotion connects us through non-verbal expressions, which establishes affect regulation.
- behavioral synchronization, or mimicry, allows us to align unconsciously. For example, we yawn when others yawn, tap our feet anxiously when others fidget; like unconscious emotional mirroring, mimicry establishes implicit connections.

Climate hot and dry; continents
deserts. Ferns, horsehair, conifers,
first dinosaurs, lobsters, and
marine reptiles.



stiff? To these stories we can add our contemporary myth of the "dis-
ease" that psychiatry has named posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD.
Indeed, when compared with historical mythologies, modern science
has certain advantages and disadvantages in accurately comprehending
the universal human experience of terror, horror, injury and loss.

The indigenous peoples throughout South America and Mesoamer-
ica have long understood both the nature of fear and the essence of
trauma. What's more, they seemed to know how to transform it through
their shamanic healing rituals. After colonization by the Spanish and
Portuguese, the indigenous peoples borrowed their word *susto* to
describe what happens in trauma. *Susto* translates graphically as "fright
paralysis" and as "soul loss."¹⁰ Anyone who has suffered a trauma knows



To summarize unconscious mimicry: It is driven by the unconscious programming to connect.

Now, addiction is quite the opposite; as Philip Flores' groundbreaking work "Addiction as Attachment Disorder" establishes, addiction is in fact a process of replacing other people with behaviors (such as shopping or working or gambling) or substances (drugs and alcohol). Addiction is a way to regulate emotions without relying on others; addicts are people who've experienced profound relational woundings and have, unconsciously, given up on people as secure bases for emotional connection and support.

This is easily demonstrated: addicts, given the Adult Attachment Interview, have extremely high incidents of disorganized attachment patterns, as well as early traumatic woundings, such as caretaker deaths, abandonments or abuse. Those that become addicts have been so wounded that any connection triggers anxiety and self-consciousness, the expectation that fresh woundings will occur. So the only choice is to replace other people with whatever can provide emotional numbing. Amongst the general population only 5% scores as disorganized, with incidents of multiple childhood traumas far less prevalent.

To summarize addiction: the goal is not to connect, unlike unconscious mimicry, but rather to dis-connect.

So perhaps the great irony is that many behaviors we pick up through social mimicry, in which we seek connection, wind up being the very behaviors that disconnect us from

STRONGER TOGETHER



POSTER POP 1999

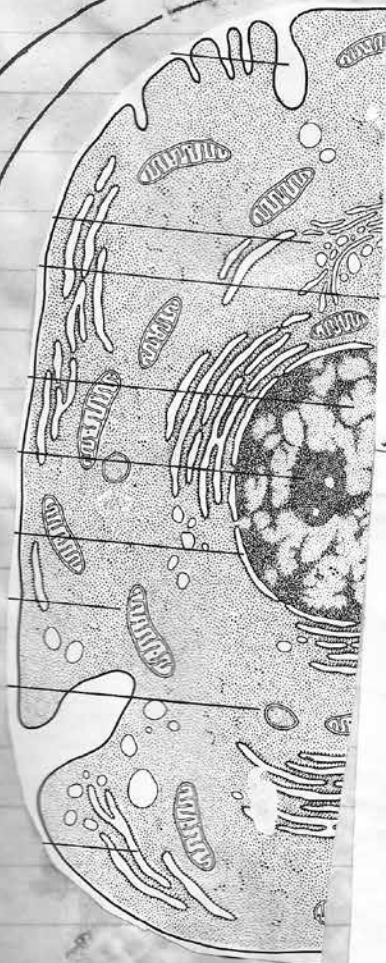
Coop

others. For example, as teens we desperately want to be accepted, so we locate a group of individuals and imitate them seeking acceptance, but if we've experienced early traumas, we find connecting too frightening, to rife with abandonment, and so we employ social behaviors to numbing and socially alienating degrees, resulting in further isolation and despair.

*So there seems to be some irony here, especially for fashion design: we imitate to connect, but as we become addicted to connection we disconnect. Craig Nakken argues along similar lines in his book *The Addictive Personality*, that addicts form primary relationships with objects and events, not with people. What may have been means turn into ends themselves and start to "bite back." That means the addict is manipulating objects for his or her own pleasure, to make life easier, and transfer this form of relating to objects to their manipulation of people in their surrounding. Friend and other people are then valued depending on how useful they are to fulfill the emotional need to deliver the fix, as the addict always places himself first.*

Are there certain types of social interaction and peer pressure which lead the way to addiction, even if the addict later tries to avoid depending on people? I am just thinking of casinos, with their restaurants, entertainment, and explicit use of seduction as part of the advertisement of the gambling experience. In a similar vein, other types of social interactions may act as channels to addiction, such as the almost ritualized drinking in the armed forces or the ideal of hedonism within the music industry. Would you think certain types of social interaction may act as a sort of gateway to addiction?

GO
RG
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If we use the term ‘abuse,’ as in ‘substance abuse’ then absolutely, peer pressure, social rituals, cultural hegemonic messages and the like can absolutely lead to self-destructive behavior.

And certainly, societal practices can influence and exacerbate an addict’s behavior:

- societies without social safety nets an addict may well experience greater states of deprivation and despair than in societies with active programs that can ‘catch’ those mired in substance dependencies,
- social interactions can steer those who are prone to seek mood regulation towards one outlet or another.

I tend to doubt, however, that addiction is frequently ‘caused’ or introduced by social practices. Rather, I suspect it’s the result of an anxious connection with one’s primary caregiver in infancy —this is why addiction has been shown to run in families, rather than in social structures (all societies have very wide ranges of behavior in relationship to addictive behaviors and substances, whereas families tend to have very narrow ranges of behavior). In other words, if a mother-child relationship fails to produce a ‘holding environment’ which teaches the child others can ‘read and soothe’ its agitated states.

Essentially, early deficits in establishing a secure connection with one’s caretakers creates a neurally wired inability to emotionally trust others in adult life, which in turn sabotages our capability of regulating emotions; we need other people to help stabilize our emotions. Such deficits occur

VAIN



when a primary caretaker is incapable of understanding or soothing the emotional states of an infant, or the infant experiences traumatic abandonments or abuse; these experiences create ‘insecure’ expectational maps of others in the brain’s right hemisphere, perhaps in the orbito-frontal region. Addicts gravitate to substances, or the dopamine rewards of gambling and hypersexual activity to cope with the extreme swings of their emotional activations.

Are there several types or expressions of addiction that could be relevant in the realm of fashion? One type, as you mentioned, is the addiction to shopping as compensation for experiences of rejection and abandonment. But could there also be other types, where we become dependent on the approval of others, our own ego so weak we cannot fully exist without being affirmed by others, and thus reliant to the verification of their demands, even if these can turn into abusive relations, such as bullying?

While we may crave approval from others—the pleasant neural rewards derived from any visible, positive regard—approval is short term, left hemispheric, ultimately hollow. Emotional connection, on the other hand is distinct from approval; true bonding is based on authentic disclosure that generates both sympathy and empathy; it releases serotonin and binds us via right hemispheric affects.

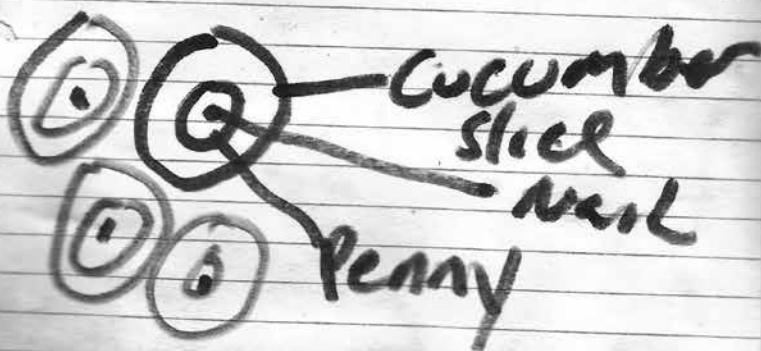
Approval and affirmation don’t leave lasting results that translate into meeting our real needs: for security, emotional connection, purpose. Approval and affirmation aren’t founded on emotional disclosure to others; approval and affirmations are essentially forms of social capital that make us feel

Dope n mine fucks you up
Happiness / Hypnosis

5 * 7 * 1

1200

FOLLOW TIME



powerful and neurally rewarded, a salute that we've accomplished a task; the neural rewards last for brief periods, before we lapse back into the empty hunt for popularity and attention.

A healthy dependence doesn't involve accomplishing anything; it's a mutual recognition of the human condition; all human's are social beings seeking to be deeply seen in the eyes of a tolerant 'other,' based on a disclosure of non-verbal feelings; the deal of mutuality is sealed when our emotions are mirrored back to us through the kind facial expressions and gestures of the other (friend, caretaker, lover, therapist, teacher).

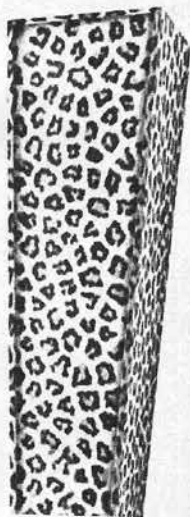
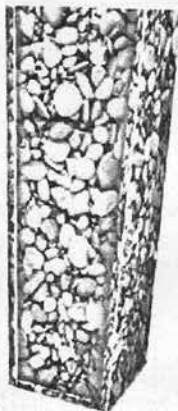
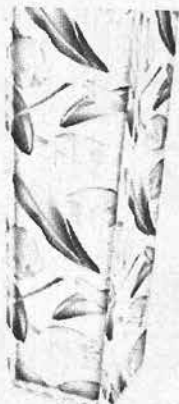
Deeper bonding requires the strength to be vulnerable, as we've all experienced early interpersonal wounds that occurred during disclosing our impulses and desires to intolerant peers and family members. So while we all seek the substantial, meaningful interactions between friends, based on mutual recognition of feelings, we can also greatly recoil from the attendant vulnerability and risk of shaming or rejection.

Fashion can provide a subterfuge, a way to convey feelings of uniqueness, outsider status, creativity, sexual impulses and political leanings, though the messages are expressed, they're expressed via trends, accessories, subcultures, brand allegiance, etc. Perhaps fashion can be seen as a kind of communication, a language that expresses, indirectly, elements of the 'true' spontaneous self, even though the iterations are purchased off the rack. When we are brave, we

THEY HAVE NO WINE

C

www.creativecoffins.com



don't dress for success, we dress to express — much as the dandy's and neo-romantics used clothing to shout the love that dares not speak its name...

Control

Could there be some relation between fashion and addiction, for example where the user looks for satisfaction or help or relief, what is sometimes called the “locus of control?” To me, I guess this is a crucial point to also understand what kind of world fashion creates for us, and where the sense of control resides.

With fashion, one tends to look to outside resources for problem solving, inspiration from idols and oracles, buying more stuff, seeking acknowledgement and recognition from others. It fosters a desire to be led, to be guided, to be designed. Fashion is always “out there”, always with others, always in the images of adoration, in the allure of Hollywood stars, and all that. So fashion promotes dependence rather than self-reliance. In fact, fashion is perhaps the antithesis of self-reliance. How can an addict change such continuous seeking for solutions outside and shift the locus of control towards an inner locus of control?

Self-reliance is a myth: the human species is a social species, we're pack animals, our ability to connect, both consciously and unconsciously (implicitly) provides us with our extraordinary survival skills. To use your phrase, we are set up to “look to outside resources for problem solving.” The



renowned psychologist Albert Bandura noted in the early 1960s (“Social Learning through Imitation”) we learn not only through explicit instruction, by implicitly, by consciously and unconsciously observing and imitating others: we don’t have to touch a stove to know that its dangerously hot if we watch someone else get burned; we unintentionally yawn when others around us yawn, which helps regulate oxygen intake, we tap our feet anxiously when others tap, which unconsciously transmits vigilance during stressful situations. In other words, it’s to our advantage that we speak, act and dress like others — think of our distant ancestors, barely surviving harsh winters in inclement tundras: those that unwittingly copied others (who flourished by wearing warm animal skins during winters) would survive brutal weather as well.

The Buddha is credited with such insights, noting that we constantly imitate others: “Just as a rotting fish that’s placed in a blade of grass makes the grass smell bad: so too do we become foolish if we associate with fools...but if incense is wrapped in leaves, then the leaves smell pleasant, so too do we benefit from associating with the wise...” (Itivuttaka 76)

That people select tribes and mimic how others in their tribe dress establishes unconsciously, implicit links that ‘seal the deal’ and ‘cement their membership.’ Without doubt I wear Carhartt and Dickies not just because I can afford them, but because they’re worn by other people I admire (Noah, one of my teachers). The clothing forms a kind of bond or social handshake.



Finally, self-reliance is not the key to overcoming addiction, in fact, its quite the opposite. As Philip Flores so aptly documented throughout his landmark “Addiction as Attachment Disorder,” addiction occurs due to breakdowns in the ability to emotionally connect with others; the key to overcoming addiction is to begin to trust and connect with others. Many people, in the rooms of church basements in 12 step programs, overcome addiction by developing mutual trust, largely by unconsciously copying the mannerisms of others, even their style of dress. (As someone who’s been sober for 21 years, its often humorous to watch as newly recovering addicts incrementally become carbon copies of their sponsors.)

So, in short, the socially compliant nature of fashion doesn’t particularly raise concerns. Furthermore, while there are daring and innovative people who can break entirely out of the mold—such as Leigh Bowery—extreme individualism isn’t necessarily conducive to mental health! Dressing in a way that problematizes tribe membership may we complicate one’s ability to connect with others for emotion regulation and support. (And while I’m stepping well outside my expertise here, I might note that the fashion visionary Leigh Bowery struggled with severe depression, as did Alexander McQueen, who I believe committed suicide. While their struggles may well have been the result of being subjected to societal homophobia, or unreliable attachment to early caretakers, it is very possible that their brave singularity left them uncomfortably isolated from the benefits of social connectedness as well... but again, I’m really venturing outside my comfort zone here.)



HAVE I
DONE ENOUGH

Yes, I see your point, and I guess we must come to think of self-reliance as not a disconnection from others, as is often the eremite-ideal of full individualism ("I owe nothing to others!"), but rather a form of acknowledgement of interdependence. I guess to most of us, we struggle finding the balance between when and how to stand firm in trust of oneself (and others), and when to follow blindly the dictates of others in order to blend in or feel affirmed. And to challenge norms and social conventions takes a high toll on anyone daring to do so.

I am curious about the processes which "shape" most of us, our identity and self-esteem, and also our trust to others, specifically in relation to clothes. As children we love to dress up and play with clothes, both alone and with friends. We dress to become superheroes, agents, princesses etc. Everyday could be a masquerade. But after some time most of us learn to escape from attention, and most of us end up in jeans/hoodie. How does this process work? Are there specific inner and outer mechanisms that make us go from playful experimentation to conformity?

Well I suspect that 'dress up' is an outlet; people put on costumes to investigate different feelings and perceptions — a child puts on a superhero costume to explore what it feels like to be powerful; children outside of play are disempowered, subject to the choices of caretakers and adults, so their costumes are a 'way out' of such confines. Putting on costumes allows us to take the tentative steps to develop identities.

I suspect that our long term aesthetic decisions are organized to attain membership in social groups and to distance



DEMANDING

BEGGING

PLEADING

ourselves from other subgroups or tribes. Our tastes continually steer us to peer relationships; these preferences consist of mimicking older individuals who have attained a membership in a group (I imitated the dress of older punk rockers when I was a teen) and we acquire an aversion towards the preferences of members of other tribes—to this day I can feel an almost physical allergy to fleece, khakis, turtleneck sweaters. When we are confronted by aesthetics of other tribes we feel a kind of innate revulsion.

We develop our tastes at a stage when we are most actively exploring the interpersonal identities and tribal connections that will protect and support us, so they become firmly internalized and can be difficult to change, as they become implicitly/unconsciously held; so they can impede our ability to make new alliances with members of other groups—we unconsciously inspect the tastes of others to determine whether or not we will be able to easily establish an interpersonal handshake.

So I see costume play of childhood as emotional exploration; its not that we ‘escape from attention... to jeans and hoodies’ but rather use jeans and hoodies to gain attention, to make social alliances; costume play serves a different emotional function, as we see during Halloween, where people put on clothing that permits exploration of different behaviors and perceptions.

I would think fashion per definition is a way of looking judgmentally at others. The very idea of fashion is to deem others



by the looks, that it offers a “shallow” interface by which we can attract or reject others. Thus our own anxiety to fit in can be projected also to others, to make sure they are anxious to fit in. In this way, our relation to fashion is a cycle which both creates anxiety (keeping up), and temporarily relieves anxiety, through the latest season’s acquisitions or attention gained at a social event. Do you think this cycle also intersects with repressed anxieties, such as not acknowledging fear; meaning we may turn to fashion consumption to temporarily escape emotions and anxiety?

I tend to view anxiety as the conscious signal that a repressed, challenging emotion—such as fear, sadness, anger or shame—or impulse that feels anti-social—such as sexual lust, hoarding or aggressive inclinations—are surfacing and seeking an outlet. Anxiety is the mind’s way of informing us the repressed is returning.

So absolutely, our fears of being socially rejected by others—especially the tribes/support groups to which we belong—are alleviated through the seasonal cycles of shopping binges and purges. As a social species there’s nothing more emotionally painful than social ostracism; acquiring the new renews the ‘social contract’ that connects us with others.

Today, the social contract seems influenced by FOMO, “Fear Of Missing Out.” This may be a sense of uneasiness more than fear perhaps, but what social media has revealed more explicitly to us is that there are so many things happening simultaneously, so many places we could be, so many tempting events running by us, so many desires unfulfilled. But I have

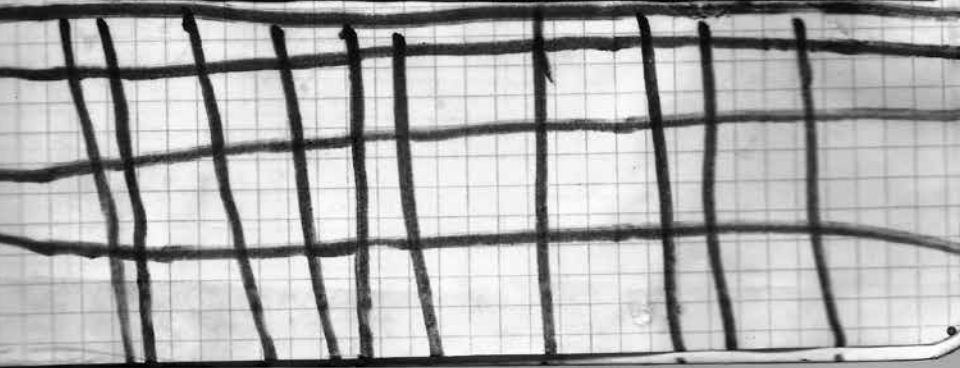
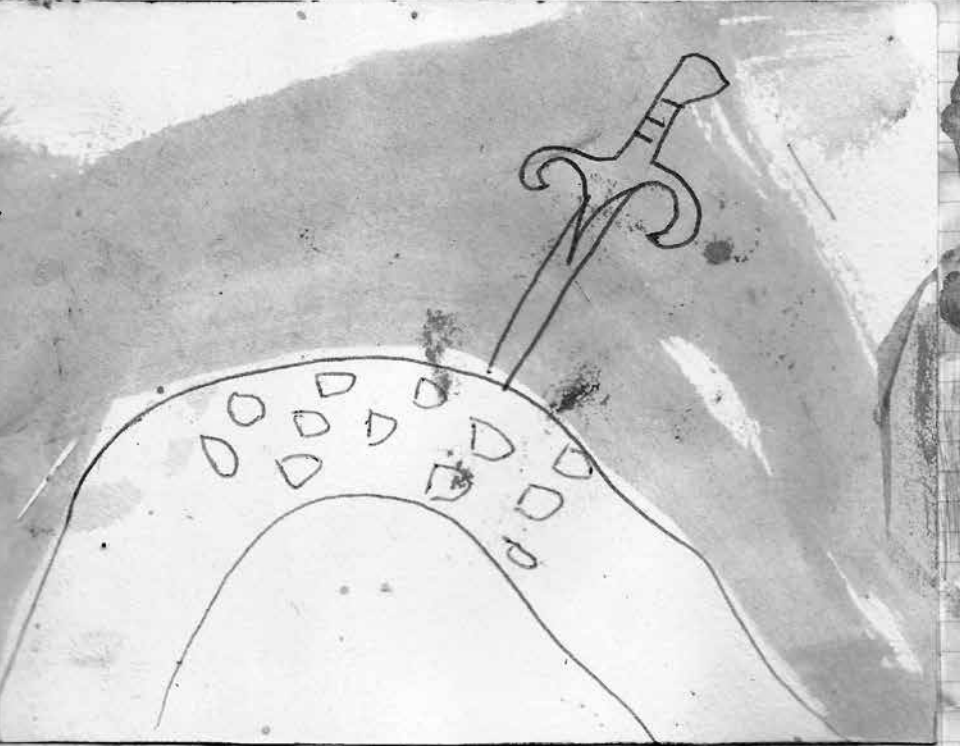
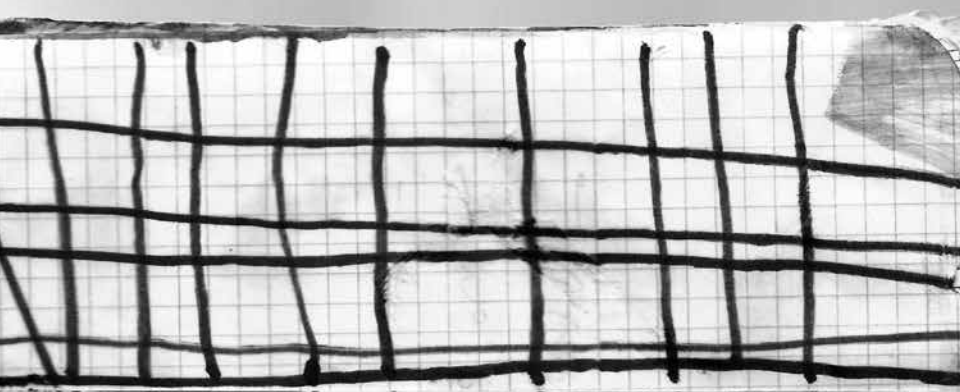


a feeling this flow of events may also be used to sort us, that the idea of being “popular” is also revealed in how one is able to move between events, how one navigates and keeps afloat in the rushing stream of events. So “missing out” may actually be a struggle to remain socially relevant, to be on top of things.

Much social theory emerging around the Second World War was concerned with mass society, the social pressures of conformity, for example Erich Fromm’s famous book “Escape from Freedom.” Today, it feels like there are other mechanisms of producing conformity through social anxiety, one of them could be FOMO (which I would also connect to fashion). Could there be any neurological mechanisms behind our current escape from freedom in the form of FOMO? Does such fear have any connection to addictive behaviors, and what would be a more wise response to this fear?

Sociobiologists like Robert Trivers would probably argue that “fear of missing out” must have an evolutionary based genetic/neurological underpinnings; not really as an “escape from freedom,” which would serve little survival purpose, but rather as an attempt to attain social adherence--we want to be a “part of the scene” as it cements tribal affiliations, providing security and strength. Unfortunately, seeking security through popularity or being at the “right spot with the right people” doesn’t provide the deeper forms of bonding we really need to feel secure, which doesn’t require popularity, but rather empathetic mirroring attune meant from a few close, reliable friends.

Lack of secure connections absolutely lie at the heart of substance and behavioral addictions; if we don’t feel con-



nected to empathetic support we'll numb the feelings of isolation and uniqueness. Worse, chasing after popularity--paradoxically--activates social anxieties, which exacerbates addictive cravings. Perhaps we chase after popularity, rather than empathy, because the conceptual mind understands fame and fortune, but struggles to conceive of the value of compassion. In other words:

- lack of connections activates feelings of vulnerability and sadness,
- the conscious mind misinterprets these feelings, believing they're caused by lack of popularity,
- the more we chase popularity, the more socially anxious we become, for we feel little alleviation,
- we drink, shop or pursue sex to mitigate the ever mounting states of agitation.

Recovery

Can some forms of addiction produce positive opportunities? By this I mean that an addiction may become a signal that helps us see some deeper currents in our life we need to deal with, that we can no longer run away from. How can finding oneself in addiction be turned into something better, reconciliation and wisdom?

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Well, an addiction is, by my definition, an attempt to use substances or behaviors to replace the necessary open and honest interpersonal connections requisite for regulating our emotions and impulses. In other words, to process our feelings without suppression or harmful loss of control, we need to express them to others who—through attentiveness, mirroring facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures—help pacify our agitations, loneliness, sorrows and so forth.

The ability to process our emotions starts early in life; it's developed in the original relationships with those who were essential to our survival, our primary caretakers. To develop self-regulation demands non-verbal connection; if our needs for connection led to disappointment, we'll struggle to trust others and seek addictive replacements.

Yes, it could indeed be argued that addiction is akin to the 'canary in the mineshaft,' letting us know that underlying trust and attachment issues require our attention. So be it; I've heard some members of alcoholics anonymous express their 'gratitude for being an alcoholic' as they doubt they'd find the willingness or determination to express their feelings without bottoming out in addiction.

Additionally, some have suggested that addictive mindstates can lead some individuals to develop highly honed skills. Think of the 13 year old boy who struggles to make friends in school, so he spends untold hours a day alone, practicing the piano and bass guitar, hoping to sidestep the vulnerable stages of making friends by winning adulation for his musi-



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cianship (this is a portrait of myself, some 40 years ago). Is the time spent developing skills to replace interpersonal intimacy worth it? People who enjoy the work of talented artists who honed their crafts as the byproduct of addiction may believe so. But the artists themselves rarely find much peace of mind, and often fall into less attractive forms of addiction: alcoholism, drugs, shopping, sex, food. Not a good trade.

So to deal with addiction means to figure out a path out of it. The idea of "recovery" gives the impression that I recover to the state before addiction. But, paradoxically, that was also the state that produced addiction in the first place. Can I recover to get forward, not as "before" (a before which created addiction), but towards something else, a more wise and healthy place?

Indeed, many people in recovery make the same point: most of us have nothing good to recover; we started out life in unsuccessful relationships, there were no halcyon days.

Some believe they had wonderful childhoods, but interviews with grown adults, who during their childhoods were observed by psychologists to have poor attachments, demonstrate that its quite common for those with disorganized attachment to believe in false versions of their own childhoods, for we can paint over darkest pain with bright, rosy colors.

So yes, 'recovery' should actually be a word that suggests growth and cultivation, not return.

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SENDING OF SPIRITUAL
ENERGY IS NOT

SUPERSTITION
SUPERSTITION



So let's go for healing for now in the sense of growth. How will we go about healing to help us move forward, but also deal with the damage done?

Adults with attachment issues—which lie at the heart of most psychological disorders—can, in a healthy interpersonal environment, connect with the feelings associated with early losses and process the early caretaking bonds that didn't occur. In one-on-one work with a therapist or Buddhist teacher, or attending support group meetings, individuals can learn how to develop secure attachments; eventually the old definitions of love—etched amidst the original abandonments and misconnections of childhood—are rewritten by the new interactions—supportive, tolerant, mirroring. It's worth the effort.

So when it comes to therapy, are there different forms of therapy for different types of addiction? Are there some general rules, and what are the types of behaviors we must adjust individually?

I believe its less about any specific modality—what tools or routines the therapist employs—than the empathetic nature of the therapist. It's the therapeutic milieu that creates the safe space wherein an individual can grow.

The great D. W. Winnicott, the eminent developmental psychologist, noted that the child thrives with the 'good enough' mother, who doesn't meet every need of the infant, but rather fosters the environment wherein the child can



safely discover the tools (such as the mother's breast or hand) that will provide its needs.

Similarly, a successful healing environment is a place where an individual can feel supported in expressing different impulses and emotions, relaxing into the flow of emotional life, rather than repressing one's feeling states.

Likewise, another great psychologist, Heinz Kohut, noted that just as children can develop under any kind of parenting style, so long as it is supported by empathy and mirroring, so too can clients thrive under differing therapeutic modalities, so long as the therapist is emotionally attuned and supportive.

What this means is that in choosing a therapist we should focus less on the style of therapy — DBT [Dialectical Behavior Therapy], CBT [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy], Acceptance Based Therapy, Depth, Attachment — than how emotionally we 'click' to the therapist: do we feel safe and encouraged to take risks and disclose secrets? Even the greatest therapist can be useless if they trigger us to feel guarded and unsafe. Look for a kind of mutual security, where both parties — therapist and client — can explore and grow.

So perhaps we need to redefine "retail therapy" into a therapy that deals with recovering from retail, rather than using retail as a substitute for dealing with the issues at hand. I think fashion designers have a lot to learn from these issues, that is, rather than fuelling the "fire" of consumerism designers could

EMANCIPAT^{ion} OF HUMANITY



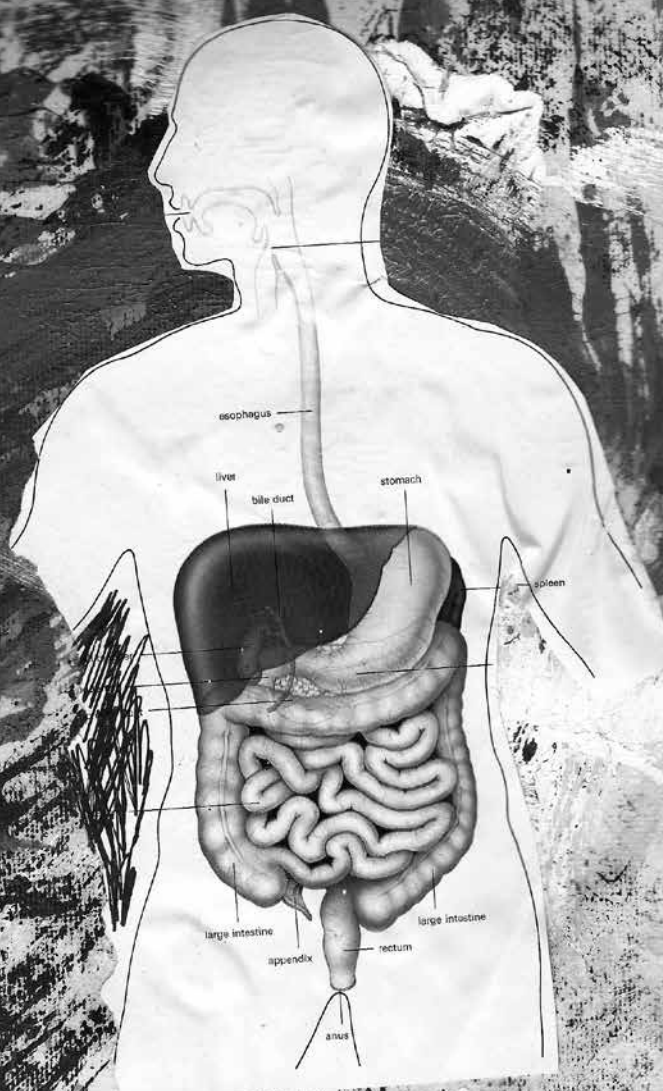
FREAKY Booty /
NINJA DYAD

ask what kind of therapy they can embody with their design and perhaps engage users in more substantial processes with their dressed self. Perhaps designers could think about how to help produce mutual security, where users feel safe to grow, rather than keep on arming fashionistas with new outfits in a perpetual style war?

So if we would generalize about shopping addiction or fashion, could you speculate about what would be a good way to start dealing with ones addiction to continually buying new clothes?

I would certainly suggest observing, without judgment, the internal experiences that occur right before and during the craving to shop. What do we feel in the body (which muscle groups are tense and contracted)? What emotional states are experienced (for example loneliness, anger, sadness, fear, excitement, confusion, self-doubt)? Does our attention and awareness feel small and contracted, or jumpy and anxious, or expansive? And the thoughts that urge us to shop, are they simply repetitive or demeaning, or grandiose, or fearful?

Addictions are attempts to regulate, or protect us from internal states; in essence we drink, snort, shoot up, binge on food, cut ourselves and shop to avoid feeling internal states, especially painful gut feelings. As we see how addiction is an attempt to distract or divert our attention from inner feelings, we can practice feeling and talking about those states, or we can develop more useful practices to alleviate our loneliness, sadness, etc. We can breath in a calming way, connect with supportive friends and disclose our discomfort,



"Before we can forgive one another, we have to understand one another."
— Emma Goldman



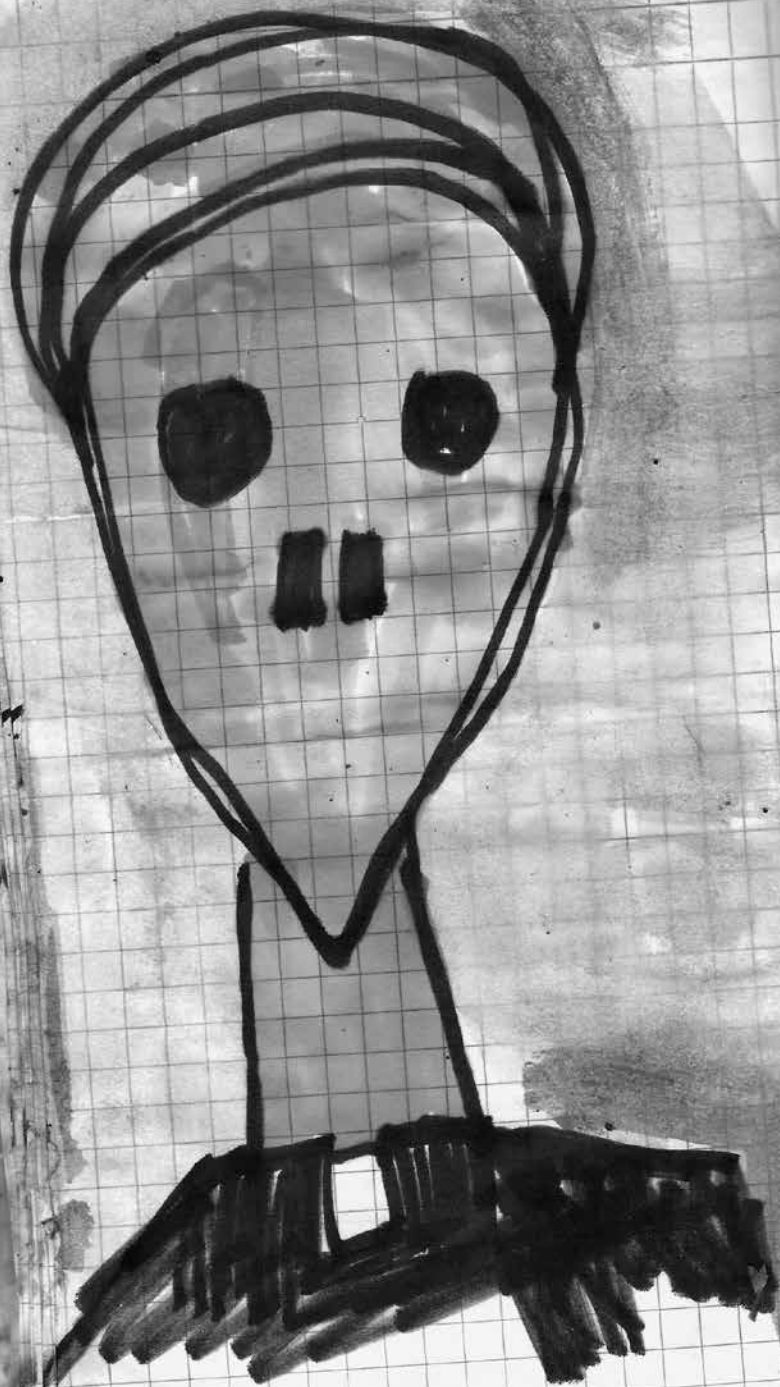
express feelings creatively and so forth. We can show the emotional mind that the rejections and abandonments which felt so intolerable in childhood, and thus necessary to avoid in the past, can now be tolerated. There's no way around feelings, we can only go through them.

EVEN EMPTINESS
IS EMPTY



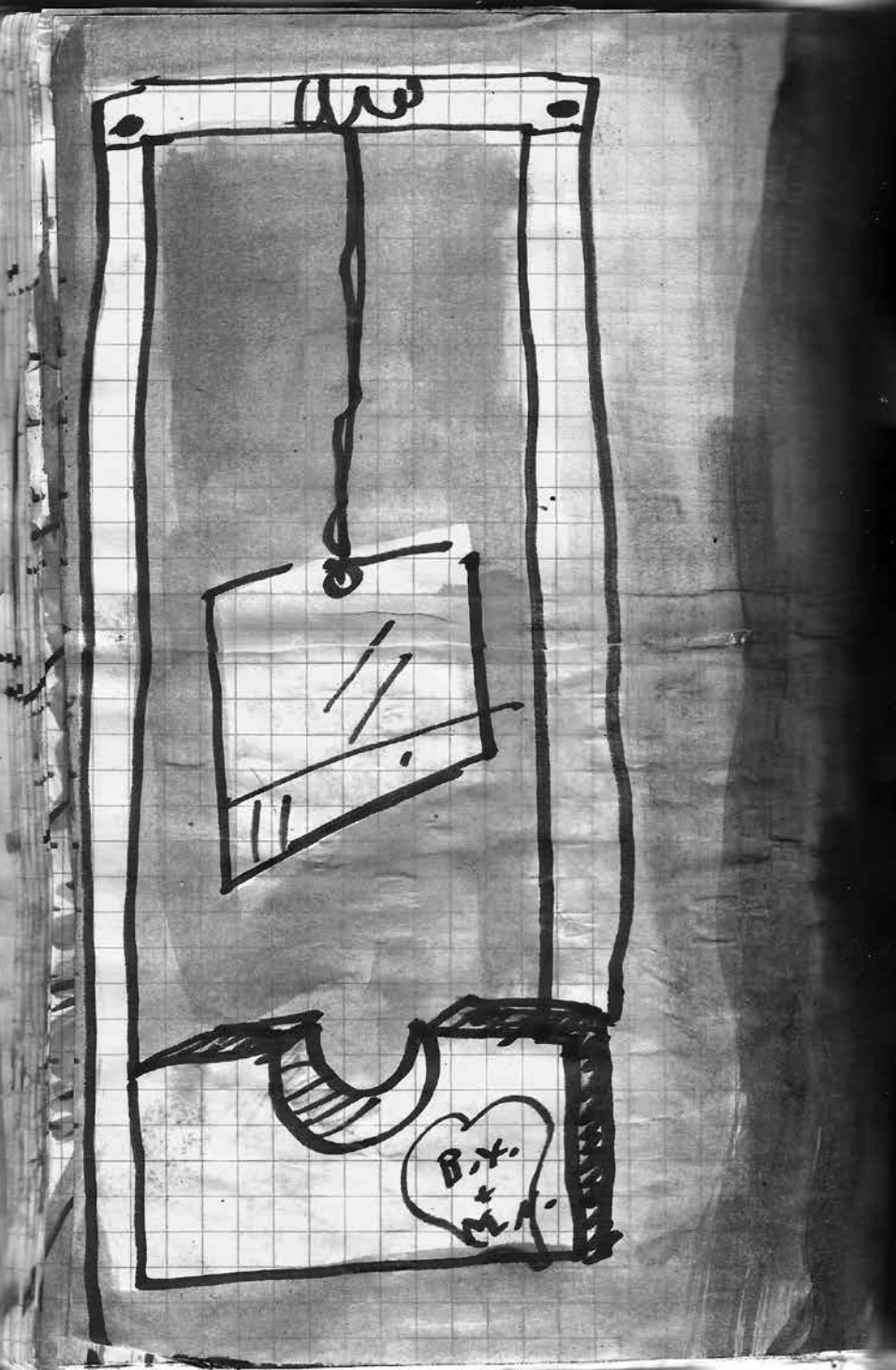
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Bios

Josh Korda has been the presiding teacher at Dharmapunx NYC since 2005, and his talks can be found at dharma-punxnyc.podbean.com. Over the last six years he has also taught retreats for the Against the Stream Buddhist lineage. Josh writes and has filmed a number of public service announcements for Viceland TV, which have been repeatedly aired, and he writes for a number of publications, including *Lion's Roar*, *Huffington Post* and *Tricycle Magazine*, the latter of which hosts on its website a documentary film about Josh's teaching, called "Against the stream." Josh mentors a wide array of spiritual practitioners; his meditations can be found on the popular mindfulness app insighttimer.



Otto von Busch is an artist and fashion designer, teaching Integrated Design at Parsons the New School for Design in New York. He holds a Ph.D. in design from the School of Design and Craft at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and was previously Professor of Textiles at Konstfack, Stockholm. In his work he explores how fashion can be acting as a form of civic engagement, building community capabilities through collaborative craft and social activism, and as a tool for social, personal and spiritual liberation. His projects on this subject can be found at selfpassage.org.

Jesse Bercowetz is an artist and a Buddhist chaplain intern who works with the chemically addicted, homeless, and the dying. His art work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, Mass MoCA and the New Museum, and featured in Artforum and the New York Times. Bercowetz is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a masters candidate at the New York Theological Seminary, and will be attending Harvard Divinity School in 2017. Bercowetz is currently living in a van in the Mohave Desert. See more at jessebercowetz.com



Josh Korda,
photo by Gianna Leo Falcon



Fashion is a form of allure, a seductive sexual rush
that also ensnares. Fashion demands craving.

We all feel the social pressure on our appearance.
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of cheap clothes, drawn into destructive cycles of
obsessive affirmation and compulsive shopping.

Can we recover from our aesthetic addiction?