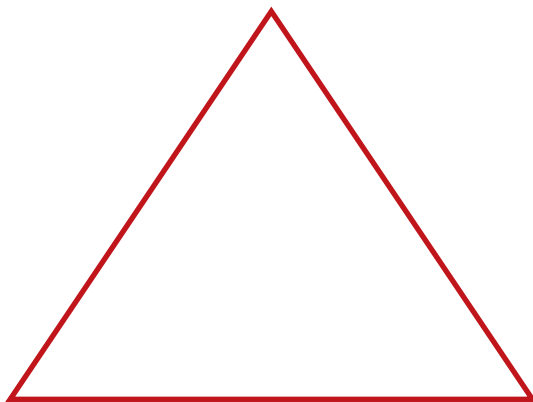

THE PASSION SYSTEM



or

Pascism:
The Fashion of Passionate Micro-Fascism

THE PASSION SYSTEM



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© copyleft 2012 / 2014
New York: SelfPassage
ISBN: 978-91-980388-0-4

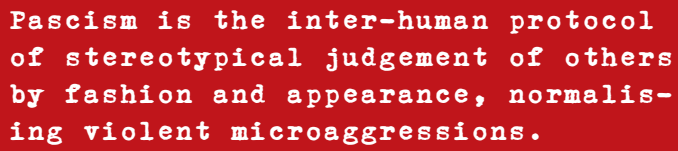



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**Pascism:
The Fashion of Passionate Micro-Fascism**







The Passion System is the fashion desiring machine. The system serves to make socially constructed differences and inequalities appear natural and even agreeable. Through the Passion System socially produced distinctions are dispersed throughout the social, permeating every meaning and relationship with the "laws of passion". We happily deem others by their looks, judge each other by visual currency, and spread the microaggressions of passicism as the new black. We strive upwards, but there is no more room at the top.



The fashion desiring machine is a distributed apparatus, a device that fragments the world, cuts the shared world apart into discrete parts, with every part reproducing another layer of manifested elitism, exclusion and micro-fascism. Yet, from a local perspective, each part may be seen as empowering, and thus effectively veiling the mechanics of systemic oppression enacted through the machine.

The desiring machine of fashion is a productive machine, it is a factory of affect, of passion, a social machine that sorts and compartmentalizes the social plasma into hierarchies of beauty, value, attention and all functions validate positional experiences according to wealth. Each discrete part of the machine is driven by an instance of a "will to fashion", the pleasurable experience of being seen, appreciated, adored, which most often in consumer society manifests itself in the experience of acquiring fashionable goods, incorporating these symbolic goods into a performed identity. Spinning on the wheels of the very human desire for imitating what we adore, fashion appears as a essential process of life in the liberal and socially meritocratic attention economy. Every part reproduces systemic and hierarchical desire as a passionate enactment of an individual "will to fashion."



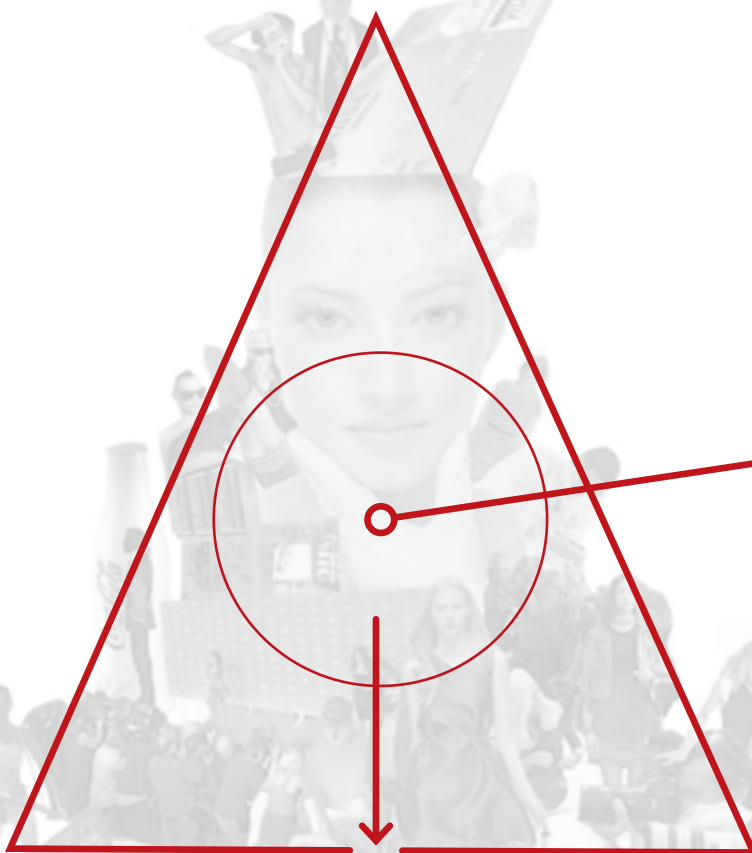
Every part also contains a reverse force of forgetting, where the functions of the device cut off every social bond and commitment beyond the commitment to the economy of fashion itself. No function has a window to the other, thus reproducing a multiverse of forgetfulness, a true oppressive machine of schizo-fetishes. Unable to see how the discrete parts interacts into a passionate micro-fascism, every participant in the machine experiences only empowerment, at the unseen costs experienced by others.

Thus everybody can keep on consuming without guilt: "Because I am worth it!"



Pascism is the pacification of our own capabilities where we passionately funnel all our desires through commodity culture.

A multitude of discrete devices, each fuelling a "will to fashion", the pleasurable experience of being seen, appreciated, adored; the self-gratification of acquiring fashionable goods, and incorporating these symbolic goods into a performed identity.



Elitism

In most social relationships two classes emerge: a class that rules and a class that is ruled. In every sphere of life rulers have attained superior qualities, inevitably dominating the weak by their esteem and influence. In the world of “democratic fashion”, style is propagated to be something that is accessible to all, but by the very logic of consumerism, style is a quality accessible only to those in power. The poor will have to make do with what they find. The game is always tilted in favour of the elite.

Passion

Passion (Latin: *patere*, “to suffer”) is an intense emotion, a burning excitement or desire for something. Compared to “lust” or “desire”, passion is fundamentally ephemeral and a craving with a mixture of pain or suffering. One is a slave to passion, submissive and a victim to its force. Passion is the force of romanticism, more powerful and dynamic than reason, but also uncontrollable. It is an emotion that enslaves.

Aesthetic automation is the labour process of beauty and popularity. To be part of fashion means to turn oneself into an attractive "package" and a beauty commodity on the social market. The fierce competition on this market merits submission to the standards of beauty. This in turn reduces subjective agency, increases dependence on the system itself, and makes the fashion user not only accept, but also desire domination.



Credit

Our desires are limitless and we are encouraged to fulfil them, buying into the current zeitgeist and pay later. Credit cards give the impression that we can afford the same goods as the people above us. We can afford our dreams now, but pay later, like a Faust of fashion. But with interest we pay a much higher price than those above us, and on a larger scale this mechanism make the poor pay more for a lifestyle the glamorous get at a discount.



The photo and mirror

We take the photograph to be a true representation of ourselves, rather than our inner life. Ever since we are babies we are fascinated by our reflection in the mirror and we grow to trust it as a more truthful depiction of ourselves than our smell or voice, or skills, fantasies and creativity. The social competition for outer representation is easy to exploit. We are all too happy to get advice from others; a social drive the whole fashion industry is fuelled by. We learn early in life that the image has a price, and we are all willing to pay whatever the cost for an image in the mirror looking more like the ones we admire.

Fashion seems to be offered to the majority, but is only available to a minority. Goods may appear accessible, but the social positions they represent are still exclusive. Tension and frustration is lived out through malevolent microaggressions extorted downwards. This is pascism.



Iconic designers

We look fashionable by dressing like everyone else, but before everyone else, and designers are there to help us be “the ones we can be”. They willingly offer to support our desire, selling their services materialised as commodities. In their new skins we get a temporary surge of status, but only as long as they last in the ephemeral system. But even the most desirable robes lose their appeal and a once daring outfit becomes everyday attire. New commodities are offered us, but we never have the possibility to cultivate the capabilities for autonomy. We become ourselves by being someone else.



Cosmetics

With cosmetics an artificially enhanced look becomes our natural self-image, the zero-degree normality. This triggers not only a ruptured self-esteem, but also an arms race of appearance, happily supported by the industry. Odour and blemishes are not only undesired, but also unnatural. Likewise, what was before medical modifications for function become obligatory adjustments, like dental braces which are now needed for any natural smile. Cosmetic surgery and image manipulation is the new normal.

We judge ourselves and other with wild enthusiasm, using standards we know we cannot live up to.



Make-overs

The whole system is based on our bad self-esteem, and the aim is to make us feel even more dissatisfied. But there is hope, as we can always be remade. If not our bodies, at least our wardrobe. We can always strive for another, even better, transformation, but we have to pay the price.

Attainable adoration

One of the main myths of fashion is that it is a mode for attainable fame, open for everyone. In the media hype, in “reality” shows and blogs, it seems anyone can make it. But a closer look reveals most of those who are “discovered” come from privileged backgrounds, or have paid a high price for their stardom. Just have a quick look at the mainstream fashion blogs, a format that should ostensibly challenge the industry: it rather reinforces ideals of beauty, consumption and class, rather than confronts fashion normatively. The more accessible fashion goods becomes, the more violence is added to keep the distinctions intact.



Processes of perfection

Already in our childhood we want to be as beautiful or popular as our idols, and we imitate the desire of others. The most popular toy is that which every other kid wants. We imitate the desire of those we admire. This endless processed towards perfection is the force behind fashion, it is the surging energy powering up the passion throughout the machine.

Aesthetic Competition

By being shallow and only a matter of looks, fashion hides its executing force in reproducing social hierarchies by tilted competitions. The contest for popularity, status and recognition binds participants closer to the fashion system which exerts coercion and fuels the fire to keep up the game. The competitive lifestyle categories, with their symbolic properties, are effectively controlled by the image industry and you can only access them on the terms of the business. If you are not up-to-date you have no prestige, you will fall behind, and ultimately become superfluous to the fashion economy: you will become a nobody.



The mall

The mall manifests consumerism as the standard form of everyday experience; the nexus of everyday meaning through our purchase of entertainment. For most of us, these acts and consumer choices may be the last meaningful activities we have. As the mall grows to not only sell stuff, but merges into full entertainment complexes, we can look forward to spend all our hard-earned “quality time” there, making sure our free time comes at a high cost.

Strata of Style

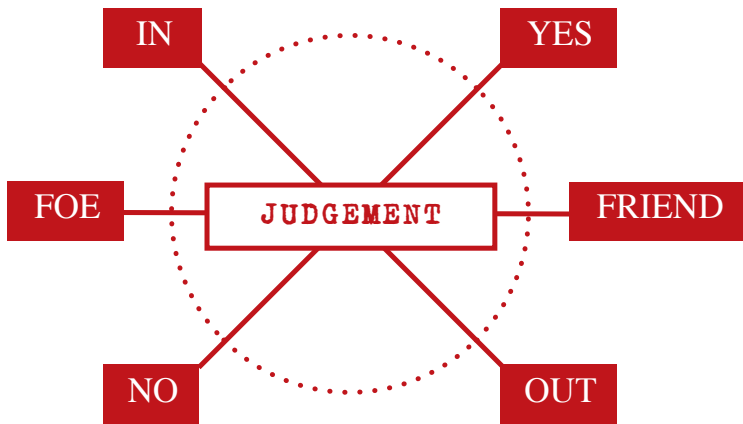
The realm of fashion is a ritualised caste system. With its social stratification, it controls social behaviours, habits, and the consumption of lifestyle and everyday life. Thus its hierarchisation also controls lifestyle factions and communities, and in the end, reproducing stable and endogamic mating practices, making sure social conflicts are effectively hidden inert he veil of “consumer freedom”.

With fast fashion comes social congestion, as more people have access to positional goods and try to move upwards. As with congested roads, the social infrastructure cannot keep up with the flood. The system freezes in a violent social gridlock.



Fashion Bloggers

Copy-pasting images creates a feeling of agency and participation, as if one is part of the industry. Thus fashion blogging is a popular type of unpaid labour for the industry. “I love to express my style” is the passion the system thrives on. With images and updates on their latest desires, bloggers push their passionate opinions out in the ether, making everyone else’s desires appear outdated. Bloggers are sometimes even celebrated by some established brands, but bloggers are still always at the mercy of the industry.



Fashion has affect; it demands to be evaluated. Judgements about taste and style are inherent into dress itself. Fashion provokes an answer; in or out, right or wrong, yes or no, friend or foe; guilty or not-guilty.

VIP borders

We love to judge others, draw borders with us on the inside and others on the outside. The sustainment of these borders intensifies the competition and we come to accept the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion as something given and natural. An invitation to a glamorous party makes us feel special, as we come closer to the ones we admire. Such experiences fuel our passion and willingness to work and spend more in exchange for access and exposure.



"One day you're in, and the next day you're out"

(Heidi Klum)



Harassment

Fashion is about the distinction between new and old, in and out. Defining something as "in" automatically pushes something out. This logic makes it perfectly normal to judge others by what they wear; it is even part of the passion. As fast fashion is so accessible the wearer is to blame for his or her bad consumer choices. If I consume "because I'm worth it", then I can without guilt bully someone else who does not keep up with my standard. If I am worth something special, then someone else is definitely not worth anything.

The will to fashion is the desire for adoration and popularity. It is the desire to be desired. Acting at the intersection of the Spinozian "conatus," the Freudian "pleasure principle," and the "will to power" of Nietzsche, it is the conquering force of passion.



Paparazzi photography

By documenting the ordinariness of celebrities, paparazzi simultaneously expose how unglamorous we are, as we never look as good as the stars can do in their arranged and retouched studio shots. When they "reveal" the ordinary life of the beautiful they thus make everybody feel worse. Luckily enough though, we can buy the products the stars advertise, and thus attain some of their glamour. We can spend more to look like them. "Because we're worth it."

Supremal aggregation

Fashion is a headless system. Nobody is in control. Every part strives upwards by kicking downwards. In isolation they may seem docile, but in a molar assemblage they form a killing loop. As all functions aggregate into an oppressive hierarchy, colonizing and territorializing all forces of consciousness, the passionate fire burns that hands that feed it.

The passion system is a machine propelling other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections: a perpetuum mobile. Fashion continually reproduces the ideal of beauty, and the body is a machine producing its self-esteem through the ideals of fashion.

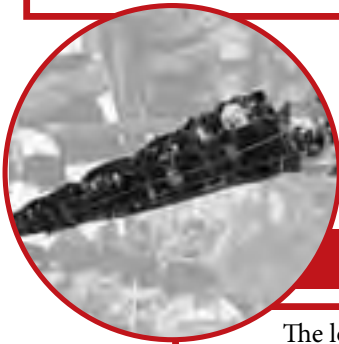
Commodity collaborations

Everyday commodities are turned glamorous by big-name collaborations, infusing a little genius into the design of the everyday. We feel as if we have a little design agency, even as we pick a soft-drink. Under the daily influence of hundreds such micro-choices we feel as if we are free, even though we have no say in any of the decisions of what is being offered to us.



Vulgar vogue

Vulgar vogue is the shallow style of the poor and marginalised. It is the trashy look of victims, a look of stigmatization for those who cannot fully engage in the rich articulation of exquisite appearances. Some may occasionally try to use it as a subcultural style, an “authentic” statement, but this gesture cannot vindicate the full corruption of the system.



The queues of consumption

The long queues were a spiteful image of the former soviet economy. Paradoxically, also consumerism celebrates the queue. With limited editions and haute collaborations cheap brands offer exclusive goods to the masses. It furthers the faith to the loyal consumers that their devotion will be rewarded: if they just wait, consume, and follow the trends, their turn to fame will come. But in fashion there is no price for compliancy or cowardice.

Serfdom of Style

The ruling class within fashion exploits the labour of sweatshop labourers and interns. Also the design process is derived from capitalising expressions from the subcultures or adding “authenticity” by appropriating the cultural heritage of marginalised groups. By expropriating every emerging difference, fashion capitalises on every potential defiance of its creeds, making it the “new difference”. Like the serfs, none of the true labourers of fashion have any rights against the lord. Not every serf is a slave, but all are victims.

"I'm kind of fascist with myself, you know. There's no discussion. There is an order. You follow it."

(Karl Lagerfeld)



Institutionalised rebellion

Rebellion is an integrated part of fashion. The very act of insurgency creates highly desired difference and allures at least a minimal trace of individuality, or commitment to a cause beyond consumption. Every small trace of imagined difference or passionate polarity fuels the machine.

Fashion supremacy

Fashion supremacy is a system of sociopolitical domination, both in the form of formal (de jure), as in rules and regulations, or informal (de facto), in sizing, placing of stores etc. The domination is characterized by exploitation and the denial of equal opportunities for those considered ugly, poor or unwanted. It is a form of social sanitization that keeps elites exclusive and it serves to justify domination: because only the rich are worth it.



Democratisation of fashion

Over the last decades, cheap and fast changing fashion has proliferated and spread pascism to every corner of the global market. We stand in line to be included, updating our wardrobes so often we need walk-in-wardrobes. We fight each other to access the sample sales just like we struggle for invitations to the chic clubs. Yet we only get our hands on the leftovers, diffusion lines or cheap copies. As we are now “included”, we all work for the fashion companies, helping to spread their ads on social media, updating our blogs about our latest buys, adding exposure to their goods. Identity itself has turned into a labour and commodity, sold over social media markets. We just seem to have forgotten that democracy should be much more than “voting with our dollars”.

The thoughtlessness inherent in fashion is part of a systemic ignorance. The elitist norms of fashion judgment function as to work against systemic cognition. We are led to believe fashion could be for anyone, what "anyone can make it", while it is explicitly a category of exclusion. As a system of domination fashion also disseminates the standards of judgment unfairly. The socially privileged learn to own their world, which by its very definition accommodates injustice. The epistemic ignorance in fashion is so presupposed that a thoughtful fashion almost seems like an oxymoron. Yet domination is so prevalent in fashion it is resistant to elimination.



The colonial order

The production of fashion has a long history of enslavement of colonial subjects, in cotton fields, off-shore sweatshops, domestic migrant labour, or unpaid interns on temporary visas. The white designers exploit, subjugate and dominate not only labourers, but now also conquer the emerging economies with a beauty steeped in blood.

The back of fashion is never seen. Fashion journalism does not exist. Where journalism is about speaking truth to power, fashion journalism is unabashed propaganda. The people in the cotton fields, in the sweatshops, or the bullied, are not voiceless, they are systematically silenced and deliberately disdained. In the glamour and glitz, the truth is preferably ignored.

Production

The working conditions in the textile industries are full of exploitation and abuse, pushing the consequences of pascism further down the system to those excluded from the goods they produce. There are calls for “sustainable” practices in fashion but they have so far not been able to address the inherent power relations and injustices of the system.



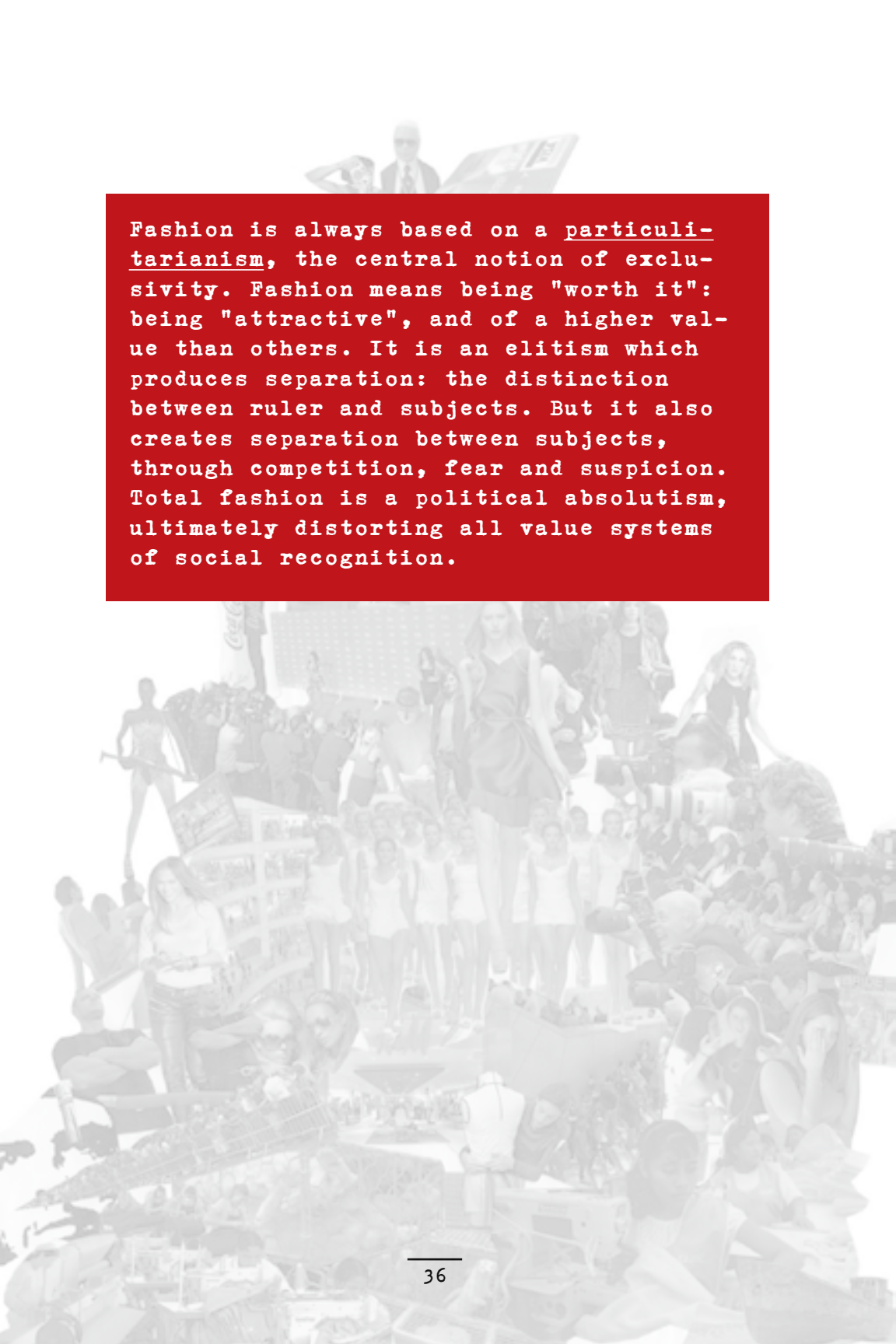
Fear is total as no one knows who will be the next victim. everything may be putatively fated by evolution to disappear, to be superfluous, no matter how compliant they are. It is a being that accepts its own expendability. Everyone is superfluous, bereft of any recognisable human qualities except their economic value.



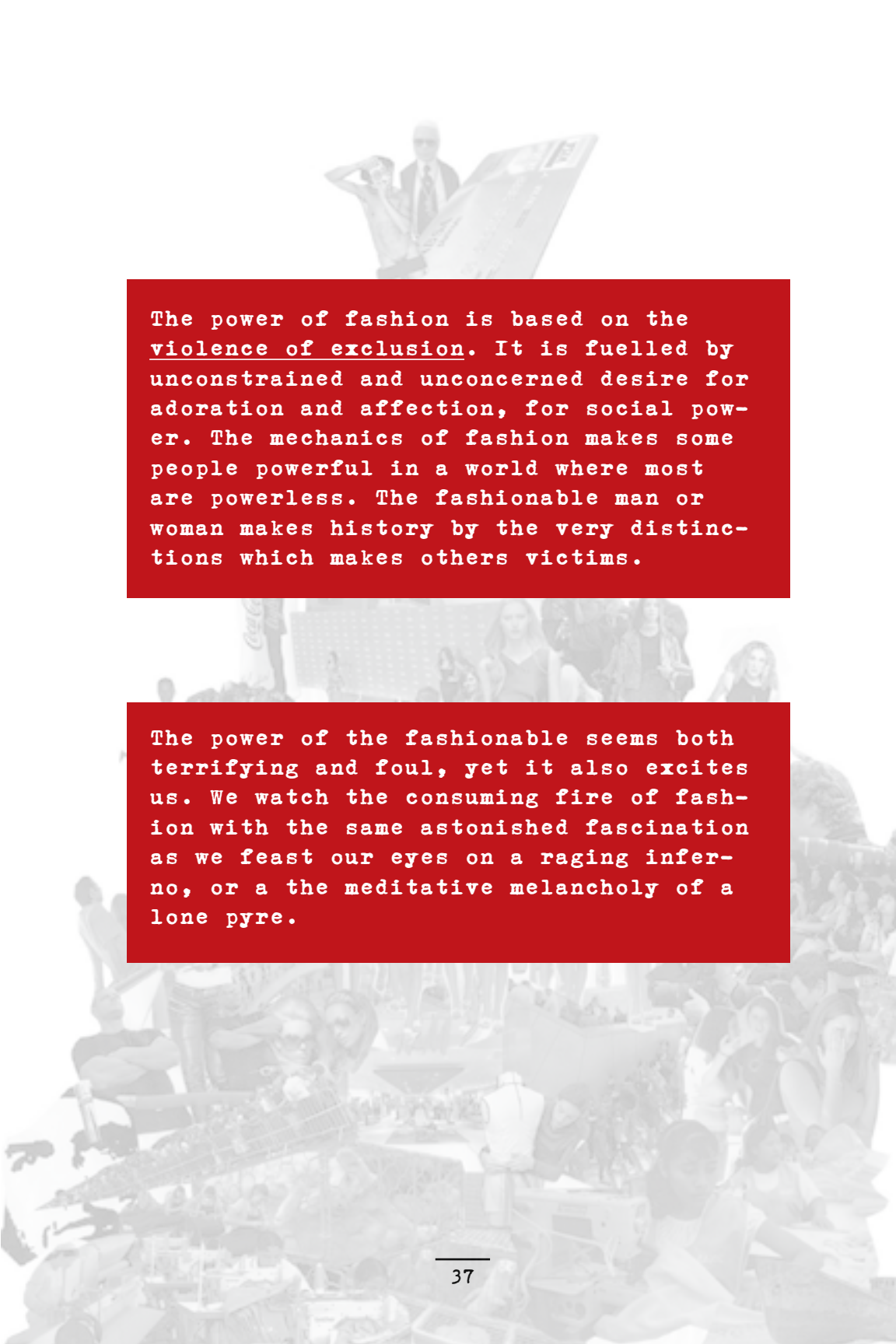
Fashion School

The fashion industry has always profited from underpaid labour. Today fashion school interns play a central part in the industry as highly educated but unpaid interns. They work on precarious visas and for free, or even pay for “experience”. And as every student has a “passion for fashion” and loves her job, why not work for free for the system?

No human worth exists which is based on reflection or spontaneity. Every person, every thing, is always redundant. Always at risk of disappearing without a trace.



Fashion is always based on a particularism, the central notion of exclusivity. Fashion means being "worth it": being "attractive", and of a higher value than others. It is an elitism which produces separation: the distinction between ruler and subjects. But it also creates separation between subjects, through competition, fear and suspicion. Total fashion is a political absolutism, ultimately distorting all value systems of social recognition.



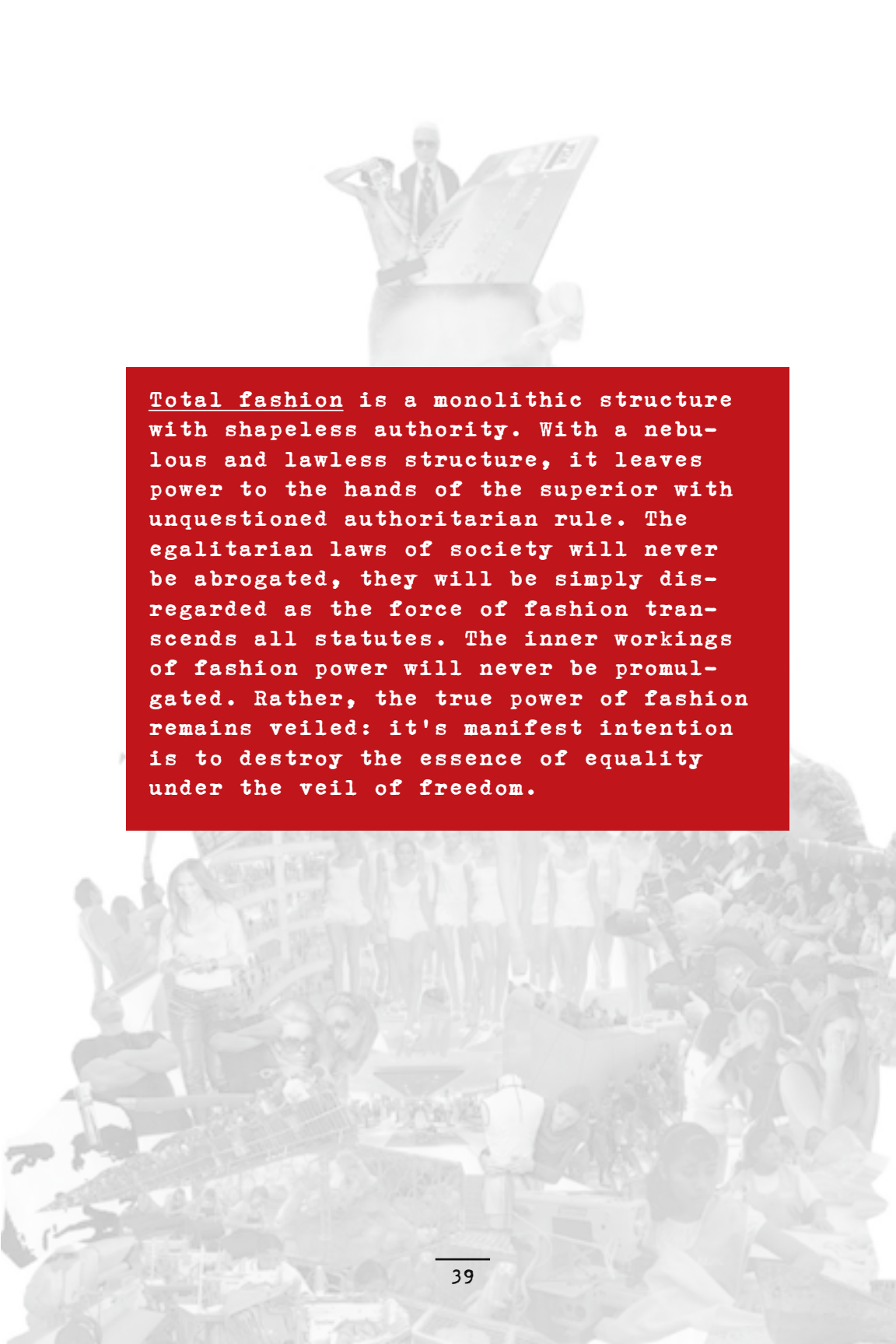
The power of fashion is based on the violence of exclusion. It is fuelled by unconstrained and unconcerned desire for adoration and affection, for social power. The mechanics of fashion makes some people powerful in a world where most are powerless. The fashionable man or woman makes history by the very distinctions which makes others victims.

The power of the fashionable seems both terrifying and foul, yet it also excites us. We watch the consuming fire of fashion with the same astonished fascination as we feast our eyes on a raging inferno, or a the meditative melancholy of a lone pyre.



Fashion is a an expression of total political messianism, always representing the arrival of a new order. Every new order promises a potential for political upheaval, yet is by its very nature homogenous. Every new style seems anti-establishment and egalitarian, yet is always supervised by the aesthetic vanguard able to divine the general will of communal desire: the fashionable elite. Behind the politics of the totalitarian fashion lies another form of Realpolitik: the continuous reproduction of another elitist reality.





Total fashion is a monolithic structure with shapeless authority. With a nebulous and lawless structure, it leaves power to the hands of the superior with unquestioned authoritarian rule. The egalitarian laws of society will never be abrogated, they will be simply disregarded as the force of fashion transcends all statutes. The inner workings of fashion power will never be promulgated. Rather, the true power of fashion remains veiled: it's manifest intention is to destroy the essence of equality under the veil of freedom.









"I'm a passionate micro-fascist."

"Because I'm worth it!"

"Because I'm worth it!"

"and you're not!"

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