

#YOUR CHOICE MATTERS



Ecoalf

Fashion protects, fashion adorns, fashion is a statement. It is an expression of an individual or collective attitude to life, the reaction to a social status quo. And especially in times of upheaval and radical change, such as we are experiencing at the moment, fashion is increasingly becoming the bearer of messages. The constant deluge of stimulation from viral media has catapulted us, both conceptually and structurally, into the age of 'anything goes'.

TEXT SILKE BÜCKER

Fashion has become genderless, models are reflecting the stereotype of reality, classic beauty has served its time. Unconventional looks and nerdiness are now sexy. Diversity is the name of the game. Even some fashion shows are mutating into an excessive caricature of society – especially those of *Vetements* or *Gucci*, two of the most pioneering brands right now. Designers are countering this one-dimensionality and redundancy of trends with a cornucopia of styles, crass combinations, a wide variety of references, overstated silhouettes, innovative patchworks, pattern mixes and material blends: couture and streetwear, baroque and sixties, fur and denim, lime green and bright purple – there's no right or wrong when it comes to mixing and matching. "I think that fashion, for a long time, has been in prison. I think, that without freedom, with rules, it's impossible to create a new story," is how *Gucci*'s Alessandro Michele sums up the maxims of this boundless freedom.

SLOW DOWN

Creative anarchy? Definitely. After all, we need self-assured inspiration and provocative boundaries in order to prevent fashion from losing itself in banality and uniformity for the sake of commercialism – only to propagate the latest trends. Just as Li Edelkoort warned in her 'Fashion is dead' manifesto in 2015: fashion is experiencing devaluation across the board; speed and the quest for profit have killed all creativity and fashion is at risk of descending into insignificance and losing its function as social commentary. Ever since brands like *Vetements*, *Sacai*, *Marni* and *Balenciaga* started to ascribe to avant-garde principles à la Martin Margiela or *Comme des Garçons*, commercialisation has, to a certain extent, taken a change in direction – but in a good way. On the catwalks recently, we have once again been seeing compact collections with a strong vision and idea behind them – and are of the highest quality, both aesthetically and in terms of their workmanship. And just as the luxury industry has always had a 'lighthouse' role when it comes to the evolution of design, material and workmanship, it is now being called upon to be a shining example as far as ethical, social and environmentally relevant standards are concerned. Especially as the very meaning of the word 'sustainability' encapsulates all values that are inherent to the concept of luxury: durability, quality, reflection, expertise, time. A quick profit and record turnovers should no longer be the chief driving force. Especially not at the expense of the demand summed up so succinctly by the Huffington Post: "We don't need sustainable collections. We need a sustainable fashion industry." "Sustainability should no longer be an added bonus. It needs to become

a matter of course. After all, there is no planet B," emphasises Thimo Schwenzfeier, Show Director of Neonyt, the brandnew name under which the two green Berlin tradeshows Green-showroom and Ethical Fashion Show will be merged in the future, forming an international hub for sustainability, innovation and fashion. "Sustainability in fashion has developed from a 'nice-to-have' extra, to a synonym for innovation and progress," he continues. "And that's what they want to confidently reflect with the new format." The challenges of a fundamental revolutionary process should be seen as an opportunity.

RETHINK

We shouldn't forget that the fashion industry – aside from the oil industry – is currently the largest polluter in the world. It is responsible for an absolute oversupply, with labels producing up to 24 collections per year. And the result? In Germany alone, every year more than a million tonnes of textiles are ending up in clothing donation bins or simply in the household rubbish. And also in view of catastrophes like in Pakistan or Bangladesh, the alarming news of inhumane conditions in production facilities or the pollution of the world's oceans, there is no alternative but a radical rethink. Sustainability has to become the common aim of a positively unfettered industry. But of course the basic tenets laid down during the heyday of industrialisation, which have been taken to the extreme during globalisation and digitalisation, are hard to just sweep away and replace by new structures and systems. Making radical changes to the fashion apparatus means tackling milestones like environmental protection, sourcing, process optimisation, logistics and supply chain transparency with competent and future-proof solutions. And these, in turn, may mean restrictions in the design, doing without profits and a clear, supportive commitment by everyone to the 'less is more' way of thinking. And these all need to be supported by politically adequate and realistic parameters.

If you take a bird's eye view of the industry, almost every company at the moment seems to be making an effort to provide 'more sustainability' in its different forms of expression. From the use of good old organic cotton to the emphasis of hand-craftsmanship and tradition down to taking back used clothes for recycling. For now, this is a good thing as it shows an overall awareness of the issue, a sort of awakening. But it's often hard to tell whether their attempts constitute consistent change or a half-hearted marketing ploy. "One first step towards steering the fashion industry in a more sustainable direction would be a national standard developed jointly by politics and the industry," suggests Mandie Bienek, whose PR agency Press Factory repre-



Lanius

tors of the big fashion houses are often responsible for up to eight collections and more each year. For visionary and agent of change Raf Simons, this was reason enough to turn his back on the house of Christian Dior in 2015. His reasoning: he didn't have sufficient time to really create anything substantial.

The fact that nobody needs such an excess supply of fashion is shown by alarming statistics, like those of a Greenpeace study which discovered that around 5.2 billion items of clothing are hanging in German wardrobes, 40% of which are very rarely or never worn. With online platforms like Kleiderkreisel, Vestiaire Collective and Rebelle, the possibilities of selling fashion on have become much more varied and are at least keeping textiles in circulation – but at the same time they are also reinforcing the concept of rampant excess. As well as unfortunately underscoring the assumption that fashion, as predicted by Li Edelkoort, is no longer valued.

Vestiaire Collective, for example, sells second-hand designer pieces. 'Preloved fashion' is the marketing term for it, a title that takes on an ironic slant when you enter a brand like *Louis Vuitton* into the search box and are presented with a total of 202,549 items, an estimated 75% of which are new, or as good as new. With principles aimed at instant desirability such as 'see now – buy now', an attempt by the leading luxury brands to take the wind out of the sales of high street copycats, the idea has run away with itself and become more or less futile.

CREATE A STORY

At the other end of the scale is the boom of fast fashion. Here, trend expertise and speed are responses to the thoughtless lust for shopping – spurred on in particular by the flood of images on social media and influencers as the new brand ambassadors. Industry giants like Inditex or the H&M Group are spewing out new sub-brands at what seems like almost every six months – after *Arket* and *Nyden*, *H&M* has now come up with *Afound* – an off-season concept focusing on discounted designer clothing and interior accessories.

And just as blatantly as the 'live slow, die old' lifestyle is celebrated, especially in an urban context, 'Generation Instagram' hysterically falls for pretty much every consumer recommendation of their digital role models without giving it a second thought. But on the other hand, the growing influence of these role models can also provide valuable inspiration and motivation – if you follow people with a genuine message. Just like the fashion enthusiast Sinéad Burke, who is calling for fashion for marginalised minorities with a different physical aesthetic, or Lauren

sents high-end green brands like *Philomena Zanetti* and *Ecoalf*. A route that Belgian designer Bruno Pieters has already taken to its ultimate destination without having to resort to higher authorities. With his label *Honest by*, he has been setting an exemplary standard since 2012 – first online and meanwhile also in his bricks-and-mortar stores. And this means absolute transparency in all the steps it takes to produce an item of clothing – he even reveals the brand's profit margins to customers

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Dieter Rams

Singer, who is showing us how a zero-waste culture can be established in all areas of life with her blog 'Trash is for Tossers'. Above all, the heterogeneity of the social scenario in its ever-changing new dimensions is showing us one thing: that there is no panacea. A differentiated and individual approach, ongoing education, the introduction of a uniform independent sustainability standard and manufacturers and brand ambassadors who use their emancipatory influence responsibly are all essential solutions that will lead the way in the right direction. In Germany, the market share of sustainable fashion is currently estimated as still being under one percent. Reliable predictions based on specific figures or growth rates are not available. But the experts are unanimous that sustainable fashion is a growth market. Thimo Schwenzfeier confidently estimates that

the market share will increase annually in the mid to higher single-digit range: "I strongly believe that by focusing on sustainable fashion with a suitable story behind it, bricks-and-mortar retailers will be in a position to face up to the competition from the big shopping and outlet centres, as well as from e-commerce. If a retailer knows their customers and advises them well, they will have the best chances of building up and expanding their business with sustainable fashion in the future."

GO AHEAD

Contributing to the green boom is a growing generation of designers and labels, for whom a careful, resource-efficient and humane philosophy is a matter of course from the outset. Often these protagonists are part of Generation Y, the generation born between the late eighties and the early noughties. Regardless of established structures or traditions, they are going their own way and setting the benchmark for a new set of values that will hopefully be passed on by future generations: these days, younger people value experiences over owning things; the culture of the sharing economy and hand-me-downs has become a standard in our urban life. Clothing is increasingly being sold, swapped or even lent, while vintage and artisan production is experiencing a real renaissance. This is also being observed by the spokesperson for Cologne label *Lanius*, Katharina Ley: "Generation Y is learning a new awareness of reflected and sustainable consumption, while in the older generation a sense of values is still deep-seated."

And the omnipresent handmade and DIY hype is, above all, one thing: an anti-concept against digitalisation, which in its

sterility, speed and perfection is increasing our desire for haptic experiences and feelings. This becomes all the more evident when you think about the fact that people touch the surface of their smartphones an average of around 1,276 times a day. Feel-good, with the emphasis on feel, is achieving a new status. And that is inextricably linked to the origin and texture of the textiles we wear on our skin.

Slowing down as both a creative claim and an incentive – just like *Working Title* from Berlin who offer timeless, high-quality clothing for a life that is sophisticated and desirable. "Our mission is to design clothing that is comfortable, natural and protective and accompanies the wearer for a long time," is how Antonia Goy and Björn Kubeja sum up the growing need of an affluent elite for 'sustainable luxury'.

Philomena Zanetti follows a similar credo: even during the design process, Julia P. Leifert, the brains behind the label, "aims to design unique items of clothing that are wearable over many seasons and for different occasions". The sustainability claim is accompanying important aspects of creation and production, and discreetly taking its place behind the design. The label *ZueAnna* is a beacon of minimalism and a slower pace, each season offering just one merino sweater model for men and one for ladies, which only varies in its silhouette and choice of colour. Designer Zsuzsanna Csébes is making a statement for an animal-friendly fashion industry. With 'Slow Shearing' she is setting a global benchmark. The production process of the sweater can be followed step by step on the website, going as far as a virtual date with the sheep.

And brands with a significantly bigger reach like *Stella McCartney*, *Edun*, *Everlane*, *The Reformation*, *Armedangels*, *Lanius*, *Patagonia*, *Nudie Jeans* and *Veja* have made the leap out of the eco niche with a confident, refreshingly new eco style statement, backed by a clear commitment to responsibility for our planet's resources – and the willingness to venture down alternative paths. So the subject of sourcing, the procurement of sustainable materials that suit the design, is a challenge that should be seen as an opportunity to create something of real value: with Tyvek, fashion label *Luuxa*, for example, has developed a fibre similar to paper, which can be recycled up to five times. *Ecoalf* from Spain is taking fashion made of recycled materials to a whole new level. To source the high-quality raw materials, the Spanish company works with an international network and is freeing our oceans from plastic waste. 250 boats bring a total of 1.3 tonnes of sea debris on shore for *Ecoalf* every day. And the fishermen of Spain are also getting involved by bringing their old nets to the brand's collection points instead of throwing them into the sea. The range of options these days includes sustainably produced silk, which is (for now) more expensive than conventional silk. And, as an alternative, Tencel is used in the commercial segment. Or Lenzing viscose, which is made from the cellulose that comes from tree trimmings. Another option is also Seacell, which comes from seaweed, and, when worn, has health-boosting and rejuvenating effects on the skin. And there are set to be even more alternatives added to the list of sustainable materials in the future.

DEMAND DICTATES SUPPLY

On a guided tour of his own 'Inspirations' retrospective at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 2014, when seeing a lavish sequin dress from one of his collections, designer Dries van Noten said: "How exactly do the people who buy a sequin dress from *H&M* for €19.90 think that the sequins got on the dress?" Exactly: they are sewn on by hand.

An appreciation of textiles and all those who contribute to them being turned into garments needs to form the basis of a mentality of collective importance. Through their decisions it's the consumer who has the biggest responsibility. After all, the basic rule of modern economy is simply 'demand dictates supply'. The key approach to a rethink is best described by Bruno Pieters: "The person with the most power when it comes to changing the textile industry is the customer. The day we all start caring, as consumers, about sustainability, transparency and the continuation of the human race on this planet, everything will change."



Philomena Zanetti

MIKE MEYER