

The Future of Fashion is Now

A garment that responds to emotions, lace patterns that grow from a plant, textile that decomposes itself and fashion that literally zips people together... With a critical look at today's fashion industry, more than fifty young designers and a number of illustrious innovators such as Viktor&Rolf and Comme des Garçons give us their vision of the fashion of tomorrow.

The development of new technologies and a grasp of the importance of sustainability are what is driving young designers worldwide and causing them to expand the borders of the traditional fashion system. With their innovative solutions and fresh designs, this latest generation of fashion designers has arrived at the interface between fashion and art.

At the invitation of Han Nefkens Fashion on the Edge, and scouted by fashion experts from around the world, six designers have each produced a new work especially for the exhibition *The Future of Fashion is Now*: Iris van Herpen (the Netherlands), Digest Design Workshop (China), Lucía Cuba (Peru), Craig Green (Great Britain), D&K (Australia) and Olek (Poland/the United States).

This book not only provides an overview of the work by the more than fifty designers being shown at the exhibition, but it also traces the development of and ideas behind the exhibition's special works.

Anrealage Kunihiro Morinaga / Boundless Zhang Da / Christoph Broich / Tania Candiani / Hussein Chalayan / Si Chan / Movana Chen / Carole Collet / Comme des Garçons Rei Kawakubo / Christophe Coppens / Lucía Cuba / D&K Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios / Birgit Dieker / Digest Design Workshop Dooling Jiang / Pauline van Dongen / Jennifer Gadiant / Phyllis Galembo / Ying Gao / Craig Green / Imme van der Haak / Hassan Hajjaj / Helen Storey Foundation Helen Storey / Iris van Herpen / Pia Interlandi / Eunjeong Jeon / Forrest Jessee / Elisa van Joolen / Hefin Jones /

Mason Jung / Jacob Kok / Julia Krantz / Alike van der Kruijs / Victoria Ledig / Wang Lei / Little Shilpa Shilpa Chavan / Maison Martin Margiela Martin Margiela / minä perhonen Akira Minagawa / Jef Montes / Jum Nakao / Olek Agata Oleksiak / Lucy + Jorge Orta / Minna Palmqvist / mintdesigns Hokuto Katsui and Nao Yagi / Nuages Gris Jeroen Teunissen and Dorith Sgardijn / Antoine Peters / Rejina Pyo / Pyuupiru / Ana Rajcevic / Sruli Recht / Shao Yen Shao Yen Chen / Irina Shaposhnikova / Slow and Steady Wins the Race Mary Ping / Lara Torres / Adele Varcoe / Viktor&Rolf / Lilia Yip



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Foreword

Fashion has undergone a profound change. All over the world, a new generation of idealistic and socially engaged designers are viewing society and the fashion system with a critical eye. Inspired by leading innovators, a symbiotic and sustainable image of fashion has emerged in which life is consciously expressed in terms of a new fashion identity. This is fashion that is personal, oriented towards society and the community, socially conscious and made with the new materials and techniques of our age. Fashion that communicates. Fashion for our time.

It's a time of exponential population growth, globalisation, climate change, the repositioning of West and East, the redistribution of raw materials and spheres of influence and the collision of ideologies. Conflicts arise in which the individual always gets short shrift. It's a time that is inciting young designers to innovate and to redefine what fashion is. Fashion as a global social plea for freedom, opportunity, self-development and engagement. Fashion against the system.

Five years after *The Art of Fashion*, which featured fashion that borders on the visual arts, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen is once again taking stock. Like five years ago, both the exhibition and the book offer detailed insight into what is going on internationally in the fashion laboratories, in the designer studios. *The Future of Fashion is Now* is an exhibition based on the knowledge of a company of eminent fashion authorities and fashion scholars from around the world who have shared their most up-to-date information with us.

I would like to thank the writer, art activist and patron Han Nefkens, whose Han Nefkens Fashion on the Edge initiative has for many years made it possible for Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen to serve as a podium for the exhibition and propagation of experimental developments in fashion. Guest curator José Teunissen, all the scouts, advisors and designers involved in this intercontinental project: thank you for your insight, knowledge and time. I hope the freedom and inspiration you engender reaches all the inhabitants of our earth.

Sjarel Ex
Director Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Fashion on the Edge: from Mannequin to Installation

Han Nefkens

July 2004, Bangkok

The brightly coloured cocktail dresses, long evening gowns, suits and pantsuits are all lined up in the middle of the hall of the enormous IMPACT Muang Thong Thani Congress Centre, where the International AIDS Conference is being held. Hundreds of congress participants walk past; some stop and giggle. Only when I get closer do I see that the outfits are made of painted condoms. Despite the serious subject of the congress – AIDS prevention – the garments come across as cheerful, even exuberant and alluring. I am an art collector and I have never been involved in fashion, but these dresses appeal to me because they're so different from anything I've ever seen before. I buy seven of them, and together with the Brazilian artist who made them, Adriana Bertini, I pack them up in boxes and send them to the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, one of the European museums where works of art I have bought are on loan.

November 2004, Utrecht

Now I'm seeing the condom dresses for the second time, and they fascinate me even more than when they were hanging in the big, brightly-lit hall in Bangkok. José Teunissen, fashion curator at the Central Museum, with whom I have had only a fleeting acquaintance up until now, has put them on display in a dark room. They're turning on a revolving platform and are lit by a spotlight, doing full justice to their elegance and playfulness as well as to the theme of AIDS prevention.

Fashion with an idea behind it, fashion that rubs shoulders with art – that strikes me as an interesting area to investigate, not least of all because of the mannequins I've purchased at the museum's request (they didn't have enough). After all, I can't very well let the mannequins go naked after the presentation is over, can I? So José and I agree to think a bit more about how we might translate this in practical terms. The idea for Fashion on the Edge is born.

March 2006, Paris

José and I are visiting the temporary studio in which Viktor&Rolf, along with a team of seamstresses, are hard at work putting the finishing touches on the collection that is going to be shown the next day in a large tent in the Jardin des Tuileries. José has put me in contact with them as well as with other designers of conceptual work, such as Hussein Chalayan. I was surprised when I heard that even internationally known designers have trouble financing the dresses and

installations that show their sources of inspiration but are not suited for the commercial collection. So I decided to help a number of them, and in exchange for my help the dress or installation will become part of my collection and will go to a museum on long-term loan. What I find so fascinating about these projects is that the most extraordinary fantasies are brewing in the heads of so many designers. I want to see those fantasies. I want to help bring them to life.

So now here I am, amidst all the tulle and silk and the silver-plated accessories, silver-plating part of the dresses being the theme of the collection. What gave Viktor&Rolf the idea was the custom of silver-plating a baby's first shoes.

By the next day I'm the owner of *Fabiana*, a dress with a full silver skirt, a silver-plated corset with a Viktor&Rolf bow and a silver-plated veil that covers the wearer's face.

November 2008, Amsterdam

In the circular room at Platform 21 an installation by Christophe Coppens is being shown. *No References* is a sewing studio placed in a theatrical set, where the pastel-coloured objects serve no function, although they do form a single unit. All the elements are related: heads from which a piece of fabric is protruding, casings for legs and arms. The work in its entirety is inscrutable, but it's enchantingly beautiful.

Christophe is the first winner of the Han Nefkens Fashion Award. From now on, this prize – which consists of 25,000 euros, 15,000 of which is to be used for the creation of a new work – will be awarded every two years to a young designer who is exploring the area between fashion and art. I want to give a chance to designers who have already shown what they can do but haven't yet had a major breakthrough.

March 2009, London

I'm sitting at a big, round table in a restaurant in the trendy Shoreditch district, where José and I have agreed to meet with three designers who have been commissioned to make something for *The Art of Fashion*. The exhibition is to open in September at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, which has now become the home base of the Fashion on the Edge initiative. The designers come to discuss their proposals individually. Hussein Chalayan wonders whether water or moss should be added to the terrarium with the revolving figure he's designing. Anna-Nicole Ziesche isn't sure about the background of her film: should it be white, or would some striking colour show up better? And Naomi Filmer

wants to know if she should produce all five of the sculptures in her *Breathing Volume* project in bronze.

Mostly I listen. I don't yet have the confidence to offer my opinion. I'm a beginner in the fashion world, but at least I know more than I did five years ago. In the past few years we've purchased works by well-known and lesser known designers. We've also commissioned various works, and I was able to follow the entire creative process, from idea to concrete object. I see how designers wrestle to find the right form for their ideas, just like the artists whose works I commission in collaboration with museums, just like myself when I write. And I see that the form almost always changes during the process, just as it does with me.

After the discussions we all eat lunch together: spaghetti, turbot with lemon sauce, tomato salad and wine. This is what I'm doing it for, I realise, to sit around the table with these people and talk about what moves us, the pleasure of working together on the same goal, our exhibition. I pour myself another glass.

January 2010, Rotterdam

Today is the last day of *The Art of Fashion*, and a photographer wants to take a picture of me for a newspaper article. It's after five when he leaves, and the visitors are gone as well. I'm standing alone among the works of Walter Van Beirendonck, Louise Bourgeois, Salvador Dalí, Maison Martin Margiela, Comme des Garçons, Elsa Schiaparelli and many others. The attendant switches off the light and says I've really got to leave the gallery now. When he shuts the door behind me, I take my phone out of my pocket and call José: I have an idea for a new exhibition.

September 2012, Rotterdam

Again I'm being photographed, this time for the installation by the South Korean designer Rejina Pyo. The sleek lines and the colours of her dresses remind me of Mondrian and De Stijl, but three-dimensionally stylised. Rejina is the third winner of the Han Nefkens Fashion Award. After the American artist Charles LeDray won the second Han Nefkens Fashion Award in 2010 with his installation *MENS SUITS*, José and I decided to find out what young designers in non-Western countries and in Eastern Europe were doing. We purchased work by the Japanese designer Pyuupiru, among other things, and began to make plans for the new exhibition. Besides work by well-established designers we also want to

show some up-and-coming talent from around the world. The work we acquired or commissioned over the last five years, along with dozens of borrowed works, will come together to make up *The Future of Fashion is Now*.

April 2013, Amsterdam

On a rainy Thursday morning, José and I are sitting in the small office of Superheroes website builders to talk about creating a site for *The Future of Fashion is Now*. We want to show how the exhibition is progressing, but we also want to create a platform where young designers from around the world can exchange their ideas and experiences. Filled with admiration, I listen to the young staff members from Superheroes and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen come up with all sorts of innovative ideas. We want to launch a discussion on the site and they're supplying possible subjects, such as the role of the body in fashion and the relationship between fashion and nature. They ask whether fantasy is kitsch or whether it creates an environment in which reality can be displayed in a different way; they want designers to start talking about where the balance lies between a garment's conceptual and visual side and about whether fashion becomes increasingly personal.

The website builders also make room for the profiles of our sixteen 'scouts': fashion experts from around the world, each of whom have recommended three designers from their own country or region for the exhibition. An international jury will choose six winners from these designers, and each winner will be commissioned to create a work. We want to show the creative process of these six on the site by means of text, sketches, photographs and films.

Two months later our website goes online.

October 2013, Amsterdam

Set out on a table in a room in the Conservatorium Hotel are dozens of dossiers of young designers who have been proposed by our scouts. The editor-in-chief of *Vogue Netherlands*, Karin Swerink, the Greek artist and fashion curator Vassilis Zidianakis, Viktor&Rolf, José and I are all bending over the drawings and photos of the various works. There are designs for clothing made from unusual materials such as ramie and organic cotton, batiked and dyed clothing, works that suggest social engagement, and fashion as a reflection of an environment or a desire. The emphasis is almost always on traditional methods and sustainability. A remarkably large

number of designers poke fun at the fashion industry. The dossiers clearly show that young designers have a different and often surprising take on fashion, and that this individual interpretation is going strong, even in non-Western countries. It gives me great pleasure to travel all over the world, as it were, from this little room.

We take the dossiers that remain after the pre-selection and spread them out on the floor. We inspect them from up close and then take a step back, as you see people doing with paintings in museums. We change the order, remove some of the dossiers and finally agree on the winners. We still don't know what they're going to make, but from what we've seen in the dossiers we're confident that their work is going to be exceptional.

May 2014, Barcelona

I'm sitting in my study behind the computer and see e-mails with sketches, drawings, photos and films that were made by the designers and are coming in from Peru, China, England, Australia, Poland and the Netherlands. Every sketch, every photo shows the next step in the creation process, and the exhibition begins to take shape in my head. The quality of the works is high and there's enormous variety: from social projects to crocheted clothing.

I exult over the thought that in several months thousands of people will be able to see what is now being made, that we'll be able to look at the works from so close up that we'll almost be able to smell them. And there's no doubt in my mind that when the doors of the Bodon Gallery close at the end of *The Future of Fashion is Now*, José and I will already be making plans for the next exhibition in 2019.

The Future of Fashion is Now

Longing for a Future Society

José Teunissen

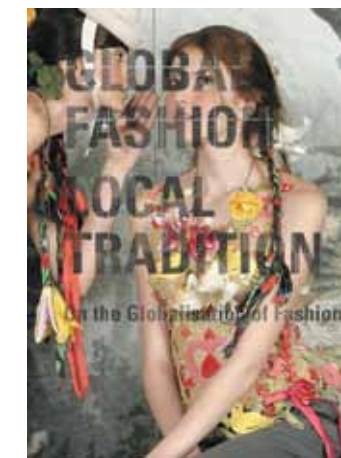
*'... today's artists do not so much express the tradition from which they come as the path they take between that tradition and the various contexts they traverse, and they do this by performing acts of transition.'*¹

Introduction

Since the beginning of this millennium, fashion has ceased being a strictly Western phenomenon. Fashion designers can hail from any continent and are no longer required to relocate to Paris, London or Milan to be discovered and to build up a career. They can achieve an international reputation right in their own country by means of web shops, blogs, social media and local fashion weeks, without the intermediate step of discovery in Paris or London by fashion journalists and buyers.²

Many newcomers in the fashion world did not grow up with a knowledge of Western fashion history and the related movements, such as postmodernism, conceptualism and modernism. Until recently, any added value they had to offer was mainly put down to the fact that they were tapping into their own traditions and craftsmanship and transforming them into fashion. In the exhibition *Global Fashion Local Tradition* (2005) and the publication of the same name, it was explained that by combining traditional craftsmanship with their own taste and style, non-Western designers were

imparting a 'national' identity to their work, and as a result they were seen as unique and 'authentic'.³ Several studies have also appeared on this subject.⁴



Global Fashion Local Tradition: On the Globalisation of Fashion, 2005

Interestingly, the notion of 'national identity' has been an essential aspect of fashion ever since the eighties. The fashion press never fail to mention the origins of each designer they cover (including Western designers), and a series of fashion analysts have tried to explain what this

signifies.⁵ The Antwerp Six were branded 'Belgian' thanks to a sophisticated marketing strategy conducted by the government during the eighties, and Dutch designers such as Viktor&Rolf and Alexander van Slobbe were given the title 'Dutch Modernists' because they have a conceptual design

Alexander van Slobbe,
SO, autumn/winter
1999-2000



identity that is recognisably Dutch.⁶ Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garçons represented a Japanese fashion identity that has its origins in the tradition of the kimono.⁷ But this might also be a matter of *auto-exotic gaze*: a representative of a non-Western culture looking at his own culture from a Western perspective, which he then translates into an ‘exotic’ product for the Western market.⁸

Comme des Garçons
– Rei Kawakubo,
autumn/winter
1983-1984



Origins and cultural traditions are still important in the twenty-first century, but the new generation of fashion designers have a different way of employing such characteristics: they explicitly link local styles and craftsmanship with new technologies and new notions of what fashion and clothing might mean in society, both now and in the future, and they do this in a quite natural way. Today’s designers are no longer searching for an ‘authentic’ style that references

their origins; their main concern is to critique the present fashion system with its consumerism and its excessive and barely sustainable production methods and to embrace new technologies, resulting in new ways of imagining fashion.

Beyond origins

According to curator and theoretician Nicolas Bourriaud, the fixation on origins – on *roots* – and the related fixation on ‘authenticity’ and an original ‘identity’ has to do with the postmodern thinking that was emerging in the 1970s.⁹ Post-modernism meant that everything (including culture) was to be interpreted in political terms and reduced to place and origin, and thereby to gender and ethnicity. At the same time, the far-reaching globalisation of the past thirty years has reinforced the fixation on authenticity, identity and origins even more. Because of the enormous overproduction of objects, images and information that have become accessible to everyone via the internet, a homogenisation of cultures

and languages has taken place. In reaction, strong movements of disengagement have developed, with people clinging frantically to their own culture and identity. On the other hand, we are also seeing an increase in *creolisation*: cultures and identities blending together without any one of them claiming a dominant position.¹⁰ ‘Of course,’ says Bourriaud in *The Radicant*, ‘roots are important, but it is roots that make individuals suffer; in our globalized world, they persist like phantom limbs after amputation, causing pain impossible to treat, since they affect something that no longer exists.’¹¹ Origin, authenticity and identity are still important concepts in the world of art and design, but they are no longer being used to advance a ‘national identity’. The youngest generation of designers deploy origin, craftsmanship, tradition and identity as fragments for sketching out an image of the future.

A new visual language and new forms

These fragments of identity acquire meaning in the context of the *project*, in which the focus is not on the product but on the process. In the working process of today’s designer, new forms of presentation are essential. Most designers show their ‘innovative’ vision not by means of a single garment or product but by inviting the observer to accompany them throughout the entire design and thought process, which is presented by means of storytelling and future scenarios. The fashion campaign, the catwalk and the fashion magazine are no longer the platform that everyone takes for granted. New presentation sites are being sought out, from empty factories and technology fairs to urban hubs and social networks. Akira Minagawa of the label minä perhonen (Japan)

minä perhonen – Akira
Minagawa, *Forest
Parade*,
autumn/winter
2009-2010



builds poetic stories around particular motifs, which he shows off again and again and reworks in many different forms, such as curtains and upholstery. Elisa van Joolen (the Netherlands) presented the project *11" x 17"* in an Amsterdam dry cleaners shop. Mary Ping of the label Slow and Steady Wins the Race (United States) always organises an exhibition in a gallery or museum to accompany her new, sustainable outfits. Adele Varcoe (Australia) unravels Chanel’s

Slow and Steady Wins the Race – Mary Ping, spring/summer 2009



Adele Varcoe, *Imagining Chanel*, Sydney, 2012

Lucía Cuba, *Artículo 6*, visual essay *La Espera (The Waiting)*, 2013



Lucy + Jorge Orta, *Nexus Architecture x 35 – Nexus Type Operation*, 2001

brand identity by means of a performance, *Imagining Chanel*. Lucía Cuba (Peru) and Lucy + Jorge Orta (United Kingdom and Argentina) use their work (*Artículo 6* and *Nexus Architecture* respectively, both projects from 2012) to create social cohesion, thereby delivering the political message that such cohesion is missing in today's society.

'Radicante' identity

A splendid example of a project where the focus is on the process and not on the final product is *11" x 17"* by Elisa van Joolen, in which she plays with the identities of various fashion brands. Almost every brand has a crew neck sweater in its collection, and what Van Joolen wants to know is how you can create a unique, authentic and original product if everybody else is making the same garment. Van Joolen makes the question of brand identity visible by asking different brands to give her samples of their sweaters, which she cuts into A3-shaped pieces and then frames. For the viewer this is the beginning of a semiotic exploration: after the fragments are placed side by side, the differences and similarities in material and stitch suddenly become apparent, thereby demonstrating that every brand is different at a materialistic micro-level. It isn't the final result that's important here – the framed parts of the sweaters – but what they set in motion: the search for differences. The *11" x 17"* project plays with brand identities and brand characteristics by isolating them and placing them next to each other, so that different layers

of information are involved.¹² This makes Van Joolen a 'nomadic sign collector', in Bourriaud's terms: 'an inventor of pathways within a cultural landscape and among signs, a nomadic sign gatherer'.¹³

Bourriaud calls this form of identity a *radicant*, like a plant that sends out roots from its stem and propagates in order to keep re-creating its identity. This principle is evident in the *11" x 17"* project. But in this case it isn't the cultural identity of the maker that renews itself. Van Joolen works with the characteristic marks of a brand's identity and builds a story with them, like an 'intersubjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it traverses, to which

Elisa van Joolen, *11" x 17"*, since 2013



it attaches its roots to produce an installation: one installs oneself. Thus the radicant subject appears as a construction or montage, in other words, as a work born of endless negotiation.¹⁴ In short, here identity is constructed as a series of fragments that tell the story together.

Conclusion: the era of 'altermodern' fashion

In their ideas and manifestations, today's fashion designers show striking similarities with what Bourriaud calls the 'altermodern artist'. Unlike postmodernism, altermodernism does not concern itself with the past, origins and 'authentic' identity, but with the future, and it is premised on the destination

rather than the source. An altermodern designer asks questions about the future: where are we headed in this society? And how can we make a place there for our identity or our origins? So it's not only about the identity of the designer or the artist. The identity of the fashion brand is also being examined, or the identity of the wearer in relation to the identity of the brand, or the relationship of the identity to the environment. 'What I am calling altermodernity thus designates a construction plan that would allow new intercultural connections, the construction of space of negotiation going beyond postmodern multiculturalism, which is attached to the origin of discourses and forms rather than to their dynamics.' Artists and fashion designers today take those who look at and/or wear their clothing on a journey and make them partners in their dreams of and longings for a better society. They try to give them an impression of what the world will look like then and what new relationships we have with the fashion products that surround us.

The effects of globalisation have also produced a new aesthetic and a new design language that is no longer searching for an authentic national style or being expressed in terms of regional craftsmanship.¹⁵ Like the altermodern artist, today's fashion designer is someone who brings together a collection of heterogeneous elements to which he or she imparts meaning in an ever-changing context: 'in the infinite text of world'.¹⁶ According to Bourriaud, each designer then becomes a *semionaut* 'accepting the idea that no speech bears the seal of any sort of "authenticity": we are entering the era of universal subtitling'.¹⁷ So designers, too, are doing their best to convert their stories into a universal visual language that is comprehensible to everyone.

That probably explains why fashion has taken on so many new forms. The photo or the outfit alone will no longer suffice; the contents and meaning of the work must also be explained by means of the revealed thought and construction process and the background stories. Performances, films and installations are the ideal media for this work, as are traveller's chronicles and process reports. For this generation of designers, what matters most are not agents, investors, being mentioned in fashion magazines or appearing on the catwalk. Today's designers are making use of the power being generated by globalised culture. Instead of gravitating to the metropolitan power centres they're searching for the local and decentralised places. And it's often the local culture and structure of unique, attractive suburbs of cities like Berlin, Istanbul and

New York (Brooklyn) that provide the most inspiring shopping districts. These are also the places where designers like to settle and establish themselves in a closely-knit community, where they can create new technological or sustainable production methods right in their own neighbourhood. Social media and having their own webshops offer them substantial mobility, as it were: in the networked environment they have at their disposal a worldwide circle of like-minded people, and they capture an international market with a small-scale, sustainable business.

- 1 Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, New York 2009, pp. 51-52.
- 2 José Teunissen, 'On the Globalisation of Fashion', in: Jan Brand and José Teunissen (eds.), *Global Fashion Local Tradition*, exhibition catalogue, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Arnhem 2005, pp. 8-23.
- 3 Brand and Teunissen, 2005 (see note 2).
- 4 José Teunissen, 'Deconstructing Belgian and Dutch Fashion Dreams. From Global Trends to Local Crafts', in: *Fashion Theory*, 15 (June 2011), no. 2, pp. 137-215, q.v. pp. 157-177; Lise Skov, 'Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World', in: *Fashion Theory*, 15 (June 2011), no. 2, pp. 137-157.
- 5 Lise Skov, 'Fashion-Nation: A Japanese Globalization Experience and a Hong Kong dilemma', in: Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkovich and Carla Jones (eds.), *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalisation of Asian Dress*, Oxford 2003; Alison Goodrum, *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalisation*, Oxford 2005; Jennifer Craik, 'Is Australian Fashion and Dress Distinctively Australian?', in: *Fashion Theory*, 13 (2009), pp. 409-441.
- 6 Javier Gimeno Martinez, 'Fashion, Country and City: The Fashion Industry and the Construction of Collective Identities (1981-2001)', in: Nele Bernheim (ed.), *Symposium 1: Modus Operandi: State of Affairs in Current Research on Belgian Fashion*, ModeMuseum, Antwerp 2008, pp. 17-35; Teunissen, 'Deconstructing Belgian and Dutch Fashion Dreams' (see note 4).
- 7 Akiko Fukai, 'Japan and Fashion', in: Jan Brand and José Teunissen (eds.), *The Power of Fashion*, Arnhem 2006, pp. 288-314.
- 8 Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theatre*, London 1997, p. 58.
- 9 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), pp. 51-52.
- 10 Here Bourriaud is referring to the publication by the West Indian writer Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Paris 1996, p. 15.
- 11 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), p. 21.
- 12 The correspondence Van Joolen carried on with the brands' marketing departments, which is also part of the work, shows how a fashion brand guards the label's identity.
- 13 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), p. 53.
- 14 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), p. 55.
- 15 Bourriaud calls this an altermodern aesthetic.
- 16 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), p. 4.
- 17 Bourriaud, 2009 (see note 1), p. 44.

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Fashion Activism: Community and Politics

The designers in the fourth theme are interested in how far fashion and clothing projects can be enlisted in addressing social themes and how they can contribute to the emancipation of certain target groups or of the consumer. Up until recently it was mainly artists who were involved in this area, people such as Barbara Kruger and Hélio Oiticica. But now more and more fashion designers are also taking an interest in the social and political impact of fashion and clothing because it is a vital way of focusing attention on the fundamental cultural values of fashion and clothing. It is significant that three of the six designers who were commissioned to produce works for *The Future of Fashion is Now* are occupied with this theme.

Lucy + Jorge Orta,
Nexus Architecture
Intervention Uyuni
Salt Desert, 1998



One of the first fashion designers to demonstrate the persuasiveness of clothing with regard to social issues is the duo Lucy + Jorge Orta (United Kingdom, Argentina). With *Nexus Architecture* (1998-2010) they literally created new social ties within a city by zipping together the clothing of separate individuals. The individuals, taken together, formed a new social network. This is Lucy + Jorge Orta's way of criticising today's anonymous urban culture. Unquestionably, Jorge Orta's South American background influenced the nature of the work. Indeed, South and Central America have a long tradition of political and activist art in which the body and its clothing are used as a medium, with the Brazilian performance artist Hélio Oiticica as the great inspiration. In the youngest generation it was perfectly natural for fashion designer Lucía Cuba (Peru) and artist Tania Candiani (Mexico) to elaborate on this theme as well.

'My work constitutes a critical approach to fashion

design and the construction and exploration of garments as performative and political devices. I am interested in broadening the understanding of the role of fashion design objects, from purely functional or aesthetic considerations, to social, ethical and political perspectives. My work is driven by the desire to harness the agency of clothes and question the established language of fashion, as experienced today, and by the attempt to broaden the potential grammars of critical action through clothes, both as wearable devices and as affective and *embodied cultural media*,’ says Lucía Cuba.¹ After having trained to be a social scientist, she then studied fashion at Parsons in New York. With fashion and clothing as *embodied cultural media* she addresses areas of social unrest and abuses in contemporary South American society. With her project *Artículo 6* (2012) Cuba decried the fact that between 1996 and 2000 more than three hundred thousand women and sixteen thousand men were forcibly sterilised in Peru. The project consists of thirty-four articles of clothing on which have been embroidered texts and references to Artículo 6 –

Lucía Cuba, *Artículo 6*, visual essay *La Espera* (*The Waiting*), 2013



the section of the law that justified this action – as well as twelve ‘actions’ in the form of performances and exhibitions. For *Exercises on Health* (2014), the project that Cuba developed especially for *The Future of Fashion is Now*, she goes even further down this path and examines the theme of ‘health’. She thinks too much is being said in terms of ‘patient’ and ‘victim’, and that too little attention is paid to the experience of health and illness. ‘Because health can sometimes be elusive, hidden behind the mind or a body and silenced by uncertainty, I use garments to explore the felt but unsaid: the affective surplus of a diagnosis that does not withstand the complexity of human emotions and representations.’²

With *Exercises on Health* she tries by means of clothing to clarify how human beings relate to health and life. ‘*Exercises on Health* are garment-based approaches to human encounters with health and life, as seen from the hardships that a place and experience of health can bring forth’, says Cuba.³

Tania Candiani often chooses a physical site as the point of departure for her work, preferably a specific place, a junction where life takes place, a network in which social ties reveal themselves. For the project *La Constanca Dormida* (2006) Candiani moved her studio to a bankrupt textile factory

Tania Candiani, *La Constanca Dormida*, 2006



for a period of thirty days. She set herself the goal there of making one dress a day. Each dress functioned as a sort of page from a diary in which anecdotes were embroidered from the time that the factory was still active, mixed with stories from visitors who dropped in to see Candiani. Thus by means of the dresses Candiani not only made the history of this factory tangible, with its harsh working conditions, but she also exposed the nostalgia of the former workers and those who lived nearby. ‘Textiles have been present in my work as tailoring, as a narrative resource and as labour, socially embedded with meaning. Tailoring as design is a contact point with architecture, where the space distribution of the plans as sewing patterns re-signifying the idea of inhabited space or the utopia of an space that could be inhabited.’⁴ In this project, the clothing refers to a social network on the one hand, but it also makes the daily practice of life in this factory more tangible.

In other fashion projects shown in the exhibition that have a political and activist slant, criticism is primarily directed at the rigidity of the fashion system, which constantly stimulates faster production and more consumption and is aimed

at turning the passive consumer into an active, independent consumer. Because of the power of the mega-brands there's hardly any room left for small brands and young designers. In addition, cheap chain stores such as H&M and Zara have killed off do-it-yourself fashion, which was still quite common in the 1970s: making one's own clothes has become much more expensive than buying a garment that is produced far away. With that idea in mind, all sorts of citizen initiatives have sprung up since the beginning of the twenty-first century that actively involve the consumer in the process of making clothing. Usually these kinds of projects are initiated by young designers.

D&K – Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios, #thatautecouture feeling, 2013



There are initiatives, for example, in which contributed clothing is restyled by young designers into something different (*up-cycling*), and *repair workshops* where designers learn how clothing can be repaired instead of being thrown away.⁵ More and more designers are realising that these kinds of fashion projects, in which they serve as director and assume an activist role, can contribute to social cohesion and the capacity of ordinary citizens to participate, while at the same time they break down the power of consumerism and big business –

or at least expose it. With this idea in mind, Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios (Australia) developed *Brand Illusions* (2012) under the name D&K, a fake commercial brand in which a series of activist installations are used to make the viewer aware of all the facets of brand identity. What is the essence of a brand and how does it function typographically in the media? For *The Future of Fashion is Now*, D&K developed *Hardly Brand – Softer Sell* (2014), an installation that examines a brand's limitations. A fashion label creates a gorgeous imaginary world by means of shows and lovely campaigns, but when the consumer has the actual product in hand he or she is often disappointed because the garment isn't well-made and the magical aura of the campaign has completely disappeared. 'The project aims to foreground the awkward "realities" and brutal "truths" of the diffusion process in fashion: from the highly desirable, idealised and constructed moments in catwalk show to their inevitable and disappointing diffusion into saleable products.'⁶ In this way the duo hope to reveal the discrepancy between the expectations aroused by the brand and the actual garment, thereby showing that the consumer is longing for new values in the production process. In these values the imagination is inextricably linked to the product, as it is in the *slow fashion* movement.⁷

'The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a *social practice*,' states the sociologist Arjun Appadurai.⁸ According to him, the imagination is no longer being employed in our contemporary globalised culture as a materialised fantasy, as a form of escapism or as a reflection of another world: '... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.'⁹ He is convinced that the imagination in today's culture must search for new values that are linked with culture and social practice. The project *Pure hearts make truly new and infinite things. Nothing is impossible for a faithful heart, faith moves mountains* (2014) that Dooling Jiang (China) developed for *The Future of Fashion is Now* is a fine example of this. She regards fashion as an 'honest reflection of human longings' and craftsmanship as a crucial link: 'craftmanship perfectly tells the truly "new" of man's authentic objectiveness which could break through the emotionless mechanical production at present. Under this foundation, "new" is infinite.' In the

Chinese tradition, craftsmanship is the perfecting of a product by making it over and over again. Whereas the West tends to focus on the new, the Chinese recognise the power of repetition, because – just as in nature – endless repetition naturally gives rise to the new, ‘from aspects of historical stratification and the range of our daily activity. In China both aspects have a rich tradition. The people in the countryside believe very

Digest Design
Workshop, *Digest*
BLUEGround,
ready-to-wear
collection, spring/
summer 2014.
Photography:
Qiananrchy



strongly that we “must live in harmony with our native soil” (a central value). Fashion is a combination of human longings; what I want to contribute to the current fashion system is to expose the purest relationship between the human individual and fashion, as well as to examine the universal value of this relationship.¹⁰ The imagination and new values emanate from the rich history and heritage of Chinese culture and its social connections. But as Nicolas Bourriaud says, they are translated into a universally readable image and fashion language in order to address the public with a number of important questions about the future. How do we want to relate to the things that surround us? What gives value to our lives, and how important is our community and our culture in this regard?¹¹

The extraordinary thing about our globalised world today is that a wide range of cultures show us the different essences and strengths of something that we wear every day, that we regard as quite ordinary and usually look at through high-fashion commercial glasses.

- 1 See www.luciacuba.com
- 2 E-mail correspondence with the artist about the commission.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 See www.taniacandiani.com/cvabout.html
- 5 Otto von Bush, *Fashion-able: Hactivism and engaged fashion design*, dissertation, University of Gothenburg, 2008.
- 6 E-mail correspondence with the artist about the commission.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, Minneapolis 1996, p. 31.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 E-mail correspondence with the artist about the commission.
- 11 See pp. 14-15.

Lucy + Jorge Orta

Lucy Orta (1966, Sutton Coldfield, United Kingdom) graduated cum laude as a fashion designer from Nottingham Trent University in 1989. In 1991 she met Jorge Orta (1953, Rosario, Argentina), who was trained as a visual artist and architect at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario in Argentina. Because of his work as an artist during the dictatorship of the Videla regime, Jorge Orta became very aware of the social role of art. This awareness became the driving force behind their collaboration in Studio Orta. They put together installations, performances and other art projects in which the focus is on social relationships and the way human beings influence nature. The work of Lucy + Jorge Orta is exhibited in galleries and museums all over the world and has been published in a series of monographs.

www.studio-orta.com

Exhibition

— *Nexus Architecture x 25*
— *Nexus Type Operation*
2001

25 Nexus overalls; microporous polyamide, silkscreen print, zippers, wooden supports
Max. 600 x 600 x 200 cm

— *Wandering, 2009*

Video: 16 minutes, 30 seconds



A

A *Wandering, 2009.*
Photography: Lucy + Jorge Orta
B *Nexus Architecture x 50*
— *Nexus Type Operation, 2001.*
Photography: Peter Guenzel

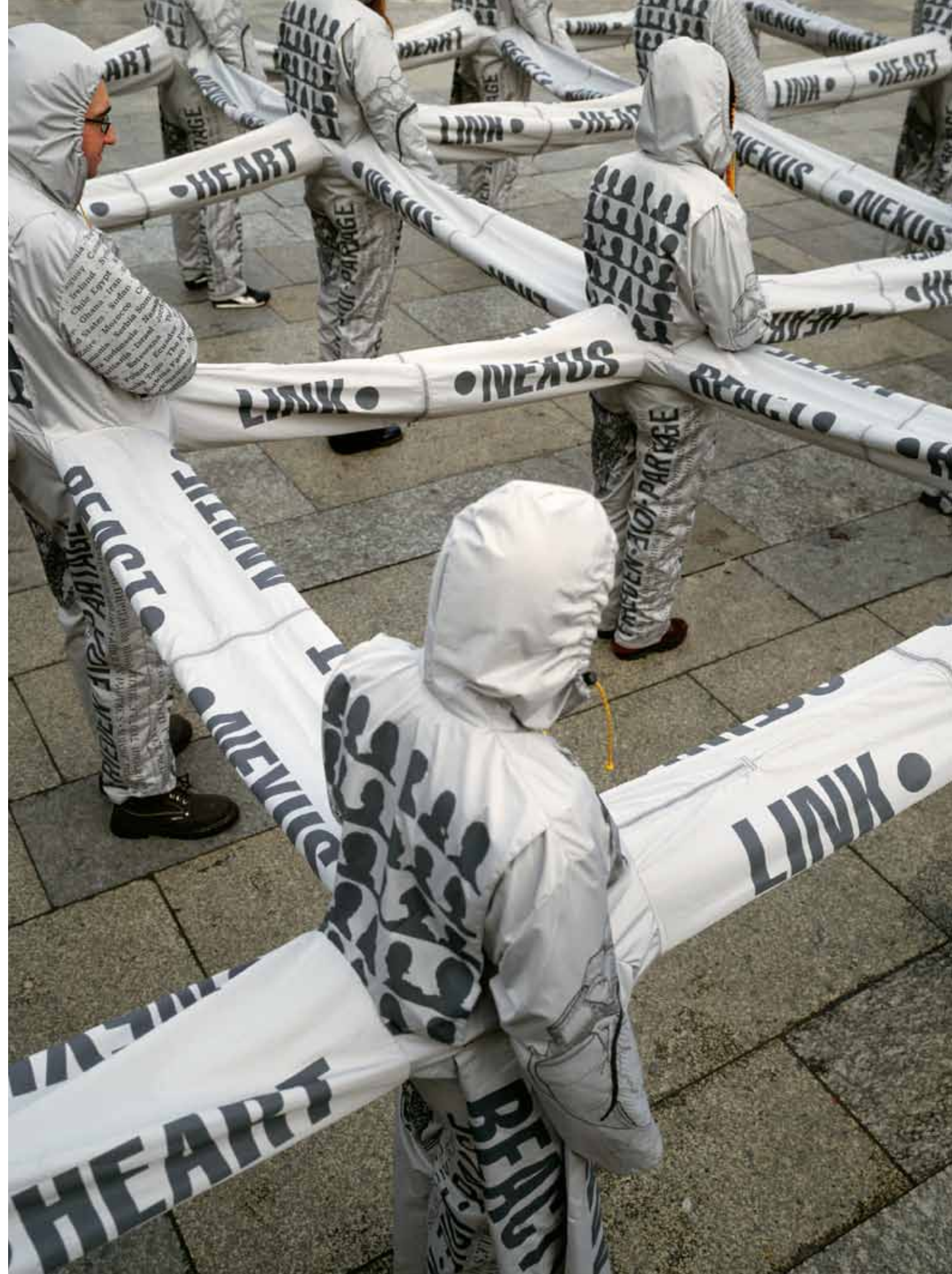
The meeting of Lucy and Jorge Orta in 1991 brought about a great change in both their lives. Lucy was working in Paris as a stylist for trend bureaus and designers at the time, but she became interested in the social and political engagement that she saw in the work of Jorge Orta, an Argentinean exile living in Paris. They decided to work together under the name Studio Orta, where they would address all sorts of social and political questions through the medium of art. Like Joseph Beuys, they believe strongly in the idea of art as a catalyst for social change, and thus a great many large projects have seen the light of day over the past few decades. Even though Lucy Orta was trained as a fashion designer, the collaborative structure of Studio Orta meant that there were no more limits in terms of materials and media, and any amount of experimentation was welcome: with textile, steel, bronze, glass, video, light and much, much more. The focus was always on the relationship between the individual and the surrounding world, with all its social and ecological implications. The *Habitent* (1992) is both a garment and a tent and is intended as a commentary on the dreadful situation in which the Kurdish refugees in Iraq found themselves, with their lack of clothing and shelter. In *OrtaWater*, which was started in 2005, they created a large number of installations having to do with drinking water, one of the major issues we will be facing in the near future. And in *Antarctica* (2007) they built fifty tents on Antarctica, the only continent that has not been claimed by any nation. The tents were made of flags from different countries and thus were symbolic of the world community without borders. The Antarctic village was completed by a flag planted by Lucy and Jorge which is also made up of a large number of different flags.

Closely related to *Antarctica* is the project *EU-Roma*, in which Studio Orta investigates and exposes the lives of the Roma in Europe. Ever since the Roma left India and Egypt about six hundred years ago they have been wandering throughout Europe, at home both everywhere and nowhere, harassed by national borders and nationalistic ideas that dictate their homelessness and invisibility. The video installation *Wandering* (2009) is part of this project and shows the traditional wide flaring skirts of a woman performing traditional Roma dances to the tunes of equally traditional Roma music. The colourful, flowered skirts were made by Lucy in collaboration with the London College of Fashion. Shazam, the smart phone app that can identify music of almost any kind, does not recognise the Roma music. And so it is with the unknown world that is given a voice and a face by Studio Orta.

Nexus Architecture

To what extent are we individuals and to what extent are we part of a whole, of a collective, of a society? Should we conform, and thus enable the whole to continue functioning? Or should we opt for our own individuality and risk the collapse of the whole – of society? These questions were constantly being raised during the years of the project *Nexus Architecture* (1998-2010), which consisted of a large number of performances in galleries, museums and public spaces. Volunteers were dressed in identical, futuristic-looking bodysuits that were then linked together by means of pieces of fabric or zippers, forming a long snake or a grid. The completely identical clothing and the incorporation of the individual into a preconceived form (the group!) was meant to cancel out the feeling of individuality and perhaps even cause a loss of humanity. It probably was no accident that the project was conceived just when the Iraq war was in full swing and the excesses in places such as the Abu Ghraib prison were gaining worldwide attention. The loss of individuality and humanity was further reinforced when Lucy Orta set the entire piece in motion by blowing on a flute or shouting out commands. Now individuals were reduced to components in a geometrically constructed whole that could only move in the desired direction if everyone went along. A number of the volunteers usually experienced the forced collectivity and uniformity as coercive, unnatural and disturbing. Rebellious groups quickly formed who ignored Orta's orders, while others obediently continued to comply with the instructions. The micro-society that this created has a great deal in common with the society of which we all are a part, including the never-ending tension that exists in every society between conformity and individuality.

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