

Fashion victims and/or social fabrics

People's validation

By: Freek Lomme

"When a woman alters her look too much from season to season, she becomes a fashion victim."

- Gianni Versace (fashion designer)

"To put it more provocatively, I would argue that design is one of the terms that has replaced the word "revolution"! To say that everything has to be designed and redesigned (including nature), we imply something of the sort: "it will neither be revolutionised, nor will it be modernised." For me, the word design is a little tracer whose expansion could prove the depth to which we have stopped believing that we have been modern. In other words, the more we think of ourselves as designers, the less we think of ourselves as modernisers."

- Bruno Latour (anthropologist and sociologist)

"Today, more people are interested in image production than image contemplation."

- Boris Groys (philosopher)

At the end of history – at least 20th-century history – both human culture as non human nature seem to have mobilised fully to equip an industry by and for the fashionable. We bluntly conceive its economy effectively as suppliers, producers, advertisers, facilitators or consumers. These various roles level up different forms of authorisation that qualify or quantify the values involved in this economy. To some, these forms might be out of sight, to others they might be within the scope of their horizon and to some it might be the same (old) stuff. As individuals, we could feel left out as we experience some kind of lack. Or we could feel resistant as we feel the necessity to inform or activate others. Mostly we just don't care, as "there's too much we could care about and we already have so much on our minds"... Overall to this economy, "common sense" is more intrusive as reason¹.

The above scenarios draft various personal stances as bases for economic validation on the grounds of a subjective point of view and experience. It's not so much a coward's "eye of the beholder" argument as it is an indicator of the economic extent to which we're able to conceive and manage this economy of our authentic experiences. We truly are left on our own when it comes to the way we do or don't relate. This doesn't mean we should turn

¹ Eventually, culture effectively will always be played upon best by the powerful as well as the unique will not become general.

towards fatalism or even cynicism; we should enter the economic arena with dignity and self-respect. Effectively it means we'd have to play in between the power and reasoning of both high- and low-culture.

Within this very fracture of high and low, two currents design a rather flexible and open body of signification. First of all: the authority and reign of high-culture fades. Recently the Netherlands experienced an upheaval of the construct of a national canon; a high-cultural, top-down paradigm that would artificially construct a framework for people's understanding of their shared identity. It's not surprising these ideas specifically manifest themselves in the fields of history and literature, also touching upon philosophy and, effectively, politics. Simultaneously, there have been debates on the construction of a European constitution that "should" be based upon enlightened thought, Jewish-Christian heritage and such. Literature and history are logical players in the call for a meaningful identity, for they are able to trace and pinpoint cultural values, despite the simple fact that hardly anyone would be able to read all the books or understand all ideas proposed.

We don't construct our lives; we practice them. High-cultural wise-guys should acknowledge that rationality does not run life. Effectively, mass media and pop culture are the real axis, assisting us in practising identity.

Secondly: the alteration in labour relations caused by technological advancement and globalisation. We work anywhere and anytime, we utilise virtual tools and deal with real person on the other end of the connection, physically, potentially, anywhere. In this very arena we need to compete effectively, for national borders can't supply a safe haven.

Therefore, our body of being is rather subject-based: partially specifically equipped, partially naïve. We can't blame ourselves. Still it's within this sphere that we have to act and have to take on the responsibility to make decisions. "A populist judgement on art such as 'Anyone could do this' expresses the discrepancy between the visual appearance of modern art and its institutional status." (Seijdel, 2010, p. 43). Still, that doesn't imply that we should start and bash intellectuals. Smart guys might in fact have smart stuff to say. But not only that: "Anyone could do this" would be argued by someone who would, "like anyone", follow the fashion of the day: it's within this very culture that both high- and low-culture generate their fashionable lure and victims of war.

"Both in professional traffic as in case of the consuming audience specific qualities are vital, like flexibility, mobility, communication, virtuosity, informality, performativity and potentiality." (Seijdel, 2010, p. 62) In the end we all live up to the same range of temptations showcased. What about the successes of the "high" culture namedropping of philosopher Jacques Rancière?: he speaks like shit, his writings are not really accessible though he has nice ideas on sensibilities. What about the success of the "low" culture namedropping of Lady Gaga?: she's a copy of David Bowie and Madonna. The reason for their effect must be that we crave the idea of an original author who actually offers a sphere beyond, within the present. Effectively: the feeling of being part of something larger than life.

Eventually, everyone can be a professional as well as an amateur: some people do appreciate both Rancière as well as Gaga. What we want to experience are "true emotions", so it sells.

It's in this field, that commercial values and cultural values become one and the same. This not only economically "happening": we also live this, as it becomes the social fabric of life. Suddenly, we can all act highly cultural and lowly cultural and use the communicative and rhetorical sensibilities for better or for worse. 'Don't be cool. Cool is conservative fear dressed in black. Free yourself from limits of this sort.' (Bruce Mau, axiom #14 in *An incomplete manifesto for growth*)

Cultural practice became a practice of commerce; of a turnover of the identity of the person or the subject. While previously we wanted to activate the market through efforts to generate "responsible producers" or "active consumers", we now have to activate humanist citizenship, for every human can take every role. There have been some predecessors to this, in the form of "outsiders" commenting on scientific research or artists taking the perspective and position of the amateur. Mostly, cross-disciplinary practices seem to be a rather viable profession. This is only logical, for if we would not be able to make at least some translation between various positions, we'd completely lose track of each other. As such, all human beings are not committed to any social contract but are living within a moral contract. We can disagree but have to follow the rules of lawfulness and democracy. Indeed: people do sometimes argue, but 'it is a mistake not to recognise conflictual collaboration as the primary means through which ideas and innovation are generated. The challenge is to build relations and points of connection that enable a plurality of research platforms and small business alternatives that can survive beyond the initial consensus model of the three month incubators.' (Lovink & Rossiter, 2007, p.10)

As such, I'd like to argue that this morally agreed dissent acts exactly upon this cultural-commercial axis. It can build upon this as it allows people to respect and acknowledge their experiences as well as their reason. It's a play of signification: not of an image economy of material stuff outside of our experiences, that showcases or elaborates the politics of the visual; nor is it a complete and configured sum of expressed and balanced communication brought to us through authorship. It's a play beyond aesthetics and poetics, beyond high and low. Effectively, it's a subject's play of motivation and expression. Life does not come about via hermeneutics, neither is it a simple saturation of pop.

We only require more awareness of the need for conflict and the trust required.

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