

# Deep Fashion Bulletin

New York March 2016

THE SEASONAL GAZETTE FOR CRITICAL CITIZEN PEDAGOGY AND DEEP FASHION

We need to move forward and conceptualize a program for a deep fashion. If we today play with the idea that fashion has in some senses has become more accessible, we should not settle at a consumerist notion of calling it “democratic” because it is cheap. Cheap fashion is in no way utopian.

Taking political philosopher Roberto Unger’s book *Democracy Realized* (2001) as a point for departure, we should seek new forms of “democratic experimentalism.” Unger suggests such program combines democratic hope with practical action, that is, “to find an overlap between the conditions of practical progress and the requirements of individual emancipation” with the ultimate aim of “the empowerment of humanity to act upon the world” (2001: 5).

Democracy in the form of participation is not enough. Participants need to be empowered. In a true democracy we all need political agency beyond the ballot. Because, as Unger posits, “we cannot be free when we are weak.” (2001: 7) Thus, the democratic cause of the experiment for deep freedom is to realize arrangements merging the conditions of material progress and the conditions of individual emancipation, cultivating an emancipated citizen, so that each is strong enough to equally take part, with full potential, in the realization of the democratic promise.

A central path to empower deliberate decision-making and citizen action is to find a new balance between innovation and cooperation, the practical progress of moving forward together. However, as Unger highlights, the inflection of in-

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novation and cooperation is not an easy merger,

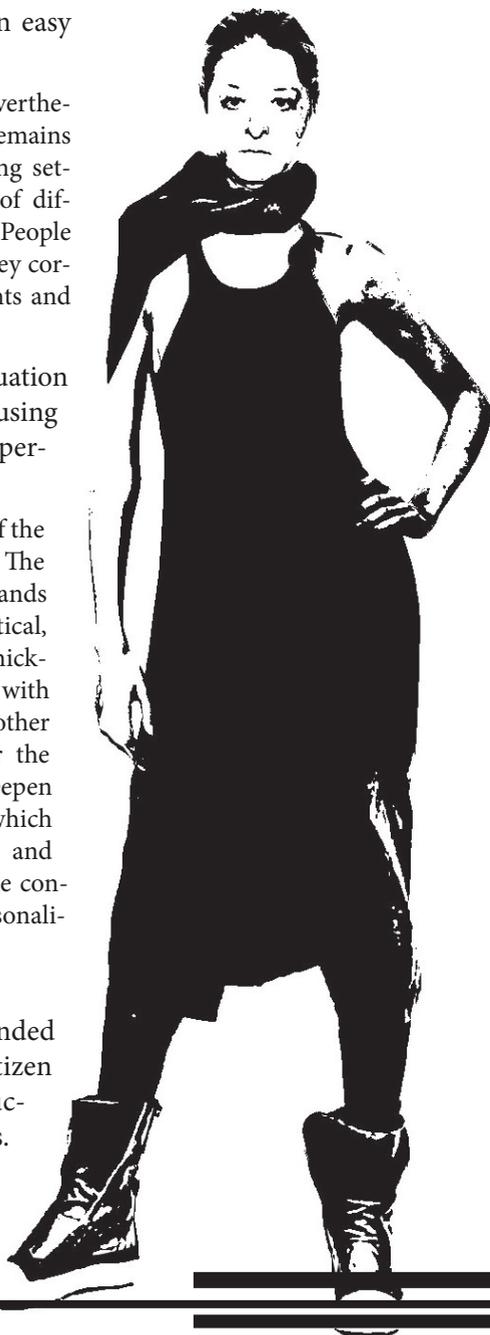
Innovation requires cooperation. Nevertheless, every real form of cooperation remains embedded in arrangements generating settled expectations and vested rights of different groups relative to one another. People regularly resist innovation because they correctly believe it to threaten such rights and expectations. (2001: 8)

However, Unger draws up a situation where such balancing is possible, using the example of the cultivation of personal emancipation,

Consider now the internal structure of the goods of individual emancipation. The development of individuality demands a cumulative thickening of our practical, cognitive, and emotional ties. Such thickening, however, forever threatens us with the double risk of subjugation to other people and depersonalization under the weight of frozen social roles. We deepen freedom – the most basic freedom, which is the capacity for self-possession and self-development – by moderating the conflict between these twin needs of personality. (2001: 8f)

A deep democracy cannot be founded on consumption, but must offer citizen cooperation in creation and production of social and societal values.

Unger differs between vanguard and rearguard production, the first being the advancement of new modes of production



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whereas the latter being a model for old types of production, for example industrialism. The compromise between the two is not as easy as it might seem, as the first continuously breaks new boundaries and captures capital, whereas the latter is the base of society yet also the one threatened to be made obsolete by the vanguard. The organizational compromise between the two needs to evolve in a democratic spirit, and not only being a mode of redistribution of profits from the first to the second. And especially, in such new endeavors, “hierarchical control must be minimized: its disciplinary and proprietary aspects distinguished from the real requirements of coordination.” (2001: 33)

The balance needs a continuous negotiation, as innovation always jeopardizes the agreements of cooperation. It threatens to disrupt ongoing relations, as every real innovation changes the character of social relations, cutting up bonds of trust and loyalty.

The task is therefore to develop cooperative arrangements minimizing the constraints upon innovation. Vanguardist production is not simply production that more effectively reconciles cooperation with innovation; it is production organized around deliberative procedures that take such reconciliation as a program. (2001: 34)

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If we are to imagine a deep fashion, it could start as a playground of practical imagination. Not much different from art, which Unger sees as the realm where “we make another world, freeing the social regime we are in from some of its dumb facility and somber authority. (2001: 230) Unger posits we could be learning from art as a platform to establish a living, fluid correspondence, of method and intention, between practical reason and cooperative work.

The role of fashion in such scenario is to empower users, not only symbolically, but offer strategic avenues of action in order to gain more control over the everyday: to produce the cultural equipment to stand up, go forward, to connect to others and co-produce social realities. Empowerment must involve agency and the realization of potential beyond the limitations of the market.

Similarly, the endeavors need to be organized in order to facilitate concerted action. “A vigilant and organized civil society is indispensable to the advancement of democratic experimentalism. A disorganized society cannot generate alternative futures or act upon them. Disorganization is surrender to accident, to drift, to fate.” (2001: 269) A deep fashion is not only a question of “personal style” but organized venues of self-realization and togetherness based on mutual recognition and shared engagement.



Finally, we must see that a deep fashion is neither more or less “capitalist” or “socialist”, nor is not more or less “fast” or “slow” than the current mode. It is not a matter of the total substitution of one existing system with another, but fashion made more inclusive, more diffused, more pluralistic, more honest, and more experimental. Deep fashion is more than the dress of deep freedom, more than any form of deep individualism: it is a mode of mutual care and celebration of life in common.

*text by Otto von Busch, fashion educator & editor of Deep Fashion Bulletin, New York*

**References:**

Unger, Roberto (2001) *Democracy Realized: The progressive Alternative*, New York: Verso