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THE PROSE OF SELF-FASHIONING

WRITTEN BY: JUAN CASPER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY: JOHN RICARD
STYLED BY: MITCHELL JACKSON AND DORIAN GRACE



THE PROSE OF SELF-FASHIONING
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: JOHN RICARD
WRITTEN BY: JUAN CASPER



CHRIS STAMP: A LOOK...
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WRITTEN BY: CHRIS STAMP | CONNIE SHEN



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FLAUNT EXCLUSIVE...
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DO NOT DISTURB...
WRITTEN BY: MATTHEW BEDARD



PANTS BY JIL SANDERS. SHIRT BY JIL SANDERS. SCARF BY VERSACE. AND BOOTS ADIDAS SILVER.



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FLAUNT NEWSLETTER

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

SIGN UP



SHIRT BY VALENTINO, GLASSES
BY DIOR HOMME, AND WATCH
BY BREITLING.

CARDINAL DIRECTIONS

13 DIESEL PRESENTS
THIRTEEN YEARS
OF FORTUNE
AND FAME



SHOES BY GUCCI SOCKS BY POLO
AND PANTS BY BALDWIN

Mitchell Jackson is a novelist, writer type of dude, and he's damn good. Need proof, you say?! Read an excerpt from his upcoming book in our Mother Issue here. He teaches at NYU, he donates to charity, he stresses about world events, he addresses strangers, loved ones with equal kindness. People think he is polite. And that he's also a man of style. Who sometimes concerns himself with the "notions of style." Being a writer and all, this isn't too out of left field. But whatever. Check him out yourself at his website, mitchellsjackson.com.

What follows are his thoughts about fashion, integrity, truth, prose, the intersections between writing and fashion, all in a neat exclusive bundle for Flaunt.com.

Let's begin by at trying to come up with like a definition of fashion.

So I'd like to use the verb form of the word fashion: *To give a particular shape or form. To make.* And the thing you are trying to make is a striking image. In that sense it's not very different from strong writing. You are trying create a feeling in someone through an image. Someone who is fashionable has succeeded in making an image of themselves— They've done something with color, texture, cut, invention etc—that speaks to an audience. So my definition of fashion, at least good fashion, is a striking image created by what a person wears. And when I say wear I mean the clothes, the accessories, the way they style their hair, everything responsible for them becoming an indelible image.

What does it mean then, to have bad taste, to be out of fashion? Can this at all relate to something (I may be getting this wrong) Harold Bloom said, about all good writing being "belated"?

Hmmmm. I never thought about it in those terms. I think what Bloom meant is that writing is destined to be belated because it comes after an action or thought. One of my mentors said the same thing about critics and mentioned Bloom as an example: that a critic always comes after the work and are therefore belated and can never be an equal. But as far as bad tastes, I don't think being in bad fashion has much to do with being belated. I guess you could miss a trend by being belated. Like maybe you don't have the MCM backpack with the studs on it this month or you missed the wave of nerd glasses a few years back. But those are different things. I don't think being fashionable is about following trends. I think being fashionable is figuring out your identity and how to best represent to the world and then being creative represent that same theme over and over. A trend can come along and you jump on it and make a bad judgment in doing so because it doesn't fit you, not fit in terms of size, but fit in terms of truthful representation of who you believe yourself to be. I'd say instead of Bloom, that we should probably use Keats idea of "Truth and Beauty." Being in fashion is when you tell the truth of yourself in a way that is beautiful. And on the other end, being unfashionable would be wearing a lie.

Could you expand on the truth of the beautiful, and the lie as being unfashionable. How does this relate to the work of fiction, which is ostensibly a well told lie?

It's true that fiction is a lie, but it's also true that fiction is about telling the truth, the real truth about yourself. One of my professors, or maybe someone else I admire, told me long ago that whenever you are writing that you are always writing your life story. And I believe it. Much of my fiction is semi autobiographical or close to it at least, but I think if I were writing about Martians, I would still be writing about me. I would still be filtering the actions of my characters through the way I see the world. And I hope that I would be courageous enough to expose the true parts of myself in whatever I conceived. And if someone is not telling the truth, in this case lying the wrong way, don't we sense it. It feels false. It reads false. I can tell when a writer has their heart in something. I can tell when they are exposing a part of themselves—their "wound" as my old mentor called it. For me that's when the fiction is strongest. I'm not worried about if something actually happened. I usually don't care much about plot when I'm reading. I'm looking for an image, a line of truth, a feeling recreated. Yes, the story is fake, but that feeling better be real. And if the feeling is fabricated, why bother with it? It's the same with fashion. You could buy closetfuls of fashionable clothes, but if they are not in line with your identity then you are going to look uncomfortable, maybe foolish. What you present to us will be false. In fiction the author is always telling on themselves. I mean is there anyone who believes that Cormac McCarthy is free of ultra violent urges? What level of real life experience does Junot Diaz have with being a player? I don't care what the story is or the characters, that's what I'm looking for. That truth inside of what we make up.

So then what truth or wound does fashion expose for the person who wears it?

I always looked at fashion as denoting something or other about class.

If you are wearing things that represent your identity then you can't help but expose a part of you that is honest. I can think of this showing up in what color one chooses to wear. It's got to be hard to wear bright orange and not feel lighter in some way. You'd probably be hard pressed to find a real live gangster who favors fuchsia for work. I also think the color black makes people feel powerful. Maybe the person who favors black intends to symbolize their power. Maybe they are letting people know they are in high pursuit of power. Whichever it is, it would be the truth of them, and if it wasn't we'd probably be thinking, 'Look at that guy. He needs some pink in his life!' As far as fashion denoting class, I think it does not to the degree it once did. Especially for people of color or people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They, or should I say we, dress aspirational. It may not the truth of where we are located in the social class system, but where we hope to ascend. We—and I mean me—see fashion as one of the achievable markers of social class. We might not be able to buy the house, or the car, or grab a few thousand shares of the next big IPO, but we can get those Rick Owens boots

if we save our few bi-weekly checks and sacrifice a months' rent. On the other hand, I see people of means dressing in a way that obscures that wealth, their social position. I guess both groups are saying something true about class through fashion, but it seems the message is ironic. If you have it, hide it. If you don't have, trick your public into believing you do. Also, from a practical sense, high fashion is more accessible at a discount now. With a little research damn near everybody can get into the Givenchy craze. I'd bet my left pinkie that there's a website selling Philip Lim for less. But back to the question (I love a good digression). I think fashion becomes a kind of rhetoric. Our way to persuade others of the selves we are or the selves we'd like to be—both of which would be our truth. But no sooner than I said that, that I'm wondering how long it would take for a lie—dressing in a way that didn't represent our true self—to become our majority truth.

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