



reflections #7

**Zinzi
de Brouwer**

Local for Local

On 15 January 2021 the Culture.Fashion network organised the livestream event RENEW THE SYSTEM in collaboration with fashion label Hul le Kes. Fashion Designer Sjaak Hullekes visited organizations that are changing the fashion system and society. How do they think of the current developments in our society? How can we contribute together to a new fashion industry? The event included conversations with Pascale Gatzen, Annemieke Koster and Jolanda Buts about their vision on a new system. The conversations can be seen [here](#).

We invited Zinzi de Brouwer, founder of the artisanal collective Studio Palha and head of Society & Context AMFI, to reflect on the event.

In these unprecedented times the world is travelling considerably less, and we are encouraged to search within our immediate locality for solace and solutions. We look to our inner circles for support; our (grand) parents, our neighbours and local shops. Fashion too, is in this pursuit. The fashion industry as we know it today has certainly succumbed to the detriment of its actions towards people and planet. As we are looking to new, alternative solutions and systems, there is a need to learn from nature and living systems to inspire a new way of doing, making and being.

Whereas the current fashion system is based on endless growth and hyper-consumption, local for local allows us to partake in a much needed paradigm shift. There is much to be said about circular societies and how individual responsibility and community action enables this. As seen in the Linen Project¹, the connection fashion has to agriculture, as well as how the material is connected to the soil it is born from, plays an imperative role in the human dimension fashion seems to be struggling with. As told by Pascale Gatzen², the impact fashion can have on biodiversity and on agriculture is where everything begins. If we start treating fashion as an interconnected field, we enunciate the connection it has to the farmland, and those who cultivate it. This holistic approach to fashion encourages the industry to look at how the practice of the community (or practice



of commoning) fosters agency and ethical engagement. Much like Annemieke Koster does with Enschede Textielstad³, in which local production empowers designers to act local offering a flexibility of weaving 1 to 10.000 meters of fabric. This translates into having a positive effect on the local economy by re-invigorating local weaving techniques stemmed from the traditions of Twente in which weavers place their love and immense knowledge into fostering small-scale production. By working closely with fashion designers, Annemieke connects producer with designer, and closes the fashion loop by producing only what is in fact needed. This translates into a cooperative embodiment of making clothing, in which a horizontal

and heterarchy-type (as opposed to hierarchy) of relationship is created with all stakeholders involved in this chain. She also includes students in this process, much like Studio RYN does in connecting makers with designers and students from the MBO and HBO education sector of the Netherlands. Focusing on small-scale production, Studio RYN looks at the entire value chain of fashion and how education can play a role in fortifying sustainable practices. In the book *Life of Lines*⁴, Ingold mentions the importance of education related to what he refers to as ex-duction: '(drawing out) of the learner into the world itself, as it is given to experience'. We see how this rings true when we involve students in production practices, pla-



cing them in an embedded reality school learning environment, building on non-hierarchical forms of fashion practices. This immediately results in an experiential practice, giving agency to future generations who will carry the importance of social interactions within the fashion industry. According to Fletcher⁵, the shift in material culture towards social culture is paramount to driving a sustainable fashion practice. She states that 'the point of departure becomes people', and herein lies the importance of not looking at the material as centre, but looking at the social relations that drive the material. Referring back to Ingold, in which he enunciates that 'to human is a verb', we can draw inspiration that fashion starts with people, and materials do not contain social lives, but the other way around (Fletcher 2012). Ingold regards human relations as the foundation of which materials stem from:

We really need a new word, something like 'anthropo-ontogenetic', to describe how form, rather than being applied to the material, is emergent within the field of human relations...

...Anthropogenesis [abbreviated from anthropo-ontogenetic] is neither making nor growing, but a kind of making-in-growing. To knit an item of clothing could be regarded as anthropogenic in this sense. The shape of the clothing might map onto the bodily form of the wearer, yet this shape arises from countless micro-gestures of threading and looping that turn a continuous strand of yarn into a surface. But is it any different with the body? 'For you created my inmost being', as it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'you knit me together in my mother's womb.' We have already seen how lines that are knit in the same womb may subsequently go their separate ways in the formation of relations of kinship and affinity...

...Human craftsmanship as an anthropogenic making-in-growing, wherein forms arise from the careful nurturing of materials within a field of correspondence, rather than from their having been imposed from without upon a material base.

From raw material, to textile and clothing, and back again, local for local allows for building a human network, engaging with people and with the clothing we wear in a deeper and more meaningful way. That is not to say that we mustn't take caution when regarding circular fashion practices. Mainly due to lack of scientific research available that regards the social integration of circularity, and how often in its methods, the disregard for the equity-based practices is still an urgency we deal with in contemporary fashion practices. This reminds me of Bruggeman's writings in her book *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion* (2018), in which she highlights the importance of taking 'fashion back into our own hands and make it a catalyst for social change'. We are in need of re-telling the stories of clothing from seed to wearer, and back to the earth. And how ultimately, we are in need of one another.

¹ Initiated by Crafts Council Nederland and ArtEZ Master Practice Held in Common.

² Head of Master Practice Held in Common at ArtEZ University of the Arts.

³ Enschede Textielstad works with recycled materials and natural fibres grown in Europe.

⁴ Tim Ingold. 2015. *Life of Lines*.

⁵ Kate Fletcher. 2012. *Durability, Fashion, Sustainability: The Processes and Practices of Use*. View here: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272144844>

