CONFRONTING BEAUTY

A COMIC BOOK ADAPTATION

BASED ON "BEAUTY & FASHION: CONFRONTING COMMODIFICATION, ADVANCING ALTERNATIVE (PART 1)"

AN ARTICLE BY - ALESSANDRA MONACO

ILLUSTRATED AND ADAPTED BY SHAUNAUK SOKEY
CONFRONTING BEAUTY

a comic book adaptation by
SHAUNAUK SOKEY

KALPAVRIKSH

Environmental Action Group
This comic is based on the article 'Beauty and Fashion: Confronting commodification, advancing alternative (Part 1)', by Alessandra Monaco, available at https://radicalecologicaldemocracy.org/beauty-fashion-confronting-commodification-advancing-alternatives-part-1

Citation: Shaunauk Sokey, 2024, Confronting Beauty (a comic book adaptation), radicalecologicaldemocracy.org and Kalpavriksh, Pune.

Inputs and comments for this publication have come from: Alessandra Monaco and Vasudha Varadarajan

'This is a Radical Ecological Democracy (https://radicalecologicaldemocracy.org) and Kalpavriksh output, supported by Misereor.'

This work is licensed under Creative Commons License Attribution Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (cc BY–NC–SA 4.0), http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0 You are free to copy, redistribute and adapt materials for non-commercial purposes and with attributions to the original authors and photographers/illustrators, clearly indicating the changed portions and under an identical license.

ISBN: 978-81-87945-97-0
About 17 years ago...

I entered the world of fashion.

More by chance than with any serious intent.

Woosh

Creak

Click!
It was as if I had jumped into a rabbit hole.

A parallel, unintelligible universe requiring new lenses to decode it.
While I lived through many adventures in the fashion industry...

The feeling of something being amiss accompanied me through all those exciting times.

This new world I had entered pushed the...

...urgency to appear beautiful as a requisit for affirming individuality.
Focus on being, look inwards

Pursuit for pleasure through accumulation and consumption leads to a feeling of inadequacy & alienation

Eric Fromm explored the ability to focus on being and taking care of our inherent needs, and shed light on the tendencies of consumerist societies to accumulate material wealth and power.

To have! Or to be!
For millennia, people have strived and struggled to find a way to cultivate and grow their inner being and also aim for something "higher" in life.

But contemporary societal aspirations undermine that noble intent by putting value on exterior appearances as the necessary condition for social appreciation.
Throughout human evolution, certain physical traits were seen as "beautiful" because they could signal good genes and health.

This was a shared characteristic in nature: the elaborate plumage of the male peacocks, signal their "superior" genetic quality to potential mates, and mate selection is key to the perpetuation of the species.

Different cultures have had varying ideals of beauty, often reflecting the values and the priorities of their societies. Though what is considered attractive today may differ significantly from its conception in the past.
The concept of beauty as we understand it today, with exclusive reference to specific physical characteristics, did not really exist...

Clothing did not play a central role in defining beauty.

What should I wear?

Don't worry too much about your appearance, just be yourself.

You're always right! Thanks kitty cat.

I know.

Purr!

TA-DA!!

!? GAK!!

Hello gorgeous!

Purr purr
The history of beauty had preserved that concept of beauty beyond an idea of clothing.

Clothing at that time didn’t have a specific aesthetic value, rather it was functional, and allowed to easily identify the sex and function of a member of the community.

ANCIENT GREECE

MIDDLE AGES

During this age clothing and ideals of beauty were fundamentally to identify social status and economic stature.

BAROQUE

The Baroque period was characterized by excess, artifice and wonder. Fashion not only became a means to indicate social status, but also became an expression of excessive luxury.

Over time the idea of beauty began to evolve in accordance to the transformation of the political and economic characteristics of the era. In subsequent historical eras we continue to see a link between external beauty, and both the values that represent the spirit of the time as well as the functional role of social classification.
The Greeks used ‘Kalos Kagathos’ which went beyond the physical appearance and emphasized the importance of harmony between outward appearance and inner qualities.

Ancient Greeks thought proportionate faces were the most beautiful and lean athletic figures for men and soft gentle shaped features with long wavy hair were considered beautiful for women.

Even though Greeks had preferences to physical appearances they understood that a beautiful body was considered to be a direct evidence of having a beautiful mind.

The idea of beauty was enrapt amidst different ideals such as beauty, virtue, and an emotional sentiment...
... but this saw a rapid shift in the 18th century onwards. Significant events such as the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the rise of the bourgeoisie reshaped fashion and the concept of beauty itself.

The introduction of the mechanical loom revolutionized the production of clothes and textiles.

Fashion became accessible and broke the exclusive hold of the nobility on fashion trends.
This technological progress, while ushering in a modicum of social equality, also ended up distancing the society from nature resulting in the loss of moral symbolism in the concept of beauty.

How do I separate myself from the peasants?

With mass production, a part of the bourgeoisie sought to set themselves apart from the masses, giving rise to dandyism.

Both Dandyism and Decadence, emphasized aesthetics as an end in themselves, idealized beauty as an absolute, while favouring the artificial over the natural.

At the time the idea of appearing beautiful was taken to the extreme.

If social media existed in the 18th century

Corset aka organ crusher

Lead & mercury based make-up
The Industrial Revolution further propagated factory systems based on exploitation. The frantic pace of production, continual and deliberate lowering of quality and durability, quick disposal of garments, contraposition between "lumpenproletariat" and the elite, further classifying and discriminating.

FASTER! MORE!!

Fashinator
2000
Fashion perfectly embodies the capitalistic model of consumption that continually invents new needs and desires for more.

As a logical next step of Capitalism, imperialism became a reality in the 16th century.

* is what Karl Marx called the Fashion machine. He considered the natural need for clothing as a contrast to Fashion as an ugly symbol of class stratification.

It was imperialism that imposed a new set of radical standards on the coloured world to psychologically impair the people in the regions with 'beauty' related anxiety, fear of inferiority. A new cultural paradigm on the world: white European stereotype as the archetype of beauty and Fashion.

Fashion however played a positive role in India's journey to independence. Gandhi began the peaceful Swadeshi Movement, which promoted traditional Indian textile and boycotted imported European textile.

There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness
Leaving behind the odd and extravagant world of fashion, I now had a much needed pause to reflect upon my time spent there.
Was it ever possible?
Possible to repel the commodification of beauty demands.

If it does should it make us feel diminished or persuade us to degrade others?
Will fashion continue to influence how we express our physical selves?
Can ill-conceived and insidious norms of beauty paralyze us into ignoring the intrinsic self-worth of people?

To have or to be...
To be continued...