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WHAT is the legacy of Adolf Loos, author of *Ornament & Crime*, in the post-internet age? How do we assign value in the fallout of an anti-fashion movement such as Normcore, which in 2014 prompted hasty analyses from both Elle and E-flux? For Issue 12 of PNYX, Curtis Roth unpacks the hyper-fashion phenomenon, in which time itself functions as the scarcest of commodities.

ANTI-FASHION & THE INTERNET  
ART OF INSTANT OBSOLESCENCE  
Curtis Roth

THAT even the most mediocre entrepreneur today practices the well-rehearsed revolutionary art of *thinking differently*, that the fevered polarization of left/right political discourse escalates even while the differences between its discursants becomes indistinguishable...and thus *the cargo shorts*. Either as a hallucinogenic inversion of our paranoid aversion to a now-extinct middle, or perhaps only a post-net Tralfamadorian's dispassionate expression of resignation over the exhaustion of the very middle we've long been so desperate to avoid, as in: *so it goes*. The difference is everything and irrelevant. Thus was the climate, and cargo-shorts the catchphrase, through which the trend-forecasting group K-Hole released *YOUTHMODE: A Report on Freedom*, Normcore's provisional pop-manifesto, in October 2013 in conjunction with Hans Ulrich Obrist's 89plus Marathon.

Forty pages of perfect parts squishtheory, PowerPoint gradients and new-age informational pamphlet, YOUTHMODE presents itself less as a manual on more-fulfilling ways to dress, than through the ambiguous genre of a *trend-forecast*, a difficult to manage proto-theoretical medium which is unrelentingly visual even while negating its own aesthetic signifiers. Taken as a polemic rather than an edict on dressing, YOUTHMODE counters mass-culture's maxing-out of difference through the rejection of difference



Image from ASOS clothing brand's editorial "#NORMCORE IS TRENDING, BUT WHAT THE EFF IS IT?"

as an increasingly scarce extrinsic *commodity* in favor of the intrinsic subjective *quality* of sameness. YOUTHMODE's radicalism thus at first appears only to be the oldest radicalism in fashion's book: to cleave value from the economic demands of scarcity through a turn towards the purportedly sustainable space of subjective valuation.

In 1903 Adolf Loos would publicly perform the very same fashionable promise of subjective liberation through a two-run publication, tellingly entitled *Das Andere* or *The Other*. In a series of early sketches documenting Loos' selection of the journal's intentionally ambiguous title, Loos formulates a constellation of critical concepts including *Das Aussere*, *Das Eigene*, *Der Same* and *Das Correcte*. Loos' search for an appropriately vague title suggests the obvious conundrum that naming a journal devoted to the intrinsic value of modern subjectivity ipso facto renders it an extrinsic commodity through the simple assignation of the definitive article. *The Other* should

consequently not be read as a title but rather an anti-title, an attempt to undermine the word *the* by pairing it with an empty signifier in order to carve out a blank space through the *the's* negation within which Loos hopes to deposit the uncommodified aesthetic corollaries of dressing correctly in modern times. Importantly, Loos' selection of an anti-title suggests the degree to which the journal itself is not devoted to fashion, but rather truth itself in the form of anti-fashion.

Increasingly in the 20th century, any fashion movement must first paradoxically present itself as fashion's antithesis, a nascent stage of development which elevates its promise of unmediated subjective expression to the status of a provisional truth by construing fashion itself as a form of violence enacted against the delicate subjectivity of the fashion victim in a conceptual gambit for substituting fashion for anti-fashion's always-empty promises of subjective liberation through authentic self-expression. It is here, operating directly within the

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# #NORMCORE

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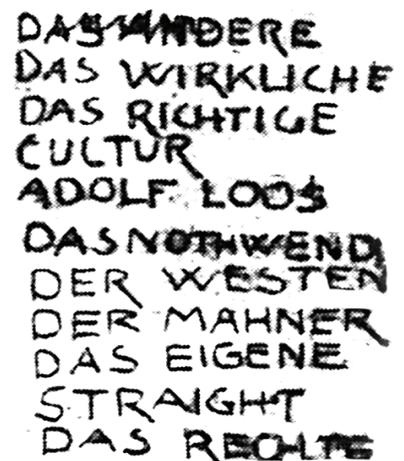
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Increasingly in the 20th century, any fashion movement must first paradoxically present itself as fashion's antithesis, a nascent stage of development which elevates its promise of unmediated subjective expression to the status of a provisional truth by construing fashion itself as a form of violence enacted against the delicate subjectivity of the fashion victim in a conceptual gambit for substituting fashion for anti-fashion's always-empty promises of subjective liberation through authentic self-expression. It is here, operating directly within the superficial irrationalities of the fashion system that Normcore becomes genuinely interesting, not that its half-hearted promise of post-authentic liberation proves any more durable than a century of false promises before it, but precisely in the simple fact that its false promises do not precede its brand's commodification, but exist contemporaneously to it.

On February 26th, 2014, five months after YOUTHMODE's public debut at the 89plus Marathon, New York Magazine's fashion section ran a now-infamous story entitled *Normcore: Fashion for Those Who*

*Realize They're One in 7 Billion*. By March 4th, Elle Online ran a piece entitled *Why the "Normcore" Phenomenon is a Fraud*, by April, Normcore's self-accelerating performance had appeared in the pages of the Huffington Post, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal, Vanity Fair and countless others. Contingent in Normcore's spring-time mediatic pandemonium was the general fashion press' strange paranoia over missing the boat, even while they collectively wondered whether there was a boat to miss in the first place. In an increasingly bizarre succession of headlines including *The Truth about Normcore*, *Normcore: Fashion Movement or Massive In-Joke?*, *The Real Meaning of Normcore*, or perhaps just *Normcore is Bullshit*, what seemed at stake in this escalating performance was equal parts aesthetics and metaphysics. What is particularly bizarre about this brief moment in the Spring of 2014, in which Normcore's metaphysical analysis took center stage, not only in E-Flux but in Elle, might be summed up by the simple question: since when has a fashion magazine been expected to so explicitly account for any fashion movement's *truth*?

Three months before K-Hole released YOUTHMODE in October 2013, a Facebook fan page was established by media artists Mike Grabarek, Chris Cantino and Jeremy Scott devoted to the strategically cryptic subject of Health Goth. That nobody knew what Health Goth was would prove irrelevant. Three months later Health Goth had appeared in the style section of the New



Above: Process sketch depicting Loos' struggle to select an appropriately vague title for his 1903 journal, quickly becoming the second most-Google'd fashion trend of 2014 behind Normcore itself. Health Goth was an open-source exercise in collective obsolescence. The artists themselves were ambivalent towards its aesthetic appearance, asking participants to