

José 0:05

Hey everyone, what's up? Welcome back to biased with me, José Criales-Unzueta

Joining us today is my friend Samantha, a I freelance fashion and culture writer and fourth year law student based in Australia. On today's episode, Samantha and I discuss classism and elitism and fashion. We also discuss the evolution of fashion commentary, Twitter versus Instagram, and our thoughts on access and the definition of luxury, so please follow along.

Hey, guys, what's up? Welcome back to biased. Today, I have an amazing, wonderful guest that I'm very excited to have here. My dear friend, Samantha, what's up?

Samantha 0:39

Hi, I'm so excited to be on your podcast

José 0:41

Thank you so much for being here. Tell us a little bit about you.

Samantha 0:44

So I'm currently a fourth year honors law student here in Australia, and also a freelance fashion and culture writer, and also do academic work and some creative fashion work as well. I currently live in Australia and was born here but I am a Tamil woman from Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. And a lot of my work is predominantly focused on using fashion as a lens to explore, like anti capitalist and anti imperialist, abolitionist, and decolonial types of thinking, and vice versa as well. So a lot of work and how I met José is through my Twitter account, @decouturize. It's where I'm kind of able to really comment on and discuss, and continue to learn about these kinds of topics, which I'm really grateful for. Outside of Twitter, my portfolio ranges from mostly writing, but I also do a bit of social media work, styling, event management, and of course, a bit of legal work. And I'm really grateful that I live in a city with a very small kind of fashion industry. So it's been really fun getting involved.

José 1:49

Amazing, multifaceted fashion doll! Yeah, I think, I think I've been following you on Twitter and on Instagram for quite a bit now. And a lot of the love that I have for what you post is that it comes with a very specific voice, that it doesn't it's not only like your background, in law, your background in general as a person, but it's also that passion that you have for like, anti capitalism, decolonization, all that I, I've been learning so much about in the past, I've always been interested in about at least since I started college, I feel since I've moved to the US from Bolivia. But I've been actively learning about it so much in the past few months, as I feel most of us have. And I've learned so much from you. So I also want to take this opportunity to thank you for that. Because I, on the other side of me also posting and creating content all the time, I know how it looks like it doesn't take any work but it does take a lot of work, you know, and especially like building a platform, etc. So thank you, thank you for all the work that you do, because I really appreciate it.

Samantha 2:54

Thank you so much. I mean, I've learned so much about fashion and the more like technical garment stuff from you. So thank you to you as well.

Love that. So on on that I the first topic that I wanted to touch with you was kind of like this fashion in the internet age, quote unquote. And then the evolution of fashion commentary, right, because I feel that when we were kids, when we were growing up and learning about fashion, there was a handful of people that would comment on fashion that you would find like Tim Blanks, Vanessa Friedman, Robin Givhan, Nicole Phelps, etc. Like there was a handful of people. And I feel that over the years, especially now with social media and Twitter and Instagram, both like even now with Tik Tok, fashion commentary has evolved into a lot of people, almost anyone really who wants to have a platform now has a platform, right. And I think that's something wonderful because in a way it has really allowed so many different voices to come up without necessarily having specific backgrounds like you and I are really good examples of that, right? That we just decided to start doing this work and decided to start posting all the things that we like, things that we find interesting, or things that we want to call out. And now we're here, you know. So I really wanted to ask, what do you think about how this has evolved, like what your thoughts are and how this has evolved? And your thoughts on the industry as well due to this, like in this area of like Internet moment that we find ourselves?

Yeah, obviously like the internet is what gave me a platform. And it's what's connected with so many people, including yourself.

José 4:31

Yeah,

Samantha 4:32

I do think that the development and increasing accessibility of digital technology and also like more specifically social media is definitely bridging the gap. I think between the big brands and the big voices and like the in this industry people and like more everyday people and people who are just starting out. So things and another way like it also means that things don't necessarily occur only behind doors like but into the world with a brand a little bit more than we would be without. And I can definitely see that, in a way social media has kind of led to breaking down that kind of a false wall between consumers and the brands and people and the industry, and has definitely helped with, I guess the issue of gatekeeping, at least in terms of who's talking about fashion, which I think is really exciting. I love to see, I guess a lot more diverse voices now. And all the people that actually enjoy listening to aren't necessarily the, you know, top notch industry people, they happen to be people like yourself, who started out on social media, he just built a platform from the ground up, because I think these people have what they have based on their face, rather than based on where they came from, or who they are. And, yeah, I definitely think that's really great.

Well, I definitely agree with you in that sense, that's just like, it's given room to so many wonderful voices. And it's allowed so many of us like you, and I, again, are perfect examples of

is to just start talking about the things that we find so important within the industry, right. And I also think that you touch into something that's very important that's like that gatekeeping aspect of it, right? I think, and again, something that I feel like if you have a Venn diagram of like, our content like that little thing, and like it becomes something that I feel both of us are really interested in passionate about. Because again, in the past, I grew up thinking that I would never be part of fashion that I am now being so like, elbow deep at it. And like all my friends only talk about fashion or like, work outside of work side job, anything, all of it is fashion, right? It's so interesting to me. And I'm so grateful for the internet, mainly for not only allowing me to learn more about fashion, but also to connecting me with people like you and to create a platform and a small community that eventually starts growing right. And on the on the topic of community. I wanted to ask you about Twitter, because you are huge Instagram, I don't know how to use Twitter, I'm still trying to learn. So yeah, like, what what High fFashion Twitter? Like, tell me a little bit about that? Because that's how I first heard of you.

Yeah, um, I would say I do understand Instagram, especially not for commentary, I pretty much only use it on like a more personal basis. And I do follow, a few great accounts in there such as yourself and @fatannawintout and @louispisano. But yeah, I definitely am Twitter girl, it just makes more sense to me. And I think that is really because I feel like Instagram is not a very discursive platform. And it's like, it's not easy for building like genuine community, and that Twitter does really well. And typically, I think the platform itself is set out for discussion and set out for connection. Whereas Instagram, and it's a bit more individualistic. It's more about like, What do I have to say, or putting out my own content? Because obviously great, but it's hard to discuss on Instagram, okay, you do a good job of like, posting like DM's you get and like using the question function. But for the most part, I think the platform isn't really catering towards discussion, and especially now like with the new update, and definitely focusing a bit more towards selling products, which

Yeah, which is very confusing.

Yeah. Which especially for like, I guess what we love about online fashion discussion is that everyone's a part of it, not just the people who are buying the brands who can afford to be right. And I think Twitter, there's no question to be worried the brands that we talk about, like, compared to Instagram, I feel like people call in people who actually engage in the industry in that way. Whereas on Twitter, most of us are not the class of people who can afford to wear these kinds of brands, but we just have a lot to say regardless, which I think is good. I think it comes with more objectivity because none of us, obviously, none of us are brand ambassadors or signed to anyone or receiving any benefit. So it's very impromptu like you don't plan content. Very, like not so much the time I just say, the first one I have, I really think about it. And I think the way that facilitates good discussion, like

for sure, I think that's actually what I love about twitter. And that's why I've been starting to use it a lot more or trying to at least, because again, for me, Instagram, it was a personal account. And I just started posting my shit, whatever I wanted to post. And somehow it like evolved into whatever it is now. And yes, like posting the screenshots of the DMs etc. And I use still use

Instagram a lot because that's kind of like where my mini community is. But I've been trying to use Twitter more because I see how people like you use it. I'm like, Oh, this is this is cool. It's great like that kind of very, in the moment conversation is something that I appreciate so much of the commentary that we have within fashion right now, especially in our generation, because there's so much value into that. And again, as you say, that part of, maybe you're not participating, or maybe you're not participating with or interacting with the brands by buying the product. But that creates a commentary that's even more honest, in my opinion, I think it's even more it comes from passion, right? It comes from people like us that are like, I love fashion and like fashion is something that I adore. And it's something that I know about, that I spend a lot of time learning more about. And on top of that, like I know about these designers, and honestly, like, I have things to say so why am I not gonna say them? You know, and I think that's just what's wonderful to me. And that's what I appreciate so much of like, our maybe generation of, of like fashion commentary, because you're just basically where we are right now. It's just allowing us to say like, say, our mind without having necessarily to interact with brands a specific way. Which is why I think Twitter is so wonderful. And I think that's something that I think that I always thought a Instagram kind of, like missed on that, that it becomes it's maybe too individualistic in the sense that as you say, this is my content, and then I put it out and bye, you know, like, I'm responsible anymore whereas in Twitter, like you, people @ you. People are actively like, Hey, girl, like what's up this you? You know, so like, it's like more I don't know, it's more interactive, I guess. And it's, as you say, more of a conversation.

Yeah, I think that's definitely the advantage of twitter. I comes with that level of activity and partiality because people are just saying what you think about it, like, fashion is reactive in a lot of ways. So I think, actually, what, you know, like when something comes out from a brand, immediately everyone's talking about it the first one they have, but that is so what fashion is about fashion is ever changing, things always happening. And when people are making curated Instagram content, I think that doesn't always necessarily reflect, like kind of like the genuine just like essence of what's going on, whereas Twitter is very organic.

For sure, I agree. I think on that note, I think we can use the word like democratization when it comes to like this kind of, like what has happened with commentary? And what has this meant for you in terms of, say, like you're a law student, right? So like, how has that how is this axis that you've had into talking, discussing more about fashion, like, maybe changed your career expectations or given you like, maybe a broader path? But also, now we Yes, like Instagram, Twitter, they have allowed us to grow our own platforms, right. But and yes, in our own terms, but to an extent, right, like, what do you think, are like the limitations that being only a social media has to your commentary?

Well, I think there's a few different things you can say on that. And I think the first limitation is time, because at the moment, because of capitalism, obviously, this kind of paradox with traditional fashion journalism, regarding quality, impartiality, and success, like the only place I've been kind of talking about where I read very honest opinions is on Twitter, and on Instagram, and so forth. But the issue is that, but we're all doing this for free, right? Pretty much everyone, especially on Twitter, no level of like, monetized content, even if you have like, a really huge

platform. And a lot of times, like people talking about brands on Twitter does actually fuel a lot of sales, or at least like a lot of engagement. Okay,

yeah.

It's still none of us get paid. But if you look at like in a traditional fashion media, any website or any, like really beat journalists, once they get good, and they gain traction, you know, money comes into it does come into it brands are the ones funding that and like be like your labels. And that comes at the cost of impartiality most of the time, or at least of my unique thought, because like when I see, you know, commentary on Twitter, it's very interesting, like those people who are bringing their personal experiences, they're saying what they feel that is actually critique. Whereas I think something we could read on Twitter a lot is like, especially stuff like vogue runway, we find that a little bit of views on them don't really make an actual comment, like those who actually pay for commentary, people who are making, I guess, more substantial critiques on social media, and who will say things that are actually a bit more interesting and more worthwhile and worth discussing are not really being paid. And there's no way to kind of escape that because if we were if, for example, as an open platform, if we were to go work for a company or write for particular brand that's going to come at the cost of all, while we can't be as objective and as impartial as we were when we were just doing stuff for free on Twitter. And I think that's probably one of the major issues with social media commentators because we don't have as long as they're not being paid. There's only so much time you can put into them. Because like to survive. Yeah. Because there's so many really cool people that if they could dedicate their life to their content, it would be amazing, but we just don't have that freedom because of you know, how it could be.

Oh, my God, you just really, you just really like hit the nail? What is it? It had been nail on the head? I think that's it. Listen, I I was actually talking about this with someone the other day, I was in a meeting about something like this. And I mentioned that I worked full time as a designer, and they were like, wait, you have a full time job. I'm like, What do you think I do all day? Like, do you really think I just like sit down and find things you post on Instagram?

That doesnt pay the rent

José 16:00

Exactly. Like they didn't give me a visa to come to the US either. You know, so like, listen and it's been really interesting. And I think on that note, something also that I find incredibly valuable about what about what you just said, Is that the cost of impartiality. Right. I think that, especially now that we see a lot of you mention Vogue runway, for example. And like vogue runway is an excellent example of, back in the day when when I used to read like style.com, because there vogue runway back in the day. And we read those reviews, there were actual reviews, right and their opinions. And I think that's also what in my case has shaped maybe the way in which I see fashion as well, always with an opinion. But trying to find context or trying to find the missing pieces that you're that you can see. You can pick and choose from collections, right from the visuals. But now when you see it as a summary of show notes, you know, and in some cases,

it's even like a merchandised kind of it reads like a press release almost. And it's really disappointing because there's, as you say, there's so much people that would do such a wonderful job. And this doesn't, this is no shade to the people that write those things at Vogue, right? Nothing to do with them. But there's so many people that would do a wonderful job as well, giving to feedback and giving maybe different kinds of perspectives into it.

On the other side of the question, What has this meant for you like, What has this evolution of maybe like, creating a bigger platform on Twitter has meant for you career wise, because in my case, like me going like being a designer right now, and I love designing, and I don't think I'll ever stop designing. But this commentary has really giving showed me where maybe my biggest passion within fashion is, which is commentary and criticism. And just, I wanted to know that about you like, how has this changed maybe the plans that you had, or the perspective that you had going on?

Samantha 17:55

Yeah, like for sure, it's definitely made a huge difference, because I know it's a bit different in America, but here other university courses like law and those kinds of courses are accessible, because we have like a loan scheme, with fashion school is very expensive. So that in the sense of like, you have to pay for your materials, things like that. So that wasn't something I could have done, realistically. So I think I always thought I just want to be able to do anything in fashion because I couldn't go to fashion school, I couldn't study fashion. So I just want to be able to be involved in it. Even though I am very passionate about it and have always been. Whereas I think on Twitter, I normally do building my own platform, but also like hearing and meeting other people who are doing a similar thing where they don't have traditional fashion qualifications or traditional fashion jobs. But through Twitter are building some kind of a platform that is giving them opportunities, or at least helping them realize that they have something to contribute to the industry. Because I always thought like not studying fashion was kind of my downfall. That's why I can't go into fashion. But I found that that has given me a bit of a different perspective, because I go to law school and I have like a bit more of like a political perspective on fashion. And that's actually really helped me build out a particular platform around a particular voice. So I've kind of come to appreciate the fact that I wasn't able to afford to go back in school because then I wouldn't be where I am today. And I wouldn't be talking about the kind of things to do with fashion that I am today.

I love what you just said because I was actually talking to one of my friends last night about the different kinds of commentary that you also find, right like Now, again, like now that there's so much that we so many of us have the ability to create smaller platforms there's, with this has also become different types of commentary, right? It's interesting because now you can you can now pick and choose, you know, you can pick like the platforms that maybe work best with you or your interests. Like for example. I am so passionate about so many of the things that I find in your commentary so I can actively follow you and learn so much from you. Because it makes sense for me right? And then it's the same thing about myself and other people. Like when I talk about collections, and I talk about the technical side of garments, some people really don't care, which is perfectly fine. But some people are so interested in that. So they want to actually

actively learn and participate from what I have to say and like, participate in the conversations that I want to start. So I think it's really wonderful to see, maybe these walls come down to an extent, and allow us to really be truly have more options and allow people that are not as involved or active and passionate, as you and I are now to also have options into into commentary that they want to experiment, you know, and whether it's geographically like, again, not everything has to be centered in like New York, London, Paris and Milan. Maybe it's yet as topics or maybe it's a different kinds of voices, like Do you want to hear from someone queer? Do you want to hear from a woman? you want to hear from a straight man? You know, there's so many choices. And I think that's, that's what's so wonderful right now. But on that same note of like, now, this larger access, I want to ask you something, I want to go into this part of the conversation that I think is something that from the moment I conceived the idea of this podcast, I wanted to have an episode about this. And in my head, it was always with you. Because I had been following you on Twitter already. And I had been, and this was before we actually had met. So yeah, like I was already like following in Twitter. It's how I was like, eventually, I need to just like slide into our DMS, I guess. And then we know, we ended up meeting and I was like, period. Just work out, you know, but it's the topics of elitism and classism in fashion. And this is something that I feel both you and I discuss in our own ways and your own platforms a lot. And I do think that you have very interesting and very important things to say about this. We talked about this democratization in the commentary, and we talked about maybe working around the gatekeeping, that editorial and journalism and criticism in fashion have always had. But we also mentioned that a lot of us that we talk about fashion, we don't have access to the fashion, right. Like I can talk about as many collections as I want. But the the probabilities that I'll be like wearing some of those clothes anytime soon are really non existent. Right. So I want to ask you first, yes. That what are your thoughts on how the internet has given us access into portions of the industry, for example, looking at shows interacting with shows following editors sliding into the DM's, whatever. But has also showed us that we don't have access to some portions of that. Right. What are your thoughts on that? Like, on that limited access that now that now we're more aware maybe that we have?

Yeah, no. So like, I definitely think that there is like some positive right? Like I definitely love being able to follow creatives themselves on social media, like writers and stylists, as opposed to like, you know, not having that access before. But that being said, I do think people at the moment almost over romanticize social media's, quote, unquote, democratization, capacity. Because at the end of the day, almost everything that we do see and can see on social media not coming from us. But in terms of coming from the brands, and coming from industry was placed there by big brands and advertisers like it's not completely just stuff that's being found, it's being placed there and to be placed in certain places at certain times for certain reasons. And yes, there are some instances where social media has, you know, maybe enabled the spread all kind of like undercover industry information. But for the most part, the internet is still very censored, and it is very heavily monitored, and it is a device for advertising. And we all frequently buy into that. And it's really hard to stay aware of how much of our content, especially like on feed, especially instagram, but also Twitter as well, how much of that is controlled and out of our hands. So whilst there is obviously suddenly greater access to the inner workings of brands and my personal stories of different people in the industry, I don't think it's to a

revolutionary extent that some people are using to present it to be like, for example, something that would actually be beneficial to have access to via social media is information regarding brands production and supply chain. And but it's my goal, these developments in communication technology, then asked me to voice the fact that we want that we have been able to access that because the brands don't want to let that go. And that whole thing assume that control like social media hasn't been able to defeat that in in any way because at the end of the day, they are in control. And we can do cool things to like, share our opinions and we can ask the things but at the end of the day, what gets released is what the big brands and industry people want to be released. And who gets let in the door in terms of gatekeeping is still in their hands. Like we can talk about it as much as we want. But how much are they really doing to respond to that? Because at the end of the day, they're in control?

Exactly. Literally all I have to say that, no, but actually, I think that last part that you say like in the end, they are in control, right. And it's it still happens with not only brands, it also happens with publications and happens with every, every portion of this industry, right? Like in the end, justice, you and I are in control of what we put out into our platforms, they are in control of what they choose to put on what they don't. And I think that's such a such an interesting part of social media that people again, as you say, so many people will like to like to sell the idea of social media as Oh, it has broken down all the barriers. And now you can see, and I think this was the merchandising strategy of influencers, right, like, now you can see us behind the scenes, now you can see us living our lives or whatever. But it's like, it's still pre packaged content, you know, and like you and I know, as also quote, unquote, content creators, I guess that's what we are. We, that we also pick and choose what we post, even if it's typing under 40 characters and hit send, you have you you have control until the point at which you hit send, you know, and I think that's something that people really do forget about, that we get. So we fantasize so much by the idea of like being able to this and being able to follow people and being able to interact with them. But then we get too caught up in that as well and forget the parts that we don't have access to. And I think that in the past few months, being elbow deep in Instagram, and Twitter, and like starting this platform has really taught me that, in the end, once I turn off my phone, that's it, you know, like there has to be, there still has to be something besides that. And I think as wonderful as Internet is, is a wonderful social media is we have to be able to recognize now it has different kinds of gatekeeping, you know, with the with the access that we've achieved, come in different kinds of gatekeeping. Even when you're trying to read an article on your phone that someone is telling you to swipe up to it has a paywall. Yeah. Which is also why like, and maybe I shouldn't be saying this, but I'll say it, I have access to like, The New York Times because my brother's a journalist. So he has a New York Times account, and I have access to it, you know, same thing with the Washington Post. And then to Business of Fashion, I have it through the office. And one of the main reasons why I started posting screenshots of articles is because I know that a lot of people don't have access to those tools, which is so disappointing, because so many important conversations are part of that. And yes, I understand why these publications need to be paid for the work that they do, of course. But if I if I can post a screenshot on like, my 4000 followers can see it, then that's amazing. And I want to share that. And I want to be able to create these conversations as well, because that's also kind of gatekeeping you know, like that access, as you say, like maybe you weren't able to go into

fashion school. But what have you learned outside of it? You've maybe you've learned on the internet, right? So if I can provide that as you can provide that to your community? That's part of the work that we can do as well, because new kinds of gatekeeping that come up with we've touched upon this a little bit. And it's that false, false, false feeling of equality, right? What do you think this has to do with elitism and classism as well?

Yes, I don't think this idea of we are becoming more equal really comes down to who you consider to be we and I believe some have a very, like, small view of who we is. I think especially through because I am, I guess a bit more politically focused, and I come from Eelam so like a colonized place, and all this kind of country, I always think about, well, what is we? like? What does that mean, to me when I say we have free will we are liberated? Like, who is that including? Yeah, I think that should include everyone really, right? But But what is the will people's idea of everyone and just like a very small view of who that is, because at the end of the day, no matter how much of these small increments that mean, so like, you know, putting shows online, or that kind of thing, fashion is ultimately like any industry under capitalism very much rooted in a broad array of systems of supremacy and different kinds of hierarchy. That will always be the set of groups and importantly, exploit a lot of a sudden people who are very much left out of a lot of the conversations we have about diversity and quality, because not only does diplomacy and hierarchy so let's begin like you know, the small things that you can purchase, I fashion who can go to school for fashion, but it also selects whose labor is being exploited and whose environment is being exploited and so therefore, I think something that's not discussed enough when we talk about elitism classism in fashion and how fashion plays into, I guess the oppression of certain people, is the way in which fashion operates within the framework of Western imperialism. And how a lot of these big Western brands and what they do for us, I guess, as like, people who are internet, but you know, living in western countries and that kind of thing, they are ultimately exploiting black and brown labor in the global south. So like, how much equality are we achieving by these very small fixes when the problem goes so deep? Like, I think it's almost very superficial to say that, you know, having like a model of color on a runway is an achievement when it's very highly likely that a Black or Brown person in the global south has died for the production of that garment. And we don't even know about that. So I think I feel like a lot of the discussion on it is very surface level, because I don't think fashion can escape elitism and classism, and all these moves, because it is very much built on it.

Period. I think, first of all, you just said that's like who the we is, I think that's something that we'll we all and I include myself, forget, when we have these conversations, right? I, and I love when I talk to people like you when I read people like you, like your thoughts, whatever. And I'm learning so much. And I'm remembering, you know, and I'm like, Oh, wait, this is true. Like, I can't say like, Oh, we have more access, but because we really, like we like the 10 people that I know on the internet. Like, that's not? What does that even mean? You know, like, does that really, that that means nothing to everyone else in the world, you know, maybe it has meant something to me, but I already have models of privilege in comparison to so many other people, right, especially a lot of people in my country. So, um, I think that's a very important part of fashion that a lot of people forget. And on that note, going back to what you just said about having a model of color, for example, it's like that kind of, quote, unquote, representation is not

enough. And I think the focus of that is also saying that representation is not enough. You know, like, there's no such thing as we can find value in representation, when in reality, it's, it's very individual, right? Just because one person has achieved a certain level of recognition or a certain level of, like, has broken specific walls, doesn't mean that everyone that looks like them has. And I think that what you just said about, for example, how these Western brands exploiting, and exploiting workers and every other country in the world, like, not even just like, quote, unquote, third world countries, but countries like from where I am, like in South America or anywhere in like Southeast Asia, in general, it's, it's amazing to see how easily people forget. And I think this also has a lot to do with social media and how, in, as you say, like, going back into what you were saying about how brands have full control on what they put out, right. They choose what they show you and they they're always going to show you the glitz and glamour, they always going to show you the finished product. They're always going to show you the model of color in the campaign but they're never going to show you that people of color in the sweatshop. No. And I think we forget about that. And I think, again, I'm saying I think a lot, but I have a lot of thoughts. Again, what you just said is so important, because I think now with the mini communities that people like you and I have, has, comes a lot of responsibility as well. Right? Like, I think that in my on my side, I feel a lot of responsibility. When I this cause fashion that I'm not only talking about the pretty things and I'm just like, Oh, this looks so cute. It's like what comes behind it like what's after, like, when I'm applauding someone, I have to do the work of questioning them as well, right. And as you say, I think fashion is perpetually stuck in a in a circle of elitism and classism and and canvas cape as long as it has the same systems that it has. And as long as it's about the glitz and glamour, it's just not gonna escape. It can. It's the way in which the system is built.

José 34:22

A couple of months ago, there was a lot of discourse and Twitter surrounding how, how some people always say that they wish less people would like fashion, right? Like how people and you're laughing because you remember this and I remember it vividly.

Samantha 34:41

Very vividly unfortunately

José 34:42

But I think it's interesting because I actually talked about this when I was in college, someone had mentioned this too, and they were like, oh, now everyone loves fashion and everyone wants to have a brand and everyone wants to be an editor and everyone wants to have a magazine. And in my head it's always been and what's what's the problem with that? Right. And I'm like, that's the whole point. Like, the whole point of like fashion. And like, the whole point of being individual is that you have your own levels of perspective, your own. Like, just, just because there's a handful of expensive brands in the world and people buy into them doesn't mean that that's fashion, right? Like fashion can be so many things. And I really want to ask your thoughts about this, because I remember when I was reading a lot of what you were posting about this, I was like, this person, is it. Like, this woman is she she she knows. So I really would love to know your thoughts about this. Because in my head, it's always been well, everyone should have

quote, unquote, access, everyone should be free to participate, whether it's by selling t shirts, or by selling handbags, or by creating a little zine like everyone should be able to participate. Right. So what are your thoughts on this? Do you think that the more people have, quote, unquote, access, the more diluted a vision quote unquote, gets? Or do you think it's better that more people have access? What do you think about this?

Samantha 36:01

Yeah, no, for sure. I definitely found that discussion, a bit irritating, but yeah, I would definitely agree with what you were saying. Just then I mean, like, ultimately, fashion is the intersection between art and life, right. And it exists without all these constraints, and to say that only certain people can experience or can create, can create fashion is to imply that only certain people can experience what is termed as life. And that is rooted in just the most complex and disgusting world of hierarchical views, and ideas of like domination and subordination. And ultimately, dehumanization. Like again, it comes back to who is we, because certain people have brought the idea we took a very small amount of people, we create fashion, but that's not true. Because everybody is engaged in fashion in one way or another. Yeah, fashion, everywhere. It's in every day, it existed before you know, hyper commercialization before capitalism itself. indigenous cultures have some of the most rich understandings and expressions of fashion there is. And I really feel that more than any other art form fashion is the people's art, right? Like, as Telfar would say, "not for you, but for everyone". And that I think, is, like, I was like, the only brand catchphrase I can ever remember because it's just so true. And it's, it just like so strongly say in this time, where there's so much of that view coming back where fashion should be like this elite circle of people and to people who disagree with that, who think that, you know, bathroom should be elite, that it should be exclusive. I think that they should maybe interrogate why their idea of luxury is almost always caught up in this idea of exclusivity of scarcity and denying other people access. So why does, Why does others having less make you feel like you have more? Because I can't begin to understand that?

Me neither. And, again, this is why this is why I wanted to talk to us pacifically about this, because I know that you had very specific and very impactful thoughts on this. And I fully agree, I think exactly what you just said, like, why does, what does it have to be only a handful of people that create quote, unquote, fashion, right? Like, for me, the the mark of a good designer, is not that everyone is buying their product, but it's that they're able to sell you an idea that you want to be a part of. Right.

José 38:29

So let's talk about our fave like, let's talk about Christopher, you know, we talked about Christopher, John Rogers, and we love the color, we love the proportion, we love exploration, we use fantasy, right? But how does that translate into you? Like, I think the other you posted a makeup look that you were like, I was like an eye look that was inspired by like the colors. And I'm like that is fashion like that specifically for me and my not so humble opinion. That's fashion. When you as an individual you want to participate on not even a trend, you just want to participate on the visual part of it in your own specific way, in the way in which you have access and the way in which you are able to I I really want to mention this because the other day, and

this really touched me and I think about this almost daily, a person sent me a DM on Instagram, like randomly not even to reply to a story just randomly. And it was this woman telling me like, I wanted to ask you what your advice because I and she was saying, I'm I think she said I'm a teacher and I'm Latina. And I'm curvy. Like I'm not super skinny. She's like, I don't know, I don't have access to a lot of fashion and I don't look like the people in fashion. But I love fashion. So how can I participate? She's like I always feel left out. And that one breaks my heart that somehow we and I say we because I'm a part of this industry. Continue to put out this expectation and this visual of who, who can be fashion and who cannot be fashion. But to it also breaks my heart because I feel that way as well. You know, I look at menswear shows, and I'm like, I don't look like that. Like, does that mean I shouldn't be buying this? Like, does that mean I'm going to look like a clown? Does that mean even, even if I could afford it? Does that mean that it's not for me? And it's heartbreaking, right? And like, what I told her, I was, like, I'm gonna tell you what I do. And I'm like, I look at the stuff that I like, on on the wrong way. And then I go to the thrift store, like, I like go to the women's section. And then I go to the men's section. I mean, they figure something out, you know, like, I know how to sew, but maybe you don't know how to sew, and you can just still play around and make yourself your own version of fashion. You know, and I think that's what people sometimes forget, like the people that are so caught up in fashion, being only for a few fashion being glitz and glamour fashion being Devil Wears Prada editor comes out of a black car, and then assistant hands her coffee, and then that's fashion. And for me, I don't want fashion to be that, like I need it. It's no, it's never been fashion for me. And I don't want it to be like that for anyone else. Right? I think I find so much value in what you just said, especially just saying, Yeah, like that. Why does scarcity mean luxury?

Samantha 41:23

Yeah, I definitely think that's something that as you kind of just mentioned, I love about CJR as well, because I think he really marks this like, push towards luxury as not being about like, you know, being small and being, you know, reflecting refined in that like very classical, high fashion sense. It's about it's so much about joy. And I think that is so inclusive, like it's so fabulous and joyful. And it invites people in instead of pushing people out, which I see with a lot of other brands. When I look at their pages, I have the same like same thought like, you know, it looks like anyone here, when you go through John Rogers, Instagram, his socials and everything that he says about what he creates. And it's all about letting people in and selling them, you know, a product, but like bringing that into a vision that he has, for people, and especially, you know, for all kinds of people, which I think is amazing. And I just think, especially with him that way, because he mostly dresses, women of color and black women, which I think is so incredible, because of other brands you like there's the best off annual and that indicates skin tone. And I find that like that would never be put on me. To me, it's made for this idea of what a fashion goal is. And I think one reason why I didn't push harder to perceive the fashion obsessed place is because you know, people told me if you're not single, you're not that girl who is, you know, whatever a high fashion girl is because it's that idea of like skinny, white, blonde, whatever, you know, rich. And this sort of that kind of really small idea of fashion, I think, is what has led to a lot of brands to be very uncreated with their work, which is why the drama just stands out so much, because he's not really confined by this idea to appeal to a fashion girl. Like he just

appeals to people. And I think that's really, that's really cool. And I hope to see more people like him.

José 43:17

I agree. And I also love that you mentioned Telfar because for me that the whole phenomenon of Telfar bag is so wonderful, and it's so interesting. And I was like a whole podcast episode of I could I probably would, at some point, at some point, because I it's so interesting to me, I think that access, and I'd like possibility of people being able to participate into high fashion without it having to cost \$3,000 is so wonderful. And I think some people and I, again, I spent so much time on social media, right? So I and I'm the person that I like, keeps clicking on like all the tweets until I find the first one I'm like, and I read the entire thread. I'm that person, I spent a lot of time in my phone. But I see a lot of the discourse that it goes both ways, right? Like some people are like, this is amazing. I love it. I love to participate. And some people are like, what is it luxury? Like? Is it luxury everyone can have it is a luxury if it doesn't cost \$3,000 and it costs 250. And that to me is just it puzzles me that there's so many people that are going back into what you just said that find that scarcity is luxury, and that find that if only a handful of people can have it and it means it's luxurious, and it blows my mind, especially in a world like the one like the one we have right now that you and I like what were the odds of us meeting if it wasn't through social media, right? You don't we live in a world where you and I can live on a similar wavelength. But, and again like that, that same thing means that it doesn't have to be three people having access to a handbag it can be so many institutions. Feel so special, you know, I can walk out and see, I hop on the train on Brooklyn and I'm like, I see three Telfar bags. And everyone just like looks at each other. And they're like, you know, they all smile they like, because they feel early part of it, but they they accept them. They are also part of the community itself. Right. And I think that's wonderful. So I love it.

Samantha 45:21

Because Yeah, I do, I do not understand that, especially with luxury and scarcity. But it is like a very predominant view in how to understand luxury. But I think for me, like kind of, as you're saying, with that example, on the train with the Telfar guys, the meaning of luxury is abundance, right? for myself, but also for everyone else around me. And that doesn't necessarily mean materialism, or anything like that. But it just means a world where First of all, everyone's basic needs are met without struggle. And therefore, where everyone is able to kind of express themselves and chase these things and be part of like a common vision. Because I think all of us that think about liberation, and because of these kind of things, without the idea of community or community, that's the core of liberation. And that's the core of the organization. It's not about you and your freedom, it's about us being able to come together as a community. And that should always be, you know, at the core of what we're doing when we're trying to, you know, create a better world for fashion and a better world in general, like we need to be doing things that bring us closer together rather than pushing us further apart. And the reason why so many people see luxury as somebody that needs to be paid cash is because they use luxury items as like a status symbol as somebody who feels superior of other people. And they're threatened by the idea that maybe luxury can't do that anymore. And they don't like that. But we

are in reality, I think it should be for everyone. And I really love that Telfar pushing that kind of an idea.

Me too. I remember a couple of months ago I on social media. I also saw a handful of former employees that were discussing the issues that they had at Vogue with classism. And it was based on that right it was on luxury items and how those are used as signifiers and assemblages for being better than,

like, I definitely say, people who understand luxury items as class, buyers, like status signifies struggle to see that in reality fashion, generally is a form of expression. And that's what it should be. And it should be to connect people and not you know, put in more boundaries and already very boundary the world.

José 47:39

So to wrap up now that we've had this entire conversation about gatekeeping, quote, unquote, democratization, access social media, all these things, but we've specifically talked about how some of these brands are maybe too in control of what they show us and are maybe too attached to only showing us the glitz and glamour part of it and not showing not being honest about production or being honest about the other most important parts of a brand, especially for us not as maybe like fashion, quote unquote, fashion people but as consumers, right as like, people that interact with the product. What do you think brands can or should do to not be left behind or to not be on the wrong side of this conversation? Briefly, so we don't get like free consulting, because if you want more advice you have to pay us.

Samantha 48:33

I think it's like an interesting question. And something that you know, isn't like, you know, delve into a lot. But I feel like I think as we were saying before, the brands that are producing really good content and our brand they're not trying to construct like some like, boasts like image or like some way cordoned off identity that hides all the like food, you know, ideas behind the brand. And like, I feel like a lot of, especially the big brands have have very big like PR brand, and like all the content, right? Like, very specifically curated, but then I think a lot of us what we really enjoy is a lot of the smaller designers that are you know, really invested in selling more than a product like they have an idea they have a story, they have a vision that we are interested in a not only buying into but like learning about and constantly engaging with, and something that when you see it, it invites you in. And I think again, classic example is Christopher John Rogers, but he does an amazing job of doing that because like even on Twitter, like you tweet, anything with his name in it, and pretty much always will like it like I think he like looks himself up, which I think is so great, like a lot of us so glad that we just love how much he tries to, like engage with what we're saying about him. It's not just like him putting out his content, which does a really good job of producing amazing content, but he also like, really genuinely looks at what we're saying about him and engages with it which is like so exciting for us like you know, every time he Like a tweet, like someone will post a screenshot, like, honestly, I just like my tweet I had so exciting, right? Because like, one time, there's been such a like, you know, gap. Yeah, like, like that I really did he and he does like really cute like Q and A's on his

story. And he always is actually talking about not his product. But his idea, which I think is something really unique to smaller designers. I'm not just saying but like a lot of the smaller designers are doing an amazing job of talking about an idea like hanifa, who did that amazing, like digital presentation. And she also interacts a lot online with people. And I know, I mean, recently when she was hired to shoot she like did a call out on Twitter, I have no experience like, I think it's exhausting models, no experience necessary, you know, sending your information, which is awesome. Like, like, She's literally reaching out to the people who are invested in her story, who care about her ideas, and not just, you know, product placements. Yeah, I think that is the kind of brands that are actually making use of social media, right, they're not just putting up you know, like, I know, a lot of the other big brands, like they place pictures of the products, and they'll tie it to the store, and it's like, this isn't doing anything for anyone, we could have gone on your store and looked at that.

Exactly, there's a catalog.

Yeah, cuz just seeing a party doesn't make you want to buy it, or doesn't make me care about it. Whereas these brands, these brands, a lot of smaller, most of the time who are interacting with people who are talking about this story, and not just their product, I think that's, that's really what you should be doing.

And I fully agree, I think, for me, in social media, I, I have, especially investments, I have unfollowed, all of these big brands, so like, I want to look at your product, I'll go to your page, but you're not telling me anything else, right. But I do follow like all these like smaller brands, slash designers, because all these Instagrams or Twitter's are both the brand account, but the personal account, which I think is so wonderful, because you do get the best of both worlds. And it's so personal. And it's so it's so inviting. And I think that's that's a key word, right? Like inviting, just like providing people a different perspective of not only your brand, but also you as a person and what you care about what you want to do. what's what's the whole point of view, being in fashion, right? I think anything is a wonderful example of the work that she does with her fashion as well. And like, who she chooses to give opportunities, or who she promotes these opportunities to, is an amazing example of giving back to the community that puts you in these places, right? Like, if you again, like when she put out this amazing show that I like I was talking about this about about the show with someone the other day, and I'm like, it's been months, but we're still talking about it. And it's, it's because it made that big of an impact. And it wasn't only because it was beautiful, and it was like a great technique, etc. But it's also because you want to keep talking about her because you see so much value in her. And the only way of look of seeing this value. And it's same the same thing with Christopher, for example, is because they show it to you, right? Because they show you their personality, they show you what they care about, they show you that they want to build a community. And that's what we appreciate. And that's that's why we choose to stay because it is a community.

Yeah, I think there is a like, those are the brands were doing really, really well.

José 53:26

I loved this conversation. And I think again, you were somewhat you your voice to me is a treasure. And I think you're really someone that I really wanted to have. When I think of what this podcast is platform is for me is having people like you and having these conversations and being honest about the things that we care about, but honest also about our positions where we are how how do we work through this? I thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you. I appreciate your voice. And I'm very grateful. And I love this conversation that we just have. I can't wait for people to hear it.

Samantha 54:02

Thank you. I'm so honored to be here like honestly, like, I feel like I'm amongst the sauce that a name. So thank you so much.

José 54:10

Thank you and those don't forget to follow like, subscribe, follow us on Instagram. Follow us on Twitter. I promise I will get better at twitter. I'll do my best. But yeah, thank you so much for tuning in. And thank you so much for being on Biased. So goodbye.