

# **A** **GAINST ULTRA**

On “STREET FABRIK” by Ini Dill

Beatrix Joyce’s impressions and reflections on fast fashion following the piece “STREET FABRIK” by Ini Dill, performed at Haus der Statistik, Berlin in May 2023.

Text commissioned by the artist.

Before I enter the auditorium at Haus der Statistik, I am greeted by choreographer Ini Dill in the doorway. She hands me a neatly folded item of clothing, wrapped with a ribbon like a gift. She tells me the story of how she acquired this flowery dress and that I can now take it with me to my seat. Feeling flattered and grateful, I head into the auditorium, where more clothes are laid out on the seats, as if to welcome me. I am reminded of the unique value of each material, each fabric, each item of clothing - a stark contrast to the feeling I get when I enter Primark on Alexanderplatz.

What do you think of when you hear the term “fast fashion”? As part of her research for her performance “STREET FABRIK”, Ini Dill asked people on the streets outside high street shops what they associated with fast fashion. To her surprise, many consumers, just coming from shops like Primark, H&M and Zara, had no idea what it meant. She asked them how often they buy new clothes, how important following fashion trends is to them and how it makes them feel.

The joy that you feel when buying a new, trendy item of clothing can be electrifying. When you wear your new top or your new jeans for the first time you feel empowered, glamorous, confident. As Ini Dill and her fellow performers Elly Fujita and Katja Scholz from the Elektroschuhe Kollektiv proclaim throughout the piece: they’re “feeling good”. Initially they strut across the stage with smouldering looks and magazine-cover perfection. But gradually they begin to disentangle these feelings: How do you fancy yourself? Who could you be? With each of their looks comes a new identity, a new character or personality. Who are you today? Who do you want to be today?

In an installation made of countless recycled garments developed by the performers, the dancers constantly change their style, their outfits, their looks. They try on the clothing, pose, catwalk, pose. Slowly, it’s not only the garments that change, but also how they wear them. Trousers become sleeves of a jacket, dresses are worn back to front. The items of clothing now feel entirely different, weirder, more daring. Perhaps we could fight the desire for instant gratification and the impulsive need to fight the boredom we feel towards our everyday clothes, by simply switching them up and trying them on the other

way around? What options open up? Could we be more creative with what we already own?

At the same time, the piece reflects critically on the process these feelings bring. The feeling of joy and happiness when you have a new outfit is amplified to the point of absurdity. These feelings can be so big they define our choices, and yet, they don't last. They fade away, only to create another gap to be filled, locking us into an endless chain of consumption. And we are left with the need to fill the emptiness once again.

In a later scene, the dancers move with paper bags covering their head and bodies: only their legs are visible. They dispose of the garments on growing piles, no doubt referring to the heaps of unwanted garments strewn along the oceans in the Global South. Heaps that we, in the West, cannot see and that therefore think don't affect us. With the bags over their heads, the performers emphasise this ignorance. In contrast to the zesty and fabulous personalities that dominated the performance before then, these bodies are anonymous, moving to a slow, mechanical rhythm. They follow predesignated routes, do what they are programmed to do. Have they become fashion zombies?

"STREET FABRIK" brings the dark side of the fast fashion industry to the forefront and makes its consequences – the crippling pollution of our Earth's surfaces – visible. This message feels timely and urgent, as we have entered an era of "ultra" fast fashion in which brands such as Chinese company Shein ensnare customers on social media with "ultra" low prices, deeply undercutting ethical standards of global production. Meanwhile the German consumer continues to buy on average 60 pieces of clothing a year (according to Ini Dill's research). But, as the creative journeys of the three performers through textiles, beauty standards and fiery fury suggest, all of this could change. May the hidden costs be there for all to see.