

# Cerebral Couture

Beneath the layers of commercial trend-driven fashion lie uniquely interpreted style, an intellectual expression of identity and an extension of the self

**"T**he only real elegance is in the mind; if you've got that, the rest really comes from it," said Diana Vreeland, ex-giant at *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Later this month the documentary *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has to Travel* will be launched and the striking opinions of one of fashion's greats will again be presented. Vreeland and, more recently, Anna Wintour believe fashion is nothing without intellect and that the impact fashion has on a cerebral level goes beyond "just a sweater."

Fashion weeks around the globe celebrate the creativity of some of the world's most inventive minds, but also appeal to the commercial aspect of fashion, thus driving trends as much as sales. But somewhere beyond the glossy magazines, couture and glamour is an inclination for more. There lies a seeking; a need for understanding the human psyche which is wrapped in human behaviour and post-existentialism. Fashion is beyond "action philosophy"; it aims to retrieve one's identity through hope – the ultimate frontier.

"Something's missing. I want to feel more... get

closer, deeper," says Lady Amanda Harlech, afflatus of the very strict Karl Lagerfeld and consultant at Dior and Fendi at this year's Edinburgh International Fashion Festival (EIFF). She's currently working on a project with photographer Nick Knight (who famously worked with Lady Gaga) to better understand the quintessence

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of fashion. Her experiences meeting designers and seeing collections have left her feeling that fashion's craving a deeper unravel.

"We're showcasing fashion in an intellectual way," Jonathan Freemantle, EIFF's Creative Director told *Scene* magazine in New York. The festival presents a diverse programme incorporating salon shows, exhibitions, talks and workshops, with a particular accent on "the relationships between fashion and philosophy that allow for



Editor-in-Chief of American Vogue Anna Wintour

ideas to be inspected at their inception."

Part of the EIFF programme was neurobiologist Professor Ludovica Lumer, from University College London, who discussed "Dressing the Self: Art, Fashion and Neuroscience." She questioned the self as a construction of our relations with others, the environment and the choices we make ("what we wear, how we colour our hair and what cosmetic surgery we have") in

order to express our identity.

"The way you dress, the way you put yourself together every morning when you walk out the door is the most important language and says more than anything you could ever produce," said Aaron Rose, writer and major culture contributor in an interview with *Another* magazine. He believes fashion is "anti-history"; that it gives way to the discourse of what we fully experience to be "style," which is the ultimate attempt to break past thread and colour and understand how fashion is a way to denude the self, to explore identity and be part of expression.

Fashion icon Iris Apfel posted a YouTube video entitled *I'm Not Just Some Empty-headed Fashionista*, which argues that her clothes and distinctive way of expressing herself are an extension of herself and not just to create a persona. She maintains that through fashion, she's found a way to uncover and detangle her identity, leading her closer to understanding the self.

Billions may tap into fashion to retrieve or discover their identity, but judgement of fashion as frou-frou is what prevents them from experiencing its adeptness. Then again, hope is what will continually remind them to deepen the search – the ultimate quest for survival of the self. ■