

Now Fashion Retailer Simons Promotes Euthanasia. “Freedom to End Your Own Life”

After Balenciaga, more publicity campaigns are taking a disturbing turn

By [Mary Harrington](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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Fashion has been smashing taboos since Coco Chanel first marketed trousers to women after World War I. But today there are very few norms left to assault in pursuit of publicity-generating controversy. So perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised to find the rag trade venturing into truly taboo territory: paedophilia and now suicide — albeit with a fig-leaf of liberal proceduralism, in its guise as medically-assisted voluntary euthanasia.

Last week, fashion brand Balenciaga triggered [considerable controversy](#) when an ad campaign featuring young children holding teddy bears dressed in bondage gear hit the headlines. Not to be outdone, Canadian fashion retailer Simons is the source of this week’s fashion rage-clicks, with a [video](#) celebrating euthanasia.

The video, titled ‘All Is Beauty’, features ‘Jennyfer’, a terminally ill woman who in October this year opted for Canada’s now widespread euthanasia programme. This has seen doctor-assisted self-deletion [grow from 2.5% of all Canadian deaths in 2020 to 3.3% in 2021](#): in 2021 euthanasia accounted for almost 5% of all deaths in Quebec and British Columbia. But apparently it needs promotion, too: the video feels like an advert for this way of ending your life. It’s styled in heavily boho-consumerist terms, compiling the kind of footage — oceans, bubble-blowing, convivial mealtimes, glowing lanterns — you’d expect in a bourgeois holiday let ad. These, though, are combined with audio voiceover from interviews with Jennyfer herself (who was a real person) in which she talks about seeing beauty in everything even as she plans to end her own life.

Peter Simons, who stepped down as CEO in March, doesn’t appear to see anything wrong with producing glossy holiday brochure-type adverts that present killing yourself as a way of celebrating life. When the campaign launched, he [told](#) the advertising trade press in October that it was “an effort to use our freedom, our voice, and the privilege we have to speak and create every day in a way that is more about human connection.” Using his company’s

resources and platform to make euthanasia adverts, is, he suggests, a positive act of corporate social responsibility, saying: “companies have a responsibility to participate in communities and to help build the communities that we want to live in tomorrow, and leave to our children.”

The mind shies away from imagining in detail the kind of ‘community’ that high fashion would ‘leave to our children’, based on Simons’s and Balenciaga’s marketing output. But lest anyone be tempted to see this as a sinister conspiracy, it could simply be explained in terms of brute commercial calculation. For as long as you don’t mind a bit of blowback, mining taboos remains an effective marketing strategy.

While Balenciaga has [apologised](#) for paedo-whistling in photoshoots, a cynic might observe that in terms of pure profile-raising, the campaign has been a roaring success. And Simons says his company’s promotion of euthanasia is “obviously not a commercial campaign”, but corporations aren’t generally noted for deliberately doing things likely to reduce shareholder profits. It’s probably a safe bet that people who are seriously contemplating asking a doctor to help them end their own life are not also in the market for a [Vivienne Westwood tweed bomber jacket](#). Meanwhile, the Simons video has been viewed a million times.

So this is another company garnering clicks and liberal cachet from taking a stand in favour of ‘freedom’, even the freedom to end your own life. No wonder, then, that the taboo-smashing ratchet goes on, aestheticising all-out war on the prohibitions that uphold our humanist settlement, even when the only ones left are child sexual abuse and choosing to end your own life. It’s at least a century too late, though, to wonder how many of the other taboos whose smoking rubble we now call ‘culture’ were also standing between us and profound darkness.

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Featured image: Screengrab from Simons’s ‘All is beauty’ campaign

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