WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

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'Excuse me dear, I don't know what you're trying to say with that floral blouse of yours, but we are not going to get married in Hawaii." Sometimes garments can say so much more than lips are able to. Therefore, instead of focussing on the words that are used in the wonderful world of fashion as I've previously done, the time has now come to focus our attention on how garments can create a language all their own.

Language encompasses much more than just verbal utterances. Actually, it's said that 80% of human communication is nonverbal. Our body tells other people that which our mouth not always dares or wants to say: the truth. And since our body is covered in fabrics most of the time – and thank the Lord for that, because for some people it should be illegal to be naked in public – our clothes speak their own language. As the expression states, some people 'wear their heart on their sleeve', meaning that their emotions are there for everyone to see. Therefore, your nonverbal emotions are also an integral part of your outfit.

Black power suit, big shoulders, high heels: "I'm proud to be a woman in control." Old ripped jeans, t-shirt, flip-flops: "I am a relaxed dude." Tracksuit, stained boyfriend sweater, UGGs: "It's Sunday, I'm cold and I don't give a sh*t how I look." Leather jacket, matching trousers, cowboy boots: "Don't you dear mess with me!" Yellow striped button-down shirt, pink shorts, socked feet in sandals: "I'm a middle-aged man with bad taste. So what!"
Clothes can express your personality, the state of mind you're in at a certain moment in time or the vibes you want to radiate. This means that by picking a specific outfit, we can actually choose who we want to be on any given day. It's in those moments that we're aware of the specific messages that garments can send. Whereas 'naked' body language, such as facial expressions and posture, occurs subconsciously, the fabrics that cover our body represent a conscious choice of expression.

This being said, if outfits represent a conscious choice of expression, then why do some people choose to not look their best? At the risk of stating the obvious, not everyone finds the way they look in general or clothing in particular that important, because not everybody wants to make a statement or stand out in the crowd. That's completely understandable of course, but in my opinion, it's a shame that not everybody acknowledges the power of a well-chosen outfit, because a nice fit can do so much for one's self-confidence. It can be like a little magic trick transforming both appearance and mood to create an instant ego-boost.

Since most of us don't own a magic mirror that tells us 'you're the fairest of them all' every morning when we stare at it all puffy-eyed and with messed-up hair, we need something else to boost our egos and reinforce our sense of self. Fashion can act as our personal magic mirror. By wearing that big-shouldered blazer you can feel powerful and in control making clothing the key to a feeling of authority. But a garment can serve many other goals such as making you stand out from or, conversely, melt into the crowd. It can make you feel sexy, girly, masculine, tough and so much more. This opens the door to creativity and interpretation for both the wearer as well as the viewer of the clothes, since the meaning of those clothes to the wearer can differ completely from the way the viewer interprets them. Aside from a difference in opinion and taste, the way we view clothes can also be culturally predetermined. For instance: that cute red dress that screams 'girl on fire' in Western Europe, can mean 'watch out I'm a widow' in South-Africa or 'I'm a communist' in Russia. No, the connotation of colours is not universal. A green hat may look very gentlemanlike in England, but when a man in China wears a green hat, it means that his wife is cheating on him. Another example: a floral top with bows that the French consider to be cute and vintage, may to a trendy American girl look like something old-fashioned that her grandma would wear. At the same time, the short leather trousers that same American girl finds sexy, may be regarded as very offensive and over-the-top by the aforementioned French girl. What's perceived as sexy in one country may be considered vulgar in another country, in the same way that good taste in one part of the world can be a perfect example of bad taste in yet another part of the world.

Sometimes the code, i.e. the secret language of clothing, is very hard to grasp. Clothing is a very personal matter due to the fact that everyone has an opinion on fashion. However, one doesn't need subtitles to translate this non-universal language. Perhaps the beauty of fashion lies in its subjective qualities. The fact that different interpretations of outfits can co-exist peacefully makes the world one big catwalk where everyone can decide how to star in their own fashion show every single day.

As you can clearly see, our garments speak their own language. Fashion has a voice, and it's loud and clear.