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One day I saw a lady wearing a T-shirt with the slogan “nothing can define you” which made me burst into laughter. She wears this because she wants people to relate her with the definition of cool and modern, and put her under the catalog of cool attitude girls. But at the same time she wears this to deny that. What a twist.

However, the case also makes me wonder dose fashion reveal our identities or make our identities even more mysterious?

Before we ahead to the question, there is another one to be answered: why fashion can somehow relates so tight with our identities?

“Anonymity” as Joanna mentioned in *The Fashioned Body*¹, puts people in a paradox where we can only have a sense of people’s identities by their wearing, but at the same time, everyone can use that fact to “trans” their identities by their looks.

“Anonymity” here means million people live in a big city like NYC where everyone seems like a stranger to each other. Because the dense of population and little time for communication or further information about other persons, people here can only use limited time to get knowing each other. Instead of in a small town where you and your neighbors may play together since you were a baby and everyone seems quite familiar to each other, big cities actually leave people in a situation that you may pay lots of attention to fashion and even rely on that to know others or impress others. Joanna gives Campbell’s study to show the examples. In Campbell’s study,

he presents that “ the figures of the dandy and the Romantic in the nineteenth century represented two divergent practices of dress which articulated a concern for individual and be ‘true to oneself’.”²This example just shows both sides of the contradiction relationship between fashion and identity.

Another interesting fact is that fashion becomes the patterns for people to “manipulate” themselves. For instance, people who dress in an exquisite suits may also want to behave like a gentleman with the Duke title. What I want to point here is how powerful the fashion is that it can be a reason for people to define their personalities. In this way, “don’t judge a book by its cover” seems right and wrong. Because we are the writers and we can be writing a fiction or a novel or an instructions even just in the second we change our covers. It seems fashion can give us a cover of who we want to be instead of who we actually are.

However, It was shocking when the power of fashion over controlled our life. There is a piece of news showing that some young people spent majority of their money in fashion which leads them even hardly meet ends up. They may wear Christian Louboutin, but sacrifice trading themselves good food. This extreme phenomenon re-define our relationship with fashion to the one with brands. Because if we see deeper in this fact, It gives us a hint that not only certain styles define us, but at times we let brand names define us well. In the book *Fashion-Philosophy for Everyone: Thinking with style* defines this case as “ the slave of fashion.” “Slaves, for one thing, are enslaved to someone else, some particular individual, against a backdrop of institutions that make the slave into property. But this pattern needn’t

hold for all objectification. Although historical slavery may provide a paradigm case, people may also be treated as objects by diffuse social systems, and there can also be self-objectification. Both of these may be in play, when it comes to the darker side of fashion.³ Editor, here, clearly sketch the idea that we, as a part of society, are bonded to the system and try to satisfied the standard from this society. As in fashion, we are slaved by social aesthetic, taste and stereotype even. But at the same time, this helps us to realize the self-value, which, in the reaction, makes us feel that is fashion. And this point also leads arguments between people who view fashion or clothing as their “second skin” and those who view it as “body accessory”. The former believes fashion has the power to speak your identity in a silent but direct way, while the other will not spare a glance for that, and thinks fashion is just “a piece of” accessories for our identity revealing. But if we think further, they may say the same thing.

If we take a closer look for this phenomena, there is an interesting twist which from ready-to-wear clothing leads people to break some boundary between different classes to how people buy brands to show their “identity labels”. In *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, Diana Crane wrote, “In the twentieth century, clothes have gradually lost their economic but not their symbolic importance, with the enormous expansion of ready-made clothing at all price levels. The availability of inexpensive clothing means that those with limited resources can find or create personal styles that express their perceptions of their identities.⁴” By this, Diana shows clear the

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reason and trend of which fashion became more multifaceted to all social levels. From high fashion to high street fashion, you can always have a peek for current trends, creative styles and fashion attitudes. While ready-made clothing gives people more choices, it dramatically narrow the way to show different identities. Because people can pay third of the price for a jacket in high fashion's lookbook, but still have a very similar style by buying net-a-porter. It pushes people to look further and deeper out of just getting that look. Then, we turns to brands. Brands choosing becomes the sign of our personal identities and the code of attitudes. Brands' values take the stage to reflect our vision. We deliver our own values, expectations and even emotions by put a similar brand story on. More importantly, brands can both give customers their own individualities for their behavior of choosing this particular brand and also the feeling of belonging because they are part of a group. This subtle psychology explains why fashion often needs brands to lead people in the commercial way. It's not just a name. However, in some developing countries, like China, people may also want to show their aesthetics by simply choosing well-known brands. That's why luxury goods gain huge attention and a large market in China. Choosing luxury brands seems like a short cut to show their great taste and exquisite behaviors which end with a fancy identity. No matter if all the pieces are adorable, it seems high class with a high fashion brands' label. People, then, attempt to get social recognition rather than showing a specific style, which, if we view in another way, shows how powerful fashion is, and how deep fashion can effect our identity-recognizing.

I have no idea why this “surface thing” goes deep like a philosophy mystery. But it’s quite interesting of the relationship between fashion and us, the way how society system influence fashion, and how fashion explore it back. Most of it, they can switch their roles in a second. They both act and react at the same way.

resources

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Crane, Diana. 2000. Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, gender, and identity in clothing. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.

Entwistle, Joanne. 2015. The Fashion Body. Cambridge: Polity Press

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