

Claudie Grisius

Wardrobe therapy

A manifesto for fashion for mindfulness
and empowerment

Self-help is a hot topic these days, but its underlying principles have been advocated by the greatest philosophers for thousands of years. Humanity has always reflected on how to lead a good, meaningful and inspiring life. Cicero, the prominent Roman statesman, wrote more than 2000 years ago that philosophy teaches us to be doctors of our own souls: “There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.”¹

Cicero was a big fan of Socrates, one of the first philosophers, and took philosophy to the streets to teach young and old the art of self-help: “We must endeavour with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves”. I personally find this quote very powerful. Indeed, I believe that our life’s mission should be dedicated to self-care and that we should use all our resources, including our wardrobe, to help us feel present, alive and empowered.

It all started with a pair of power socks

When I was a child, we had a big garden. Every year around Easter, I went to check on the daffodils. I would use them as my own personal fashion barometer. If I could see their white heads sticking out (even if they weren’t officially in bloom yet),

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the season of skirts and socks had arrived. I still remember that feeling of joy, empowerment and real excitement when I could swap my long winter pants and tights for my beloved socks (we called them *Sportsströmp* in Luxembourgish) and a breezy skirt. My *Sportsströmp* stood for spring, power and freedom and gave me that blissful feeling of excitement, energy and vigour.

I had a few other memorable fashion experiences growing up. For our admission exam to secondary school, my best friend and I wore real armour: a pair of strawberry red pants and a white sweat-shirt emblazoned with a colourful rainbow. We marched into that exam room like a pair of soldiers – fearless and full of determination. Nothing could stop us in that power outfit.

Finally, I also had a life changing moment thanks to a scarf – that moment you always read about in books and think will never happen to you. One chilly morning in early autumn, the sun was shining and I was wearing a fierce leopard scarf which transformed my whole outfit. I could literally feel it in my veins. I was walking to the office in the sunshine with that power

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The invigorating power of *Sportsströmp*Bouclé v-neck *bourgeoise affranchie*

scarf around my neck and for one perfect moment all I could feel was bliss. At that moment I knew that I wanted to create clothes that help you tell stories and empower you to walk the catwalk we call life. It was that scarf that triggered my own personal (r)evolution; I completely changed career path and became the co-founder of a fashion label. For me, clothes and fashion are a means of self-expression and empowerment, but this isn't the case for everybody.

Fashion as oppression?

The Cambridge dictionary tells us that "fashion is a style that is popular at a particular time, especially in clothes, hair, make-up etc..."². I know plenty of women who think fashion is a(nother) means of oppression in society. Not only do they feel they have to be financially independent, a perfect mother, the best spouse ever, but on top of that, they need to look good and keep up with current trends.

Fashion affects how other people perceive us and if you buy a certain piece for its logo, price tag or to impress others and display class, status or achievement we're definitely in the realm of oppression.³ But, more importantly, fashion also affects how you think about yourself and this is the most interesting part.

Some of my clients come to my shop and ask which colours are fashionable this season and all I can say is that I have no idea and couldn't care less. Fashion is like a language; everybody has a different way of using words and putting together sentences. Everybody has a different accent and speaks a different language. We're all unique

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and express ourselves in our own way. You'd never consider getting the latest bestseller and learning the chapters off by heart to tell your own story. So why would you get a whole outfit from the catwalk or a look put together by somebody else just because it's fashionable? You speak your language in the same way you wear your clothes. And that's where it gets tricky. We need to ask ourselves what our style and our fashion language is – and more crucially how we want to feel in the garment we're wearing.

Enclothed cognition

Clothes have always been very important to me; they're an extension of myself, a

means of empowerment and armour to match my fighter spirit. I love playing around with textures, styles and attitudes. Some of the people in my life were sceptical of my passion for clothes and thought it was all bit too much. Obviously, I had to defend myself against accusations of shallowness, vanity and materialism. All I can say is that fashion is not shallow, not vain and not in vain. Fashion is a language and as important as verbal communication.

Although I fully own my *Sportsströmp* episodes, I didn't invent the theory that clothes have an impact on our emotions. Cognitive psychologists Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky have called this "enclothed cognition"⁴. Enclothed cognition describes the direct influence that the clothes we wear have on our emotions. In enclothed cognition, two different factors are at play; the symbolic meaning of clothes and the physical experience of wearing them. In 2012, Hajo and Galinsky examined the effect that wearing a lab coat had on the participants' attention. The experiment showed that two conditions needed to be fulfilled to increase attention; the lab coat actually needed to be worn at the time and the coat needed to be associated with a doctor. The participants who were told that they were wearing a painter's coat didn't experience the same increase in attention.



Self-reflection smart-shirt: it's NOW or never!



Smart-shirt forever JUNG!

Studies have also shown that formal wear like suits can help you feel authoritative and powerful.⁵ Casual clothes boost openness and friendliness.⁶ Active wear or gym clothes increase your likelihood of working out and making healthier lifestyle choices.⁷ And, last but not least, socks and underwear, even when not visible (my *Sportsströmp* were obviously very much on show), can boost confidence and self-image.⁸

Wardrobe therapy

I use fashion – I actually prefer the word garments or clothes – to consciously influence my emotions. I don't like the term fashion as it suggests that it's short-lived and unsustainable, I wouldn't let myself be guided by something that by definition is as volatile as emotion itself. When I had my life-changing moment wearing that power scarf, I knew that my mission in life was to empower people through clothes.

In my view, clothes should make you feel mindful, playful and alive, but most of all you should be comfortable. The clothes we make are designed to amp up your vol(t)age⁹, because life is all about electricity and change. The clothes we wear should reflect our personality and our desired mood. And that's where it gets tricky for most of us because we need to ask ourselves who

we really are. We design clothes with a certain intention to guide you in the right direction. All of our empowering accessories have different names and are made for a certain kind of woman.

Want to feel like a true cosmopolitan? "Deeply in awe of the Universe, she calls the infinite cosmic arena her home. Ani-

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mated by her visceral knowledge that she is made of star stuff, she consciously celebrates her existence, finding stillness and strength in the profound feeling that she is a tiny part of the Whole. For the true cosmopolitan."¹⁰

Or would you rather be a wild explorer of life? "She knows that her wilderness is innate. Her inner peace rests in her intrinsic knowledge of her uniqueness helping her to embrace new fresh pathways to unleash her creativity and inspire others. Fearlessly pursuing her goals, she dives into her power to move forward enjoying the

fullness of Life. For the wild explorer of Life."¹¹ Some days we need to feel like a *bourgeoise affranchie*: "Determined, classy, and astoundingly clever, she stuns with her mental independence. Protecting her personal space with a liberating aloofness, she knows how to creatively inspire her people who thrive in the radiantly comforting sparkle of her presence. For the *bourgeoise affranchie*."¹²

There is poetry in every look. Every wardrobe reflects the personality and the choices of the wearer. Our clothes are a part of us, we imbue them with our energy and experiences. But the opposite is also true; the clothes we wear can inspire us and heighten our emotions. That's why we created a line of self-reflection smart-shirts, which feature mirror-inverted positive messages or mantras that we read when we look ourselves in the mirror.

Our life's mission should be dedicated to self-care and we should use all our resources and, most importantly, our wardrobe to help us feel present, alive and empowered. We make clothes charged with positive energy and create slogans to be etched in our minds. We make pieces that stick with you through the catwalk of life. Because life is a journey: "Living and ageing are all about gaining back our own Self by individuation, i.e. by

self-actualisation. It's all about overcoming the tension of opposites. The yin could not be without the yang. The night could not be without the day. Embrace your shadows. What you resist persists. Continue recreating your Self, go with the flow. *'I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become.'*¹³ – forever JUNG!

Love your wardrobe as you love yourself

Today, I reorganised my wardrobe in preparation for the colder season. I just spent an hour combing my wool and cashmere pullovers to remove the pills that come from wearing them and I feel like I've just come out of a fancy spa session. As we get older, our clothes age with us and we should treat them with the care they deserve. I'm an unconditional supporter of sustainable clothes and I only buy good quality garments that I intend to keep for as long they make me feel empowered.

Going through my wardrobe feels like an exercise of self-reflection. I use the KonMari method¹⁴ which to me is the only authentic and constructive way to engage with your possessions and apply the principles of enlothed cognition. As we have seen, what you wear has an undeniable effect on how you feel. Marie Kondo advises you to pick up each item in your wardrobe individually and ask yourself if it "sparks joy". An item can spark joy because you love it or because you acknowledge how well it serves you. Do you feel good when you put it on, does it serve a purpose in your wardrobe? If the answer is no, Kondo recommends thanking the garment for its service and then throwing it out or donating it.

Checking in regularly to see how your clothes make you feel is a powerful tool to practice mindfulness. This way, you really appreciate what you have. It also helps you realise what's important to you. When you use your knowledge of enlothed cognition in future purchases, chances are that you only buy what you really love to wear or what really serves you. I'd like to conclude this article with a quote by Cicero: "We must endeavour with all our resources and all our strength to become capable

of doctoring ourselves".¹⁵ Let's keep it simple and start with our wardrobe! ♦

- 1 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*. For a modern and lively analysis: Jules Evans, *Philosophy for Life and other dangerous situations*, Novato, New World Library, 2013.
- 2 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/fashion> (all websites referred to in this article were checked on October 21, 2021).
- 3 In the famous novel *Kleider machen Leute* (Clothes Make People) by Gottfried Keller published in 1874, a young penniless tailor who fabricated himself fine clothing was mistaken for a visiting young lord in a neighboring town and managed to marry a princess.
- 4 Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky, *Enlothed Cognition*, in: *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2012.
- 5 <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/04/wearing-a-suit-makes-people-think-differently/391802>
- 6 Terri Gutierrez, R. John Freese, *Benefit or Burden? Dress Down Days*, in: *CPA Journal*, April issue, 1999.
- 7 <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/12/psychology-of-lululemon-how-fashion-affects-fitness/281959>
- 8 Christiana Tsaousi, Joanna Brewis, *Are you feeling special today? Underwear and the "fashioning" of female identity*", in: *Culture and Organization* 19 (1), Taylor & Francis online, 2013.
- 9 vol(t)age is a *jeu de mots* of the word "voltage" meaning electric and the French word *volage* meaning evolving and changing.
- 10 <https://www.byvoltage.com>
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Marie Kondo in *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying*.
- 15 *Tusculan Disputations*, ibid.