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**Article:**

Clarke, JS and Holt, R (2016) Considered consumption: Vivienne Westwood and the ethics of consuming fashion. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 25 (2). pp. 199-213. ISSN 1056-4926

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492615592969>

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## **Considered consumption: Vivienne Westwood and the ethics of consuming fashion**

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### **Abstract**

Little attention has been given to the ethics of fashion consumption despite the often trenchant critique of the fashion industry for intensifying cycles of production, consumption and disposal and encouraging in consumers a superficial sense of identity and the good life through apparel. In this paper we suggest that although relationships with clothes are not often explicitly stated as ‘being ethical’, the capacity to be ethical can pervade the buying and wearing of clothes. We focus on the fashion designer, environmental campaigner and critic of consumption Vivienne Westwood and those who consume her clothing. Using a single case study approach (combining interview data, participant observation, internal and external documents and literature) we examine the ethical potential of consuming fashion. We show how ethics in consumption is a critical engagement with how products like clothes are bought and used, and understanding the value of the products we choose to buy. Consumers find themselves personally implicated with and caring for a designer’s work and become responsible for reflecting on their own consumption decisions rather than cheaply satisfying immediate desires.

### **Keywords**

Fashion, Ethics, Consumers, Vivienne Westwood

## **Introduction: Ethics in fashion**

Fashion has long been implicated in debates about wasteful consumerism through encouraging consumers to regard apparel and the ‘good life’ as almost synonymous (Buchholz, 1998; Gibson & Stanes, 2011). The idea that consuming more equates to a better existence has been sustained by adages such as ‘buying-as-therapy’ and ‘shop ‘til you drop’ and by the rapid circulation of products and styles (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; de Graaf, Wann & Naylor, 2001). The tightening cycle of consumption, image and identity is accelerated by wider institutional forces. First by the media’s fascination with fashion and fashion shows, willingly ceding to the identity of fashion being less about commerce, and instead more of an art, deserving of cultural comment, generating huge amounts of free copy for copy-hungry journalists, bloggers and readers (Chakraborty, 2014; Geczy & Karaminas, 2013). Second, by ‘houses’ - not firms - like Burberry exploiting digital technology enabling consumers to buy as they view the catwalk in real time online, and allowing the interruption of the traditional twice yearly seasonal framing with special collections, micro-seasons and special collaborations. Third, the phenomenon of fast-fashion, a response to an increasing demand for cheap fashion, has led to high street stores utilising just-in-time manufacturing with such intensity that a turnaround for collections can be as little as three weeks, resulting in disposable clothing that is designed to be worn less than ten times (Claudio, 2007; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009).

We find an industry steeped with concern for efficient, rapid and inherently datable production, all of which is sustained by the active manipulation of human aspiration. Accompanying this intensification of production has been criticism levelled at the way fashion supply chains disrupt local economies by encouraging monoculture, use of child labour (Kavanagh, 2013), poor working conditions (Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shiu & Hasson, 2006) and cruelty to animals through activities like cosmetics testing and fur. The fashion industry’s hand in despoiling the natural environment has also been highlighted, for example water use

in cotton production (Hoskins, 2014) and the impact of fast fashion on increasing levels of waste with claims that more than 1bn kilogrammes of textiles are being sent to landfill every year in the UK alone (Waste Online, 2008).

Many fashion firms have reacted to bad publicity by espousing social and environmental concerns, enacting sustainability campaigns, using environmental labelling schemes, and employing co-operative groups (Berry & McEachern, 2005). Increasing the transparency of supply chains, for example, finds companies investing in better working conditions, installing environmental protection systems, considering less invasive production methods, all of which amount to clothes made with more consideration for the impact on others. For example, the clothing retailer Gap, historically a target of anti-sweatshop activists, is now part of the (Product) RED social responsibility campaign which seeks to combine consumerism and altruism using celebrities to promote items where 50% of profits go towards HIV treatment (Amazeen, 2010).

Yet criticism continues, not only with regard to the base level contradiction that fashion by its nature encourages rapid consumption and hence *has* to be wasteful, but also that an assessment of the success of these ethical production initiatives remains a very inexact activity (Entine, 2003). Being skilled at the manipulation of taste, extending these skills to persuade consumers of their ethical credentials has been a natural progression for many brands. For example, H&M, the leviathan of fast fashion (currently promoting 30-50 trend-driven fashion ‘seasons’ each year), have launched a Conscious Collection and invest heavily in producing and promoting their sustainability report, and yet remains elusive as to how far into company activity these commitments extend (Shen, 2014). Nickel & Eickenberry (2009) cite the irony of leveraging social responsibility for overtly capitalist enterprise and remark how the fashion consumer is being exposed to ‘marketized philanthropy’ that ‘creates the appearance of giving back, disguising the fact that it is already based in taking away’ (p. 975).

Any serious questioning of this accelerated consumption has more or less disappeared from discourses in mass media as, reliant on advertising revenue, they warmly espouse “the concerns of activist-consumers or even ethical consumers but they shy away from any direct assault on the premise of consumerism” (Gabriel & Lang, 2006, p.148). Moreover, any claims that we should consume less are frequently ridiculed, “especially if those who make them can be seen sporting anything more ostentatious than sackcloth and ashes” (p.149).

The ethical debate about fashion seems stuck here; one side attempting to persuade consumers that products are made fairly and sustainably in systems designed to ameliorate adverse impacts on others, the other side accusing fashion companies of being complicit in the degradation of human lives and the wider natural environment. In the midst of this are the decision-making consumers who have been absolved somewhat by being consigned to a position of manipulated endpoints whose role is to feel an unending desire for ever more populous panoply of products (Gabriel, 1995). In this paper we move the debate away from concern with the nature of and compliance with ethical standards in production and move our focus to the consumers of fashion. Using a single case study approach (combining interview data, participant observation, internal and external documents and literature) we investigate how fashion might constitute a fertile area to study first how consumption and ethics might be sympathetic rather than antagonistic, and second whether the buying and using of clothes constitutes an area of such sympathy.

Our case study examines the British fashion company Vivienne Westwood still led, in part, by the eponymous figurehead, focusing predominantly on the consumers of this fashion brand. In using a single case study approach, ‘extreme’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001) or ‘revelatory’ cases (Yin, 2003), are advocated because they display phenomena more transparently. Westwood is certainly what would be considered an ‘extreme’ case. Her designs have always elicited comment from the slashes, pins and confrontational slogans of the “punk” aesthetic and

onwards. More recently Westwood has become somewhat infamous for her growing insistence that we ought to consume less, and her campaigning work for environmental groups and the Occupy movement, despite being embroiled (as all fashion houses are) in the endless turnover of product we have already discussed. This tension sets the background for the study and while we explore Vivienne Westwood, the individual and her firm, the focus of our analysis is predominantly on the experience of Westwood's consumers as they buy and wear her clothes.

Our paper develops insight into the ethics of fashion consumption, arguing that customers of Vivienne Westwood can be seen as ethically consuming fashion. We find these consumers knowledgeable about the way the clothes are made and alive to the historical lineage of their making and use, their symbolic resonance; they feel themselves part of the story. Long-standing consumers find themselves implicated in how they too are being 'designed' in processes of use that they then continue through imaginative experimentation. Once committed to Westwood there is little evidence of the customers wanting to trade up to more expensive designers, or even obsessively buying more while discarding what they had. They care about the material being used and invest themselves in wearing the clothes, riffing off them with their own self-made creations, finding kindred spirits similarly engaged. Our study shows how the active involvement of consumers is not only important for commercial viability but embroils consumers in an engaged, critical, collectively negotiated and sustained creation of an ethos that carries with it a sense of right from wrong; wearing clothes has ethical resonance.

### **Vivienne Westwood: Fashion designer and critic of consumption**

Vivienne Westwood is a somewhat subversive figure whose fashion career first began with her business and romantic partnership with Malcolm McLaren in the 1970s. Though

Westwood spoke of an early desire to look like ‘a princess from another planet’ (V &A, Vivienne Westwood Chronology), wearing clothes others would balk at (McDermott, 1999) it was McClaren who persuaded her to channel this experiment into design. McLaren was heavily influenced by the situationist movement, which was a group of avant-garde political revolutionaries that rejected capitalist authority and saw as its mission to subvert and challenge the bourgeois status quo through interventions (Debord, 1967). Together they created a body of situationist merchandise sold from premises at 430 Kings Road, London (Steele, 1996). Westwood’s “princess” became an androgynous figure dressed in ripped shawls or converted life-vests adorned with pins, images of Karl Marx and scrawled script declaring the end of the future (Evans and Thornton, 1991). Their T-shirts bore disturbing slogans such as "Destroy" superimposed over a swastika and an image of the Queen or depicted images that shocked a conservative 1970s England such as a pair of homosexual cowboys naked from the waist down. This style known as “punk” found favour with the disenfranchised youth of London amid a climate charged with ethnic tension, a jaded establishment and industrial and military unrest (Savage, 1991). Led by McLaren and the Westwood-wearing band the Sex Pistols, they worked to catalyse fellow working class youth into issuing a creative ‘up yours’ to establishment mores (Lydon, 2014).

The shop on King’s Road went through a number of name changes - ‘Sex’, ‘Seditionaries’, ‘World’s End’ - each reinvention opening up yet another imagined place: “Sometimes you need to transport your ideas to a world that doesn’t exist and then populate it with fantastic looking people” (Vivienne Westwood, Worlds End Blog, 2013). Initially this “new world” was populated by London punks but no sooner was punk expressed than popularized by a media all-too ready to translate the offence felt by middle-England into good copy. Westwood and McLaren moved on, now making clothes based on the costume of native Appalachians, swashbuckling pirates and a scurrilous inversion which found underwear



becoming outerwear (Carnegy, 2006). Westwood talks of the transition from punk as her realising both the impotence of rage (“I was very angry...now I know we need ideas not kicking down a door”) (Morrison, 2012) and accepting how capitalism, is very adept at absorbing and adapting to its own ends all attempts to escape it. The new collections were exuberant, joyous, as Evans (2007, p. 22) puts it, Westwood led “bold and swashbuckling raids on the past, treating history and culture as a dressing-up box from which to recreate the self as a flamboyant and spectacular creature’. This morphed into yet another musical movement centred on the Kings Road shop – New Romanticism, all Darcy shirts, sack and buckle boots and caped drama (Westwood & Kelly, 2014).

In the wake of Malcolm leaving and their partnership ending Vivienne turned to tradition, craft and to a study of how others have made things before her (Steele, 2008). Technically Westwood was self-taught, it was she said McClaren who gave her creative catalyst sufficient to go it alone once they split as a couple. From the mid 1980’s she was rooting her work in tailoring and apprenticed herself to the skills necessary to cut, sew and fold cloth (Wilcox, 2004). This apprenticeship she describes as learning through action, often taking the form of copying, about which Westwood remains unabashed. By trying to copy technique you build up your own technique – ‘I was finally able to produce a silhouette that hadn’t been done before, nor could it have been, because it was a synthesis put together in the present’ (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010, p. 143). From this time the artistry becomes more grounded in an appreciation of what makes cloth, the body and movement hang together through time as well as in time, without ever losing the playful edginess in which she had been schooled with the McLaren partnership (Wilcox, 2004). The clothing remains distinct in being always slightly on the move, even if still, with slightly twisted hems and button lines, or odd junctures of texture, material and pattern (Negrin, 2014). The resulting look can also be androgynous, skirts for men, codpieces and tailored jackets for women; the traditional polarities of gender

are played with, contrasts are brought out through the inversion of habit (González & Bovone, 2012).

Punk began this playing with opposites, and arresting use of materials - bondage suits in military tartan, lifejackets declaring an end to life. Yet though the 1980's and onwards Westwood has found more a creative wellspring in tradition than something to rail against. The clothes often take reference from the pattern books of British history and culture, almost to the point of its becoming a tradition. The logo – “The Orb and Ring”, for example, used since 1985 is quintessentially British; part of the royal regalia held by the Queen at the ceremonial State Opening of Parliament. Together with the ‘Saturn’ ring this logo represents “taking tradition in to the future” (Ben Westwood, Worlds End Blog, 2013). Visible between the language of branding cliché, there is DNA here, the orb represents the grounding core of tradition, the satellite ring the open possibility spinning out from it; discoveries in design come from studying tradition.

Vivienne Westwood has come a long way from maverick designer, to gradually becoming part of the establishment, receiving an Order of the British Empire in 1992 and the title of Dame Commander in 2006 for her outstanding contribution to British fashion (Stanfill, 2002). She is now the figurehead of a large cultural and commercial enterprise, her clothes and products are sold in more than 50 countries and over 700 points of sale worldwide across all five continents including UK, France, Italy, Russia, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia, South Africa and the US (Vivienne Westwood, Staff Training Manuel, 2012). See Table 1 for Westwood chronology.

Like any other fashion brand, as a firm Vivienne Westwood is mired in consumption urging those who buy the clothes and accessories into a cycle of seasonal production, promotion and consumption. Her brand is no stranger to logoed t-shirts, outsourced perfumes and cheaply stamped jewellery. Yet there is a growing tension even contradiction, within the

firm which comes with her now growing insistence that consumers should resist consumerism. In 2010 after presenting her collection during London Fashion Week Westwood made a stand against consumerist society saying backstage to reports “Stop all this consumerism...I just tell people, stop buying clothes. Why not protect this gift of life while we have it?” (Katz, 2010). The riposte is obvious and Westwood’s ambivalent, often contradictory stance has drawn predictable and barbed comments, often from similarly conscripted fashion journalists. As Suzy Menkes, fashion editor of the International Herald Tribune remarks:

How dare she send out a show laced with anarchist messages, take her bow in a clinging dress with the word "propaganda" spiralling around her ample figure, announce that the spirit of her show is ‘the more you consume, the less you think’ and then take the opportunity to launch her collection of punk safety pins in diamonds? (Cadwalladr, 2007)

Through her role as figurehead and creative force in a successful fashion business she is persistently accused of duplicity, even hypocrisy. She is an ardent critic of the very consumer society within which she and her firm exist, “Dame Vivienne Westwood has always been a mass of contradictions. She hates, with an unswerving passion, consumerism and excess. Yet she has built a fashion empire” (Iley, 2014). Recently her criticism of consumer society has taken the form of vocal support for the Occupy movement, the work of WikiLeaks and especially the informant Bradley Manning, for preserving the Arctic from mineral speculation, and campaigning against climate change. For instance, in her Spring/ Summer 2010 collection entitled Planet Gaia (referring to the idea of the planet as a self-regulating system), the models were adorned with environmental slogans such as “Act fast, slow down, stop climate change” (Negrin, 2014). On these issues Westwood has put her money and name forward as capital for

protest with a commitment and passion of an ingénue that eclipses the corporate efforts of rival fashion firms.

Discussing submission to compliance standards and support of “worthy” causes takes us into typical territory when discussing fashion, ethics and capitalism. In this paper we move the focus of ethics in fashion consumption away from ideals such transparency in supply chains or limiting environmental damage towards and instead bring attention to the buying and wearing of clothes as an ethical process. We argue that rather than focusing on Westwood’s more controversial and contradictory comments (“get rid of advertising. Consumption is the biggest propaganda. It’s ruined the world”) (Iley, 2014) we suggest there may be greater ethical resonance in her quieter, more persistent (through her career) advice encapsulated in her edict: ‘buy less- choose well, make it last’ (Cain & Johnson, 2014). Westwood is not anti-consumption; rather she asks consumers to take consumption seriously, and beyond the parameters of buying/using/replacing objects and services. Here the consumer is not a passive recipient of a largely politicized message adorning a t-shirt, but is being pressed into the production process. There is a recommendation to scale back from excess, focus on quality, and to consider use. So we buy fewer items, wear them differently, and look after them, as they will look after you, functionally and expressively. This is where we feel Westwood touches upon an ethics of consumption, by placing customers into roles of self-enactment, forcing them into a more active engagement with what they wear and why.

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## **Data Collection**

We collected data using three techniques; (1) unstructured, one-on-one interviews, (2) internal company documents and external secondary literature, and (3) participant observation. We relied on the interviews with Westwood's consumers as the main source of data, with the observation, documents and literature serving as important triangulation and supplementary sources for understanding the business and building a chronology of the brand, identifying any discrepancies among interview participants and as a means of gaining additional perspectives on key issues that unfolded through the interviews (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

***Unstructured interviews:*** We conducted eleven unstructured in-depth interviews, lasting 90 to 140 minutes, recorded and transcribed. Using a purposeful sampling approach, we focused on a limited number of respondents selected because of their extensive knowledge and understanding of Westwood herself or the Westwood Company. This included long-standing employees and notable customers (identified for us by Westwood employees) who had been buying Westwood for at least twenty years and fashion dealers who both consumed and sold Westwood clothing over an extensive period. We also interviewed a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum with extensive knowledge of Westwood. As Patton (1990, p. 169) argues the 'logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases [participants] for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research' (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The unstructured nature of the interviews, allowed us to elicit what was experienced by the interviewees as worthy of sustained comment as they reflected on their recollections of events and experiences associated with buying and wearing the clothes and business dealings with Westwood herself and her firm (Kvale, 1984). Follow-up questions (more depth) and probes (clarifications) were used flexibly so as to allow us to follow

emerging themes and to trigger a further elaboration (Silverman, 1993). The interviews were then transcribed in full ready to analyse.

***Documents/Literature:*** The Westwood case is very well documented. We started by collecting data through documents pertaining to Westwood and her brand and clothes (Webb & Weick, 1979). The key texts and external literatures included her biographies (Krell, 1997; Mulvagh, 1998; Westwood & Kelly, 2014; Wilcox, 2004), media articles and reports, interviews in trade journals and newspapers with Westwood herself and those working with her (e.g. Brockes, 2007; Khan, 2012; Lutyens, 1998; Ross, 2013; Saner, 2008; Threlfall, 2010; Walker, 2009). In addition the Westwood Company's extensive online presence was examined (e.g. Westwood's official website; her World's End Blog; her Climate Revolution Blog; and the Active Resistance to Propaganda website hosting a manifesto). We also obtained internal documents (e.g. staff training manuals; selling catalogues; sales reports) useful in gaining insight into how the Westwood Company wants employees and customers to encounter the brand. In addition we examined wider historical source which situated Westwood and her business within the context of the social, artistic and economic changes happening throughout the evolution of her firm (Savage, 1991; Simon, 1995; Vermorel, 1996). Although our focus was on the consumer's experience, an important part of the study was to examine the wider firm and the internal and external messages in relation to consumption. Not only did these documents provide a secondary data source but also proved helpful as a tool for engaging participants in discussions about Westwood.

***Participant Observation and Informal Interviews:*** Finally, using a form of participant observation we conducted approximately 20 hour of observations. Although we didn't actively participate in the activities of our participants (i.e. we did not become organizational members) we asked questions and conducted informal interviews during the observations (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Key observations events included observing stockists

buying the collections; watching employees' interactions with consumers on the shop floor; observation of and partaking in couture fittings and attending Westwood shows at London and Paris Fashion weeks. We took detailed field notes during the observations and, in the process, not only captured those items of relevance to the direct interests of this research but also acquired useful information about cultural and structural aspects of the organization to aid in understanding the organizational context. We constructed the narrative of our findings from a combination of our interviews, documents, and observational field notes.

### **Data Analysis**

As we collected we also inductively analysed data, adhering closely to the guidelines specified for methods of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given this, we remained aware of how interviews present images of events and experience that are structured by wider social settings, both those experienced as well as our own questioning, thereby skewing responses rhetorically (Silverman, 2013). Here the variety of data sources help, using secondary material to the supplement interviews particularly with Westwood herself, as we had no primary interview data with her. Secondary data also allowed us to emphasize certain critical periods and were useful when there was differences in terms of factual information from participants.

Having left the field, we began the analysis by becoming highly familiar with all the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts of interviews, field notes and collected materials. Given that theory in this area is underdeveloped our aim was to build theory that was “grounded” in the data through a systematic inductive analysis rather than imposing an external structure on the data (Charmaz, 2014). The coding began with the process of open-coding where we assigned a code to each line of text. These codes accurately described the meaning of the text segment and helped organise the data by breaking up the text into

manageable chunks. For example, the text “there wasn’t the landfill of clothes that there is today and I call it a landfill, not lightly, because it is a fucking landfill, trust me” was coded as “critique of fast fashion”. Each relevant statement was organised under its appropriate code within a separate word document.

In the next analytic phase we built on the previous coding cycle and using the existing codes, we reread the data and searched for any further data that fit into the existing categories. We then clustered together similar codes and looked for redundant codes. Based on a thorough examination of all codes created in the first cycle, we organized and synthesize them into more analytic secondary codes. These second order codes are more abstract, because they are based on a preliminary analysis of more descriptive first-cycle codes (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). For example code names included “Evoking and subverting traditional class system” and “Power of art and gallery system”. We aimed to develop a sense of the categorical and conceptual order arising from the open codes (Saldaña, 2009) through comparing codes to other codes and categories in order to advance our theory-building. We searched for relationships between and among these categories, which facilitated assembling them into our final second order codes.

Finally, we then gathered similar themes together into four overarching dimensions that make up the basis of our theory of ethics in fashion consumption: Reinvigorating heritage; Curating a story; Experimenting and DIY; and Critical consumption. The final data structure is illustrated in Table 2, which summarizes the second-order themes and over-arching dimensions and some further examples of raw data quotes. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is not to develop a set of general rules that apply across all cases but, instead, to look at the detail of thought and action surrounding specific events and periods in the experience of a group of consumers buying and wearing clothes to understand the larger systems of meaning reflected in them, in this case in relation to ethics and consumption (Geertz, 1973).



## **Findings**

### **Reinvigorating heritage**

Throughout the consumers' accounts there was evidence of the recognition and appreciation of traditional materials. Most notably the fabrics Westwood uses such as Harris Tweed and tartans crafted using long-standing weaving techniques are for her consumers of integral importance. These traditional, solid and conservative fabrics evoke longevity and a sense of being within a collectively anchored cultural field.

[Westwood's relationship with materials is] something that I love and admire...in the eighties when they used to work with John Smedley they used to make tartans and tweeds on the looms in Huddersfield, in Ireland whether it's Harris Tweed in Scotland, whether it's sequins done in India, [the materials are] the most important ingredient in the clothes. (Customer 1)

Westwood sees fashion as being profoundly enriched by the renewal and reinvention of tradition: "I'm not trying to do something different" she reflected "I'm trying to do the same thing but in a different way." Westwood's re-invents these traditional fabrics, modernising them and making them feel relevant to consumers. This focus on using and revitalising traditional and indigenous fabrics is one of the most attractive aspects of her clothing for her consumers.

It's quality of course, that's what people associate with [Vivienne Westwood], you see some of the old collections that we've done "On Liberty" "Café Society" those fantastic collections full of tartans and tweeds you don't even need to touch the fabrics

you don't even need to see the fabrics in real life, you can see from the images of the shows that the fabrics are amazing. (Employee 2)

The consumers showed an understanding and interest in the symbolic power of Westwood's clothing both to evoke history while at the same time subverting traditional notions of class, status and British nationalism. The Westwood aesthetic finds tweeds traditionally worn by gamekeepers and aristocrats and the Saville Row suits worn by city financiers, are upset, disturbed, finding their way onto eccentrically cut cloth, brought into irregular alignments. Her consumers appreciate how her clothing honours tradition while at the same time unveiling the contrived nature of the British class system.

If we do a collection and we've got Harris Tweed in it you immediately love it because it's got a history, it's got culture, it's synonymous with Saville Row with tailoring, it used to be something for the upper classes and the more aristocratic affluent people, whereas now it's just available for everybody, it's accessible to some degree but at the same time it's got exclusivity. (Employee/collector)

Tradition is used critically, where historical garments are studied and re-cut, materials used in the 'wrong' places, or brought into hitherto unacceptable contrasts. Consumers express delight in how they evoke reactions from others through this subversion of tradition and use her clothing as a means to create and transform their identity. As one consumer describes below the reaction of employees in his local supermarket:

It's how you can dress completely opposite and the colours and different cuts and different sizes length trousers or different sized length shirt, twisted drunken shirts and

things. My Asda loves it. They love to see what I am wearing and how I wear it and I could wear the same top with different things and nobody twigs on that I have had the same top on for a week. (Customer/Collector)

By appropriating the clothing of aristocracy and elite society, Westwood taps into their power and theatricality and allows the consumer to assume and play with this alternative subverted identity. Westwood has commented that her clothes “give you power because you’re able to play with your identity” and her consumers also often spoke of the power of her clothing, the fabric used and its properties.

For want of a better word you feel the power of it...from buying one or two pieces, standing completely out with just a shirt or something, [people] say that's a nice shirt oh yes it's a Vivienne Westwood it's got an orb on and then all of a sudden you start collecting it and then you start understanding it and then all of a sudden the penny drops...you wear different things in different colours and different styles and different ways ...it made me become, I don't know not powerful but I disarmed a lot of people  
(Customer/Collector)

There is an understanding the while Westwood’s clothing, her play on tradition and gentle mockery of the British Establishment, can be used to play with identities, ultimately the consumers also spoke about their developing awareness that they are essentially performances rather than enacting a “real” self.

I liked wearing Westwood’s clothes for all the obvious reasons: they are striking and unusual, and I hoped that the wearing of them – which in those days required a certain

degree of courage – displayed similar qualities in me. I was also something of a rebel, and I found the association with punk – an enormous inspiration to me as I was growing up – quite irresistible. A lot of this was, I now realise, self-delusion  
(Author/collector)

The customers had an enduring relationship with the brand and commitment to tradition but there also remained a critical awareness and questioning among the consumers. Westwood consumers are not blindly devoted to the symbolic ‘value’ of fetishized commodities but are aware and able to critically reflect on their reasons for consuming fashion and to recreate the meaning affixed to goods they buy (Agnew, 1993).

### **Curating a story**

The idea of the Westwood brand as a “story” or narrative was evident throughout the interviews. By stories the consumers referred to the provenance and history of Westwood created originally as a rebellion against established consumerist agendas and with an active disinterest in profit, growth or future earnings. They compared this to the constructed accounts of other fashion labels created only to sell clothing, that existed in an increasing liquid society with permeable boundaries of status and wealth where people aspire to be what they are not by reaching for things they do not yet have. This aspiration is managed by publicity, the promulgating of images and messages showing the manifest benefits of products and cultivating communities of similarity (Bauman, 2008). Westwood consumers felt they were removed from the vagaries of such a system of managed desire:

I’m not even interested in anything else [clothing brands], because there’s no story, no depth, no body to it...the problem nowadays people want everything, they’ll open a

magazine they'll see you got to have this, you've got to have that to feel acceptable... It's just marketing, it's people controlling people whereas with the [VW] story is ever evolving and changing all the time and it's the way it should be....there was a punk movement, there was a new romantic movement, now there's a more element of couture movement, so it is a broad spectrum of people but at the same time encapsulates everyone (Employee/Collector)

When talking about Westwood and her brand, consumers spoke of the label as “wholesome” and themselves as “custodians” of “protecting” and maintaining her work and passing her “story” on to future consumers. For example rather than speak of “selling” the clothes the employees often framed their role as being curators of a story, one they needed to share with potential consumers. Without the story a potential customer cannot connect with the brand in the same deep manner.

you're selling a story, you're not selling clothes, you're selling a story...it's nice to give people a sort of provenance that what they are buying has some sort of identity some sort of story, it's not just a piece of cloth or a horrible fashion accessory it's got something to it depth that's important I think (Employee 1)

Westwood consumers argued that we shouldn't consume clothing to satisfy desire managed and stimulated by publicity as any satisfaction we initially feel is simply an overture for yet further managed desire. They argue the value of clothes has become indistinct from the thoughtless and intensifying cycles of expression, production and disposal and we should instead buy clothing with a “provenance” a “story” that is precious and to be preserved rather than discarded and disposed of.

the slogan [Westwood's] was 'buy one thing choose it well' whereas some say in business you need to sell, sell, sell...that's not right you don't sell clothes, you don't sell bags, you don't sell jewellery, you don't sell accessories the most important thing in my eyes is that you're selling a story and it's a story that can grow, you know as a book grows from the first page to the last page and then when you've read that book you read a different book, the whole Company is a story and it will never end because even if the Company finished tomorrow and we ceased to be any longer, there's still the clothes that were produced years and years ago that will always carry on (Employee/Collector).

Westwood's consumers are passionate about the creation and intricacies of her clothing and although they covet the clothes it is not as a means to acquire more but to appreciate and treasure the items they already possess:

[One of my] favourite pieces that I have is the destroy muslin top from the late 70s that's just basically a cheesecloth shirt with a print on that had the depiction of Christ upside down on the cross...I mean how it survived is beyond me because it was almost like tomatoes they were perishable goods you wear them they got destroyed, they got knackered they don't last...it's an iconic piece...its authentic, it's real...the person who had it before they've got their little story of how they acquired it...it's someone's story that is passed on to someone else (Employee/Collector)

It is not just her consumers who value Westwood's clothing and seek to curate and preserve it, her work is now itself considered a form of art by the fashion establishment. This is evidenced by her clothing's presence in museums such as London's Victoria and Albert Museum

(V&A) which has acquired an impressive collection of Vivienne's early work (Steele, 2008) and the exhibitions touring the world showing pieces from her own personal archive.

Westwood had a long history of engaging in research at the V&A's costume collection, where she studied the cuts and draping of historical dress, so as Steele (2008, p. 16) comments it seems "fitting that her own work should be placed on display there". One respondent describes an encounter with Malcolm McLaren in the early 2000s where they spoke with humour about how this clothing created to shock the establishment had ended up curated in a museum:

[Malcolm McLaren] came up to the studio and I had everything in bin liners, in cupboards and things and it made my day to see Malcolm so excited and he said to me I love the fact that you have got them in fucking bin liners and that these clothes have all been worn some of them near to death, because that was what they were made for, they weren't made to be wrapped in acid free tissue... although today we are looking on them where they will be in a museum which is quite fun isn't it....so going back full circle. I don't think for one minute that they imagined it would be in a museum, [Vivienne] was going to museums for inspiration you know. (Fashion dealer/Stylist)

Like her consumers Westwood has a deep respect for the preservation of cultural, historic and artistic treasures and see engagement with these as integral to the development of an ethical consumption "go to art galleries" says Westwood "start to understand the world you live in. You're a freedom fighter as soon as you start doing that, and you get a perspective on everything, not just on consumer life" (Walker 2009).

There's a fantastic series called Painted Ladies that she did and she's talking about how art, mainly the Wallace museum, the Boucher Prints.... all sort of influences for her different collections....you know there's collections of painting, collections of porcelain, collections of clocks that all influences her clothes which is fantastic, all little intricate ideas. (Customer 2)

Through her engagement with museums, galleries and art Westwood has encourages a respect for the past within her consumers out of which comes responsibility for the future, developing a form of consumption that might enhance rather than compete with an ethical life.

### **Experimenting and DIY**

Westwood advocates a sense of experimentation and bricolage, making do with a do-it-yourself spontaneous look “take your mother's old brasserie and wear it undisguised over your school jumper and have a muddy face.” (cited in Lunning, 2013, p. 111). Westwood herself had no formal training and consumers reminisced about the beginning of this do-it-yourself approach in the 1970s (McRobbie, 2002) where working class punks unable to afford real “Seditionaries” clothing started to make their own:

What you did was you perhaps saw a kid at a gig wearing these bondage trousers and I got some black straight leg trousers and I actually took them in by hand and made a bum flap, I got an plate, and I got a piece of tartan scarf and I cut a pattern out from this plate and actually make them myself and put it on. So there was a lot of that going on where people made their own stuff and also a lot of people adapted their own jackets and they would buy old second-hand biker jacket and they would like paint band's names on, there was a lot of this DIY stuff. (Employee 2)



Westwood's customers see themselves as fashion bricoleurs who combine and adapt what is currently available to them. They contrast their DIY ethic with the prevailing lack of style, taste and imagination in how people often consume fashion today. They spoke about a materialistic, depthless approach to fashion where individuals buy prefabricated designer ensembles or highly promoted "looks" where no individual thought is needed resulting in fashion conformity that is the antithesis to the original Westwood philosophy.

[Westwood] went to hobo-punk and punk couture, it was basically like a street vagrant...it was exciting to have a raggedy sock that was run up in somebody's kitchen. But it was interesting you had that feeling that you could do a bit of it yourself so you could add to it. Now you get the complete look from somebody. You get head to toe. There's nothing, you don't need any ideas you know because they have thought it for you right down from the clutch to the shoes. (Customer 3)

Her consumers talk about Westwood's clothes as inaccessible to those who do not understand the "story" or value within them. It was not sufficient to simply have the material resources to purchase the clothing rather you needed imagination, "street education" and cultural awareness to wear her clothing. This is in contrast to other brands where a pre-fabricated identity can be purchased if you have the appropriate level of wealth to do so.

It was a small little hub in London and everybody wanted a part of it but you know what? You could not get a part of it for money you could not be the rich person, just fly over because you had to be too cool for school. You had to have some edge. You had to have some street education. Now today Maria from LA can just call up and say okay I want the whole Tom Ford collection, a multimillionaire can just call from Essex

and say I want this dress I saw it on Posh Spice yesterday, I want it today, have it delivered. You could not do that. So you could not buy into it easy. (Fashion dealer/Stylist)

There was also however a sense throughout the interviews that the Westwood brand was also in danger of slipping into a similar pre-fabricated fashion territory as with the growing availability of Westwood throughout the UK and abroad, “uninitiated” consumers were beginning to consume the brand and view it as symbol of status. There was a sense of malaise among Westwood’s consumers at the lack of appreciation and understanding of the items purchased by the “wrong” customers.

They sell to the wrong people now. Lads, and dads are buying it and without being mean they probably shouldn’t be wearing the brand because it wasn’t made for them, it’s like a market so now everyone knows who does these shirts, everyone knows the jewellery is a lot more accessible, it’s cheaper now, it doesn’t feel special. (Customer 1)

In order to ethically consume the consumer should have the ability to appreciate, connect with and understand the ethos of the items they purchase not merely buy to own or possess them. Some consumers saw these escalating changes in the types of people who consume Westwood as evidence that even a brand like Westwood that started out to rebel against the capitalist system eventually work to reinvigorate consumer capitalism by developing new ideas, products and ways of being (Heath & Potter, 2005).

The only real way to win through against capitalism is to do what Westwood did, and make things yourself. As Billy Childish [artist] said to me when I complimented him on his paintings, ‘When are you going to start?’ Well, I did start, and crossing that line between creator and consumer, observer and participator, saved my life. That is why I look back on my days as a dandy with profound regret. Ever have the feeling, as someone once said, you’ve been cheated? Nevertheless I am happy that I was married in a tartan bondage suit, complete with mini kilt, and I will probably be buried in that same outfit (Author/collector).

This individual suggests that all products are created for consumption in a system that encourages alienation and nonparticipation (Holtzman, Hughes & Van Meter, 2007). The only way to move beyond this is to return to the DIY philosophy where activities (such as fashion) normally reserved for capitalist enterprise can be reclaimed and self-organised as Westwood had initially intended.

### **Critically consuming**

Throughout the data there was an obvious concern and awareness of the wider social and environmental impact purchasing decisions can have. Westwood’s own personal stance is that she would like her consumers to critically examine the reasons behind why they consume before they choose to buy her clothing. “I’d like people to stop buying and buying and buying. There’s this idea that somehow you’ve got to keep changing things, and as often as possible. Maybe if people just decided not to buy anything for a while, they’d get a chance to think about what they wanted; what they really liked” (Thomas, 2007). Her consumers also refer to their distaste for fast fashion and its accompanying waste. As one participant below discusses the era before fast fashion existed in its current form:

There wasn't the landfill of clothes that there is today and I call it a landfill, not lightly, because it is a fucking landfill, trust me. Everything is so over manufactured, over produced, its piles of it, nothing special.

Westwood is currently working with the charity Cool Earth and has personally pledged £1 million to help tackle climate change to prevent logging in the rainforests of Borneo, the Congo Basin and Peru, just as a few years ago she handed over similar sums to the Occupy movement. In the main her consumers expressed respect for activities as an environmental campaigner and political activist:

[the brand is] always evolving, it's the same thing now, moving to what is the next thing, what is the next story, now it's a political story it's about giving something back, you've obviously done something you've enjoyed, you've made a lot of money from it and now you're giving something back to the people, whether that's the opinion of the Company itself from a business or commercial point of view, it doesn't matter, the great news is that you can always put some good back in to something you've received a lot of good from as well. (Employee/Collector)

While Westwood continues to warn her consumers of the impact the production of these goods are having on the environment around us many interviewees found her eponymous firm in tension with her personal stance on climate change and environmental degradation:

I think, as the Vivienne Westwood Company goes, knowing the people they employ and how they operate and how the business works, she can bang on and the Company bangs on about global warming and stuff like that then you go and have a look at their

ten bins full of plastic from the clothes and the cardboard all going to landfill and you think she has got the money to practice [what she preaches] or the Company has but they are taking, just like any other business, the path of least resistance you know and then you are buying a T-shirt at £80 saying “Active Against Resistance  
(Customer/Collector)

Though personally Westwood continues to critique a system bent on rapid consumption, a system upon which she is a dependent, the firm bearing her name appears more sanguine about orthodox growth. Acquiring franchises and increasing stockists, coupled to almost irresistible media exposure of Westwood herself, have found a profitable and growing firm. This is apparent to employees and long-standing customers, wary about these changes and the impact this would have on what makes Westwood distinct. The worry is not simply that of climate change, or exploitation, but more pressingly, more personally, the changing relationship with the clothes:

You were buying into heritage you were buying into a brand that wasn't plastered everywhere, that had its exclusivity. You could buy like a drunken shirt (a type of Westwood shirt), like three in this shop and three in World's End that made me feel special. Yeah they have completely flooded the market, they are ruining it, there's over 200 stockists in the UK. You can buy it in nearly every city in the UK, it's widely available now (Stockist)

Many interviewees argue that despite her paradoxical position of fashion designer and critic of consumption, she is using her clothing and catwalk shows as a vehicle to express ideas about culture and politics.

The only reason she's going to a benefit tonight is to promote something that has been done wrong in the world, or trying to save something, she's not going there to promote you to buy a fucking cardigan, she couldn't care, the Company does that...people are going to say to you why are you trying to tell me Westwood is so great when it's just a fucking sell out, you can buy it at TK Maxx...I've got Westwood up to here, you can buy the sheets, you can buy the flannels...she's not in control of that, it's kind of running with the wolves with the rest of them...but she is still taking something out of it, to plough something back. (Fashion dealer/Stylist)

Westwood herself acknowledges that her company is implicated in burgeoning consumerism but doesn't "feel comfortable defending my clothes. But if you've got the money to afford them, then buy something from me. Just don't buy too much" (Cadwalladr, 2007).

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## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this paper we focus on ethical consumption in fashion, an industry that has increasingly been criticised for widespread humanitarian and environmental issues as well as encouraging a superficial and debilitating relationship with human identity. The industry has even been responsible for a general moniker "sweatshops", used to describe the poor working conditions and low wage settings that afford manufacturers the promise of abnormal profit (Hilton, Choi & Chen, 2004). While much work relating fashion to ethics has focused on how

fashion houses can be ethical in terms of producing clothes, i.e. fair trade, compliance standards, etc. we put the consumer at the centre of our theory of ethical consumption by focusing on the ethical potential of buying and wearing clothes. Our focus is on the case of Vivienne Westwood the fashion designer and her eponymous fashion and consumers of her clothing. A formative figure in the 1970's U.K. punk movement, Westwood has become one of the most influential British fashion designers of the twentieth century, and as her business has grown so too has her apparently contradictory stance as environmental campaigner and opponent of mass consumption. Westwood has continuously argued that much of the fashion industry is complicit with a shallow democratization of image in which the value of clothes has become indistinct from thoughtless churning of production and disposal. This continuous rallying against consumerism has drawn the obvious sting of many fashion commentators: she produces several collections a year for an industry whose sine non qua is stimulating cycles of consumption and waste.

There is, however, as we have shown here, a complex story to be told here, of making and wearing emerging from the do-it-yourself ethic of British punk in which the consumers play a creative role and in this paper we delve into this case through the narratives of Westwood's consumers. We suggest, in the case of Vivienne Westwood and her consumers, we get a sense of how ethical fashion can be experienced in an industry considered by many to be at the vanguard of unethical consumption and production. Like Westwood, her consumers are aware of the joy clothes might bring, while being wary of their corrupting and baleful influence where they are made too quickly, too readily available, too thinly invested with meaning. Our findings show how ethics in fashion consumption can be considered not just as an issue of compliance with externally validated standards (as it largely has to date) but also consumers becoming responsible for considering their own consumption rather than cheaply satisfying immediate desires. Ethical consumption of fashion should be less about fast fashion

and ‘throw away’ philosophies, where people buy cheap items and throw them away after a short period of time, and more about engagement with the product, a DIY ethic and valuing and understanding the products we do choose to buy. To consume ethically consumers bring questionability and sociability to bear upon cycles of desire and the perpetual state of dissatisfaction by which what is possessed is no longer good enough (Bordo 1993). To do this Westwood customers, we have found, them involved in and experimenting with the techniques of craft, they are aware of cloth and its (sometimes loaded) heritage and story. The sense of movement into mass markets by Vivienne Westwood perturbs many of these consumers, there are portents of something being lost, and a questioning of whether they will continue to be involved with a firm that might now be falling in with the idea of fashion as “the logic of planned obsolescence” (Faurschou, 1987).

Using Westwood we show how ethical consumers are active rather than passive economic actors who force “a questioning of the core assumptions of consumerism and open up a range of choices that are currently if not invisible at least submerged’ (Gabriel & Lang, 2006, p.149). Consumption ethics urges consumers to regard themselves as active partners in an on-going enterprise, actively reading themselves into the value and meaning of what is being consumed by intervening in exchange, asking questions of producers and their goods and critically assessing the value of commodities. It is clear in our exploration of the Westwood case that criticisms were made, especially of the firm’s strategy, and even Westwood herself. It is clear from our findings that Westwood and her firm are diverging in worldview. It is not yet clear whether the Westwood brand will continue to align with ideas of ethical consumption or move from crafted novelty towards the forms of standardized, faceless availability that Westwood as an individual abhors? We might also ask whether that even through promoting a do-it-yourself ethic, and decrying thoughtless consumption, traditional customers can ever find themselves working beyond the role of consumers, towards that of



makers? At least insofar as they continue to form themselves through the clothes, identities, traditions into which they are thrown (Skinner, 2013), continually negotiating these in an environment that far from being counter culture, sits at the heart of late capitalist endeavour – fashion.

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**Table 1: Westwood Chronology**

Vivienne Westwood Chronology
1941 - born Vivienne Isabel Swire in Glossop, Derbyshire, United Kingdom.
1962 - Marries Derek Westwood, 21 becomes a primary-school teacher in Willesden, North London
1965 - Meets Malcolm McLaren with whom she has a long-term partnership and relationship. McLaren was particularly attracted to the <u>Situationist</u> movement, which promoted provocative actions as a way of enacting social change. He also retriggered the interest in fashion, encouraging her to experiment with her personal image.
1971 - Westwood and McLaren open first shop at 430 King's Road London called 'Let it Rock' specializing in the 1950s revival Teddy Boy 'Rock and Roll' aesthetic
1972 - They then became interested in biker clothing, zips and leather and the shop was redesigned as 'Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die', accompanied by a skull and crossbones motif.
1974 - Shop name is changed to "SEX" Sex' underscored with the slogan 'rubberwear for the office'.
1975 - Westwood and McLaren began to design t-shirts with provocative and political phrases. They were fined for 'exposing to public view an indecent exhibition'.
1976 - The Sex Pistols, managed by McLaren, went to number one with God Save the Queen, and were refused air time by a shocked BBC. The Sex Pistols were dressed by Westwood with a look informed by sexual fetishism and a do-it-yourself approach to fashion with bondage trousers, zippers and chains. The band and their music dubbed 'Punk Rock' by the media provided Westwood and McLaren with extensive publicity.
1976 - 430 King's Road is renamed 'Seditionaries' – Clothes for Heroes', transforming the aesthetic of 'Punk Rock' into the fashion of choice for the disenchanting youth living in the depressed economic and socio-political conditions of the mid-1970s England.
1981 - The shop was again remodelled and in 1981 renamed for the final time as 'World's End'. The interior of the shop became a galleon with small windows, a low ceiling and a sloped decking floor with a large clock displaying 13 hours where the hands continuously moved in an anti-clockwise direction.
1981 - The Pirate Collection (A/W 1981-2) was shown at Olympia and marked Westwood and McLaren's runway debut; they had become established fashion designers. The look was romantic and androgynous, borrowing heavily from



history by evoking an era of “outlaws” in the form of swash-buckling pirates, highwaymen and dandies

This year also marked a turning point in McLaren and Westwood's career as their interests diverged with McLaren gravitating toward music and Westwood moving into fashion design and becoming obsessed with history as an artistic reference for techniques and ideas.

1982 - Her first independent show was the Autumn-Winter Buffalo collection (which witnessed the first ‘outer-underwear’ with underskirts worn over leggings and satin bras over shirts) Buffalo (A/W 1982-3) and Punkature (S/S 1983) shown in Paris.

1987 - Westwood designs the Statue of Liberty corset as part of Harris Tweed (A/W 1987-8). It is the first corset to be introduced into outerwear.

1989 - Westwood’s name appears in a list of the world’s top six designers in John Fairchild’s book *Chic Savages* (1989), along with Armani, Lagerfeld, Saint Laurent, Lacroix and Ungaro.

1990 and 1991 - Awarded Fashion Designer of the Year by the British Fashion Council.

2004/5 - London’s Victoria and Albert Museum hosts retrospective of Westwood’s work that then tours.

2006 - appointed Dame for contribution to fashion.

2007 – Begins railing against the ‘drug of consumerism’. Releases manifesto Active Resistance to Propaganda, a somewhat hyperbolic call for people to engage with art, become more culturally aware, and buy fewer luxury items

2010 - Makes pointedly anti-consumerist statements to reporters at London Fashion Week, for example: “Stop all this consumerism...I just tell people, stop buying clothes. Why not protect this gift of life while we have it?”

2011/12 - Donates large sums of money to Occupy Movement

2013/4 – Supports save the arctic

**Table 2 – Data Analysis**

<b>Overarching Dimensions</b>	<b>Second Order Codes</b>	<b>Further examples of raw data</b>
<b>Reinvigorating heritage</b>	<p>Recognition and appreciation of traditional materials.</p> <p>Renewal and reinvention of tradition</p> <p>Evoking and subverting traditional class system</p> <p>Power of clothes to reveal and create identity</p>	<p>Tailoring, wonderful tailoring, looking at the cuts, looking at the fabrics...producing all these fabrics at a time when all these companies were going out of business because nobody would buy it. She was buying little small quantities and making them you see the craftsmanship in it and you see the time and the energy that she kind of put into it...people didn't mind paying the money for that, and it was the same with the female clothing, going into all that beautiful mohair tartan, the tartan and the tweed, it was such a beautiful period and it was very very British...you know when she was doing a kilt she would go to Scotland and study it and it would be hand sewn. (Fashion dealer/Stylist)</p> <p>When [Vivienne] done the Harris Tweed and done the Royal family she was doing the Royal family for club kids...so people were going around with A-line jackets on that wouldn't be out of place on like Princess Anne. I think the way Vivienne put it across and the way people seen it, it was almost like dressing up, she actually called the collection dressing up didn't she? But it was kind of dressing up with crowns and crinis and corsets and breeches and Harris Tweed suits, at the same time it was educating people about history, almost in a fun kind of way, a fun fashion kind of way. But in another kind of way the detail that went into that was absolutely incredible. To study that corsetry, even to make that crown, to come up with these concepts, to come up with these ideas, you know it was quite genius you know. (Fashion dealer/Stylist)</p> <p>Well it's always been there tartans always been a prolific part of Scottish culture and history, you have a dress tartan that's lighter and a shooting tartan that's darker for hunting, it's the same with tweeds in England, it's the same with wools you know it's the same with shoes, you know everything but obviously things change and you want them to go back to the old ways as you get older, then again there's always progress and you have to move forward (Employee/Collector)</p> <p>It pushes people it drives people you...not like any other brand you get besotted with it because the hit that you get and the comments that you get, the way it makes you flaunt I suppose, makes you feel confident about wearing it...it's not everybody's cup of tea, as soon as you have had a bondage suit on and you have three straps between your legs everybody wants to know (Customer/Collector)</p>

<p><b>Curating a story</b></p>	<p>Brand as a story</p> <p>Story-telling not selling</p> <p>Consumer as custodian/curator</p> <p>Importance of art and gallery system</p>	<p>When I went to work at Westwood my whole thing was to tell people, you know like not how good the past was but you know like educate people you know the history. (Employee 2)</p> <p>Unless you serve every customer yourself you can't put the story across of what you're trying to tell....you get little kids coming in the shop their parents might be trying things on, they'll sit down so you get them a little book, get them a brochure to flick through, find out what they like and don't like, you know have kids doing work experience, you know while they're there they're the next generation, who are going to buy the stories you find out what they like and don't like, how much they can pay for things, what would they want to buy from there, what's accessible to them and what's not, not only from a monetary point of view but from a taste point of view as well, and that goes right through the board from someone you can communicate with from 3, 4 years old right up to 60, 70, 80 years old, you know stereotype and single individual because you don't know, you can get the most straight-laced person walking in the shop and find out they used to be a transvestite in the 80s, and they loved all the Worlds End stuff or they were a punk. (Employee 1)</p> <p>Vivienne I really admire her...going to museums and being interested in history, to bring that history alive, to bring that shift, to bring all of these great stories that you would love as a boy, to bring pirates and platforms and all these kind of things. So she was playing with the history books but playing with great fabrics and fun. (Customer 2)</p>
<p><b>Experimenting and DIY</b></p>	<p>DIY ethic</p> <p>Adding to and experimenting with clothing</p> <p>Emptiness of pre-fabricated fashion "looks"</p> <p>Material resources insufficient to engage with Westwood brand</p>	<p>With the scene in the late 80's, you were encouraged to make your own and customise things and that was the exciting thing...it wasn't just about Vivienne as a whole it was adding to that because very rarely a) you weren't able to afford the complete look anyhow and b) you wanted to add something of your own into it. (Customer 3)</p> <p>You made your own t-shirts or in the back of the newspapers you could send off for bondage trousers, and when you got them they didn't look right because there was a book called The Sex Pistols File and that was out Bible. We used to look at that every day, look at the angle of the clothes and the cut. ...I had my hair spikey I had my home made bondage trousers I tried to copy like them out of Seditonaries' (Customer 1)</p> <p>All they [new customers] want is the orb earring and that's it, that's as far as they can take it but some people [want to know the history] and some people say thank you for the chat. (Employee 1)</p> <p>Before that if you tried to copy before to make the trousers, you didn't know how the chap fitted, you didn't know what buckles they had, so you improvised. (Employee 2)</p>

<p><b>Critically consuming</b></p>	<p>Critique of fast fashion</p> <p>Critique of the brand Westwood</p> <p>Critique culture and politics through fashion</p>	<p>[Vivienne] hasn't got enough control over the people who are making these items. She doesn't know what's in the whole collection. When we receive bulk orders of shirt from Turkey or Malaysia or Indonesia, it's the amount of wasted paper and packaging and boxes and sheets to tick off, there's more packaging than actual items, yeah it's embarrassing and I think we fill about 18 bin bags full of paper from each shirts, like clips, paper and things, so I think [Westwood Company] are going against massively what they are preaching, so that's not what she's saying. (Employee 2)</p> <p>Before you'd have a little buzzer on the door you'd let someone in "oh hello how are you" whereas now the door's open people can walk in and out, you're almost losing the sense of the relationship between you and a customer it's almost like someone walks in and walks out and you can never talk to them, never found out what they liked or what they didn't like whereas before you could, but then again that's the difference between being a small company and being a big company and then obviously there's the money element, I mean when you were a little boutique and when you're a big shop, you know that's change, that's progress and you have to survive, you have to adapt to your competition (Employee 1)</p> <p>Vivienne today in the clothing world and I think she never wanted to play the game, there wasn't a game as far as she was concerned, she wanted to do what she wanted to do and now no designer would have the balls to do that because it's about what you sell. Although Vivienne's Company and organisation has grown towards that...but you've got to remember there wasn't a great big kind of dreams and schemes to make it a multi-million pound company...it was done with a heart and unfortunately we are not allowed to have that today, do you know what I mean, like everything is driven by numbers and sales and figures and how much fabric they are going to buy and how it is going to run the machine, you know, how much publicity you were going to get. (Fashion designer/Stylist)</p>
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