

**The world through a rose-tinted wardrobe:
An investigation into the sustainability discourses of
B Corp Certified fashion brands and their narratives of
resistance.**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Literature Review	7
Methodology	19
Findings	24
<i>Every silver lining has a cloud.</i>	24
<i>You are what you wear.</i>	36
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	51
Appendix	61

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“Buy less. Choose well. Make it last”

Vivienne Westwood, English fashion designer and businesswoman

Introduction

We inhabit a world fuelled by consumption. We dress every day in new threads, flown, shipped, transported across the boundaries of the globe driven by consumerist satisfaction and a need for 'fashion'. Our world is pillared by profit. But, "in nature's economy the currency isn't money, it's life" (Vandana Shiva, 2006).

It is the essence of this Shiva quote which motivates this paper. Discourses have long been populated with calls for protection, reduction and recognition in the face of climate change and the destruction of our planet at the behest of capitalist, growth-pursuing industries. Global consumption-production patterns have detrimental impact on the health of our ecosystem; the fashion industry, a primary culprit.

Yet, despite wide-spread awareness of sustainable necessity and the fashion industry's extensive contribution to environmental destruction, the rate of garment consumption is steady and engagement with the fast-fashion industry remains high. Indeed, sociological research has put substantive effort into critiquing the role of (fast) fashion in maintaining, and (re)producing the unsustainable status quo of consumerist logic (Heidenstrom, 2025). It is widely recognised that, despite a shift towards a more sustainable trajectory, the industry remains vastly unsustainable and its material and discursive infrastructure upholds socially and environmentally unjust and harmful practices. These span from fashion accounting for 10% of global emissions (Bailey et al, 2022; Centobelli et al, 2022; Wren 2022), to the reaffirmation of a responsible consumer

(Heidenstrom, 2025). However, recent studies have noted increasing consumer demand and engagement with sustainable fashion brands (Bertola and Colombi, 2024).

Human-nature relations remain divisive and malleable through discourses which pervasively reassert the notion of nature as contingent on human values and meaning and subordinate to consumer desires (Liu, 1989). By interrogating notions of an “external nature” (Canniford and Shankar, 2013) and moral consumption, this project seeks to further comprehensions into the narratives of resistance of B Corp - (Corp shorthand for corporation fashion brands - wherein social and environmental sustainability is fundamental to their corporate identity and their commercial mission. It aims to understand the discursive intricacies that uphold notions of a political consumer, of human-nature relations and (un)sustainable garment consumption practices. Often regarded as a bridge between culture and capital production (Okwir, 2025), the industry’s de-valuation of nature and environmental harm is of particular interest when understanding the environmental movement as a transformative socio-cultural and political revolution.

If the environmental movement is one of resistance and justice, the narratives presented by B Corp fashion brands should surely be symptomatic of a society moving in the right direction. This paper delves into the narratives of B Corp certified fashion brands, interrogating their sustainable discourses against questions of the necessary reinstatement of sustainability into the political realm and promises of social and

ecological sustainability, with (the health of) nature and humanity equally and both valued.

Accordingly, this paper opens with the key debates within literature, exposing fashion's antagonistic relationships with nature and sustainability. It guides the reader through central issues within the sustainable consumption paradigm and concludes with the relevance and necessity of this project which uses multimodal discourse analysis to investigate the discursive infrastructure of sustainable fashion brands. The second section outlines the methodological approach; this section discusses this paper's ethical considerations - which shall be explained as minimal, explains the data set of this paper and justifies its rationale. Succeeding this, analysis is presented and discussed; the findings suggest that nature and fashion consumption (connectedly and distinctly) are (re)moralised and romanticised to the effect that the 'resistance' of the B Corp fashion brands is pliant to the hand of neoliberalism. The politics of sustainable fashion is awarded revolutionary potential, yet characterised as timid. Finally, the conclusion closes the project, discussing the implications of this project and opening doors to future development.

Ultimately, this project endeavours to investigate the supposed incompatibility of nature and agency, of fashion and sustainability, and of profit and resistance. It seeks to unearth the political necessity and potential of sustainable fashion, with fashion a universal language which fosters "unity, connection and understanding" (Rana, 2024,

p.1), and sustainability an inherently emotional phenomenon (Haaja and Harikkala-Laihin, 2025).

Literature review

(Un)sustainable fashion

There is a tension between fashion and sustainability. The (fast) fashion industry is reputed as detrimental to planetary health (Bick et al, 2018), with contemporary fashion consumption and production patterns "frustrating an entire economy" (Binet et al, 2018, p.25). The dominant 'fast' fashion model, which produces low-quality clothing and promotes a rapid produce-use-dispose model of garment consumption (Aponte, 2024), triggers extensive resource use, and so major environmental costs and significant impacts on planetary and civilisational health (Aponte et al, 2024). The "infrastructure in place today cannot capture the processes or current levels of textiles waste and is not suited to handle increased consumption" (see Heidenstrom, 2025, p.2; John and Mishra 2023; Niinimäki et al. 2020). The issue of sustainability in the apparel industry is becoming increasingly forefront.

Unsurprisingly, there is significant literature regarding this; much of it centred around two main interrogatives: material (un)sustainability and the tangible environmental impacts, and sustainability as a discursive category and tool (see Connelly and Prothero, 2008). Finding the material consequences as well researched and emphasising greater need for recognition towards fashion's deep entanglement "[...] with socio-ecological injustice" (Wodars, 2025, p.2), reveals the two-dimensional character of fashion. As a "tool of cultural mediation between the individual and the social environment" (Bertola and Colombi, 2024) and as the second most polluting

industry in the world (Huynh, 2022; Bertola and Colombi, 2024). The fashion industry has consequently been forced into the spotlight and scrutinised, resulting in a recognised shift towards sustainability amongst actors within the fashion industry (Mazzarella et al, 2019; Khandual and Pradhan, 2018).

The Great Shift: A Myth

Aligned with a move towards sustainable consumption and supported by growing consumer awareness and demand (Bertola and Colombi, 2024; Faludi, 2025), “[c]ontemporary consumption is going through a phase of increased ‘responsibilisation’ and ‘remoralisation’” (Chatzidakis, 2015, p.81). The fashion industry has necessarily shifted towards a more sustainable trajectory (see Mazzarella et al, 2019; Khandual and Pradhan, 2018); and one might assume that “fashion brands that prioritise sustainability not only contribute to a healthier planet ... but also position themselves for long-term success” (Bertola and Colombi, 2024, p.4).

However, the persistence of resource intensive patterns of fashion production and consumption draws into question the effects that the rhetoric of these (sustainable) brands has on repositioning the ‘moral’ and (un)sustainable dresser. Arguably, the naturalisation of a neoliberal economic model (see Tulloch and Neilson, 2014) results in sustainability becoming “depoliticised and inert” (Pitcher, 2011); legitimate environmentalism is characterised by “meeting targets, changing attitudes, [and, fundamentally] being responsible consumers (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014, p.2). Despite

environmental necessity and supposed economic incentive, the sustainable path of the fashion industry remains narrow.

In line with Tulloch and Neilson's (2014) theory of 'neoliberalisation', and the prevalence of the construction of the "change agent", the industry is consistent in its continued mobilisation of (the myth of) the (neoliberal) "sovereign consumer" and the notion of a "moral protagonist" (Luedicke et al, 2010). Where communication practices (through media and advertising for instance) and consumption orientations fuse to assemble a 'political consumer' (McLeod et al, 2007), consumers remain idealised as a sovereign agent of change. Research reveals the injustices in the "redirection of blame" amongst increasing media and societal focus on "fast fashions-triggered environmental injustices" (Lin, 2022, p.1). Despite this fashion communications are still neglected as an "essential research topic" (Palm, 2023).

Instead, centralised in the 'sustainable' fashion market (and corresponding literature), is the purpose of the consumer to shop sustainably. Ultimately, the industry's accountability is obscured, and their responsibility is diluted to simple offerings of 'sustainable alternatives' (Heidenstrom, 2025, p.13). Therefore, it is critical to develop a systematic perspective which examines the social, political and economic structures that define fashion today (see Fletcher, 2010), to enable insight into sustainable practices, considering the narrow and obfuscating sustainable discourses at present.

Arguably, the current discursive presentation of (non)sustainability and (un)sustainable consumption in the garment domain, perfectly exemplifies a Gramscian “passive resistance”, Meaning, the hegemonic project (neoliberal consumerism) is perceived to incorporate the oppositional discourse (environmentalism and sustainable fashion), but in reality, is normatively selective and thus undermines the oppositional message (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014, p.2).

The Practice of Consumption

Practice theorists argue that sociological comprehensions of consumption should move beyond (deficit) traditional assumptions of deliberate personal choices and consumer action, and towards an understanding of the “shared frames of meanings” (Hand et al, 2005) which are a product of the institutional and structural standards around the ‘practice’ of consumption.

Beyond the sovereign consumer, theories of practice (Welch, 2017; Schatzki, 2002; Hand et al, 2005) are rooted in Giddens’ theory of Structuration (1984), and Foucault's work on Governmentality (1991). Through a ‘practice lens’, individuals' actions are attributed to a framework of social structures which inform the self-governance of individuals through the subtle filtering of state power, but where this same framework is simultaneously created and modified by individual actions (Lippuner and Werlen, 2009). Theories of practice provide foundation to this project, enabling the comprehension of consumption as an intra-action of structures and agency.

Practice theories aid understandings of why the fashion industry's rhetorical turn toward sustainability has limited material impact. Through a practice lens this is conceptualised as due to the normalisation of infrastructures, meanings and temporalities which coalesce to become the primary 'sites' (see Schatzki, 2001) of (un)sustainability. This aligns with Tulloch and Neilson's theory of neoliberalisation where sustainability becomes a matter of (improved) rational, economic choices' rather than a transformation of the socio-material arrangements that make fast fashion possible and allow it to persist.

Sociological literature recognises the profound change in the nature of consumption over the past few decades (Warde, 2017; Miles, 2018; Chessel and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018). An increasing amount of literature observes how "consumer society is no longer the precursor of a new society, but is now the very root of society itself" (Ogino, 2013, p.105). Sociological research has therefore turned to examine the interdependencies between the "infrastructures, institutions, routines and conventions in shaping (environmentally damaging) processes of consumption" (Evans et al, 2017, p.1; Southerton et al, 2004).

In an era of necessary sustainable focus, consumption is prevalently understood through theories of social practice. Through this sociological lens, discourses and corporate representations of sustainability are scrutinised as overly correlated to

individual action, and industry discourses are evidenced as sites of ideological power - consumption instead is contextual, situated and embedded.

Literature is consistent in its critique of the dominant fashion system, including of its (merely nominal) shift towards sustainability, determining that in response to climate change major brands have undergone a rhetorical shift but still fail to change their unsustainable practices. Literature on consumer behaviour and consumer sovereignty and agency, therefore highlights a comprehensive gap (due to a lack of interrogation) in (un)sustainable fashion consumption. With regard to the supposed 'sustainable turn' in the fashion industry, fashion brands which are centred on sustainable production-consumption and social relations, and as increasingly popularising the market, become points of interest. However, understanding that the fashion industry only appears sustainable through consumer-centric narratives and moral selectivity, this project explores narrative resistance of B Corp certified fashion brands who have not yet been thoroughly researched against existing debates in the literature.

With B Corp certified brands increasingly present and interior to sustainable consumption – both discursively, through the narratives they circulate, and materially, through their production practices – they are now central in defining and mediating sustainable fashion. However, there lies an empirical gap in the question of how these 'oppositional discourses' are reasserted amidst growing consumer awareness and increasing market presence of sustainable fashion brands (Tcholakova, 2024) amongst the, still reigning, neoliberal (un)sustainable consumerism logic. Focussing on the

‘producers’ and foregrounding practices (specifically the production of conventions and meanings) rather than individuals, this dissertation fills a gap. Practice theories provide a useful spine, as arguing that consumption is practice-based, the discourses that shape meanings, competences and material arrangements are central to the evolution of a practice.

However, this cannot be explored without investigation of the social and discursive dimensions of sustainability within the fashion industry. Evidently, the sustainable turn in the fashion industry is materially shallow and limited to rhetoric, through which the consumer remains sovereign. Responsibility for ‘sustainable dressing’ and accountability for sustainable development remains to a vast extent limited to the consuming individual - the practices of the industry have not changed with sufficient progression or effect.

This stalling in progress can be attributed to the value systems enmeshed within neoliberal (fashion) markets, which fail to value the natural environment as an individual entity (Bogert et al, 2022). Sarah Milner-Barry (2015) contended that the discursive figure of “Mother Nature”, for example, supports the idea that nature is subordinate and ‘giving’. Following the work of Sherri Ortner (1974) she spotlights this issue, seeing that the dominant value systems continue to reinforce the (feminised) imagery of nature, as it serves to maintain the subjugation and justification of the exploitation of our natural resources (cf. Jaremko Bromwich, 2022). Nature, ultimately, “is a [...] social construction, the outcome of human activities or imagination ...” (Polloni, 2017, p.1),

which presently deems nature as separate and subordinate to capitalist market demands and consumerist desires (Videl et al, 2024; Bogert et al, 2022). Discursive constructions of nature, and the understandings of human-nature relations are, therefore, central to the conventions of sustainable consumption.

The ‘natural’ boundaries of a sustainable society

Research by Vidal and colleagues (2024) shows that societies in Europe, North America and the Western consuming world, view nature through a “domination lens”. That is, nature is represented through a “logic of exploitation” (Vidal et al, 2024, p.13) and seen to be subordinate to the desires and survival of humans.

Sociological literature shows the social construction of nature as “always already” humanised, a product of our peculiar vision, where (capitalist, consumerist) culture defines and produces nature (Oerlemans, 2002, p.32). The meaning of the natural world is “deeply intertwined into the fabric of human cognition and social behaviours, created by power relations that govern its perception and use” (Vidal et al, 2024, p.2), thus it is important to consider contemporary socio-cultural understandings of, and the political climate, that constructs sustainable practices.

Contemporarily, the issue of sustainability and environmentalism is fundamentally ‘depoliticised’ through cultures which promote an understanding of nature as subordinate and separate from cultural production. Subsequently, nature often appears

within and through romantic notions in a personified form. Often “[...] the source and ground of beauty and truth” (Bewell, 2004, p.1), whilst simultaneously “[...] reduced or idealised to mere scenery of landscape” (Oerlemans, 2002, p.31). What this project therefore sees of fundamental importance is the notion, credited to Alan Liu whereby “there is no nature” (1989).

Liu argues: “there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government” (Liu, 1989, p.104). As a discursive, social construct currently belittled by the (de)political definitions of neoliberal capitalism; nature's position in this project is vital in that it aids comprehension of the revolutionary potential of the B Corp brands within a capitalist, consumerist culture. The relationship between fashion and nature can be understood through two distinct binaries: first, as materially antagonistic with fashion production harmful to nature, and, secondly, as separate with fashion within culture and nature “external” to culture (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). This project sees that “[n]ature, like anything else we talk about, is first and foremost an artifact of language [...]” (Chaloupka and Cawley, p.5).

The Sustainable Promise: B Corps and narrative resistance

Hence, the discursive practices (conceptualised as narrative resistance) of these socially and environmentally sustainable brands will be scrutinised. Narrative resistance refers to the discourses of these brands as opposing the dominant norms of the industry (fast-fashion, overconsumption etc.). Conceptualising the discourses as narratives of

resistance enables insight into the nuances of how the B Corp brands actively oppose and reshape conventions of the dominant fashion industry to align with more socio-ecological sustainable values.

By investigating “born-sustainable” (Kolotouchkina et al, 2025) B Corp certified fashion brands, sustainability is assessed on the notion that the brands’ cultural authority, authenticity, and leadership (Interbrand, 2024; Moorman, 2020) make them relevant catalysts of needed social transformations (Sarkar and Kotler, 2018). Fashion firms deemed to be “more sustainable” have been seen as more “transparent and proactive in addressing their own problems and industry problems” (Tao and Ryan, 2025). This project thus seeks to interrogate the supposed shift towards more inclusive socio-ecological rhetorics and practices within the fashion industry, where “sustainability [is a] social and cultural construction [...]” (Heidenstrom, 2025, p.2).

Arguably, operating with an objective to “increase the level of environmental consciousness in society through green, eco, or environmental marketing communications” (Prothero et al, 1997, p.75), this project aims to explore B Corp fashion retailers’ sustainable discourses against the debates explored in sociological literature.

Most studies concerned with the sustainability of (fast) fashion have focussed on the practices of consumers. This study, recognising the work of Ertekin and Atik (2020) in noting the role of actors such as designers, retailers and politicians in maintaining the

unsustainable status quo, explores the practices of fashion retailers in fashion sustainability. Brands were deemed of utmost importance in creating change and circulating awareness to improve the transparency and environmental footprint of the entire fashion industry (Ertekin and Atik, 2020). Hence, focus on B Corp fashion brands enables enlightenment into contemporary sustainability relations, especially considering Vredenburg et al's (2018) study suggesting that corporate neutrality is being increasingly criticised in the face of critical, social issues.

This project investigates B Corp certified fashion brands' sustainable discourses; their 'mobilisation' of the consumer, their positioning of nature and their (re)framing of responsibility for (un)sustainable fashion consumption. Sustainability will be explored considering the analytical factors of consumer sovereignty and neoliberal market forces - which are inherent to current (un)sustainable narratives within the fashion industry. This project analyses the extent to which B Corp certified fashion brands centralise sustainable consumption as a normative value through their websites, considering the external ideologies and structures (discussed above) that may assimilate into the discursive infrastructure of the sustainable fashion market.

This project provides a finer comprehension of (un)sustainability, embedded in a contemporary fashion industry which remains demonstrably unsustainable and whose ecological potential has been curtailed by the neoliberalisation of sustainable consumption understandings and incentives (see Tulloch and Neilson, 2014). It investigates discourses on the websites of B Corp certified fashion brands, exploring the

extent of their narrative resistance against de-politicised neoliberal environmentalism and (hedonistic) consumer logic. Leaving empirically open questions of the 'political consumer' and a 'de-political nature' this project seeks to "[uncover] the interface between social and ecological (non)sustainability" (Wodars, 2025, p.15), in the United Kingdoms' B Corp fashion market.

Methodology

To effectively complete this project, the required data was a collection of discourses produced by B Corp fashion brands.

In sociological and linguistic studies, language - or better “discourse” - is understood through terms of systems of (constructed) knowledge, of power dynamics and through specific social contexts - where it is a simultaneously constituted and a constituting entity (see Foucault, 2002 [1972]; Fairclough, 1992). Comprehending discourse, as shaping, not merely reflecting, social realities, this qualitative research project proceeded with the aim of unpicking the dynamics within and understanding the deeper, constructed meanings of the discourses of B Corp fashion brands.

Via (multimodal) discourse-analysis, following a “language-in-use” framing, which is beneficial in its recognition that language takes part in the active construction of a social reality (Ballard, 1980), this research considered the context, register and intertextuality of B Corp fashion brands websites. It interrogated how the narratives presented across the websites discursively shape and (re)position the figure of the consumer, of nature, and the practice of sustainable consumption. It explored the extent to which these brands offer forms of narrative resistance within the (sustainable) fashion market.

Aiming to investigate how sustainability was constructed within a traditionally unsustainable industry, accounting for the importance of conventions and meanings in

consumer practices (see Hand et al, 2005); discourse analysis allowed this project to delve into the intricacies of the 'sustainable shift' and interrogate the narratives of sustainability and sustainable fashion relations.

The sample was limited to B Corp certified brands, with "B Corp" representative of an external certification awarded to (for-profit) companies by B Lab. The certification represents the verification of high standards of social and environmental "performance, transparency and accountability" (B Lab, 2023) measured across five different modes: Governance, Workers, Community, Environment and Customers. Companies are awarded a score after the B Impact Assessment evaluates its operations and business models, considering its impact on these domains. A score above 80 grants its B Corp certification and considers it a socially and environmentally sustainable company.

Determining the necessary inclusion of B Corp certified fashion brands, the sampling was purposive. Purposive sampling, referring to the intentional selection of 'participants' based on specific knowledge or experience they are seen to hold about the point of research interests (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011), "has its roots in early qualitative research, where researchers prioritised depth and specificity over generalisability" (Tajik et al, 2024). In accordance with the aims of this dissertation this method of sampling was considered the most effective. B Corp brands were selected intentionally on the criteria of having a B Corp certification awarded within the last decade. This aided in the keeping of the most relevant and valid data set; but B Corp was also selected as a

necessary criteria due to its renowned and respected reputation as a trusted identifier of commercial sustainable practice.

The justification of choosing this specific sampling population was as follows: these brands have been externally legitimated as exemplar in ethical and sustainable practices both socially and environmentally. This certification ensured they had the relevant characteristics for the purpose of this study.

The ten brands were selected following a search of B Lab UKs directory – although B Lab is a global company, this project focused on UK based and certified brands and therefore the UK Directory was chosen. The brands selected were also seen to be (succeeding an online search of “UK B Corp certified fashion brands”) repeatedly acknowledged within various articles or across websites and thus were determined commercially visible and legitimated. This visibility was deemed beneficial to this project on the premise that these brands are likely to be circulated more widely, reach a greater number of consumers, and carry greater symbolic authority. Analysing the websites of brands that have achieved more market traction enables thorough exploration of the potential tensions between ethical commitments and commercial imperatives and offers a genuine analytical insight into the extent of their resistance and narrative shaping.

The sampling process resulted in a diverse range of brands, products, and consuming audiences; the sample was split with six brands selling both male and female wear, two brands selling female wear and two brands selling men's wear, the ‘function’ of the

garments sold was broad. The multilateral consumer appeal of the sample heightens the generalisability of the data set.

The data collected was excerpts from the websites of B Corp certified fashion brands. A sample of ten brands were selected: Patagonia, Finisterre, Seasalt, Pangaia, Baukjen, With Nothing Underneath, Berghaus, Lestrangle, Aubin and Wills and FatFace. A total of 55 excerpts (meaning a page on the website) were studied, ranging from “Stories” and “Blogs” to more sustainability-centric passages such as “Our commitments” segments. The range of excerpt ‘topic’ (meaning for instance “About us” segments which tell the brands identity, foundation etc.) came from a natural reading path, encouraged by hypertext, links and on-screen interactions, as well as structured, purposeful selection led by knowledgeable guidance, for instance towards “Our missions” or “Sustainability” tabs knowing they would offer relevant insight into the brand's sustainable practices and communications.

Given that brand websites are multi-semiotic environments, the interaction between text and image was crucial to constructing a comprehensive analysis of their narratives. Research by Kress and Leeuwen (2001) suggested that information on (computer) screens relies heavily on visuals and less so on text (also Kress, 2003). Thus, this project consisted of multimodal discourse analysis and considered the interactions between visuals and texts. Post analysis the data was ‘coded’ based on the recognition of patterns and significant linguistic features that were relevant to the construction of meaning. The analysis considered the syntax, grammar, structure, linguistics, and visual

elements that coalesced to construct meanings and formulate narratives. The findings were then interpreted in relation to the research's aim.

Considering the exploratory character of this research (noting a lack of existing research of this specific nature), the data was examined twice. Following an impartial observation of the raw data whereby the language and visuals were interrogated on their construction and reflection of a social reality it was then re-explored guided by existing sociological literature. This allowed for rigorous and saturated analysis and an understanding of the relationship between a sustainable identity and the "meaning making" of sustainable fashion.

Multimodal discourse analysis proved efficient for this dissertation. This method of analysis treats image and text as unified communicative events, unpicking their collaboration in constructing meaning and representing ideology. This allowed for a more intricate and truthful analysis given the multi-semiotic nature of the field of analysis (websites) and the aim of the study being to investigate how fashion brands (who foreground sustainability as part of their ethos and commercial endeavour) construct the concept discursively.

The public availability and the intention of public consumption of my sources meant that there was minimal ethical consideration to this methodology. The lack of human participation meant that concern over potential harm and participatory rights (i.e. to withdraw, anonymity and consent) were dismissed.

Findings

This dissertation deemed 'nature' and 'product' the essential components of its sample's sustainability discourses. These align to this chapter's subchapters. "Every silver lining has a cloud" discusses how the brands present an innate and romantic relationship with our ecosystems, positioning themselves as aligned with the needs and desires of nature. "You are what you wear" discusses how the products became protagonists for the brand - either through exemplification of their material sustainable practices or as something the brand is "more than" (With Nothing Underneath, "WNU").

This chapter discusses the romanticisation and moralisation of nature, sustainability, and fashion consumption; arguing that despite eliciting urgency and necessity, the discourses promote sustainable fashion consumption through an a-political, passive lens which limits their revolutionary potential.

Every silver lining has a cloud

Whether a muse, a friend, or a "shareholder" (Patagonia, homepage), nature was a protagonist in the brand's stories. Evidentially nature is trapped into a discursive double-bind: both passive and agentic; the romanticisation of nature versus the empowerment of nature.

A. The trees are talking

This section explores the notion of Earth as an agentic force, delving into one half of the double-bind: empowerment.

Three years ago, we made Earth our only shareholder. Since then,
reporting to her hasn't been easy. (Patagonia, homepage)

This personification creates a rhetorical shock by fusing ecological and economic vocabularies - the effect is progressive. Instead of equating economic progression with ecological health - as received criticism from Tulloch and Neilson (2014) - Patagonia naturalises corporate environmentalism in a way that positions the brand – and the consumer - as answerable to Earth. The boundaries of the natural world become non-negotiable components to their corporate mission - Earth is no longer subjugated to human materialism, evidencing resistance to dominant sustainable discourses. Beyond the explicit configuration of Earth as an authoritative figure, this quote represents a key pattern of agency and equality. Nature is made equal to humanity:

We see a world where coexistence with the planet is possible [...].
(LESTRANGE, homepage)

“Coexistence” does great ideological lifting in this context. We are led to envision unity and peace, prophesying that “coexistence with the planet is possible”, liberates Earth from the toolbox of human survival and makes it an equal, free agent - just as ‘man’ is. Evidently these brands live up to their B Corp accreditation, displaying narratives which resist limited discourses of sustainability.

Nature is an equal agent, not a subordinate and not a source - reflecting a progressive ideology. Nature is seen as valuable as an individual entity, as something we are accountable to as our equal and with which we should work with to create an industry, and a society, that is mutually beneficial.

“Shareholder” encapsulates the overarching ideal of nature-human partnership which progresses the brands beyond the traditional, limiting paradigm of nature-human antagonism where nature is subordinate (Vidal et al, 2024). The attribution of legal personality through this personification invokes a rhetoric of responsibility and partnership between humans and Earth. However, there is a tension in how the sample constructs a relationship with nature. Agency is present; yet, the romantic edge is prevalent. Nature is trapped into a double bind of passivity and resistance.

Seasalt’s quote “The Language of Plants and Flowers” invites interrogation of this duplicity. Seasalt gives the plants communicative power; this metaphoric association, whilst critical in its romantic edge (as will be explored), reinforces the idea that nature has a voice - that the flowers are talking. Whether a shareholder, a peer, or a talking

flower, the sample suggests that nature is an agentic force. Despite this, nature's existence remains contingent on humanity - a shareholder is merely a partial owner of capital in a wider company. Nature's meaning is controlled by human discourse, its identity is dependent on ours, it is void of meaning without us.

B. Nature: my friend, muse, and victim (romantically)

Across the sample nature is passive, yet giving, remaining useful only through what it has allowed the brand, be that an identity or the colour scheme of its latest range. Nature is depoliticised and romanticised as a confidant, a muse, or a victim in need of saving. Inclusive of all these tropes is the passive-character of nature; even if awarded agency, it is acquiescent, even timid. Here the lineage of nature as "external", meaning separate from culture, passive, and readily available for aesthetics and extraction, pervades (Canniford and Shankar, 2013).

This section, broken into analytical parts: respectively, nature as a "friend", a "muse", and a "victim", explores the romanticisation of nature against the spine of Nancy Fraser's "progressive neoliberalism" (2017, 2019). "Progressive neoliberalism" describes the alliance between progressive social movements and neoliberal economic policies. Here, it reflects a pattern across the discourses, where marketing techniques emphasise a sense of intimacy and care towards nature. Progressive cultural values (environmentalism) fuse with market logic.

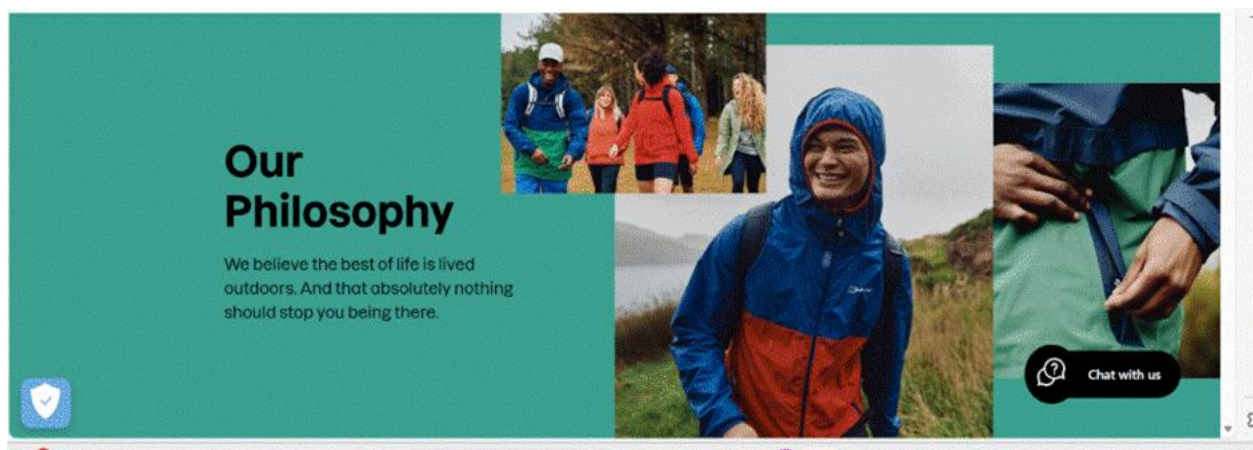
Constructing nature as a friend through anecdotal and place-based meaning Finisterre anthropomorphised the sea, rejoicing over their “real and romantic relationship ... that runs deep in (our)[their] narrative” (Finisterre, About The Brand). This romantic (and critically de-political) description of the ocean as one half of a balanced relationship between itself and ‘man’ was documented in the “About The Brand” tab on Finisterre’s website. The personification of the sea within the context of discussing *who* the brand is, embeds a sense of intimacy between the two, positions the brand as innately linked to and borne from an affection with nature. Their sustainability becomes natural. Despite softening the asymmetrical power relations between man and water and sanitising decades of maritime violence the brand becomes a credible, caring and, an inherently sustainable actor. This kinship was a pattern evident across the sample through both text and image.



This WNU image evokes pastoral authenticity and naturalness. The photograph, paired with the “Sustainability” passage, grounds WNU in nature, legitimising its sustainability in lived reality.

This sample-wide practice of intimacy with nature, works effectively as a “rationalisation as legitimation strategy” - the processes whereby social actions are legitimated by reference to their goals and “to the social knowledges that endow them with cognitive validity” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.2). This discursive tactic justifies sustainable consumption, by appealing to instrumental necessity and common sense. By visually anchoring themselves in nature through multimodal discourse, the brands appeal to logic, framing themselves as responsive to objective needs and as a source of expertise through a familiarity with nature.

Berghaus (About Berghaus) uses similar visuals.



Embedding itself in the outdoors, naturalising its presence there - the brand portrays a closeness and experience with nature. The image visualises their philosophy of “nothing should stop you being there”, suggesting that Berghaus’ equipment and products can help make nature *your* friend. Allowing the consumer to overcome barriers to a life lived outdoors, the brand is blurring the line between product and philosophy. This is significant across the sample - they are selling a value system.

Through such discursive practices the sample constructs themselves as environmental allies. The brands' sustainability and their alignment with the needs and wants of Earth is emphasised - appearing of secondary importance through syntax and structure, is their commercial endeavour. This lends ethos to the brands as sustainable actors and credibility to the claims across their webpages.

Existing literature is laden with fashion’s (re)production of an antagonistic relationship between fashion and Earth and the pursuit of neoliberal environmentalism. Divergently this discourse proves narratives of resistance against the tokenistic green communications in the dominant fashion industry (Heidenstrom, 2024). By making a friend of nature and immersing their corporate image within it, nature becomes more than a resource and the brands re-define societal conventions around human-nature relations. However, as the market here becomes progressive, the politics of recognition which are central to the notion of progressive neoliberalism are prominent. Nature’s values and needs are recognised, and the narrative becomes inclusive of nature as a

friend. However, this friendship becomes a selling point, and we see the substitution of systemic change with moralised branding and individual practices.

While progressive in giving nature value, nature is re-asserted in classic romanticism. This depoliticisation of nature is deeply embedded across the discourses and when it is not a source of affection it is a source of inspiration, a muse.

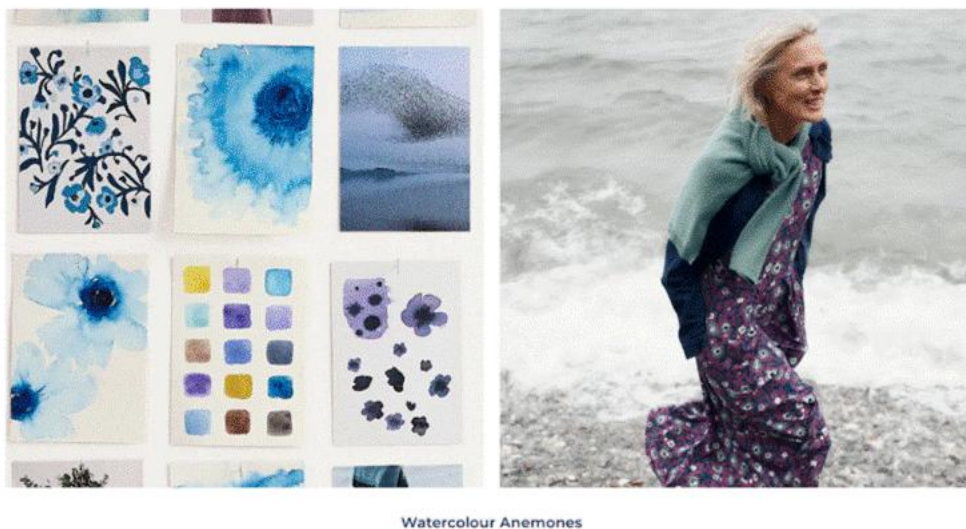
With the introduction of a new collection: “The Language of Plants & Flowers” (Seasalt, Stories) Seasalt gives nature agentic capabilities. Through anthropomorphism the plants and flowers have communicative capacity. This positions nature as something with agency and with a voice - progressive considering the usual subordination of nature; but also awards the brand the ability to understand what nature is saying. This comprehended relationship invokes an idea of friendship and mutuality between the brand and the flowers. However, the brand ultimately reduces these plants and flowers to points of inspiration with “nature as (our)[their] muse” (Seasalt, Stories).

The brand is the productive force; the artist, and nature is reduced to idle beauty. The muse is silent and passive; the muse exists simply to stimulate creativity in others. By making nature the muse (this specific collection was “guided by the principles of floriography” and “takes inspiration from Cornish oak and early spring anemone [...]” (Seasalt Stories)), the brand simultaneously implies a deep relationship with nature and romanticises it. The implication is: environmental responsibility is reduced to symbolic gestures and nature is stripped of its material reality. Nature is subjugated to vanity - in

both senses of the word - and the opportunity is missed in giving nature political recognition.

The idea of nature as a resource for artistry is naturalised; ecological crisis appears commodified, nature is ornamental. Seasalt aestheticises nature and romanticises market values through the extraction of the “fleeting beauty of early spring anemones” into “rich textures and responsibly source fibers” (Seasalt Stories). Positioning nature as a muse subtly continues the lineage of extraction and depletion of natural wonders to resources - nature is dismissed as a living individual and turned into “January knitwear”. Sustainability is “depoliticised and inert” (Pitcher, 2011). The visuals paired with this excerpt support this analysis.

Through this image fashion becomes a lived experience and ideals of sustainability as a lifestyle are emphasised; still, the product remains the protagonist.



The model is immersed in coastal scenery - the beach is black and white whilst the model - and the product - are front and centre and in colour. Explicitly reflecting

harmony with nature; implicitly it implies that although the Cornish landscape was the inspiration behind the collection, it is subordinate to the product and by extension the consumer and, significantly, to profit. This represents a tension across much of the sustainability discourses - accredited leaders and exemplary actors in the sustainable fashion market, revolutionising the industry, but still on a commercial endeavour.

The romanticisation of nature, as a-political, compliant, and valued-through-association, moralises fashion and the consumer; yet positions the brand as an environmental steward. Nature, occasionally allowed the same agentic capabilities as humankind, remains merely a nostalgic past-lover, who shaped and guided the brand into the nature-centric company it is today, but who remains seldom credited and of lesser significance. This reaffirms Vidal's (et al, 2024) study that argues (consuming) societies tend to see nature through a "logic of exploitation" (Vidal et al, 2024, p.13). Despite being artistic rather than violent, this sample is still utilising nature for human value; nature is fetishised to produce consuming goods and thus remains subjugated, as Nutter Smith puts it, "to patriarchal [and neoliberal] desires" (2010, p.2). This again reflects the relevance of Fraser's "progressive neoliberalism".

Whilst 'progressive' carries positive connotation, and this fusion appears to wed emancipatory ideals with neoliberal governance in a favourable light, the co-option of social movements into market friendly forms necessarily faces critique. Here, progressive neoliberalism is positive only in providing a frame which aids comprehension into why sustainability discourses feel progressive and yet remain

tethered to market-driven governance. Aligning ecological values with market logic reduces sustainable development to green consumption and prioritises recognition, and environmentalism as a cultural performance - through engagement with B Corp fashion brands for instance - whilst leaving growth-driven, extractive economics untouched. It is therefore inefficient at producing solutions. However, it's naive to dismiss the economic needs of this sample; they are for-profit organisations and can only continue to perform sustainably if they are making money. The tension is thus less a representation of internal hypocrisy and more a reflection of societal negligence of sustainability and fashion as political and systemic issues.

Notwithstanding the sample recognises the systemic, collective need for sustainable action - it is not, without flaw in doing so. Addressing nature's need for relief from the industry's deeply unsustainable practices, the brands promoted this through calls to (consumer) action and displays of market heroism. Nature was positively spotlighted, centralised in the brands' narratives, but only as the 'damsel in distress':

Its future and our own are inextricably linked, and this decade may be the last chance to save our seas. (Finisterre, Sea7)

But it's also resilient. We can save our planet if we commit to it.
(Patagonia, Yvon's Letter)

These quotes represent different sides of the same coin. In both, to “save” is the dominant idea. The natural world is constructed as a victim.

Finisterre, uniquely implies mutual dependence between us and Earth, framing sustainable action - as environmental protection - as less an ethical choice and more a survival imperative. This is powerful moral logic and draws on both pathos and logos as discursive tools. It creates a sense of urgency and crisis, eliciting temporality (“future” “this decade” “the last”) to present climate change as an imminent threat and action as urgent. Effective in its weaponisation of environmental necessity to promote sustainable action, discourses like this one from across the sample exemplify a shift (away from the obfuscating and burdensome mobilisation of the sovereign consumer) in sustainable discourse - although responsibility is given to individuals, accountability is communal and the imperative is shared.

Patagonia’s contrastive clause (“but”) introduces hope. Personifying nature through its attribution of “resilience”, the brand’s technique differs from Finisterre. Instead of constructing a sense of crisis, the brand relies on optimism and opportunity; albeit conditional. The resilience awarded to nature is dependent on our rescuing of it; nature is ultimately responsive to human superiority. Salvation is framed as contingent on human will; subtly reproducing the narrative that the solution is behavioural and not structural or systemic (see Silva and Gonçalves-Dias, 2025). Whilst promoting and raising awareness of our need to live more sustainably, both brands become nature’s

saviours, and active heroes where nature is a passive, helpless victim - reaffirming the romanticisation of our relationship with nature.

Softening the political reality, the sample narrates a story of peril and heroism. Nature is exhibited through an idyllic and romantic light. By reducing it to our damsel in distress, nature is solidified as contingent on us - void without human action. This spotlights Liu's notion of nature's meaning being discursive, and existent through political ideologies (1989). Whilst 'progressive' and 'liberal' in suggesting we must save nature, nature is still responsive to, and at the behest of, humanity. The romantic edge softens the violence of human-nature relations. The narrative reflects progressive neoliberalism - we need to care for and save our planet; this is done by engagement with these brands. With the brands suggesting they are the 'saviours', their profit essentially becomes the budget for nature's survival. The progressive rhetoric of environmentalism supports market-growth.

Evidently, the market is a key factor in the brand's narratives. It is something which the brands fail to escape and simultaneously resist. This is examined below through themes of morality, resistance and sustainable dressing.

You are what you wear

This section discusses the performance of morality and resistance. Exploring the 'products and beyond,' examining how the samples discourses frame sustainable

consumption as a moral act. With their products being tangible proof of ethical action, sustainable practices are proved and a 'moral' sustainable consumer is constructed. These two practices are explored against a spine of Gramscian "passive revolution" (or "passive resistance"). Adam D. Morton's (2010) definition of passive revolution is utilised as "a condition of rupture in which processes of revolution are at once partially fulfilled and displaced" (2010, p.316).

Revolutionary ideas are present, with language of resistance against the dominant fast fashion system ("the fast fashion system is over producing", "we need an industry that is in support of degrowth" (LESTRANGE, Impact)). However, the sample also subtly reproduces two existing (deficit) orders: consumer responsibility and market solutionism. Instead of challenging capitalism, they fold sustainability into it. This idea is investigated on the backdrop of an earlier explored tension: profit - and is conceptualised through the notion of 'neoliberalisation' in sustainable development (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014). The political potential of sustainable fashion brands is proposed considering the formation of a moral (political) community.

A. The wardrobe that saved the world

Through moral branding (structuring identity around moral principles and responsible actions), the brands highlight the materiality of their products: "[...] made from bacteria" (Pangaia, Pangaia Lab), "refined to maximise resource efficiency" (FatFace, Our Materials) and "organic or responsibly sourced" (Seasalt, Sustainability). The products

produced by these brands are sustainable - they are of course certified as such. This deems them progressive against industry peers who persist in ecologically damaging production practices. Their sustainable practice does not stop there; the brands are insistent on being “more than just a product” (WNU, Charity Work) and as B Corp, they maintain both social and environmental sustainability. The sample accordingly centred “people and planet” in their mission statements with this coupling repeated across and within the sustainable discourses (“we’re committed to putting people and planet first” (Berghaus, Positive Business); “[...] remaining committed to product, environment and people” (Finisterre, Our Purpose).

Offering services such as “repair and reclamation” (Aubin and Wills, “Repair & Reclamation”) or campaigns such as Finisterre’s “Women of The Sea” (“Campaigns”) or Seasalt’s sponsoring of Cornwall Pride (“Community”), inclusivity, equality, workers’ rights, and source-to-product transparency were repeated themes. By equating “people and planet” as equally core components of their sustainable missions, the brands legitimise themselves as (socially) sustainable, but also moral actors. The sample is undeniably progressive in moving sustainability beyond the restriction of mere ecological protection. The revolution is here “fulfilled”. Sustainability becomes more than tangible processes of material choice and ecological protection and becomes a movement towards social equity and inclusion.

However, the discourses promote market solutionism. Environmental salvation is presented as achievable through innovative and careful design and production

processes: "[o]ur design process prioritises materials, and we continually strive to improve through innovation and accountability" (FatFace, Our Materials), "[i]t's our mission to make the best item for the best price, producing the *right* clothes, not *more* clothes" (Aubin and Wills, Made to Last). The idea that "sustainability is woven into all (our)[their] choices" (Baukjen, Sustainability) is emphasised, and subsequently "market capitalism becomes the very means by which ecological sustainability can be achieved" (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014, p.2). B Corp fashion becomes the solution to unsustainability, yet their resistance becomes passive under "massive surrender" to "ecological modernisation" where capitalism is the means of achieving sustainability (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014, p.2; Van der Heijden, 2007; Bogert et al, 2022). Morton's "displacement" is evident here. The brands are 'revolting' in the sense that they are producing clothing in opposition to the dominant practices (being materially sustainable and environmentally friendly). However, sustainability is displaced from the bounds of the system and the realm of the political, and becomes affiliated with commerce and neoliberal market practices.

Despite rhetorical rejection of the dominant system across the sample, with declaratives like "our answer to climate change is systems change" (Patagonia, Our Footprint), and noting that passive resistance works in such a way that it dissolves conflict, arguably the brands soften the antagonistic edge of sustainability. Blurring the global politics of unsustainable fashion by replacing it with 'feel good' consumer choices through eco-friendly and pioneering products, the sample exhibits Morton's "partiality of rupture". Positive in recognising industry pitfalls ("the fast fashion system is over producing"

(LESTRANGE, Impact)) and their social sustainability, the discourses however remain acquiescent to capitalist demands and unresponsive to the brands' potential (of political engagement). This responsiveness to economic demands is demonstrative of the great tension which plagues these brands: money. Yes, profit is the only way they will survive, and capitalism is the reigning model - however, the rupture is partial.

Regardless, they hold themselves accountable and transparent through explicit recognition of their industry's unsustainability:

It dawned on us that while we believe in business as a force for good, we were actually participating in one of the planet's most harmful industries (Baukjen, About Us).

There is, however, a thin line between accountability and responsibility. Through 'moral' products and social sustainability they are accountable to their sustainable ethos. However, in so being, the sample forms a moral community. This community and the subsequent interpellation of a moral consumer (explored below) work to "partially fulfil" and "displace" sustainable development within the industry. The brands become accountable commanders of revolutionary potential. Such potential represents the breaching of commercial boundaries and the movement into political activism. In stark opposition to the unsustainable practices of the fast fashion world, the brands are distributing an ideological stance as well as selling products, albeit responsibility is displaced through the creation of a community and a consumer citizen.

The brands create a community which is living (and producing) by sustainable values. Through discourses that promote an anti-fast-fashion stance: "[i]t's not a revolutionary idea: we believe clothes should last" (Aubin and Wills, Made to Last) and "we believe that better is greater than more" (Aubin and Wills, Our Philosophy), they re-configure the practice of fashion consumption, by creating a moral divide between sustainable brands and the rest of the industry. Simplifying complex sustainable debates into digestible moral equations ("better is greater than more") the brands construct a moral community through the affiliation of their products with a virtuous consuming lifestyle. Baukjen exemplify this moral community:

Baukjen is more than what we make, it's how we wear it, share it, and live in it. (Baukjen, About Us).

The discursive triad ('wear,' 'share,' 'live') deems clothing a gesture of community, self-expression, and lifestyle. Sustainable fashion in this light is more than just a commercial endeavour; it is a way of life and a moral imperative.

This point is substantiated across the data set and can be seen through the use of pronouns "we" "our" and "you" which is most effective in phrases such as: "with our guiding commitments to People, Environment and Product" (Finisterre, B Corp) or "our mission" and "we believe" or "we are committed". The collectivising effect of "our" and "we" produces a community through the brands' identity. The consumer is then seduced

to participate through direct addresses (“you”) such as “you can also take action” (Finisterre, Campaigns), “Designed for good. Designed for you” (Baukjen, About Us). These quotes work to the same effect - the mobilisation of the moral consumer.

Through subject positioning and the seclusion of action where “you” is a personal pronoun and “we”, which is not used, is plural; the choice of “you” suggests that despite sharing the struggle, action is solitary. Collective environmental struggle is pacified into individualised consumer action. Agency is shifted toward individualised forms of participation, framing purchases as moral activism. Hence, we get the formation of a moral consumer. Responsibility is displaced, a shift from neoliberal sustainable consumption paradigms is only partially fulfilled through the reaffirmation of consumer sovereignty.

The brands ultimately promote their market sector as the solution (which it rightfully might be) but in doing so ethical action is (re)channelled into buying the ‘right’ products and systemic critique is neutralised in the face of consumer responsibility. The revolution is defanged by the reaffirmation of consumer sovereignty.

B. “Does this make me look sustainable?”

Via subtle reaffirmation of neoliberal sustainability (see Tulloch and Neilson, 2014) through the promotion of their products as invariably better (more sustainable) than that of the wider industry, these brands moralise consumption. Consumption becomes a

value-led act through which consumers are making conscious and ethical decisions. Through the discursive construction of a moral product, and a sustainable community, the consumer undergoes subject formation (the process of language shaping the unconscious mind and sense of self) and through inevitable engagement with the brand, is interpellated into a moral actor.

This is subtle - for instance, by determining the idea that clothes should last as “not revolutionary” (Aubin and Wills, *Made to Last*), the brand appears to be sanitising the pioneering aspect of sustainable fashion, yet it has the reverse effect. Instead of diluting the significance of the practice it frames it as orthodox and mundane. Additionally, through superlatives (“greater”, “better”) Aubin and Wills present a contrast between ways of living and consuming, creating a code of moral and superior conduct, with “better” defeating “more”. Working in the same category as quotes as stark as “the fashion industry is over producing” (LESTRANGE, *Impacts*) and “[w]e are firm believers in buy less, buy later” (Baukjen, *About Us*), it becomes evident through a sample-wide referral to “beliefs” that they are selling an ideology not just a product – one which is anti-fast-fashion and anti-overconsumption.

The discourses aid understanding of the concept of “moral selving” - the distinction of oneself as more virtuous through practices that assume accountability to others - (Allahyari, 2000) within the context of sustainable fashion. It is this ‘moral self’ that these brands mobilise. Engagement with these brands becomes a moral act more than merely a transactional one. Whilst the sample constructs themselves as the spokesperson for

nature's needs, wants, or the advocate for its utilities - the power is still in the debit card. They protect and advocate for nature ... we pay.

Their insistence on an identity beyond their product has been explored, and it is argued that they construct themselves as moral, accountable actors as well as commercial ones. The argument that they are selling a system of beliefs, rather than just a piece of clothing, stands.

Accepting that “ethical action is [...] a choice made to accept a widened scope of responsibility towards both human and non-human others and to act upon that acceptance through one’s identity as a consumer” (Barnett et al, 2005, p.8) - fashion consumption becomes an ideological and political movement, with purchasing framed as akin to activism. These brands lead the revolution against the dominant fast-fashion system by discouraging engagement with it. Hence, where ethical consumption practices are dependent on “distinctively cultural forms of ‘government’” (Barnett et al, 2005) - meant in the Foucauldian sense of “governmentality”, where government refers to the symbolic repertoires that shape how people think and act (Foucault, 1991) - aimed at the cultivation of a moral consciousness, of self-control and of self-display (Barnett, 2001); these brands mobilise a responsible and moral consumer citizen. Consumption becomes political, with purchasing decisions based on an ideology of care towards the environment, and individuals remain weaponised as agents of change. We are reacquainted with Morton's definition of passive resistance.

On the one hand, sustainable fashion is depoliticised in the face of necessary systemic change when it comes to global sustainable development. The mobilisation of a moral consumer through an emphasis on ethical consumption, reflects the reaffirmation of the neoliberal insistence on sovereign market actors and green consumption; the issue is deemed individual rather than communal and behavioural rather than political. However, the idea of 'boycotting' feels unavoidable.

Transactional engagement with these brands has the potential of developing something that reflects Copeland and Boulianne's definition of political consumerism as "the deliberate purchase or avoidance of products, goods, or services for political reasons" (2020, p.1). In moralising their products and consumption, the sample promotes the "deliberate purchase" of their products in line with a "political reasoning" towards sustainable necessity and a moral, survival imperative and the "avoidance" of non-B Corp products due to the vast impacts on environmental, planetary and civilisational health they are known to produce (see Aponte et al, 2024). This is the pinnacle of passive revolution: the brands are revolting against dominant systems by "fulfilling" sustainable consumption necessity, yet "displacing" responsibility onto the consumer, and thus the 'neoliberalisation' of sustainability where it is contingent on market progression and consumer action is only "partially ruptured".

McLeod (et al, 2007) argues that communication and consumption practices fuse to assemble a political consumer; thus recognising that "a revolution in the way fashion is consumed is required"; and simultaneously noting that, "citizen[s] [are] not only the

audience but also produce, finance, [...] and disseminate fashion” (Buzzo and Abreu, 2019, p.9) deems the political potential of the brands evident yet not fulfilled.

Ultimately, their B Corp status makes them capable catalysts of needed social change and universal justice (Sarkar and Kotler, 2018). The communication practices of these brands (seen to leverage morality and reasoning) hold the potential to catapult sustainable fashion consumption into a political movement.

Conclusion

This project contributes to comprehensions of narrative resistance and relations within the sustainable fashion industry, where a turn towards a more sustainable trajectory is deemed necessary and potentially revolutionary. It illuminates the critical issue of the politics of recognition, and passivity of resistance, displayed by B Corp fashion brands.

Despite exhibiting revolutionary progression and potential in their sustainable material and productive practices; their social sustainability (for instance charity work or gender-equality and workers' rights campaigns); and their centralisation of the need for environmental action, analysis suggests that the discourses produced by the sample are permeated by profit imperatives and haunted by 'neoliberalisation' (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014). With nature and product, the two pillars of their sustainability discourses, the ultimate effect was a reduction of nature to idle beauty through romanticism and the construction of a moral consumer through calls to action and nudges towards 'boycotting'.

Whilst the brands economic needs are respected, it was ultimately found, that through the conflation of romanticism and neoliberalism, sustainability was characterised through tensions and inconsistencies. Sustainable fashion consumption and subsequent sustainable development was discursively constructed as a moral imperative but, was simultaneously, left to the devices of laissez-faire ideology in that market growth appeared untouched through rhetorics of heroism and nature is

discursively constituted as passive and subsidiary, yet, loved. This stimulates notions of the romantic revolution - hijacked by the sustainable fashion industry, which performs Fraser's concept of progressive neoliberalism. Whilst pillared by ideals of resistance these brands romantically softened the political edge of sustainable relations and remain critically passive to neoliberal environmental and market logics – hence aptly characterised as a Gramscian “passive resistance” (see Morton, 2010).

Ultimately, as we witness the breach of planetary boundaries and the suffocation of shores the world over under the fabric of our discarded wardrobes, it is an ever-pressing survival imperative that we engage in sustainable consumptive habits. Going forward we must disrupt the reigning comprehension of human-nature relationships as segregated and hierarchical. Having accomplished a discursive interrogation of compatibility, ‘meaning’ and resistance, this dissertation presents data to the fact that the fashion industry can be a match for sustainable partnership. Sacrifices are efficiently made, with greater impact than cost, to the wellbeing of nature in fashion consumption-production; and money, though necessarily made, does not completely halt the progression of sustainability nor resistance against the dominant paradigms.

Indeed, limitations have been discussed, with a stamp “passivity” pressed aside the B Corp logo. Nature was not awarded effective political recognition, and the consumer was re-asserted as the driving force for sustainable consumption, reducing the political and systemic dimensions of (un)sustainable fashion, yet moralising the practice. Still, the intricacies revealed genuinely progressive sustainable discourses and subsequent

assessment of these brands' political potential was determined as a positive discursive effect, with hints of a future where fashion is rooted in politics and a more sustainable industry will flourish.

However, with questions of political engagement left unfulfilled, future research would usefully delve further into this idea. Considering the preliminary character of this project, greater depth is needed to solidify the political potential attributed to these B Corp brands. However, accepting the view that sustainable consumption *can* become a political movement - future sociological interrogation should explore under what conditions - outside of the discursive realm - this movement exists.

Throughout this dissertation, the presence of money has been nagging; although not discussed in relation to the consumer, financial resources are essential to the possibility of engagement with B Corp fashion brands. Thus, with hints towards "buycotting" movements and ideas of "voting with one's wallet", ultimately the money problem embedded in B Corp certified fashion brands needs further exploration. Ideas are necessarily developed on the political potential of these brands, as well as exploration into the ways in which their resistance is not only passive, but potentially exclusionary. Whilst the political potential was deemed a positive effect, future research could interestingly explore the way in which 'buycotting' shifts responsibility onto the consumer and yet does not redistribute the capacity to act - or 'buy'. The practical implications of a political fashion industry and political sustainable consumption ought to be assessed against ideas of access, equality and participatory capacity.

With all things considered, perhaps with an edge of hypocrisy - though being an attempt to conserve the romantics some of their profundity - this dissertation closes with the words of Henry David Thoreau. "In wildness is the preservation of the world" (Thoreau, 1862 [1997]).

Thoreau inferred that our liberty and our wellbeing grow in nature, balance, and enrichment persist through the preservation of the natural, untamed world - with 'wildness' a quality of vitality, agency, an attitude and resistance self-willed by impulse as well as representative of the ecosystem (Thorson, 2019). Critiquing the excessive cultivation of modernity, he advocated for the harmonious existence of humans, animals and plants without the risk of being "civilised off the Earth" (Thoreau, 1854 [1996]). This author, almost 200 years on, wishes the same.

The freedom and health of humanity and nature depend on protecting the regenerative capacity of Earth and refusing to collapse all that exist into commodities. If it is the conflation of multiple impulses and imaginations that "create" nature, then let us re-imagine a world where hedonism does not rule. Let us not consume the world to end, being dressed to kill is not meant literally.

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Appendix

About The Brand

Built from the needs of hardy British surfers, Finisterre makes enduring outdoor wear for an inspired life in and around the sea.

It started in 2003 in a flat above a surf shop with an innovative fleece that was designed to keep out chill winds and warm up cold bodies. Since these early days, driven by those who have jumped on board, supported by our customers and suppliers, the brand and product has widened beyond these original beginnings. Yet from our cliff top workshop in St. Agnes, we stay true to our original design ethos of functionality and sustainability brought to life in an understated style and identity, always remaining



Introducing The Granny Grommets

In 2023, Leah Rustomjee was the winner and recipient of our first Finisterre International Women's Day Film Grant. Winner of the Peoples heartwarming film about ladies who have taken that there is no age limit in the ocean. Watch the trailer about this special group in Australia.

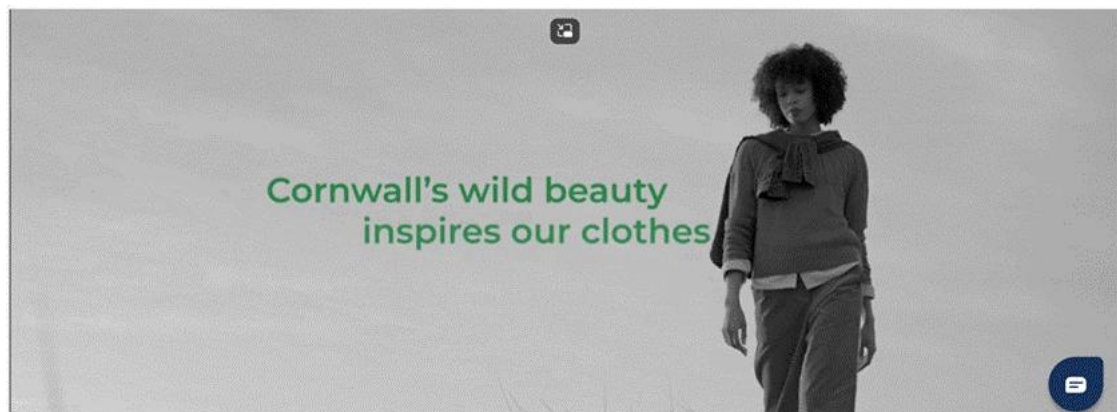


Introducing Salt is The winner Ward, who I Salt. A Cyst from Dublin Alice's relat which cause body, and h way to help Produced in Surf / Film I at the Festi

Photograph by Rose Ward

Snipping Tool

Screenshot copied to clipboard
Automatically saved to screenshots folder.





STYLE

31st December 2025

The Language of Plants & Flowers | Colour Study

Grounding shades and soft shapes. With nature as our muse, our January clothing collection steps into the new year with ease.

[Read more →](#)

Earth is now our only shareholder.

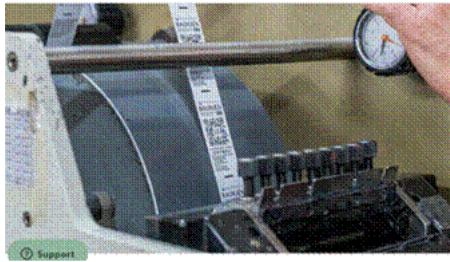
If we have any hope of a thriving planet—
much less a business—it is going to take
all of us doing what we can with the
resources we have. This is what we can do.

Earth is no easy boss.

Three years ago, we made Earth our only shareholder. Since then, reporting to her
hasn't been easy. Our first Work in Progress Report details the truth about how we're
messing up, where we're making progress and all the stubborn challenges ahead.

[See Our Impact](#)

We have always found it important that the people who make our clothes are well paid and work in factories that look after their staff, but it was only years later when we realised the impact the fashion industry has on our planet. It dawned on us that, while we believe in business as a force for good, we were actually participating in one of the planet's most harmful industries. That was never our plan. So, we decided to do everything we could to make a positive difference, not just with our brands but for the whole fashion sector as well. We didn't do this alone of course, the team and our suppliers have been involved all the way.



LOWER IMPACT.
HIGHER STANDARD.

Charity Work

More than just a product

WNU was created to make the perfect shirt for women, but as a business, we want to be more than just a product. From the very beginning, supporting charities has been intrinsic to the brand and we are honoured to have worked with charities both locally and Nationally.

Here, below, is a list of a few of the amazing places we have worked with - please do check them out.

Smart Works Reading. The charity helping women get into work. Through a number of activations we have worked closely with Smart Works Reading, from donating shirts to add to the charity's wardrobe to styling sessions to raising monetary donations through online activations.

Tuesday Night Bites. The charity food and clothing bank in East London. After raising money to help fund this incredible organisation, we called out to friends, family and customers (- thank you!) to make a donation of clothes ahead of the Winter months.

Luminary Bakery. The charity baking to help women from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Why it matters

We give a damn. About our planet, and about the people who live on it.

Being a B Corp is the proof. It's an independent standard that shows we're putting environmental and social responsibility at the heart of our business.

Because we're not just here to make a profit. We want the world to be better off with Berghaus in it.

There's a high bar for **B Corp certification** and while we're no strangers to high places, this particular peak means a lot.



1. The outdoors must be for everyone.

The outdoors is incredible. It can change your life. Which is why we're committed to getting everyone out there. This isn't easy. It's not something we'll achieve overnight - or alone. We're already working with some incredible partners who are breaking down the barriers towards the outdoors. And we're just getting started.



The fashion industry is over producing.

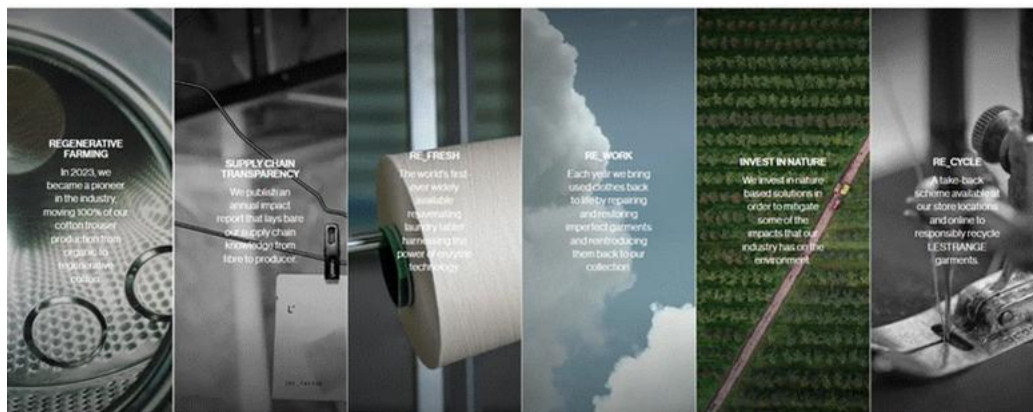
The output of the industry has more than doubled in the last 20 years to reach over 100 billion units per year¹. But whilst the United Nations has set an emissions reduction target of 40-50% by 2030² some reports suggest it's very likely we'll not only miss this target but increase our impact.³ We need radical action.



We don't need more sustainable clothing, we need more sustainable business models.

Today, "sustainability" in the fashion industry is mostly about making clothing more "sustainable" by using lower-impact materials and manufacturing processes.

But reducing the impact of individual items at the same rate of production, will never do as much to reduce the footprint of the industry as producing a lot less clothing would.



B CORP

Our underlying philosophy is one in which we only work with people and partners that are brilliant at what they do and that we like and trust. People who share our general ethos and ways of working..

Our approach to everything we do in the business is one of quality, expertise and integrity.

Aubin is a Certified B Corporation which means we are part of global community of likeminded businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental impact.



Certified



(R)

MADE TO LAST

It's not a revolutionary idea: we believe clothes should last. So, everything we make is made well. Our garments won't date in style or fall apart, but rather get better over the years. Our designs are inspired by the past, but remain highly relevant for today's world.

We insist on quality while evaluating the impact of our processes. It's our mission to make the best item for the best price, producing the *right* clothes, not *more* clothes. We want every Aubin item to be lived in, put through its paces, mended and passed down.

