

GET A LIFE!

The Diaries of Vivienne Westwood

2010–2016

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ACTIVISM AND FASHION: THE BEGINNING

AUTUMN 1970

Let it Rock 430, King's Rd. Our first shop – I was together with Malcolm McLaren. I began fashion as a rebel expressing myself through clothes. We chose the '50s for our inspiration because that seemed a time when youth rebelled against age: See you later, daddy, you're too square! The hippies politicised my generation and I hated a world of torture and death organised by the western world. **Sow the whirlwind, reap the whirlwind.** The older generation was responsible. We were against age – because age had abdicated its responsibility to us – and the political system.

Every time we did a new collection we changed the name of the shop: *Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die; Sex*. Then *Seditionaries* – that was when we did punk. I did the Anarchy sign. Punk was a culmination of previous collections. We were trying to form a band of rebels who would topple the system.

Johnny Rotten really meant it when he sang 'I want to be Anarchy / I want to destroy the passer by/ Your future dream is a shopping scheme'. But of course it couldn't sustain; we had no plan beyond 'Don't Vote'.



How to change the system! But back then we didn't realise how **ultimately** important it was. Then I was thinking, punk is over, we need ideas. We changed the name of the shop to *World's End*. I still have this shop and I still use fashion as a vehicle for activism.

MARCH 1981

Pirates, my first catwalk show. This collection was designed for *World's End*. Malcolm and I were splitting up and he wanted me to put my name to the collection. Though he gave good ideas to this collection he concentrated on his music. The idea for *Pirates* was culture. Let's get off this island and explore history and the third world / Exchange black for gold. Subversion lies in ideas.

It was at this time that I met my friend, Gary Ness. He was thirteen years older than me and he died a few years ago. He was a painter and reader. He opened up the world for me, directed my reading: Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell and the French in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and up until the First World War; music; we went to the ballet, *Petrushka* (that's where I got the idea of the mini crini); painting – we went to see seventeenth-century Dutch painting, and he turned me on to Chinese art. He did my perfume, *Boudoir*.

From Gary I realised that there is no progress in art: great art is perfect and timeless, original and alive.

I continued to research history for my fashion ideas; I copied the garments and tried to make them like the originals, yet taking into account that they have to be machine made. No designer did/does that. I tried to prove by example that the past is alive to us, that ideas come from traditional skills and copying.

This was my rebellion, my activism against twentieth-century dogma: **'The past is over, do your thing! You are wonderful and everything comes from you?'** No! Ideas have to come from somewhere. Where else can they come from but the past. No roots, no art / no laboratory, no science. Culture is necessary for human beings to evolve into better creatures. I read.



Fan Kuan: Travellers by Streams and Mountains (hanging scroll, ink on silk, c.1000. 206.3 x 103.3cm; National Palace Museum, Taipei). I have seen this in Taipei and I bought a replica for home, half measurements – they didn't have it full size.

Thus the mini crini, the eighteenth-century corset I named the ‘Stature of Liberty’ (SoL), slashed denim taken from the slashed clothing of soldiers at the Renaissance; the *Portrait Collection* which attempted to represent the gamut of rich fabrics and qualities in portrait painting throughout history, including furniture, china, landscape and architecture (seen through the window), and finally the paintings themselves (photographic printing of the Wallace Collection’s *Shepherd Watching a Sleeping Shepherdess* by Boucher, printed on the front of the SoL). I wanted the ‘woman’ to look as if she had stepped out of the painting and I gave her a pedestal – the high platform shoes.

MARCH 1990

Andreas came to work with me. I love working with him. Men do put women on a pedestal.

Andreas ... pedestal. By studying clothes and how they were made, since he was a child, Andreas came to understand couture. He was able to take the construction and manufacture of clothes to the top, beginning with the secret of the SoL – you can attach much fabric to it and it will hold it comfortably to the body. So we had grand dresses with trains half the length of the catwalk. Andreas says clothes should feel light as if they were made by angels.

MARCH 1995

Vive La Cocotte. Working together, yet I would never have gone so far, Andreas creates a new silhouette, extreme female, for the supermodels.



MARCH 2005 PROPAGANDA

Caring about the alienation of young people from politics and culture, I asked myself: what would I tell them today? Huxley said, ‘The world has three evils: nationalist idolatry (NI) which has taken the place of religion, non-stop distraction (NSD), and organised lying (OL). The greatest of these evils is non-stop distraction.’

Gary suggested the acronym, NINS DOL – have you had your daily pill? I thought these three evils were the constituents of propaganda. I designed graphics for six T-shirts and put them also on other clothes and bags in the collection, which was called *Propaganda*.

OCT 2005 ACTIVE RESISTANCE

Having analysed that culture is the antidote to propaganda I named this collection AR = Active Resistance (to Propaganda). The only real hero on kids' T-shirts seems to be Che Guevara so I put Rembrandt – wearing his beret – as a hero of culture.

Active Resistance is founded on the idea that the **Art Lover** is a freedom fighter for a better world because he thinks, and his exploration of the past gives him a perspective from which to form his own opinions and to act.



ACTIVE RESISTANCE TO PROPAGANDA

Culture versus Dogma

AUTUMN 2007

We set up our Active Resistance website. I had been writing an AR Manifesto in the form of a handy pocket pamphlet. It is a journey to find art with a cast of twenty different characters – among them Alice (in Wonderland), Pinocchio, Aristotle and Leonard Peltier. And we perform it as a reading – it takes about forty minutes – the first being with our colleagues in our studio. We launched it officially with our next reading at the Wallace Collection. Young Georgia May Jagger read Alice.

Its aim is to encourage people to become art lovers. ‘You get out what you put in.’ We had eighteen readings travelling all over the country. Some in universities. People made costumes.

The Royal Shakespeare Company did it with me at Wilton’s Music Hall.

MARCH 2008

I read an article in *The Guardian* by the famous scientist James Lovelock. He guessed that by the end of the twenty-first century there would only be one billion people left due to climate change. I did not know we had run out of time. We must tell everyone! What can we do? We must get people talking!

My brother Gordon and my friend Cynthia did a pilot with me for a TV chat show, with Tony Juniper as our climate guest. It didn’t work because I also tried to include discussion on culture which didn’t fit a chat show formula.

Anyway, there wasn’t time. We had to start **now** working through the social media. But, **the first thing we have to do is save the rainforest**. During our research for the show we met many important people from NGOs and charities. We were particularly impressed with the working model to save the rainforest by Cool Earth. I think they’re amazing and I am full of gratitude to them – working with the indigenous people. What is so incredible is that they need only £100 million to save the equatorial forest in Brazil, Congo and

Papua New Guinea. We support them as much as we can; most importantly I gave them some money to boost them along. NGOs are our hope. Governments are doing nothing – and at the same time they support the wrecking of the earth by the fossil fuel industry and by austerity. For ten years the World Bank has been sitting on \$1.6 billion specially donated to save the rainforest. They have spent some of this money on administration and meetings but have not yet saved one tree.

I began my Diary for our AR (later Climate Revolution) website. I had just rewritten my manifesto. I wrote the Diary to try to influence people because without public opinion we are lost. I want to warn people of the danger we're in from climate change; and I talk about fashion to alleviate the hard focus which nevertheless we must apply to save the world. Fashion, too, is my life and I want to let people know it's not easy and it has to be built on tradition, and inspiration comes from genius – from all the artists who lived before us. It gives me the credibility to open my mouth and say, 'I can't tell you the inspiration for my fashion, I have to talk about climate change.'

The only way out of this is a green economy.



WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE PLANET IS GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY"
"WHAT'S BAD FOR THE PLANET IS BAD FOR THE ECONOMY"

What's good for People is good for the planet.

2010

NOVEMBER 2010

WEDS 3 NOV LETTER TO A PRISONER



I've been a supporter of Leonard Peltier for many years now. He has been in prison in the United States for thirty-five years, more than half his life, as a result of a trial based on a flawed and dishonest case full of false evidence given by the FBI.

Leonard is a Native American activist, considered by Amnesty International and many others to be a prisoner of conscience. I've got to know Leonard through a long exchange of letters and books. Here are the first of our letters, which Leonard has now agreed to share with you. *[The idea was that Leonard should write a diary from prison, send it to me, and we would put it on our website, then called AR – Active Resistance. Leonard never did it.]*

Dear Miss Vivienne!

As always it is great hearing from you. Hey I was just being honest; it is exciting to receive your letters, being as I find you a brilliant unique lady! Before I forget, 'Yes' I did receive the books you sent, quite some time ago it seems, I just did not know who sent them, they are very expensive books I might

add, especially the Rembrandt book!! Thank you. Although they are great books I must admit I did read them before; we studied Rembrandt in College. I took Prison Course (5) when I was at LVN (Leavenworth USP), but now I have my own copies for my Private Collection ... Again, thank you very much as I did enjoy them again.

I do understand the Humanist theory, and more and more all the time as I age ... And I also believe very strongly we earth people are not alone in the many vast universe(s). I also understand life comes in many different forms, as science is proving I might add! Some life is completely invisible to the naked eye! But to answer your question, Yes I'd love to work with you, on one condition! That you will guide me and help me to write things!! Or correct me and edit me, I meant! And you're welcome to quote me!

One of my first cousins is coming to visit this weekend. I have not seen him in over forty years that I can remember. This is going to be cool I am sure. The two days we are allowed will be filled with question after question! Our mothers were sisters, both deceased now. I am awaiting approval for one of my grandsons to visit. He will bring one of my great grandsons – I have eleven great grandchildren so far. The sad part is that I have not seen any of them. I'm too far from home!

O.k. in your next letter send me some of your ideas etc, and I will try to respond to them. Hopefully this will work out to be something good!! I better put this in the mail, you take care tell everyone hello for me! In the spirit of Crazy Horse DOKSHA. Leonard...

Dear Leonard

It is more than two months since I wrote to you. I spent all my spare time in August re-writing my Manifesto. August is the one quiet time in the fashion business and I was waiting for a block of time to write. So I kept my head down and did just that. I think my Manifesto is now clearer and more profound.