



Upcycling Agency: Material and Human Transformation for Sustainability in Fashion

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Abstract

In this paper, we offer some conceptual building blocks, or rather conceptual flows, towards a radical processual rethinking of the type of agency that allows for the sustainable production and consumption of fashion. Appeals to principled decision making or calculating costs and benefits instrumentally fail to engender the necessary behavioural changes, and more importantly, our current conceptual apparatus cannot account for the relationality that fosters sustainable lifestyles. An empirical study of upcycling practices allows us to interrogate the agency involved in sustainable organising and acknowledge the complex forms of valuation that take place in and through the making process. Our data were analysed through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatist perspectives on valuation and were brought into conversation with literature on 'making', more specifically through the anthropological work of Tim Ingold. We contend that current conceptualisations of sustainable organising are inadequate because they undermine the relational orientation that sustainable organising entails. We argue for a processual, relational approach to valuation, which allows for the accommodation of a plurality of ways of thinking about what sustainable organising may mean. To live sustainably, one has to stay close to materials, engage relationally with one's histories and contexts, and allow valuation to present itself as part of everyday practice.

Keywords Upcycling · Agency · Ethical fashion · Dewey · Ingold

Introduction

In this paper, we offer some conceptual building blocks, or rather conceptual flows, towards a radical rethinking of how individuals take ethical decisions around fashion production and consumption. The fashion and textiles industry is acknowledged to be one of the worst performing global industries in terms of negative environmental impacts (Niinimäki et al., 2020) with the evidence around associated consumer behaviour often highlighting the difficulties individuals face in acting on their values (Hiller & Woodall, 2019), in particular in relation to the claimed existence of the attitude–behaviour gap (Carrington et al., 2010). Inherent

at the heart of these challenges, we propose a meaningful alternative to current practices, characterised by three inter-related problems. Firstly, why can't the facts and figures about threats to the environment lead actors to calculate the irreparable harm resulting from fashion production and consumption and change their behaviour? Secondly, why do 'good', principled people with sound values not engage in sustainable fashion production and consumption? Finally, what can we learn about the kind of agency that leads to sustainable organising by studying the practices of those individuals that do engage in sustainable fashion production and consumption?

We respond to the call of this special issue for a more radical rethinking of sustainable fashion by addressing the above problems in three corresponding ways: firstly, we critique 'business-as-usual' utilitarian calculations to achieve sustainable fashion consumption, arguing that they are both neither radical enough in significantly affecting behaviour change, nor are they based on flawless assumptions. Secondly, in exploring empirical cases of sustainable production and consumption, we challenge the view that principled agency is the only way to approach sustainable consumption

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through exploring the nature of, and motivations behind, upcycling practices of designer-makers. Instead, the process of valuation that takes place in upcycling practices challenges existing binary oppositions that still underpin our thinking about sustainable fashion consumption and production. We therefore argue against ‘principled agency’ to more clearly articulate what ethical, sustainable or responsible agency means in the context of upcycling practices. Finally, we offer a radically relational, processual reconceptualisation of ethical agency by bringing the pragmatist perspectives of John Dewey into conversation with that of Tim Ingold. Ethical agency emerges from the practice of ongoing valuation in interaction with materials and histories. This valuation gives rise to sustainable agency, not because agents are acting on principle, but because of their ongoing socio-material engagement with practices of valuation. Responsible agency is another iteration of ethical agency, as agents become ‘response-able’, that is, capable of responding ethically towards whomever or whatever they engage with. We argue that ‘homo economicus’ must make way for other conceptions of our human agency, such as *homo faber* (Arendt, 1958; Bergson, 1907), or *homo ludens* (Huizinga, 1949/2016). In doing so, we hope to explore the impasse involved in escaping mainstream sustainability logics by taking on a particular value/s-lens on practices (agencing) of upcycling fashion designer-makers, interrogating the individual valuation involved in sustainable organising, and challenging the instrumentality at the heart of the ‘business case’ for sustainability.

To articulate our proposal, we have to challenge certain persistent assumptions within the extant literature. We believe the disruptive possibilities of upcycling are undermined by a paradigmatic adherence to either deontologically claiming commitment to certain values or principles, or instrumentally arguing for ‘the business case’ in terms of increased competitiveness and reputation (Scherer et al., 2013; Vilanova et al., 2009; Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Our paper presents a departure from conventional logics around ethical agency that still display a simplistic faith in principled business decisions, made by calculative agents. The fact remains that the ‘business case for sustainability’ still dominates the discourse, both in theory and practice (Albertini, 2013; Aragón-Correa, 1998; Du et al., 2010; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Sharma & Vredenburg, 1998; Wang & Bansal, 2012). Its persistence makes it impossible to challenge the assumptions of capitalist logics of growth and consumption which are the key causal factors for unsustainable fashion. Even the imperative to create ‘sustainable business models’ (Pedersen et al., 2018; Schaltegger et al., 2016; Scherer et al., 2013) simply tweaks current business models in the direction of sustainability without fundamentally challenging the logics that underpin it. As such, embedded arguments for sustainable fashion in

utilitarian logics perpetuate capitalist growth and consumption instead of challenging it.

What is the alternative? We aim to articulate what a radical alternative to utilitarian and deontological ethics in the context of sustainable fashion may be, by exploring the nature of, and motivations behind, upcycling practices of designer-makers as examples of sustainable production (and lifestyles) organised predominantly as micro, or small-business, or even communities/platforms. The empirical basis for the research on ‘valuation in the making’ at hand is the qualitative investigation of a range of upcycling designer-makers’ work and life-worlds. Specifically, we aim to explore how valuation emerges within a group of designer-makers who are committed to living according to their values, how these values are ‘made’ and ‘remade’ on an ongoing basis and what this may teach us regarding organising sustainably. Our analysis will explore why these practices are in many ways antithetical to the conventional logic around sustainable organising in the fashion industry and go beyond typical normative models for explaining behaviour. In fact, upcycling as a practice flies in the face of an insistence on the scalability of sustainable organising and its typical instrumental orientations, as it wants to allow for an altogether different form of valuation. Our reconceptualisation of sustainable work practices is one that allows for the pragmatic emergence of both sustainable values and business models in and through creative practice itself. Just as sustainability should be understood as an unending process, defined by dynamic and moving targets responding to interdependencies between social and ecological systems (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016), it is in the ‘making’ of values through relational, processual practices where the disruptive potential of upcycling lies. Following this we therefore explore the following questions:

- (a) What type of valuation could replace the utilitarian analysis at the heart of the market-based ideal of a ‘business case’ for sustainability and which enables individuals to live well?
- (b) How principle-based arguments, which seem to fail to affect behavioural change, may be replaced by the processual, relational making of values?
- (c) How do ethical agency and values emerge through the process of making?

In dealing with these three questions, we weave together the ideas of Follett, Dewey, and Ingold to develop the elements for our processual reconceptualisation of sustainable agency. From Follett we take, amongst other insights, the potential of processual integration, from Dewey (also in conversation with Bentley), the notion of trans-action, and from Ingold, indebted as he is to Dewey, an understanding of the material relationality at the heart of processual agency. His

is a description of alchemistic elements that can never be described outside of the process of their becoming(s).

Upcycling in the Context of Sustainable Organising: Current Impasses

Upcycling, here defined as the repurposing of discarded objects or material into useful items which may have higher quality or value than the original (Bridgens et al., 2018; Wilson, 2016), can be framed as a local, spontaneous, and collaborative process that holds immediate aesthetic, psychological, social, cultural, and environmental value potential (Wilson, 2016). It is, however, also positioned as an example of sustainable production which can form an important part of material circulation, waste management, and sustainable fashion consumption. Whilst the practice can be distinguished from thrift, defined as a response to economic imperatives in home-making in which individuals buy cheap, re-use, and repair (Podkalicka & Potts, 2014), it nevertheless shares characteristics of the practice, driven by ethical choices and complexity that are “simultaneously practical and symbolic, individual and collective, economic and cultural” (Podkalicka & Potts, 2014, p. 263).

Whereas previous studies have focused on the roles or identities of designer-makers (for example Fletcher et al., 2012), or have sought to describe and define upcycling practices (for example Paras & Curteza, 2018), our research intends to make a contribution to better understanding the emergence of sustainable lifestyles, work practices, and organisation, and to articulate an alternative understanding of the processes of sustainable valuation on the (micro) level of people’s life-worlds. In fact, this paper’s focus on upcycling may help us understand why current conceptualisations of sustainability cannot account for the forms of valuation that lie at the heart of some emergent forms of sustainable organising.

In what follows, we reveal some ontological and epistemological blind spots that remain intact in both principled and utilitarian arguments for upcycling practices. We challenge the belief in principled agents whose organisational practices are driven by values. These flawed assumptions also inform the belief in calculative arguments towards the ‘business case’ for sustainability. In both cases, we still rely on an outdated understanding of the rational homo economicus calculating her/his own self-interest before acting (Painter-Morland & ten Bos, 2016). On the basis of those sustainability notions inherent in specific work practices, such as upcycling, we believe we need to move beyond traditional utilitarian motivations for sustainable (business) practices and extend the literature on what a paradoxical understanding of sustainability and living sustainably could mean (Hahn et al., 2014, 2015). We argue that the processual

and relational qualities of sustainable lifestyles do not subscribe to the binaries of objective and subjective variables that are employed in sustainability justifications. This allows us to explore what sustaining ‘living well’ embedded in a specific socio-material environment may mean and how different forms of value and embodied forms of agency emerge as part of relational, processual practices.

The Problem with Calculation and ‘Business as Usual’

A central challenge in making a utilitarian argument for sustainable fashion production and consumption lies in the fact that weighing benefits versus harms is not such a simple ‘calculation’ to make (Hiller & Woodall, 2019). The notion of ‘paradox’ has become increasingly central to how sustainable business practices are described (De Colle et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015; Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). Whereas Hahn et al. (2014, 2015) describe the ‘paradoxical’ frame as competing social, environmental, and economic imperatives that simply have to be accepted, we also locate the paradox within the terminology that is employed within the discourse of sustainability itself. In fact, we argue that the language of ‘paradox’, ‘tension’, ‘contradiction’, and ‘compromise’ may block new forms of organising in and through its inability to acknowledge a much more radical challenge to existing logics. We go beyond the idea of paradox by tapping into Dewey’s critique of dualism, to radically reframe persistent binary oppositions within a more relational ontology.

We, however, acknowledge De Colle et al.’s (2014) observation that some types of paradoxes have a pragmatic nature in that they do not necessarily imply a logical contradiction. Unfortunately, the implications of this insight do not filter through in the way in which we describe the motivations behind, and the workings of, certain sustainable forms of organising such as upcycling. A reliance on ‘calculating agency’ remains present, even in accounts that acknowledge the paradoxical nature of sustainable organising (Hahn et al., 2014, 2015). The ‘paradoxical’ frame is offered as an alternative to ‘the business case’ frame, and a reliance on linear cause-and-effect relationships is replaced with a systems perspective on organising and complexity thinking as an approach to dealing with this. However, whilst embracing a complexity perspective, the focus remains on managers whose cognitive frames shape their decisions and actions. In their analysis of the influence of the ‘cognitive frames’ on decision making, Hahn et al. (2015) for instance found that those managers displaying the ‘paradoxical frame’ are less likely to be pioneers spearheading comprehensive changes in routines. Unfortunately, the focus on ‘cognitive frames’ still assumes the existence of an agent (subject) framing the objective reality, and as such that a fully non-binary

understanding of agency, which also acknowledges agents' socio-material entanglements, remains elusive.

The language of 'trade-offs' or 'win-wins' also remains prominent throughout (Hiller & Woodall, 2019; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). The assumption seems to be that the fate of sustainable organising lies in an agent that can stand back from the complexity of business engagements, and 'manage' moral contradictions (Reinecke et al., 2012) through 'justification', 'compromise', or developing a 'grammar' for dealing with competing normative frameworks (Demers & Gond, 2020). This is of course to be expected—the role of managerial decision making has long been at the centre of how sustainable organising was understood (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2012; Sharma, 2000). Stereotypical archetypes in articulating managers as agents remain present, even in the notion of 'economies of worth', coined by Boltanski and Thévenot and used by Demers and Gond (2020) to analyse the kind of moral judgement involved in sustainable decision making. The idea of an 'economy' is hard to get rid of as an overriding parameter, even in thinking through sustainable agency, which from our perspective requires not so much a commitment to abstract principles, but rather on ongoing engagement with practices of valuation.

On an epistemological level, we also face difficulties in how to design methods by which we can come to calculate the benefits of known sustainable organising. The response to this question that emerges in much of the literature is that we know that a practice is sustainable when it allows a business to continue to make money whilst balancing social and environmental responsibilities. 'Corporate sustainability' links the capacity of an organisation to be successful in the long term to its ability to balance economic imperatives with social and environmental performance as well as sound governance (De Colle et al., 2014). The preoccupation with measuring social and environmental impact and translating it back to financial value is evident in how sustainability is being approached in various organisations (De Colle et al., 2014; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Schaltegger et al., 2016). As Ergene et al. (2020) argue, the 'business case' as we encounter it in corporate sustainability remains driven by conventional economic principles of competitiveness and profitability. As such, it cannot easily be squared with forms of organising that disrupt these agendas. As Ergene et al. (2020, p. 5) explain: "the analytical tools of corporate sustainability reinforce the managerial view and do not capture the contradictions of market-based ideals and socio-ecological wellbeing [...]".

We believe that making reference to seeming contradictions reasserts restrictive oppositional thinking. This tendency necessarily subscribes to either-or logics, which is not helpful in thinking processually about sustainable living. We witness this challenge in much of the literature. Those who study the integration of sustainability

in organisational contexts highlight incompatible logics and the existence of different subcultures in enacting such logics (Kok et al., 2019). Also, in the case of new ventures, sustainability priorities are justified by means of a 'business case' (Wang & Bansal, 2012). This stands in stark contrast with the utopian way in which others, like Levy and Spicer (2013) describe the sustainability imaginary. They describe the 'sustainable lifestyles' imaginary as characterised by localism, a simpler, less materialistic life, slowness, a stronger sense of community, small-scale production, co-ops, and so on, as experiments in alternative economic structures, similar to the 'slow fashion' concept proposed by Fletcher et al. (2012). This, of course, stands in stark contrast to dominant cultures that emphasise growth, careerism, and consumerism. As a result, sustainability discourse seems split in adversarial camps, the 'critical' versus 'managerial' (Ergene et al., 2020). In considering the integration of sustainability, however, there may be scope for accommodating a plurality of ways of thinking about what sustainable organising may mean. As Follett (1924/2013) argues, rather than accepting voluntarily submission, struggle or compromise, a focus on 'progressive integrations' would break up the 'wholes' of questions or ideas to surface differences and use them as a means in creative joint discovery. Follett's contribution to our thinking through a process-oriented ontology enables the development of a radical rethinking of sustainable agency, because it suggests integrations of what might seem in tension. In confronting diverse interests which all claim to be salient, there must be a relational and inter-behavioural process of revaluation, which considers the emergence of values which humans engage whilst doing things, and this necessarily involves activities in realising additional values which change attitudes towards the original value. Values are therefore "eventual things" (Follett, 1924/2013, p. 172). Similarly, Dewey's ethical theory is based on creative social *action* embedded in specific socio-material relations and conditions, with the interest of human beings being more in consummations than in preparations (Dewey, 1994, p. 60). In Dewey's correspondence with Bentley, the way in which discrete entities interact is transcended through processual transactions, which allows for the emergent becoming of agency (Simpson, 2016, p. 159). Read together, Follett and Dewey move us beyond thinking oppositionally, and towards exploring the possibility that divergent elements may come together processually to allow for sustainable living. Agency, from this perspective, is not the result of principled individual action as strong agentic 'selves', nor entities 'inter-acting', but rather a 'seeing together', extensionally and durationally, what emerges (Simpson, 2016, p. 160). What this may mean for finding ways to live sustainably within the limiting logics of neoliberal capitalism, remains to be

explored. We believe Ingold takes Dewey's pragmatist thinking towards understanding even more precisely the material trans-actions that are required.

The Problem with Values as the Basis for Principled Decision Making

A principled approach to pursuing sustainable fashion consumption faces a different, but equally paralysing set of problems. There is, for instance, a causality dilemma of sorts around the constitution for sustainable lifestyles and associated work practices. What comes first: values or behavioural predispositions? Are those committed to sustainable fashion production and consumption acting on their held values (that is, applying some principled commitments to frugality, environmental protection, respecting human rights, and self-sufficiency), or are these values the residual effect of certain habits and practices which are inherited and continuously nurtured? Do values come first, followed by (lifestyle) choices, or, as Follett (1924/2013) suggests, is the flow of life a habituated process of 'making do', which 'makes' values? Important here is Follett's description of coactive power, rather than 'power over' (Simpson, 2016, p. 169). Though those involved in sustainable practices often proclaim their alliance to environmental values and are vocal advocates for the values of frugality, environmental protection, respecting human rights, and self-sufficient lifestyles, we suspect that something more profound has shifted in their understanding of 'value'. We question whether sustainable production and consumption practices (such as those we witness in this paper within upcycling design making) are necessarily driven by particular values being applied to the lifestyle and work of specific individuals. Instead, we propose that the values, or rather valuing the underpinning of an alternative form of organising in the fashion industry such as upcycling, may challenge conventional logics around the 'business case' for sustainability.

The extant literature signals the persistence of certain binaries that need to be challenged. 'Values' remain distinct from 'facts', 'reason' from passionate engagement. This binary thinking plagues the agency constructs that underpin sustainable organising, and the way in which we evaluate and describe sustainable practices. Bansal and Song (2017) argue for keeping some of these binaries intact: they argue that 'responsibility' and 'sustainability' may display certain overlaps and continuities, but that essentially, they have different origins and harbour very different ontological assumptions. 'Responsibility', according to them, retains a normative orientation, whereas 'sustainability' is based on systems science and as such, offers a more descriptive and managerial perspective. The 'facts' versus 'values', 'descriptive' versus 'normative' distinctions therefore remain firmly intact. In their response to the notion of paradox, Bansal and

Song (2017) briefly draw also on Eastern philosophies. It is here that they offer the possibility of questioning certain Western assumptions around linear cause-and-effect relationships and disembodied agency. The potential that lies in the idea of 'ecological embeddedness' (Bansal & Song, 2017, p. 29) as a way of rethinking both the agents and the organising involved is what our paper helps to explore. Some alternative conceptions are indeed emerging, with an emphasis on embodiment, relationality, and community organising (Daskalaki et al., 2018). From this perspective, agents dwell in certain 'worlds' and participate in 'orders of worth' rather than deliberately engaging in justification (Daskalaki et al., 2018).

According to Dewey (1939), no theory of valuation is possible; valuations are simply empirically observable patterns of behaviour. What this perspective allows us to conceptualise is that studying the practices of upcyclers is the clue to understanding their values and the emergence of ethical conduct. Much of the discussions around values and their role in shaping human decision making posits that values transcend specific actions and situations (Schwartz, 1994). That is, that 'values come first', and that practices are merely the 'application' of these principles (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994). As Gehman et al., (2012, p. 86) summarise, referring to Latour (1986) "both cognitive and cultural perspectives define values in 'ostensive' terms".

However, rather than seeing values as fixed 'ends' to pursue, Dewey argues for the perspective of 'ends-in-view' in which values are continuously constructed through practice and are subconsciously 'remade' in acts of expression. Though Dewey (1989) celebrates the way in which Aristotelian philosophy does not advocate a separation between the theory of nature and the theory of culture, he does not believe in good and natural perfect ends that are fixed aspirational principles. Instead, ends are experimentally or dynamically determined and are relative, not absolute. Dewey (1934/2005) suggests that whilst values are incorporated into personality through past experiences, values can be progressively reformed. Indeed, the perspective of the past and the continuity of human activities are interwoven into practices. That is, present valuations cannot be validly stated until they are placed in the perspective of the past valuation of events, with which they are continuous (Dewey, 1939). Here, we find two salient perspectives on the past. The first relates to traditions and the role of social relationships in shaping emerging values. The second relates to the role of chance in the development of both practices and values. Dewey's (2016, 1925) 'aleatory world' is one which is irregular, unstable, and often hostile. As such, practices that are aleatory by nature do not subscribe to neat calculations and standardised measurement, as much of 'business case' thinking seems to demand. What Peirce (1892) defined as 'tychism', or the role of chance, remains a feature

in this aleatory existence, and is also crucial to understanding the fluidity of pragmatist valuation. But how does this work in the context of sustainable fashion production and consumption?

Tim Ingold's insights on 'making' have integrated Dewey's perspectives on valuation in the direction of a relational, processual ontology that offer some radical alternatives in terms of how both 'values' and 'agency' operate in this context. For example, Ingold (2013) urges us to abandon our preoccupation with chemistry in order to return to 'alchemy'. Where the chemist views matter in terms of its invariant atomic or molecular constitution, the alchemist views material not by what it is, but by what it does. We take inspiration from this insight in exploring what materials *do* (and not what they *are*) in terms of shaping the kind of agency that shapes upcycling practices.

'New' Understandings: Engagement with the Critical Sustainability Literature

Criticism of the dominant narratives around sustainability (Ergene et al., 2020) and arguments for a more embodied understanding of human agency (Daskalaki et al., 2018) have been emergent, and it is to this stream of literature that our study contributes. We do so by challenging mainstream instrumental sustainability logics through adopting a value/s-lens on practices (agencing) and interrogating the individual valuation of upcycling fashion designer-makers.

We acknowledge the need to take up Ergene et al.'s (2020) challenge of fostering a much more interdisciplinary understanding of sustainability and responding to the nature of design-making work practices at hand. In fact, we believe a much broader interrogation of the philosophical, anthropological, and spiritual dimensions of sustainable production and consumption is required to develop a much more holistic perspective—one within which the 'environment', 'nature', or 'materials' are not split off and set up against 'agency' and 'culture'. Escobar (2011) outlines an ontological approach to designing by which sustainability is precisely about designing for a pluriverse, seeing: "the Earth as a living whole that is always emerging out of the manifold biophysical, human, and spiritual elements that make it up" (Escobar, in: Ingold, 2019, p. 669).

The contribution of pragmatism to thinking beyond binaries in organisation studies is well established. Wicks and Freeman (1998) drew on pragmatist thought to transcend the debate between positivism and anti-positivism and to offer pragmatist experimentation to allow for the ethical evaluation of capitalism. More recently, Lorino (2018) offered a comprehensive analysis of the way in which pragmatism reframes organisation studies, which was applied to questions regarding sustainable organising in a special issue published in this journal on "The Development of Responsible

and Sustainable Business Practice: Value, Mind-Sets, Business-Models' (Painter et al., 2019). Painter et al. (2019) draw on Lorino's analysis to unpack the way in which pragmatism supports embracing a relational ontology within sustainable organising. They indicate how valuation reframes our thinking about binary distinctions such as 'facts' and 'values', and how the process of relating to others and with animate and inanimate entities enables sustainable habituation. What remains absent from this account, however, is precisely how such trans-actions with human, animate and inanimate others may be affected in the processes of sustainable production and consumption, and how this shapes human agency. Ingold (2017), reflects on his relationship to Dewey in discussing the centrality of communication, and explains that he believes that we need to return to Dewey's insistence on the broader verb 'to common'; that there can be no progress in the sharing of experiences unless there is variation in what each participant brings. What Ingold adds is the insight that the 'variations' that make commoning possible include engagements with materials and things, and emerge in the embodied process of making, rather than simply communicating. Ingold (2017, p. 9) therefore argues that correspondence rests of three essential principles: of habit (rather than volition), 'agencing' (rather than agency), and 'attentionality' (rather than intentionality).

Ingold's (2017) thinking offers helpful metaphors for understanding ever-emerging agency in relation to valuation processes at hand, describing social life being characterised not by solidity but by fluidity. He describes 'doing undergoing' as the enacting of experience, where transformation comes from within. From this perspective, agency is not given in advance of action (cause and effect) but is rather ever forming and transforming from within the action itself. Ingold (2017, p. 17) calls this 'agencing' to emphasise: "the potential of undergoing reflexively to transform the doer".

Ingold (2019) brings this notion of designing in line with his idea to see the world towards sustainability rather as a 'plenum', a 'full space' in which everything and everyone is intermingled and ever in formation, in the processing of ends and their transformation into pure beginning (Ingold, 2019). Ingold (2020) further describes life as a tangled web of concurrent conversations, between people, animate and inanimate objects, materials, and landscapes. Designing for sustainability: "is not about the preservation of form, but rather the practice of form-giving, but more importantly about the continuity of life" (Ingold, 2019, p. 669). He emphasises the profound opposition of this perspective to the mainstream, science based, and business thinking-shaped rationale of sustainability which rather turns "beginnings into endings, the transformative power of a living earth into goods and services for human consumption". Instead, for Ingold (2019, p. 671): "sustainability lies in correspondence", which he describes as "knowing from the inside".

From this perspective, things carry on together and answer to one another, they do not so much interact, as *correspond* (Ingold, 2020). This involves ongoing, open ended, and qualitatively democratic conversations, involving a dense relational network, emerging in and through time as a result of conjoint action and affective resonance (Bennett, 2010; De Colle et al., 2014).

If, as previously argued, sustainability is understood as an unending, dynamic, and interdependent process (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016), we need to acknowledge the ongoing task of understanding interrelationships and interdependencies in the ‘making’ of our (human and environmental) wellbeing and the emergence of sustainability. From this perspective, one may argue that upcycling motivations and the evolution of and commitments to sustainability can only be properly conceptualised if prevailing utilitarian economic reasoning takes a back seat—as a mere means and not end in itself—to make room for nuanced meaning-making and valuation practices (Walker, 2017). This may allow us to conceptualise alternative notions of valuation of a more inter- and intra-subjective nature in relation to the immediate environment. In her description of leadership as trans-action, Simpson (2016, p. 165) draws on Dewey and Bentley (1949) to help conceptualise what ‘agency’ may mean in radically processual terms. Key to this conception of agency is ‘emergence’—agency building on ‘doings’ over time, rather than being reliant on individual intent (Simpson, 2016, p. 168).

Conceptual Framing

From the above analysis of the extant literature, we contend that there are a number of threads, or alchemistic elements, that can be woven or catalysed into our proposal of a relational, processual understanding of upcycling behaviours as a means to sustainable fashion production and consumption. Firstly, in rejecting binary distinctions such as between ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’, ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, ‘facts’ and values, Dewey’s view of social ontology is one of habituation, rooted in a recognitive process of dependence on, and learning from others (Testa, 2017), always continuous with embodied experiences. Drawing on Dewey’s ideas, Ingold’s work allows us further to focus on the interrelationships between concepts that are typically discussed in opposition. This allows us to investigate how histories, materials, and creative practices are entangled in upcycling practices, and how this sheds light on the emergence of the kind of agency that enables sustainable fashion production and consumption. Ingold’s proposals help us get closer to what pragmatist thinking may entail in terms of material practices of sustainable living, perhaps because he draws even more explicitly on processual thinking as it has gained force in various disciplines over the course of the twentieth century.

Secondly, both Dewey and Ingold gesture towards new ways of understanding the normative force of our entangled agency. This allows us to replace the idea of ‘principled decision making’ with the pragmatic valuation that takes place through what Dewey (1934, 1989) called ‘consummatory experiences’ amongst upcyclers. In the process, we replace ‘ethical design making’ based on desirable outcomes or principles, with an understanding of how values are ‘made’ in practice, or, more precisely, how they are alchemically catalysed through making practices. That is, we want to explore how the engagement with materials and others in practice leads to the emergence of sustainable behaviours. Drawing on the work of Ingold (2013, 2019), we propose that it is through the imaginative and skilled aesthetic practice of socio-material engagement that is part of making, that valuation practices with strong normative force in terms of behaviour emerge. What our study of the material engagements of upcyclers enables us is to witness the alchemistic entanglements that allow for the emergence of sustainable agency.

Methodology

A cross-disciplinary conversation between a pragmatist philosophy of valuation and a relational anthropology of design making allowed us to investigate situated and relational processes of upcycling as the ‘making of sustainable values’. In particular, we explored the iterations of emergent themes through Dewey’s philosophical lenses and brought it in conversation with the literature on ‘making’ as articulated by Tim Ingold. As such, our methodology is fully aligned with what Simpson (2018) describes as six interrelated theoretical pragmatist concepts that can enrich organisational research, namely, abduction, inquiry, habit, social selves, gestural conversation, and trans-action. We believe that bringing Ingold’s insights into conversation with Dewey’s allows us to deepen our understanding of many of these dimensions, especially in view of how upcycling practices shed light on habit, social selves, gestural conversation, and trans-action. As suggested above, Ingold (2019) refers to sustainability—the sustainability of everything—as a continuous ‘plenary’ process of correspondence of intermingling human/social and natural forces. He argues that humans do not ‘possess’ agency, but instead, are possessed by action (Ingold, 2013). This perspective, read alongside Dewey and Bentley (1949), allows us to raise questions around how ethical agency and (sustainability) values emerge through action (or trans-action). In doing so, we are able to explore whether values exist in a principled sense, and how they really work when examining flows of activity.

In line with our literature review, our methodological approach of this paper remains pragmatist, directed

at understanding transforming the world. In this regard, our study embraces an experimental approach that has become central to pragmatist forms of inquiry. That means that we believe the world is not primarily something to observe, but something in which we are trying to live our best possible lives (Martela, 2015). Following this, as Dewey (2008) notes, truth depends on what individuals find through observing reflectively on events; the ontological view of value/s is subjective, emerging through lived experience and “intelligent reflection on experience within nature” (Varey, 2015, p. 213) and in experimental mode (Martela, 2015). Dewey’s social ontology emphasises changing practices, co-dependent lived experiences, and personal narratives around the enactment of value, which leads us to the adoption of qualitative techniques, and in particular in-depth conversations with upcycling designer-makers, adopting a transactional approach which would enable us to observe these practices and narratives not as independent entities or realities (Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

We entered the study with an interest in understanding upcycling as a practice of sustainable organising. How are upcycling designer-makers engaged in the process of living their best possible lives embedded in socio-material life-worlds and how are these lives maintained? We wanted to explore the pragmatist notion of trans-action that is described by Simpson (2018), as we believed that by observing how upcyclers trans-act with their materials, we may come to understand how the actor is: “continuously emergent within the flow of the integrated whole, which is itself emerging” (Simpson, 2018, p. 21). In order to achieve this aim, we engaged with those for whom upcycling is both a lifestyle and a means of economic subsistence. Access was gained through personal networks and referrals from designer-makers. We conducted thirteen conversations with designer-makers in different UK locations between May 2018 and March 2019; these were conducted at the designer-makers’ homes and studios allowing for rich discussions (following a guide of pre-determined topics) alongside observations of their work practices including show-and-tell of the design processes and outputs. This allowed us, as much as possible, to ground our inquiry in transactional processes which considered the processes as wholes as a “spatio-temporal” connections (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 133). Our conversations were recorded and transcribed and field notes were written throughout the course of the visits, which typically lasted between one and three hours to aid analysis. Respondents were given a project information sheet at the point of recruitment and informed consent gained before the visits were undertaken. In order to protect anonymity, participants have been allocated pseudonyms in our analysis, and any other identifying information has been removed. The participant profiles can be found in appendix one.

In particular, our questioning focused on the following: the events and activities which drive valuation, especially when activity ceased to be routine and disrupted to do so; how participants analysed past experiences to guide future actions; and how participants realised what was anticipated and how failures shaped future actions. One of the authors spent significant time with the upcyclers, visiting their workshops, walking around their premises, sharing a meal, all of which set the scene for the interview as more structured conversation. The interviews can therefore not be seen as isolated scientific accounts occurring in an office, devoid from context and contamination, but rather as the result of layered trans-actions infused by the materiality of the locations and the witnessing of the material processes of production. Though engaging in interviews is necessarily retrospective, the storytelling that our upcyclers engage in, bore witness to their relationship to materials and, eventually, to the products of their making. The material objects made bear further witness to the intra-actions that occurred—the upcyclers becoming sustainable agents in and through the (re)making of materials.

Our analysis of the data was informed by an interdisciplinary conceptual analysis, informed by the theoretical constructs of Dewey and Ingold as described earlier. The conversations allowed us to observe and experience valuation as it emerges in and through making practices. Whilst upcyclers seem to be principled people committed to living according to their values, how this valuation emerges is rarely interrogated. In engaging with these individuals, we became more and more interested in exploring how these values may be ‘made’ and ‘remade’ on an ongoing basis, and what this may teach us regarding motivations towards sustainable living.

Pragmatism emphasises the primacy of practice; that language and knowledge are means of coping with a changing world. Our discussion guide was shaped accordingly, focusing on the practical aspects of what the participants are doing on an everyday basis, the craftsmanship of their work and on the issues of values and ethics raised by the use-value of the results (Kvale, 1996). As Lorino (2018) suggests, the aim was to explore how participants tell a story about how events, acts, and results are linked together; to explore what events and activities drive valuation; and when activity or impulses stop being routine and disrupted or transformed. Our questioning aimed to gain insight into how participants analyse their past experiences to guide future actions, how they realise what was anticipated (means/ends), and how ‘failures’ shape future actions. In particular, it was important to uncover participants’ practices, with a focus on the processes they are engaged in. We were interested in how participants became artists (focusing on conditions rather than rationalisations), their creative processes and encountered circumstances, what gave them the most (dis)satisfaction

and what materials participants enjoyed working with. In relation to specific practices, we asked questions around habits, routines, and rituals, and evidence of success or failure. Our approach was broadly consistent with the type identified by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000), which integrates a number of hermeneutic themes and examines the research problem/questions from existing perspectives dependent on the discipline and research problem. We made use of what they call ‘reflexive interpretation’, with a focus on creative ideas rather than empirical norms in which the material is interpreted at various theoretical levels, mixing empirical work, meaningful interpretation, critical reflection, consistent with Dewey and Bentley’s (1949) notion of transactional inquiry, which should allow for new descriptions of the aspects and phases of events to be made freely at all stages of the inquiry. Accordingly, interpretation was sequenced by dividing the project into different phases, concentrating primarily on the empirical work and including definite periods at which the project was interpreted in reflective terms. This required both an intra-textual analysis (reading transcripts in their entirety) and inter-textual analysis (reading across transcripts to identify patterns, themes and insights). In addition, important elements were listened to, observing and reflecting on socio-material trans-actions, as our findings below will reveal.

Findings and Discussion

What emerged from our review of the existing debates around sustainable organising is firstly the need for a more nuanced understanding of agency, one that can move beyond homo economicus’ calculative reasoning and take account of a plurality of ongoing processes of valuation that allow us to live well (Painter-Morland et al., 2017). Secondly, in describing and evaluating emergent forms of sustainable organising, such as fashion upcycling, the ‘business case’ for sustainability may be replaced by an appreciation of the ongoing experiments by which we give form to life in and through our embodied relationality. Our final goal is to develop a meaningful, more radical alternative understanding of ethical agency as relational and processual, as exemplified by Follett’s (1924/2013) proposal for *coaction* in her notion of ‘power-with’ rather than ‘power-over’, in which actors integrate to jointly develop power to gain control of situations and resolve conflicts. As stated in the introduction, we therefore set out to explore with our participants:

(a) What type of valuation could replace the utilitarian analysis at the heart of the market-based ideal of a ‘business case’ for sustainability and which enables individuals to live well?

(b) How principle-based arguments, which seem to fail to affect behavioural change, may be replaced by the processual, relational making of values?

(c) How do ethical agency and values emerge through the process of making?

Our analysis revealed some salient interrelating themes as described below, which in conversation with the conceptual frameworks of Dewey & Ingold as ‘hermeneutic lenses’, help us address the above questions. In thinking through our findings, we hope to bring the themes in conversation with pragmatist accounts of agency, and to recast the motivation for sustainable practices in terms that steer clear of binary thinking by acknowledging the processes involved in (re)making values and (recreating) sustainable livelihoods. We start by reconsidering utilitarian calculations, as well as the idea of principled action, in order to attempt a radical rearticulation of the agency constructs involved in sustainable organising.

Beyond Utilitarianism and the Business Case: The Process of Valuing

In rethinking how we describe sustainability practices, our engagement with upcyclers revealed the limitations of viewing sustainable organising primarily through the ‘business case’ lens. Whilst Lewis drew the distinction between his desire to be a ‘business’ rather than a ‘social enterprise’, most respondents spoke little of economic imperatives as the dominant motivation (although, these are of course important). For example, Alexa explained in relation to the moments of the creative process that give her the most pleasure:

The whole point with reusing is that there is this sense of finding something that is very strong and the creative thinking behind what it will become which is also very compelling [...] So it’s difficult to focus on which bit I like the most. I can tell you what I like the least, and [that] was any commercial relationship that evolved from the creativity, so any sales weren’t of interest to me... but everything else from the finding of the fabrics and the process of transforming them, that was obviously very exciting [...] I faced the challenge but I moved ahead from it so that the upcycling to make something that is interesting and unique is interesting and creative, but it’s not a business [...] what we did, we were in shops and the exercise was to achieve reproducibility as soon as possible [...] at one point we used to say each design is reproduceable, but each piece is unique.

Similarly, Ben discussed how he enjoyed the creative freedom from making unique pieces which were not made

to order and over which he could take his time. This, along with the operational difficulties associated with scaling the business had overridden the business case and the ‘natural urge’ to grow. In a very real sense, all these ‘trans-actions’ between time, materials, human relationships and lifestyle preferences, ‘made’ upcycling their preferred way of making.

We have had many other places to work over the years... [my partner] wants to do her own thing and get on with it.... She is super fast whereas I am more... everything is like a bloody piece of art—I am like, oh composing it and then I think stop and just sew it on and then if I don’t take my time, I think, oh you rushed that and I don’t know where it is. And I won’t unpick it because I don’t do unpicking... We’ve had workshops with 8 machines in; we had one and tried to make it bigger and done that kind of thing—you don’t really make any more money, you just end up paying everybody and you have more hassle and more paperwork. It’s almost a natural instinct to go bigger, but maybe keep it small...

Instead of calculating outcomes at arm’s length, experiences of being absorbed in ongoing processes of experimentation characterised many of the reflections of our participants. There are various forms of valuation that are fully interrelated in a sustainable practice like upcycling. General intuitions about the quality of life seem to spring from the integrated form of valuation that characterise consummatory experiences, and from here, judgement about the value of things emerge. Rather than a clear ‘business case’, our engagement with upcyclers revealed a plurality of ‘consummations’ (Dewey, 1934/2005), or ways to live life well (See Fig. 1).

Various consummatory experiences were evident in the way that the flow of the creative practice fully absorbed the creator. For example, Charlotte explained how the creative



Fig. 1 Upcycling and living well

process so absorbs her that she forgets to eat or do anything else. We also found the role of ‘chance encounters’ (Dewey, 1925, 2016) a persistent theme in our analysis. For many of our participants, the ‘social traditions’ which shaped much of their practices were overlain by a number of chance social encounters which were critical in reshaping and reforming their impulsions, starting with materials, influencing their motivations and acts of valuation as they emerge in relation to the made things Susie employed similar terminology, although noting that the materiality ‘comes first’:

Actually, it was a love of the materials and authenticity and originality first as opposed to thinking necessarily about the responsible ethical side of the business. I have always been really open; it’s almost a happy accident that I started my business because I just love the materials.

The making of ‘value’ therefore seems more important than acting on ‘values’. Ethical conduct and a sustainable lifestyle seem to emerge through to the interactions of brains, bodies and things in the world, or in the correspondences between material flows, sensory awareness, and reflective practice (Ingold, 2012, 2013). Our analysis reveals some important points of difference between how upcyclers go about their practice and the way sustainability discourses are typically phrased. In the first place, the ‘end-in-view’ mode of working is not one of reaching distinct, measurable targets in the near future. Instead, ends-in-view (Dewey, 1934/2005) are reached via daily engagement with nature and materials, and listening and responding to what they communicate—in our minds a clear example of attentionality, rather than intentionality. Elisabeth explains:

They are just gorgeous to work with, they feel wonderful. And of course they all have a history which is fascinating and you find things like the little hand stitched hanging loop on something which you just think, that’s so charming. So, how could you not want to do something about it?

In relation to traditions and the roles of relationships or social processes of action, we find a deep-rooted history in each of the respondents’ practices; through past relationships, upbringing, and social histories. For many respondents these had roots in times of austerity, for example in the post-war thrift era, or in youth in which respondents had limited income, emergent in values of avoiding waste and sustainability. These thrifty habits and habituated avoidance of waste, seem key to the makers’ commitment to upcycling practices. For example, both Lorey and Peter were brought up under humble conditions in which waste would be avoided. Lorey—as many of the other designer-makers—learned early on to make the things she wanted to wear herself from good quality, non-synthetic material, because she

was either not seeing them around her or could not afford them. The actual design making starts from the materials themselves and follows equally emergent processes, often showing little evidence of planning or the determination of end goals. A feel for the materials and what they do is a process of discovery—to take something on and make it their own. As Susie noted:

For me, what I really love, it's almost the archaeology behind the work that we do and I never get bored of going out trying to find original pieces and then deconstructing them, reworking them into something new.

We found that the communication of the sustainability credentials of the upcycling practices takes a back seat to creative processes, and this can be particularly valuable even when they are 'hidden'. As Daniel explained:

I think getting something that people perceive has low value and creating into something that has value, it's definitely the most satisfying. And especially if you can do it in a way that they would never have guessed [...] I remember we sold to this one quite 'high-end' shop and we just didn't really tell them much about sustainability, they bought quite a lot of stuff from us, and it was that feeling of like, all these ladies go and buy these things and have no idea where it comes from, that's brilliant. That's the motivating and exciting part of it.

Upcycling practitioners do not feel the need to engage in typical capitalist logics of branding their products as 'sustainable' or developing a business case. Instead, there seems to be other excitement and valuations to be had.

Beyond Principles: A Redefinition of 'Values'

Our data related to upcycling practices suggests that sustainability values are, indeed, active and emergent, but also based in tradition and social processes of action. We here read our findings through the pragmatist lens of John Dewey to show how it may help us get out of the fact-value, descriptive-normative binary that still plagues the conceptualisation of sustainable organising. Seeing the relationship between values and practices like upcycling from this perspective, reveals it to be less having a set of hierarchically organised principles which determine behaviour, and more an ongoing process of valuation that emerges from problem-solving over time. For Charlotte, for instance, the necessity of thrift also led her into a particular lifestyle which had profoundly impacted her current practices. Whilst she reflects that there was no definable point at which a particular values orientation was formed and that her values were indeed emergent, this stage in her life clearly played a formative role:

There was no date or time that I became this person, I have always had the thought process in my mind to be creative with what I had around me. So, it has always been part of my lifestyle. If I needed something I couldn't afford to go and buy it, so I would always have to adapt maybe clothes for the children, changing the size when one child had finished with it and I had to adapt it, to be creative [...]

Similarly, Ben described how his practice had developed over time from his teens through experimenting with spray-painting t-shirts, customising garments with patches he made and then working with whatever materials or garments came available to him. In explaining some jackets that he made to sell at a festival:

I did a load of polka dot jackets this year and I got some really good 90s-style puffer jackets... So I get out in the garden... and just spray paint those jackets, really good fun, and then make up loads of ideas I'd had all year with patches and stuff and patches I've never made. And I thought, oh I'll make that one, make that one, that's really cool. Make a whole series of patches. Then make 20, 30 jackets just for myself and for that festival.

Upcycling also has a strong historical dimension in which what is registered in the individual in the form of 'values' is socially constructed over time. Central to this analysis are the variations that are so crucial to 'commoning', from Dewey's perspective. It involves an ongoing process of valuation that results in proud old traditions which upcyclers respect and protect through their practices. The favourite material that Lorey and Peter work with is (Harris) tweed. Lorey loves the compositions of the material, as many different colours are woven into each other, as well as its possessing natural properties to work with (see Fig. 2 below):



Fig. 2 Working with Harris tweed

The traditional process of making the tweed corresponds with their idea of design making. They enjoy ‘playing around’ with the traditional materials and giving them a ‘new life’:

They are traditional, people are still making these sort of things in that way. It’s not in a huge factory somewhere, some of it is. But the mills are, there are not many mills left and I think that’s sad. It’s sad that we are losing this heritage.

Many of our participants discussed brands and materials which enabled them to ‘play’ with local traditions. Their work, dominated by the use of tweeds, tartans and leather, had its roots in three items, the first of which Lorey describes as a ‘happy accident’ emerging from her engagement with beautiful materials:

We had a pair of pure wool plus-four trousers that Peter had been given [...] by a man, a ghillie up in Scotland who said, ‘These don’t fit me, but they’ll fit you.’ Well of course they didn’t fit and they kicked around for ages didn’t they? And then we also got this Harris tweed jacket that had been in a theatre and it was in an awful mess, covered in paint, we cleaned that up, I actually wore it for a bit. But these were beautiful fabrics.

What we see here is how the interaction between the upcycler and the material operate—the material ‘speaks to’ Lorey as a form of correspondence, as Ingold would suggest. Similarly, Elisabeth’s interest and love for the French linen fabrics grew through her understanding of fashion/design history and creation of clothing. As a child, she would re-jig her things if they weren’t right. Her mother was working in a fashion business which exposed her to learning about cut, shape, style, and fabrics. The link between aesthetic appreciation and sustainability values is evident when Elisabeth talks about the unique quality of antique linen and the fact that the inefficiency of old looms and the absence of pesticides led to more durable fabrics. Elisabeth’s engagement with the materials seems to be an instance of agencing, that is, becoming an upcycler because she could not resist the way in which the materials pulled her into the making process.

Linen is a beautiful textile. And I suppose because I am working with antique linens they have such a softness to them. Modern linen is fine as far as it goes but it’s not the quality of the antique stuff by any means, it’s simply not. Because these were all made at a time, they are organic because they hadn’t invested pesticides. And the looms they were woven on were less efficient so the fabric is more dense, the fibres are thicker. There is more quality to it.

Likewise John described his commitment to traditional techniques based in his upbringing and their contribution to his self-actualisation:

Traditional techniques are more visible and that’s what I enjoy doing... I like to highlight the repair. I want to show the textile item has a history which the owner can start talking about and create a bond with that item, and I think that’s important if you want to make things last.

The correspondence between histories, stories that can be told about them, and the various iterations of the linens involved, shapes the upcyclers’ love for, and commitment to, the upcycling practice. Thus, for our participants we find strong evidence that the perception and meaning of materials are shaped by past experience and progressively reformed (transformed physically towards new meaning), with sustainability values and respective ways of living emerging and being strengthened through the making practice and corresponding with materials and things. Ingold extends Dewey’s (1966) analysis of the continuity of the life process as a social process depending on communication (‘communication’, ‘community’, and ‘common’) in a material direction. That is, communication is the way in which communities come to possess things in common. As Ingold (2020) argues, things are fundamentally open, corresponding to one another, and responsible, with this responsibility depending on responsiveness. Following his argument, sustainability therefore means the capacity to keep going rather than the perpetuation of a completed form.

Here, an act of expression through making blends the conscious with the unconscious, bringing into play conscious intent with the values, ideas, and emotions shaped by past experiences which are also progressively reformed, as are the physical materials that constitute a work of art, here upcycled artefacts. This objectification of values and emotion is therefore translated into the aesthetic, and whilst Dewey acknowledges the problems inherent in conferring aesthetic quality into all acts of production or creation, he notes the benefit to communities of the remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression. Here, we argue that acts of upcycling not only remake the materials of experience in an intangible sense, but also include the remaking of tangible elements of experience. This is not to say, of course, that sustainability imperatives and challenges are not forefronted, but they become part of a wider set of enmeshed practices. As Libby articulated:

The part of the upcycling journey I want to talk about is kind of actually the area that I’ve had a bigger focus on in the last couple of years, which is really trying to understand how do we as a fashion brand try to fight against waste, but still putting garments into the world

[...] When I first started upcycling I just felt incredibly passionate about upcycling and that it was this really exciting, subversive, creative practice. And I still believe that, but [...] if it's not done within an overall responsible framework it is essentially just a blip on a linear conveyor belt of goods to dump... I have started to think about how upcycling is in a way a tangent—it's a small detour in a linear model.

A Relational, Processual Conception of Agency: The (Ethical) Self in the Making

Our data suggest that in a very real sense, the 'sustainable valuing' emerges from an engagement with discarded materials, and to respond to the ever-new opportunities and challenges this poses. Upcyclers don't seem to subscribe to typical *homo economicus* reasoning, as they do not seem to plan or calculate outcomes ahead of time, both in relation to designs of collections of or individual pieces, or in relation to the direction of the business as a whole. It is clear that the practices of our upcyclers are more akin to that of *homo ludens* (the playful human) and *homo faber* (the maker human) Natalie's comment was typical of many of the participants in the study:

It's just so silly the things that excite me and that then directs my business... but I don't think I would have experimented like that if I was just designing and not doing any of the making.

Dewey (1934/2005, p. 182) states that there can be: "[...] no perception of an object except in a process developing in time", and that art, or the aesthetic, is awakened by invoking experiences which have significance and value. Here, the effects of a creative act are greater when the multiplication of the effects of its single qualities lead to a consummatory, or unified experience. The design making is a continuous process of learning—experiencing material qualities, pattern making, actual sewing, and knitting flow into each other. Or as Ingold would insist, they correspond. Charlotte appreciates being challenged by the materials and finding matching solutions, and also having people recognise the 'waste materials' in her compositions.

I am using a material which may have beads on it or some lumps of yarn stitched into it and I am putting it through the sewing machine and the next minute the needle has snapped because it hit something, lots of learning curves with using materials that I didn't go out and buy but trying to upcycle.

All respondents talked about the 'love' of making and repurposing and of specific types of materials learned from these past experiences and were able to recall how active habits and consummations had been shaped in relation to

them. 'Sustainable lifestyles' are therefore a processual and relational residue, rather than the result of a principled stance. The objection against this theory would of course be that 'values come first', and that sustainable practices are merely the 'application' of these principles. But if we were to believe Ingold, our traditional conceptions of 'agency' come up short in understanding most of human behaviour. Humans do not 'possess' agency, but instead, are rather possessed by action (Ingold, 2013). We believe that there is something important to understand here in terms of how 'responsible agency' emerges. Dewey and Tufts (1947) describe ethical conduct as a reflective practice, comprised of past human experience that flows into situational assessing, deciding, and acting (now) in anticipation of consequences for the future. For Dewey, the moral self is one that is always a work in progress, constituted through 'active habits', and when the routine takes over, the growth of the moral self is arrested (Pagan, 2008). The reflection and learning that emerges from being tripped up or disrupted is central to the development of the ethical self. It is important to acknowledge that although the conception of agency we defend is not that of the independent, calculative subject rationally choosing principles to enact, or mental images to render, but not a kind of random, directionless agent either. As Ingold (2011) suggests, forms of life are neither pre-determined nor imposed, but instead "emerge within the context of their (social and natural) mutual involvement in a single and continuous field of relationships" (Ingold, 2011, p. 5). This refers to the making of artefacts that are generated in and through the practical movement of skilled agents in their active, sensuous engagement with the material.

As it has become clear, for upcyclers, everything starts with the materials and natural things they gather. As artefacts are modified or shaped by human activity, things are grown organisms too. Here, the scope of 'agencing' is extended. By opposing hylomorphism, aligning animate and inanimate processes of becoming, and placing the designer-maker as a participant in amongst a world of active materials, Ingold (2011) frames 'making things' not as a process of transcription but a process of progress (morphogenetic processes). The generativity of action is that of animate life itself (and lies in the vitality of its materials). Instead of a theory of agency we need one of life in which matter is an active participant of the world's becoming (Ingold, 2013, p. 97).

Many respondents described this process. Libby, for example, explained how the process of individual and organisational growth was a constantly evolving process:

I love the combination between making and thinking... I've been sourcing textiles for the best part of 15 years in bulk... some of the stuff we source is like a waste stream that we just happen to have access to... we have

been through so many iterations of how we work so it's evolved over the ten years that we have been commercially wholesaling. I am going to tell you how we work **now**, but it has taken a long time to get to this point.

Concluding Thoughts: Sustainability as Relational Process

We set out to explore three questions in our analysis of our conversations with upcycling designer-makers. In relation to the types of valuation which could replace utilitarian analysis and enable individuals to live well, our analysis leads us to ask some critical questions regarding our current approach to arguing for behavioural change in terms of sustainable fashion consumption. Our preoccupation with measuring ocean levels and setting SDG targets may distance us from the everyday engagement with which our sustainability discourses are trying to protect. Our research shows that the variables informing our understanding of sustainable wellbeing fall short of articulating what is at stake in sustainable lifestyles, because of their tendency to employ binary thinking. Indeed, a plurality of consumptions including (but not limited to) creative freedom and absorption in experimentation were often salient in our findings. Our findings therefore extend and deepen Painter-Morland et al.'s (2017) analysis of both the economic and philosophical wellbeing literature. They conclude that 'wellbeing' is a combination of intra-subjective variables, inter-subjective variables, objective individual variables, and inter-objective variables. More importantly, they argue that wellbeing is not something that we arrive at once and for all; we are always involved in the pheno-practice of becoming well. Though it is helpful to unpack the various expressions of the criteria that shape our conceptions of wellbeing, it became evident from our study of upcycling practices that these are much more enmeshed and interrelated, so much so that it makes little sense to view any one of the dimensions in isolation. The overall sense of a life worth living, with all its components thoroughly interrelated, transcends the categorisation of objective versus subjective variables. It cannot be denied that 'objective' individual variables like finding employment and generating income are seen as means to sustain a living in relation to upcycling practices and emerging artefacts/goods. However, though upcycling involves producing something of economic value as a commodity, the process of making is as much about enjoyment, fulfilment, and love (both for place and community). Our integration of Dewey and Ingold's perspectives allowed us to more clearly articulate the kind of trans-actions that are required for sustainable living to emerge. Our processual reconceptualisation of agency suggests that a closeness to materials and the loving pursuit of certain making practices over time creates a relational

dynamic that fosters sustainable production and consumption. The love of materials, a particular place (topophilia), and the knowledge and self-understanding that are bound up with this seem to strengthen and shape sustainable valuation (Painter-Morland et al., 2017). In a similar vein, our aesthetic considerations cannot be calculated, nor plotted in a cause-and-effect scheme, yet they influence, for example, communities' acceptance of wind-farms and solar panels as sustainable solutions to energy demand. Consequently we argue that acknowledging the complexity of trans-actions more explicitly, and addressing changes to production and consumption practices processually, will be crucial in fostering sustainable lifestyles.

In relation to a processual, relational making of values, in the case of our upcyclers, the making itself is a highly fulfilling process. They are working with and through their ideas and values, continuously exploring new designs and developing their senses, knowledge, and skills through their making experiences of meshing together high-quality discarded and collected materials into aesthetically pleasing and functional new forms. Just as the materials transform in the making and assemble new form and meaning, are the humans transforming or growing—mentally, socially and culturally—through the making. These processes of transformation continuously carry on together. Though directed at becoming an artefact and then a product, the upcycling process itself is a relational, open-ended, and playful communication/correspondence between humans and materials. The designer-maker is continuously experimenting, failing, repeating, learning, adjusting, and thereby shaping who the person becomes. Through their very materiality the objects that are being (re)made reassert the values of thrift (by being repairable), durable, and of quality. Inter-subjective wellbeing variables such as topophilia (love of place) and respect for nature emerged through the 'economic' process of walking to collect 'raw materials'. It is a 'supply chain' of things like leather and fabric that creates the values that lie at the heart of sustainability. Artefacts also express and sustain self-identity and pride in personal values. By investigating designers' motivations for upcycling, processes of making, and value-to-be created through their practice, we discovered a processual, relational understanding of human agency. Agency emerges in and through experimental engagement with the material world and in response to both complex histories and emergent everyday challenges. We find that for our participants, sustainability values, and aesthetic valuation are active and emergent, with commercial valuation being a side-product of secondary importance.

A further conclusion therefore addresses how ethical agency and values emerge through the process of making, which is that we will understand the motivations behind sustainable living much better if we decentralise the human from her/his autonomy, propriety, and idealism. In fact,

we share more with the animate and inanimate around us than we used to believe, and it directly affects our wellbeing. Understanding the relationship between wellbeing and sustainable living requires a new process-oriented, relational human-material conception of valuation. If there is a sense of accomplishment or ‘autonomy’ in terms of being a designer-maker and having the ability to sustain oneself and one’s family, it is wrought through a thoroughly relational process of responding to available materials, receiving donations, listening to advice, and belonging to a community. Freedom is not that which lies outside of work, nor is autonomy the absence of constraint. Leisure is fully embedded in collecting, gathering, and experimenting with the limits of materials. An aesthetic sense is something that is as much suggested by the materials themselves as by the maker. It therefore seems to us that the process of making upcycled artefacts helps upcyclers articulate, solidify, share, and sustain their values, providing them with a sense of freedom, autonomy, responsibility, and self-realisation.

In this way, situated sustainability ‘values’ emerge in and through our connections with the material process of making. As such, we find support for the emergence of Dewey’s ends-in view, in which values are continuously constructed through practice and are subconsciously ‘remade’ in acts of expression. The rhythm of these practices, manifest in, for example, the peaks and troughs of demand, which further adds to this continuous flow. This processual understanding of production and consumption as the way in which values are made and sustained offers rich perspectives for rethinking sustainability in fashion. When one interprets the insights of upcyclers around how they approach sustainable design through Dewey’s (1934/2005) notion of consummatory experiences, we find strong evidence that, as Dewey suggests, acts of expression blend the conscious with the unconscious in the progressive reformation of past experiences and physical materials. Emerging from this, we propose that ‘sustainable lifestyles’ are a processual and relational residue, rather than the result of a principled stance, and that ethical conduct is not determined by agency, but a reflective practice constituted through active and evolving habits. Though there are clearly instrumental orientations present, they are not strategically calculated before the acts of making. As ends-in-view, they require ongoing experimentation. In line with this, we may want to rethink how we engage in such experimental practices as scholars, consumers, and educators.

In rethinking sustainable fashion practice, we propose that appreciating a process-oriented and relational conception of valuation can assist in understanding better the relationship between wellbeing and sustainable living. This means disrupting the theorising and language that maintain binaries. Much of our scholarship, however, perpetuates these binaries, and alternative assumptions often function

at the margins or our writing, rather than informing our practice-focused thinking about business sustainability. Typical capitalist concerns with ‘practicality’ and ‘scalability’ crowd out the possibility of engaging more relationality as a first point of departure and designing business models more creatively in response. Yet, new experimentations are long overdue. In line with pragmatism’s rejection of such binaries and an anthropological lens on human material making, we have come to the conclusion that a relational orientation to valuation offers much potential for creating more sustainable practices of fashion production and consumption. We believe that by combining Ingold’s perhaps lesser-known ideas with the pragmatist perspectives that are often used in the sustainability literature, we have developed a more robust account of the kind of agency operating in sustainable practices of fashion production and consumption. The evolution of sustainable ways of living is a local and relational human material process. Living sustainably means living closely together with and through nature, people, and things, being embedded and active in local communities, and nurturing the traditions and habits that maintain this closeness and relationality.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest Mollie Painter declares that she has no conflict of interest. Alex Hiller declares that he has no conflict of interest. Johanna Oehlmann declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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