MODEM Dialogues - In conversation with Simon Whitehouse

Posted July 07 2025



Simon Whitehouse Founder of EBIT™? (Enjoy Being in Transition™?) and former CEO of JW Anderson and Art Partner.
Portrait Simon Whitehouse - Photo credit ® Mauro Maglione.
Questions conceived and hosted by Florian Müller

MODEM:
You've worked with fashion in vastly different contexts – from strategic leadership to creative collectives. Which encounter or phase has most profoundly shaped your current perspective?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
Without a doubt the experience of being in certain boardrooms. Connecting dots at the highest levels. During your 20s, even 30s, one grows in confidence. Even hubris can set in, as we refine one or a few specific skills and gain experience. We think we know it all. But we don't know what we don't know. The Dunning-Kruger effect takes place – a psychological deficiency, a cognitive bias of illusory superiority. However, when you are in boardrooms of the absolute highest level, where dilemmas of morals, ethics, planet, people and profit overlap – this is where we truly understand what it means when we say we don't know what we don't know. After that, you know. And that shapes you. This has most profoundly shaped my current perspective.

MODEM:
Founding EBIT™ marked a clear departure from conventional paths. What compelled you to step away from established structures and open up an experimental space of your own?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
The God's honest truth is that I believe I was visited by my late father in 2017 (he died in 2006), and also by my late mother in 2019 (she died in 2018). I've got the soul of an old Irish gypsy, I'm sure of it. These two moments made interventions in my path, spiritually. And these moments coincided with being just so bored of the system. Realizing that the majority of the fashion industry is just fueling fat white men who squirrel away their profits.
I encourage everyone to follow the money. Seeing extreme capitalism for what it is. And me being an intrinsic cog of the whole machine for almost 30 years, and fashion really is a dinosaur of an industry, I just became so bored. Culturally, it just didn't feel right. The whole mess the system is in now, I was talking of this almost 10 years ago. It all may sound holy – what do I know with my little EBIT™ just now taking baby steps getting off the ground.

MODEM:
The current collection centers on bipolar experience – not just thematically, but through the direct inclusion of individuals affected. How does the creative process shift when it becomes both an act of expression and of listening?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
The whole ethos of EBIT™ is Factory Records, and the era of ecstasy. A tribal time when people came off regular society and formed their own bonds. A value system - artistic freedom, compassion, solidarity. So how we approach project to project has no rules. It's complete feeling. Whatever feels right. And that may be wrong for some/most people, and that's OK. We go with how we feel. And the bipolar project came about so spontaneously and serendipitously, we had no choice but to follow it. And when we committed to it, we set ourselves the design challenge of (tastefully) making every single item in the range bicolor, as a quite blatant but subtle reference to bipolar.
This concept of duality, versus the mono/singularity of the previous season being wholly on John and his return. And then the casting is so important to EBIT™. With all due respect, I would never want a ***Kylie Jenner*** in a campaign. My heroes are people like ***Joseph Nana Kwarme*** *and* ***Rosie Viva****,* overt in their advocacy of bipolar disorder. ***John Skelton. Amina LadyMya*** *and* ***Danny Moors. Clark Sabbat. Giovanni Piglipochi,*** a psychiatric doctor who we cast in AW24 campaign. Those people who have a truth and authenticity around their experiences with mental health.

MODEM:
You describe EBIT™ as a model of transition. What does this openness mean to you in day-to-day practice – in thinking, in making, in shaping?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
This may be good or not to say, but it's the truth. The acronym EBIT™ came from an inspiration I had after getting my mother's final words tattooed onto me. Her words were: "I AM NOW".
And I was inspired after getting this tattoo by a sentence that came into my head on repeat: 'the most profitable brands will all be directed by their moral compass'. Our EBIT™ is a subversion of financial term of EBIT, reflecting the greed of extreme capitalism. Enjoy Being rather than Earnings Before anything else. The feeling, the thinking, is that feeling of being unsure. The

uneasiness in your stomach. The tension, the nerves, the excitement, before a release.

The concept of enjoying being. Accepting and embracing that truth, even if we don't know where it will lead us. Faith. In my mind it was always this memory of taking first ecstasy pill, and being so nervous, totally going into the unknown, but then finding a new universe and a communal solidarity inside a new tribe. Now, today I don't condone drugs. It's a postmodern reference to that time of Factory Records, Hacienda, Renaissance. Today, our feelings most importantly are: 'are you ok?', are you safe? Are you having a good time? And speaking our truth to obtain peace in these answers.

MODEM:
Many emerging designers today navigate a tension between self-exploitation and the pressure to stay visible. In your view, what needs to change so that creative work no longer comes at the cost of personal resilience?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
I don't really know how to respond to this question. My instinct says: I recommend to review who you want to "stay visible" to. Question that. Because if you're stressing yourself out to be visible to people who don't care about you, then that's messed up. I also think the systems, the platforms are not conducive for emerging designers, and the parallel personal resilience of staying visible. Despite some nice people in the industry giving visibility to emerging designers and projects, unfortunately the mega groups control most of the marketing with their "PRIZES" and big money, and then Big Tech controls the algorithm.

Facebook is for grannies. Instagram is over saturated. We're in this weird phase where the majority of people (myself included by the way) are putting most of our attention into the hands of extreme capitalism and toxic places, which are only really benefitting the fat white men at the top. This is why we're also feeling a sensation of sickness in our bellies. Because something is off. And, like a dog can sense that something is wrong before it walks into a room, we're human, we're instinctive creatures, and we can sense that something is wrong…

MODEM:
Your projects often emerge through interdisciplinary exchange. In what forms of collaboration do you see the greatest potential for new ways of thinking and producing?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
AI is and will totally shake things up. Conversely, and in my opinion more powerfully, more natural and authentic ways will be key – things that AI cannot do, fundamentally. EBIT™ has at its base mental health. Each project has a reference rooted in, a departure point from, an inspiration by, an element of mental health. Whether the casting, the clothes, the vocabulary, the music, the purpose, et al. Hence why interdisciplinary exchange has been fluid, because the core always remains around this central axis of compassion of mental health. New thinking and producing now in the fashion industry must come in circularity of product due to the mass flooding of products that the big brands have been pumping into the market over the last 5-7 years.

MODEM:
As part of my Mental Health in Fashion campaign, I speak with individuals who don't just advocate for change but embody it. What unspoken burdens do you perceive in the everyday workings of the industry – and how might they be sustainably addressed?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
I get asked this a lot. So, I keep it simple. I believe that every brand/company should have a mental health and safety guideline. The physical health and safety guideline, by law, a company needs to comply with it, and we've all seen those picture guidelines in plastic covers that are usually situated near to the fire extinguisher on the wall in most offices. Mental health should be considered equally as physical health. We should have guidelines. Then, in terms of management, it's clear that we should not kick, push, punch each other, right? Something that could cause physical damage. Similarly, why is it not clear that we should not shout, scream, belittle, each other? Things which could do psychological damage. These are very basic things. It's about education, guidance, then governance, to change the stigma, the accountability, and the behavioural habits and acceptance. Not easy, across many different cultures too in the industry.

MODEM:
EBIT™ resists easy categorization. How do you manage to maintain a distinct creative signature within such a fluid framework – without overwhelming the people around you?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
The visual identity of EBIT™ was created by M/M (Paris), and this typography and language is a glue amongst the orbiting projects of EBIT™. Also now with the eye of John there is a distinct focus. But maybe we are overwhelming. EBIT™ was intentionally seeded off the radar, a bit odd, a bit off. And, sensitively, in our own little cocoon, we're still emerging from this embryonic phase. We're not interested in what anyone else is doing. We're just doing our own thing in our own way, which we feel. Basta.

MODEM:
For you, fashion goes far beyond surface. It responds to social realities with intention. What kind of responsibility do you see in thinking beyond the garment itself?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
I am sure it's naïve but I don't feel any responsibility except to be true to ourselves. For the people that are and will be attracted to our reality will have compassion and understanding. And even if/when we make mistakes, hopefully they will understand our truthful base in which we come from. This is talking on a philosophical, spiritual level. EBIT™ is just a mirror, a conduit, for the truth which is already out there.

MODEM:
When you imagine what might remain of EBIT™ once collections have passed and conversations have moved on – what legacy would you hope to leave behind?

SIMON WHITEHOUSE:
I cry when I say this. I believe we can save lives. I believe it's that deep. I believe that, even in silent solidarity, people could see reflections of their own journeys in the projects and the people of EBIT™, and that solidarity could give them strength. Strength to be open if and when they could be struggling, mentally, in their own mind. And we all know that by being open, by talking, or even sharing in this tribal community we're forming, it can save the mind from going to very dark and isolated places. And with this solidarity may come a more transparent and deeper understanding of how extreme capitalism has affected our collective mental health – and that's a foundational place for systematic progression.