

Sustainable Fashion

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Kate Fletcher is best known for her 2008 book [Sustainable Fashion](#) (Earthscan) one of the great advantages of this book is the way it crosses fields from natural science through social science to the arts. More specifically it used natural science to establish what is known about the basic materials that are used in clothing whether synthetic, plant and animal derived fibres and also what we are finding out about the consequences of each. These might range from the speed and ease of decomposition to the water or chemicals used in their production. But this work flows naturally into social science issues based around the conventional norms of consumption. Since often the core to environmental consequence lies in consumption itself, for example how quickly we consider a certain garment to have become dirty and to need washing multiplied by the amount of water required by the type of washing we presume is required. The final part of this triumvirate is aesthetic in as much as the volume is replete with high class fashion photography that both illustrates and promotes the activities of all those companies that at that time were trying to promote various aspects of more sustainable fashion. The book is complemented by others such as Lucy Siegle's recent book [To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?](#) (Fourth Estate) Siegle is a journalist and the writing is more pacy and passionate, and I would say an important read, but is complemented by Fletcher who provides the access to scholarship and science but also to designers and the industry that are the other routes to having an impact in this sector.

Since publishing her book Fletcher has been developing her [`Local Wisdom`](#) website based around her employment at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at the London College of Fashion. This is not directed at academics, but consists rather of snippets, anecdotes and photos that might appeal more to designers as a potential influence, which is the intention of the site. What I find interesting is the increasing emphasis upon consumption as central to issues of sustainability and also as the source of a creative response.

Intriguingly if you look through the site you can see that in effect it blends two very different kinds of activity. One is individuals who have an increasing concern and consciousness over environmental issues and who are looking for practices such as washing clothes less or finding clothes suited to a variety of seasons that seems to be helpful in developing sustainability. On the other hand the site also picks up stories that emerge from historical and conventional practices such as the inheritance of clothes or sharing them within the family or home repair. These may have developed from quite different concerns such as frugality or family sociality, but can now be re-considered in terms of their potential as making consumption more sustainable. I am interested in this juxtaposition, since in my own work on Blue Jeans – the art of the ordinary (D. Miller and S. Woodward. University of California Press 2012), these come out as particularly good examples of what we might consider the fortuitously sustainable. That is people keep jeans longer, wear them more, wash them less and resist fashion more than with any other kind of garment. But none of this was done for reasons of sustainability. Looking at the sector as a whole it raises for me a significant question about how we develop more sustainable practices. In short do we hope to inspire designers and the

corporations and have these come down to mass populations from above, or do we start from mass practice and try to re-think their potential for sustainable consumption and then direct these upwards to influence production?