

*Central Saint Martins
MA Fashion Communication presents:*

A MANIFESTO

for Sustainable Fashion
Communication

In most industries, the purpose of journalists is to seek truth. In fashion, it often seems like the role of journalists is to uphold and even celebrate business as usual. But business as usual is an exploitative model based on exclusion, outdated systems and unsustainable practices like hyperconsumption. Here's a whistlestop tour:

The best existing framework for sustainability is the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which demonstrate the need for a holistic approach spanning people and planet. Fashion touches every single one of the 17 goals.

The fashion industry employs one in six people on the planet, and fewer than 2% of them earn a living wage. Of its 70 million garment workers, the majority are women and people of colour. Fast fashion is a feminist issue, and a form of colonialism. Organisations such as Remake – which recouped \$22 billion of the \$40 billion worth of orders brands cancelled at the beginning of Covid-19 through its #PayUp campaign – exist to support these workers.

The fashion industry as we know it needs to change, but there is abundant space for fashion that champions community over commerce. We can buy less and buy better, utilise the growing rental and secondhand markets, support charity shops (without gentrifying thrift) and mend our clothes. Choose natural, unblended fabrics that do not shed microplastics when washed and are quicker to decompose. Care for your clothes as long as possible. These individual choices do make a difference, but the impact of ethical consumption is limited – we need systemic, legislative changes too.

Between single brand statements about carbon neutrality, loans linked to environmental goals and collective fashion pacts, the industry has many self-prescribed sustainability targets, but this is not enough. Many brands exaggerate their progress by greenwashing, although some countries are taking steps to curb this. Sustainable fashion communicators can avoid spreading misleading claims by using accurate sustainability terms and digging deeper than the information brands choose to share. Transparency, however vital, does not equal sustainability.

This manifesto is a call to action – a fluid document intended to inspire a new generation of fashion communicators (journalists, image-makers and academic commentators) to do better. You will not learn everything about sustainability from this document, but hopefully you will learn how to challenge the industry we want to love and hold it to account, how to ask critical questions and create positive change.

Finally, thank you to the communicators who so generously shared their thoughts and philosophies with us in the making of this manifesto: Clare Press, Aja Barber, Orsola de Castro, Georgina Johnson, Will Bull and Amy Foster-Taylor, Elizabeth Paton, Peter Hunt, Tamsin Blanchard, Maria Nishio and Mal Burkinshaw.

THE MANIFESTO

1. We will avoid single-use and waste wherever possible. Writing assignments will be submitted digitally and lecture notes will be circulated via email. Events will use glass or recyclable paper cups instead of plastic. Photoshoots will be more circular, starting with a communal prop store for reuse and upcycling. The course will invest in regenerative projects and carbon offsetting to minimise its impact on the environment.
2. From 2021, the course will include a workshop on eco-literacy, during which students will compile a sustainable fashion glossary. Part of the job of a sustainable fashion communicator is to convey complicated terms in a simple and accessible way, so it's important to know your stuff, from supply chains and pesticides to the circular economy.
3. Understanding the materials from which clothes are made has become essential for modern-day fashion communicators. Can you tell organic cotton from BCI? Did you know that you can turn human hair into rope and animal dung into paper? Specialist textile and fibre seminars will be added to the timetable from 2021 to ensure students have a solid grasp of the most and least sustainable fabrics, and they know the right questions to ask.
4. In most other industries, the role of a journalist is to seek truth and communicate it to the public. In fashion, it often seems like the role of a journalist is to prop up the industry, and facilitate business as usual. We acknowledge that business as usual is both impossible and insane, given the climate crisis we are faced with. We will use our position as journalists to hold the industry to account, celebrate progress and encourage conscious consumption and production.
5. We will think carefully about the brands we choose to work with, and prioritise those who are making changes to be more sustainable. We acknowledge that this doesn't look the same for every brand: some will work with upcycled and recycled materials, others will invest in regenerative projects and some might just start with a sustainable collection. Beware of greenwashing, but appreciate the effort. We don't want to discourage brands into doing even less.
6. On that note, we will remain critical of empty promises and complacency. Here's a handy checklist for weeding out greenwashing: 1) Does the supply chain match the snappy slogan? This isn't 'what a feminist looks like' if the mostly-female garment workers were overworked and underpaid. 2) Is the sustainable range part of a sustainable company? If the company is ASOS or Boohoo, the answer is definitely not – the only thing that range is sustaining is fast fashion. 3) Are the terms used to market the brand vague and non-committal? 'Sustainable', 'recyclable' and 'vegan' mean very little. 'GOTS certified' and 'made from 100% recycled deadstock' are a little more concrete.

7. We will be aware of the broader narrative our work is feeding. Are we treating the climate crisis as an opinion when it is actually scientific fact? Are we writing from a growth mindset where bigger is always better? Are we focusing so much on changing individual consumption habits that we are letting big businesses and governments – who could enact systems change – off the hook?
8. We recognise that the climate crisis does not mean the end of creativity. It is a call for creative solutions, an opportunity to think differently and design a world we are proud of. The relationship between brands and consumers should not end at the point of purchase, it should be an ongoing collaboration, recognising the sentimental value of clothing and extending its life cycle. As fashion communicators, we help to define desirability, and can play an instrumental role in championing measured indulgence, responsible creation and conscious consumption rather than excess.
9. We will focus on positive, solutions-based writing. We will not lead with doom and gloom or demoralising statistics unless we deliver them alongside solutions and encouragement. People respond best to stories that only scare them as much as they inspire them.
10. We will be kind to ourselves and others. The fashion industry often encourages hyper-productivity, a culture driven by self-neglect. To be a sustainable fashion communicator, you have to be able to sustain yourself emotionally, physically and financially. We will be empathetic when others work to do the same.
11. We acknowledge that our privileges and prejudices shape which stories we deem important enough to tell and how we tell them – it is important to hold ourselves accountable as much as we do with brands and businesses. We will not be exclusive, exploitative or extractive in our work.
12. And finally, we will not be elitist in our approach, but will provide multiple routes into sustainable living and working. Not everyone has the time to shop secondhand out of choice, scouring rails to find hidden gems. Not everyone can afford organic cotton, and who are we to blame people who can't for choosing fast fashion? Not every innovation will come from luxury fashion houses. In fact, we're more likely to find meaningful solutions among indigenous communities, who are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Let's explore every angle and celebrate the complexity of the crisis we face, because overcoming it will be our most rewarding creative challenge.

FURTHER READING

These lists are by no means exhaustive. Start with the resources that jump out at you, then dig deeper. Look at their sources and bibliographies, read reviews of them to understand their successes and limitations, and check out what else the communicators behind them have published.

FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES:

- **The True Cost** (2015)
<https://youtu.be/xGF3ObOBbac>
- **The Patriot Act: The ugly truth of fast fashion** (2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGF3ObOBbac&feature=youtu.be>
- **The Story of Stuff** (2007)
<https://www.storyofstuff.org/>
- **Made in Bangladesh** (2019)
<https://www.amazon.com/Made-Bangladesh-Rikita-Nandini-Shimu/dp/B08HP88MML>
- **My Fancy High Heels** (2010)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miiNgSSIgAo>
- **Before the Flood** (2016)
<https://www.beforetheflood.com/>
- **The Next Black: A Film About the Future of Clothing** (2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCsGLWrfE4Y>
- **No Impact Man** (2009)
<https://www.impactpartnersfilm.com/films/no-impact-man>
- **The Child Labour Experiment** (2016)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gA97UjCOUI>
- **Tim Jackson: An Economic Reality Check** (2010) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZsp_EdO2Xk
- **Sir David Attenborough & Professor Johan Rockstrom for WWF Living Planet** (2016) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lluiHOc6dwA&feature=youtu.be>
- **An Introduction to Sustainable Development** (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfsWI8XgQyo>
- **Michael Green: How We Can Make the World a Better Place by 2030?** (2015)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o08ykAqLOxk>
- **Li Edelkoort: An Anti-Fashion Manifesto** (2017)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV3djdXfimI>
- **Wilson Oryema: How toxic are my clothes?** (2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TjQ5_T8krl
- **River Blue** (2016)
<http://riverbluethemovie.eco/>

BOOKS:

- **Fashionopolis: The price of fast fashion and the future of clothes** (Dana Thomas, 2019)
- **Rise & Resist: How to change the world** (Clare Press, 2018)
- **Stitched Up: The anti-capitalist book of fashion** (Tansy Hoskins, 2014)
- **Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the way we make things** (Michael Braungart and William McDonough, 2002)
- **Wardrobe Crisis: How we went from Sunday Best to Fast Fashion** (Clare Press, 2016)
- **Silent Spring** (Rachel Carson, 1962)
- **Climate Change: A Ladybird Expert Book** (HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper, Emily Shuckburgh, 2017)
- **To Die For** (Lucy Siegle, 2008)
- **Why Materials Matter: Responsible design for a better world** (Seetal Solanki, 2018)
- **No Logo** (Naomi Klein, 1999)
- **Overdressed: The shockingly high cost of cheap fashion** (Elizabeth Cline, 2012)
- **This Changes Everything** (Naomi Klein, 2014)
- **Slave to Fashion** (Safia Minney, 2017)
- **The Golden Thread: How fabric changed history** (Kassia St. Clair, 2018)
- **How to break up with fast fashion** (Lauren Bravo, 2020)
- **The Slow Grind** (Georgina Johnson, 2020)

PODCASTS:

- **Wardrobe Crisis**
<https://www.clarepress.com/podcast>
- **Black Neon Digital**
<https://www.blackneondigital.com/podcasts>
- **Mothers of Invention**
<https://www.mothersofinvention.online/>
- **Conscious Chatter**
<https://consciouschatter.com/>
- **Fashion Revolution Podcast** <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/resources/listen-to-the-fashion-revolution-podcast/>
- **Remember who made them** <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/remember-who-made-them/id1525126733>

ARTICLES:

- **Why 'biodegradable' isn't what you think** (The New York Times)
- **#FashionCrisis series** (Teen Vogue)
- **Why we need to decolonise and democratise our imaginations** (Will Bull)
The troubling ethics of fashion in the age of climate change (The Washington Post) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2019/11/18/troubling-ethics-fashion-age-climate-change/?arc404=true>
- **What fashion can learn from a decade of disasters** (Business of Fashion) <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/end-of-the-decade-fashion-moral-sustainability-climate-labour>
- **No fashion (week) on a dead planet** (1 Granary) <https://1granary.com/industry/no-fashion-week-on-a-dead-planet/>
- **When Greta Thunberg met David Attenborough** (BBC) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/270DpZjTRtdscc0qbQbmDH7/10-things-we-learned-when-greta-thunberg-met-david-attenborough>
- **Climate Positivity at Scale** (Study Hall NYC x Riposte zine) <http://www.ripostemagazine.com/study-hall-zine>
- **Is the cloud killing the environment?** (The Face) <https://theface.com/life/cloud-technology-data-environment-carbon-footprint>
- **How to talk to the younger generation about consumerism** (Eco-Age) <https://eco-age.com/magazine/how-to-talk-to-the-younger-generation-about-consumerism/>
- **Fashion's biodiversity problem** (Vogue Business) <https://www.voguebusiness.com/sustainability/fashion-biodiversity-problem-wildlife-stella-mccartney-kering>
- **This is my message to the western world** (The Guardian) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/12/western-worldyour-civilisation-killing-life-on-earth-indigenous-amazon-planet>
- **Can fashion's new activists make sustainability sexy?** (Business of Fashion) <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/can-fashions-new-activists-make-sustainability-sexy>
- **5 sustainability threats facing fashion** (Business of Fashion) <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/5-sustainability-threats-facing-fashion>
- **Build sustainability into your business from day one** (Business of Fashion) <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-build-sustainability-into-your-business-from-day-one>
- **Can we stop greenwashing?** (Patagonia) <https://www.patagonia.com/stories/can-we-stop-greenwashing/story-93546.html>
- **How fashion is making sustainability stylish** (Vogue) <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/how-fashion-is-making-sustainability-stylish>
- **A beginner's guide to shopping sustainably on a budget** (Miss Vogue) <https://www.vogue.co.uk/miss-vogue/article/how-to-shop-sustainably-on-a-budget>

- **26 ridiculously easy ways to live a more sustainable lifestyle** (TheThirty) <https://thethirty.whowhatwear.com/how-to-live-more-sustainably-1>
- <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/terms-to-understand-fashions-role-in-climate-crisis-sept/index.html>
- **Let's keep our movements intersectional** (Eco-Age) <https://eco-age.com/magazine/lets-keep-our-movements-intersectional/>
- **Can fashion stop climate change?** (Common Objective) <https://www.commonobjective.co/article/can-fashion-stop-climate-change>
- **Fashion and the SDGs: what role for the UN?** (UNECE) https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM/Website/RFSD_2018_Side_event_sustainable_fashion.pdf
- **The global environmental injustice of fast fashion** (Environmental Health) <https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12940-018-0433-7>
- **Water scarcity** (WWF) <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>
- **The nine planetary boundaries** (Stockholm Resilience Centre) <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

REPORTS:

- **The Fashion Economy** (Raconteur, 2020)
- **Road map for the rebuild** (The New Standard Institute, 2020)
- **Fixing Fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability** (Environmental Audit Committee 2019 – for government response, see here)
- **The Fashion Transparency Index** (Fashion Revolution, updated annually)
- **Remake Transparency Report** (Remake, 2020)
- **Pulse of the Fashion Industry Report** (Global Fashion Agenda, updated annually)
- **CEO Agenda** (Global Fashion Agenda, 2019)
- **The State of Fashion Report** (Business of Fashion and McKinsey, updated annually)
- **Kering Group EP&L** <http://www.kering.com/en/sustainability/whatisep&l>

OTHER:

- **The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
- **The Slow Factory Foundation** runs online classes
- **FutureLearn** runs several free online courses about sustainable fashion, including this one by Kering and London College of Fashion
- **The Footprint Chronicles** by Patagonia and the **Environmental Profit and Loss system** by Kering
- **The CFDA** has several useful sustainability resources for designers and brands, including a guide to sustainable strategies, sustainable strategies toolkit, materials index, and KPI design kit.

KEY VOICES:

- **Celine Semaan and her organisation, The Slow Factory** (especially their #SlowDictionary on Instagram) <https://slowfactory.global/>
- **Aja Barber** (follow her on Instagram for free or support her Patreon for extra content) <https://www.instagram.com/ajabarber/?hl=en>
- **Marielle Elizabeth** (Instagram and Patreon) <https://www.instagram.com/marielle.elizabeth/?hl=en>
- **Daze Aghaji** <https://www.instagram.com/dazeaghaji/?hl=en>
- **Venetia La Manna** <https://www.instagram.com/venetialamanna/?hl=en>
- **Clare Press** <https://www.instagram.com/mrspress/?hl=en>
- **Orsola de Castro** <https://www.instagram.com/orsoladecastro/?hl=en>
- **Tori Tsui** https://www.instagram.com/toritsui_/?hl=en
- **Pattie Gonia** <https://www.instagram.com/pattiegonia/?hl=en>
- **And Beyond** <https://www.instagram.com/andbeyond.earth/?hl=en>
- **Birdsong London** (this is a brand, but they share useful sustainability resources such as their clothing care guide) <https://www.instagram.com/birdsonglondon/?hl=en>
- **Fashion Revolution** <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>
- **Extinction Rebellion Boycott Fashion** <https://www.instagram.com/xr.boycottfashion/>
- **Eco Age** <https://eco-age.com/>
- **Ellen MacArthur Foundation** <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>
- **Copenhagen Fashion Summit** <https://www.copenhagenfashionsummit.com>
- **Business of Fashion** for articles on sustainability (particularly by Sarah Kent) <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/author/sarah-kent>
- **The New York Times articles** (particularly by Elizabeth Paton) <https://www.nytimes.com/by/elizabeth-paton>
- **Vogue Business** (particularly Rachel Cernansky and Bella Webb) <https://www.voguebusiness.com/sustainability>
- **Sustainable apparel coalition** <http://apparelcoalition.org/the-coalition/>
- **The Mirror** <https://www.instagram.com/the.mirror/?hl=en>
- **Covering Climate Now** <https://www.coveringclimatenow.org/>
- **Remake** <https://www.instagram.com/remakeourworld/>
- **Clean Clothes Campaign** <https://www.instagram.com/cleanclothescampaign/>
- **Labour Behind the Label** <https://www.instagram.com/labourbehindthelabel/>
- **Fashion Roundtable** <https://www.instagram.com/fashionroundtable/>

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