

**Ethical
Sustainable
Renewable**

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Surface Pattern Design

Word Count: 2284

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I will be looking at three keywords which I feel reflect my interest and concerns surrounding my practice. I will be looking at *Ethical*, *Sustainability* and *Renewable* and their relationship and conflict with my practice as a designer. I will particularly be looking at materiality in both my fashion and my area of practice, its effect on the world and the living beings on it. I will be researching what is currently being used both in my practice and fashion worldwide and will be researching whether they are ethical and sustainable and are there alternatives that are renewable that we could be using instead of those causing harm to our environment, us and living creatures.

Ethical is 'connected with beliefs and principles about what is right and wrong' (Oxford Dictionary, 2020) so if something is believed to be ethical it is therefore believed to be right and just. As a designer you have to constantly question the decisions you make and the materials you choose to use, and whether or not you can justify their use as ethical. For example, in textiles you may have a choice to use silk or to not. In order to get the silk from the worms more often than not, they have to die. In an article 'How Is Silk Made? And Is It Humane?' (2020) by Sheryl Ryan, notes that whether the silkworm dies or not is dependent on the method of harvesting. However, the most common method is to steam or boil the cocoon, Ryan states "the only way to keep the cocoon intact is to boil (soften) it with the silkworm moth still inside." If you were to allow the silkworm to emerge the cocoon it would break the continuous thread which would then need to be repaired, consequently making it more 'convenient' to boil the cocoon.

But this questions how convenience can outweigh the ethics. Whilst reading an article on 'How is silk made?' (2014) by Melissa, I found that "it takes the deaths of about 2500 caterpillars to make a single pound of raw silk." To think of how much silk one fashion company may use or even a university, the amount of deaths is colossal.

Many people do not think to consider the animals involved in the fabrics when using them, especially when they may be considered insignificant or they do not care for them. Peta have played a large part in educating people of the fashion industry and truths of the fabrics and clothes people reach for every day, their slogan being "ANIMALS ARE NOT OURS to experiment on, eat, wear, use for entertainment or to abuse in any other way." See figure 2, for what is on the top of their website page.



Figure 1. Ryan, S. (2020)
The broken cocoon of a wild silkworm, after it has emerged.



Figure 2, Peta mission statement and logo (2020)

If a living creature has to die in order to give us fabric, other methods and materials should be explored. Their lives equal do not equal the only value of fabric. In a world where the technology is vast and ever growing, high quality alternatives should be accessible as much as those that cost lives to make. Ignorance plays a large role in this, if there are alternatives

that look and feel the same, for example leather versus faux leather, there is high quality faux leather which is identical to that of the real offcut, why couldn't it be replaced. According to a 'Fibre Briefing: Leather' article by Common Objective (2020) livestock of cows for example are responsible for 'deforestation, water and land overuse, and gas emissions' but they are produced to the 'need' of people, when realistically there isn't a need, but only a want. A faux leather which is similar in qualities to that of real leather poses as ethical, if production were to change this could change that of fashion drastically. In Bellacasa's 'Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) she speaks of care and its interdependent forms, for instance "Feminist ethics of care argue that to value care is to recognise the inevitable interdependency essential to the existence of reliant and vulnerable things (Kittay and Feder 2002; Engester 2005)" If we were to care and to then recognise our responsibility to care for the silk worms or cows for example as they are vulnerable, we would then be recognising our interdependency with them. This could be as simple as not supporting the use and mass production of silk or leather to reply to our duty of care and realising it is un-ethical to kill in order to produce fabrics which are by no means necessary for our existence, especially when there are ethical alternatives available.

Sustainable 'involving the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment' (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). To be an environmentally conscious designer is to use sustainable materials and to consider every decision you make that may impact the environment and those around you.

Eco Fashion Week Australia (EFWA) launched in 2017, they offer traditional runways partnered with Australian universities and conservation organizations. Their aim is to educate those on sustainable fashion and offer an alternative of slow fashion. See figure 3 for an example of their sustainable fashion. Although this is a company to definitely lead by and a step in the right direction in terms of sustainability it doesn't address the system of fashion itself.

In Mathilda Tham's paper 'Languaging fashion and sustainability' (2010) she speaks of the emerging environmental strategies that are already emerging in fashion, which she states are highly positive but then goes on to argue that "they do not constitute the systemic approach needed to reverse the alarming effects of a consumerist and producerist society." (Tham, 2010. P. 13) I strongly agree with this, as the decisions that are made to reduce the fashion industries negative impact on the planet, it will not reverse the detrimental effect it has already had. Not only should the fashion industry be constantly thinking of ways to reduce or to not damage the environment, they should also be looking how to rectify what they've already done. Tham then declares that fashion not only needs 'a new generation of strategies and practices' but they "need to address the very system of fashion". To change fashion's whole system of how it works, produces and even designs to favour the planet would be advantageous to all textile designers. If the issue and knowledge of sustainability in fashion was made known to designers this would then change the mindset of what's to be used, in both method and fabric. Tham explains that there are already environmental staff put in place in fashion industries but until very recently the contact between them and the designers was little to none. She gathered this information from interviews from a wide range of staff whom all shared the experience of a division between 'creative designers' and 'constraining environmental staff'. This begs me to question, how can you expect change in an industry that is damaging our world if you are to deprive the knowledge and resources

until now. If we were to increase the contact between those environmental staff to creative designers, the knowledge they could then share would take effect on what is used and put out into society. I argue that if you were to share the knowledge of our environmental detriments we put in place through design and fashion, to those in lower levels of fashion and designers, (e.g. schools, university students and free lancers.) this would then set in place an aware mindset of material choices and methods to further support their future decisions which would impact their future on the future of the planet. By doing this you would then be addressing and changing the system of fashion before it starts.



Figure 3, EFWA. (2018)

Renewable '[usually before noun] (of energy and natural resources) that is replaced naturally or controlled carefully and can therefore be used without the risk of using it all up.' (Oxford Dictionary, 2020)

Not only are the fabrics and materials used in the fashion industry damaging our planet but also the energy consumption is having a catastrophic consequence on our environment. As claimed in article 'Clothing and Energy' by The Conscious Challenge (2019) textile production is said to be the world's second most polluting industry, after the oil industry. "The total greenhouse gas emissions from textile production currently stands at 1.2 billion tonnes annually and accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions" stated in 'Clothing and energy', the need or more so want for clothing, particularly fast fashion is causing destruction to our planet and will effect it significantly for many years to come. Fibre2Fashion's article 'Various Pollutants Released into Environment by Textile Industry' (2012) talks about the high water usage during fashion production, for example 'The textile industry uses millions of gallons of water everyday' they go on to argue that the main

problem is not the high water usage. The main problem is the waste is not properly treated to remove pollutants before it is disposed of into water bodies. See figure 4 for example given in article of the water pollution.

One of the main issues of the damage fashion is causing to the environment is the lack of knowledge, people are unable to create a change if they aren't given the push to do so. Many people do not think of the effect what clothes they buy will have on the environment and will likely just buy what they like the look of rather than which is a more eco-friendly choice. If they are doing their part of recycling at home and avoiding single use plastics, this can be seen as an effort to try and right the many wrongs done to our planet, but it is not enough.

I then furthered my research by reading Marie-Cécile Cervellon and Lindsey Carey's article, 'Consumers' perceptions of 'green': Why and how consumers use eco- fashion and green beauty products' (2011). They go on to discuss eco-labels and the broad concept of 'green' and the levels of green within the fashion industry. 'One of the most important constraints on the development of green products is the lack of consumer trust and the lack of information (Cervellon et al. 2010). Clearly, a majority of European consumers are ready to engage in a more sustainable lifestyle and make greener choices in their purchases, but they are confused by national labels, European labels, third party labels and manufacturers' claims (Horne 2009).' (Cervellon and Carey. 2011. p.121) If people were made aware of the green products, the different variations and the effects their choices would have this would lead to a drop-in world pollution and use of non-renewable resources.

The information and knowledge of green fashion is key for our planet's future, as people become aware of the choices that are available to them or could be available the less waste and pollution would be put out into our atmosphere. If the demand was higher for more renewable clothing that does not have the negative impact that majority of today's fashion does, it would mean for a greener and healthier planet for us all.



Figure 4. Fibre2Fashion. (2012)
Water pollution

After conducting my research on the environmental and ethical issues in the world of fashion and textiles, I have come to the conclusion that Francis Bacon was correct in saying “knowledge is power” (Bacon, 1597). The lack of knowledge seemed to be a problem in a lot of the research I found. If people were made to know the origin of their materials and the deaths it has cause, but more importantly how there is an ethical alternative to these then a more educated decision can be made. As well as this, if designers were given the know-how of the more conscious decisions that could be made then this would lead to more sustainable textiles. But what I deem imperative is, if the knowledge of more eco-friendly products in both fashion and other retails were made available and the labels of ‘green’ were made more comprehensible to majority of the public. Informed decisions would then be made for the better of our planet. We would then have the power to make a big change in the right direction for our planet. Although many people may have no interest in fashion, we are all part of the bigger picture. We all clothes on our backs and it is down to us to make sure those clothes aren’t damaging the world which is our home.

I believe ethics has the potential to strengthen the whole system of fashion. There are already forms of sustainable fashion and ways of design which need to be reinforced, more renewable sources need to be researched and methods conducted for greener fashion. If greener fashion was then made to be vast public knowledge and grow to be desirable, then we could still enjoy clothes and fabrics in a more economical way. Which has led me to conduct my question I would like to further research *‘How can the use of ethical practises be successful in the world of fashion and textiles in terms of renewability and sustainability?’*

Fully formed research question

How can the use of ethical practises be successful in the world of fashion and textiles in terms of renewability and sustainability?

Sub questions

- What ethical practices are there to demonstrate this?
- Why is it important to focus on sustainability and renewability when working with textiles?
- How important is ethics in the world of fashion and textiles?

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Images

Figure 1: Ryan, S. (2020) *How Is Silk Made? And Is It Humane?* [online] Available at: <https://greenopedia.com/wild-peace-silk/> [Accessed 16 April 2020].

Figure 2: PETA UK. (2020) *People For The Ethical Treatment Of Animals* [online] Available at: <https://www.peta.org.uk> [Accessed 17 April 2020].

Figure 3: Eco Fashion Week Australia. (2020) Eco Fashion Week Australia. [online] Available at: <https://www.ecofashionweekaustralia.com/nj6msmy1jh9pcjgs98uiogs8ujkjsd> [Accessed 09 May 2020].

Figure 4: Fibre2fashion.com. (2012) *Pollution By Textile Industry - Pollutants Of Water, Air, Land, Environmental Pollution By Textile Industry*. [online] Available at: <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/6262/various-pollutants-released-into-environment-by-textile-industry> [Accessed 09 May 2020].