

'It's important that everyone with an interest in fashion reads this book so we can live on a healthier planet' **Arizona Muse**



Loved Clothes Last

How the Joy of Rewearing
and Repairing Your Clothes
Can Be a Revolutionary Act

Orsola de Castro

'The most timely book you'll
read this year' **India Knight**

LOVED CLOTHES LAST

Orsola de Castro is spearheading a global movement calling for change in the fashion industry. After co-founding Fashion Revolution in 2013, she pioneered a global campaign in response to the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh and became an internationally recognized opinion leader in sustainable fashion.

She began her career in 1997 with the upcycling label From Somewhere, which combined sustainable thinking with fashion-forward design to create clothes from pre-consumer waste. In 2006, she co-founded the innovative British Fashion Council initiative Estethica, London Fashion Week's showcase for sustainably designed labels.

Alongside revolutionizing our wardrobes and fast-fashion culture, Orsola is an Associate Lecturer at UAL, a Visiting Fellow at Central Saint Martins and a keynote speaker, educator and mentor. She is a leading speaker on fashion and sustainability.

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ORSOLA DE CASTRO



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*This book is for my husband
Filippo, for my children Elisalex,
Georgia, Giacomo and Leonia,
for my grandchildren Vigo and
Bronwen, and for my mother
Matilde (Nanu).*

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PREFACE

I started writing this book in October 2019. The week after I delivered the first draft to my editor, in February 2020, Milan went into lockdown as a result of the global pandemic of the coronavirus. To be even more precise, the day after I pressed Send I actually went to Milano Fashion Week, where I attended several shows and was a guest at a huge *Vogue Italia* gala dinner with hundreds of people.

Two weeks after I came back, London (where I live) went into lockdown too. By the time I was working on the final copy, in May 2020, I had been in self-isolation with my family, and most of the rest of the world, for more than two months.

In a few short months the world has been turned upside down, and many of the topics I talk about in this book – mass production and mass consumption, waste, the exploitation of workers and engaging thoroughly with modern technology – are now more relevant than ever.

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion is not frivolous, it is actually incredibly important, and to define it just as a series of passing trends is to deny its fundamental role in human culture and history. Clothes have always been at the centre of our lives, marking our rituals, representing identity, profession, rank and status, but they have profound social implications as well. What we wear often brings us together with others who wear similar things, helping us to find our people, connect and belong. We have always been enamoured with our clothes, from the time when the primal instinct of covering up developed into a more sophisticated concept of adornment, and we show little sign of losing interest.

The modern-day fashion industry is huge: a maze of disconnected supply chains encompassing many other industries, from agriculture to communication, affecting 100 per cent of the population and touching lives, natural resources, people and places in equal measure. In the UK alone the industry is worth approximately £32 billion, providing more than 850,000 jobs. Globally we are looking at a US \$2.4 trillion business of never-ending runs of tops, dresses, trousers, T-shirts, shoes, bags and bikinis – mostly looking the same, and many made by the same high-street or high-end enormous companies.

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Fashion is one of the most socially exploitative and resource-polluting industries in the world, its economic and environmental impact is vast and its capacity for cultural influence is endless. Fashion is by no means superficial; it delves deep, saying as much about who we are, and the state of our civilization, as it does about our personal tastes and our local traditions.

Of course, its association with fleeting passions and women's work has rendered fashion an easy target for mockery, but the truth is that it cuts a much more serious figure in the great scheme of things, and today's fashion industry is hiding some pretty dark secrets behind a facade of gloss and glamour.

The statistics are almost grotesque: clothing production has doubled in the past 15 years and yet we are wearing our clothes less and less, either keeping them hidden and useless at the back of our wardrobe or getting rid of them without thinking of the consequences.

As a result, of the supposed 53 million tonnes of textiles produced globally every year, over 75 per cent are discarded, both in the production phase and at post-consumer level (after we've worn it). The equivalent of a rubbish truck full of discarded clothes goes straight into landfill every second.

The fate of cheap clothing is marked as soon as it leaves the factory, and it's worthy of an unedited Grimm Brothers fairy tale: made in misery, bought in haste, worn for one night (if that) and then chucked in the bin. Our ready-to-wear has turned into ready-to-waste. Karl Marx once said that religion is the opiate of the masses – to upgrade this concept, today's consumerism is our crack cocaine.

And expensive things aren't necessarily better made; the luxury sector is equally responsible for damaging the environment and for human exploitation, and it would be a big mistake to think that just because something costs more its profits are more ethically distributed throughout its supply chain.

There is not much difference, apart from the price tag, between cheap clothes and fast luxury. It is the entirety of the fashion industry that is called into question, as is our insatiable thirst for more, more, more.

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MEND

*'Over 75 per cent of the 53 million
tonnes of textiles*

REPAIR

*produced globally
every year are discarded.'*

REWEAR

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There is no way that we can continue like this, as our resources are finite and will soon be limited in availability – polyester will become more expensive than silk if we are to drastically reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, and cotton prices will skyrocket as we run out of the soil in which to grow it. Sustainability may be a buzzword right now, but what does it really mean to be sustainable when it comes to our clothes? What are the choices that we can all make, as clothes wearers, to shift from being part of the problem to becoming instead part of the solution?

It is wrong to think of sustainability as just another passing trend; the truth is very much the opposite: sustainability has been trending for billions of years, it is essential to our survival and our evolution. Sustainability is about balance, quality and respect; it denies us nothing and provides us with everything. It speaks of gratefulness rather than greed, resourcefulness instead of exploitation. Writer and activist Dominique Drakeford defines sustainability as ‘an inherently black, brown and indigenous regenerative mechanism for living and engaging with nature’. Excess – that is the trend, and one we need to make firmly unfashionable or we are in danger of being the instruments of our own demise.

We can all do so much to change this. We can mend, repair and rewear. The alterations we must make aren’t about enjoying things less, they are about enjoying things differently and, when it comes to our wardrobes, reclaiming and restyling our used clothes to shape our intentions. We can look at limitations not as restrictions but as ways to stimulate alternative solutions, challenging ourselves to think of imperfections and faults as opportunities for improvement, rather than something to be discarded; just as we can learn so much from a mistake, so a broken piece of clothing properly mended can become a favourite statement piece.

We don’t have to go far to gather the knowledge to make our clothes last longer; a small generational rewind is enough, because reusing and recycling are as old as time, the knowhow is engraved in all cultures and we are hard-wired to it – only now the benefits and implications are wider than ever. We can employ used clothing as a metaphor for political expression (think the Sex Pistols,

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slogan T-shirts, badges, banners, patches, pussy hats and rainbows) and as a tool to reduce our carbon footprint, because reweaving and repairing encourage slower, more careful consumption patterns, fostering a culture of appreciation instead of exploitation.

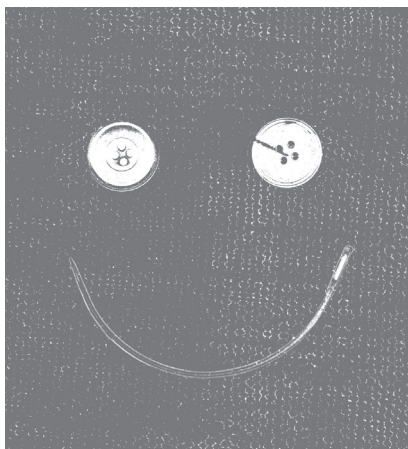
The actions required are simple, not sweeping. And they give us infinitely more than they take away. The point is to start now, at your own pace, in your own way, and explore what it feels like to drape yourself in new ideas and old clothes.

This book is a call to action to use our clothes – and the tools that make them last – as our armour, taking up mending as a revolutionary act. At this important juncture we are between evolution and extinction, one road leading to ruin and one to redemption. We must do what is required of us as citizens, and that is to take action: small actions or big actions, all are welcome, all are necessary.

This is not a ‘how to’ book, it’s more of a ‘why to’ – a book for making things and for making changes.

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Chapter 1



Mending Is
a State of Mind

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Clothes touch us all. We may not all be interested in fashion, but we can't avoid getting dressed, which means that every time we gaze into our wardrobes wondering what to wear, we could be making a choice that has a positive or a negative impact.

The global fashion industry is producing well over 100 billion garments per year (and that's not counting shoes, bags and other accessories), made from materials of unclear origins, by a workforce that is often inadequately paid, in disconnected, inefficient, opaque, often unsustainable and exploitative supply chains to feed our apparently insatiable 'consumer demand'.

Tonnes and tonnes of clothes reach stores and warehouses and leave stores and warehouses unsold (because there were too many), to go God knows where, to be incinerated or go into some other circuit of excess.

Judging by how many things are left unused and unloved, the less we know about the clothes we buy, the less we make an emotional connection and the easier it is to get rid of them – discarded items that we once desired, but did not cherish.

The fashion supply chain is not a land far, far away; we all become a part of it the moment we decide to buy something. Our responsibility is not limited to making sure that the stuff we buy is ethically and sustainably made, but also that it is ethically and sustainably disposed of – and that means keeping clothes for as long as possible and seeing our wardrobes as a starting point, not the finishing line.

Basically we cannot keep buying and throwing, hoping that at some point soon it will all disappear in a big closed-loop recycled rainbow. However, we can still consume – properly 'consume', from the Latin *consumere*, meaning 'to destroy or expend by use' – and, by implication, *rewear, repair and commit*.

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I The fact that mass production, mass consumption and accelerated disposal are scarring our planet and our culture is something that few people can doubt. And yet it is so hard to change, as we go about our daily lives weighed down with things: things we don't need, things we might not even really want, things that should be luxuries and not conveniences, because things that are permanent should be carefully considered.

And make no mistake: the items we buy and surround ourselves with really are permanent, in the sense that they were not designed to decompose or biodegrade, or turn into something else once their first function is over. Everything else in nature does, including us.

Antoine Lavoisier, considered to be the father of modern chemistry, said that in nature, nothing is created and nothing is destroyed, but everything is transformed. Our clothes pass through us and keep on living for a long time after we throw them away, because there is no 'away'. In fact, except for the small percentage of fibres that are turned back into other fibres (1 per cent, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation), everything you have ever owned, and thrown, is still here, in one shape or another: either enriching someone else's life, because it is true that one person's trash can be another person's treasure, or poisoning a landfill close to your home, or close to somebody else's home.

Maintenance is a word we no longer associate with clothing at all, but it lies at the crux of the problem, and is a way to define part of the solution, a way to redress the balance between consumption and disposal. For sure, repairing an object of value and fixing the hem of a £2.99 Boohoo miniskirt may feel oceans apart, but right now it's the attitude that counts. We shouldn't be measuring a garment's value by its price tag, but by the purpose it has in our life. We should own it because we love it, and because we love it we should want to keep it for ever, consume it, wear it to death.

To counteract disposable consumerism, the only way is to keep. Everything around

CHOOSE

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us tells us to throw, so we should rise to the challenge and keep. Even if it costs me more to repair something than buying it new, I choose to keep.

TO

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The story of poorly made objects is well known: it started in the USA in the 1920s with General Motors, to encourage the buying of more cars, more often, and was originally intended as a way to increase production (and jobs) by deliberate manipulation of the design of a product, in order for it to break sooner.

This system is called 'planned obsolescence' (although the original name, as coined by the man who invented it, Alfred P. Sloan, Jr, was 'dynamic obsolescence'), and it has now spread to almost everything we buy – things are not made to last, and there are increasing legal or logistical loopholes that actively prevent us from independently repairing the stuff we buy once it breaks, as anyone in possession of a faulty iPhone or leaking washing machine knows only too well. You can't just call the person down the road to mend your broken object, because it wasn't designed to be disassembled: only approved technicians will do. Why?

The monopolizing, forceful and non-inclusive nature of this business model, which is directly responsible for our current cheap mass production and resulting crisis of hyper-consumerism, denies decent work to local communities. Repairing, crafts and making are no longer seen as dignified, viable professions, which in turn decreases our capability for manual skills, because we are no longer teaching such skills in schools.

The loss of skills and abilities that we have honed for millennia isn't just a sad cultural loss, it has also other implications, as does any loss to the overall ecosystem. Many of the manual skills required to be a surgeon – precision, a steady hand, needlework, accurate cutting, grafting – are not dissimilar to what is needed for domestic crafts – precision, a steady hand, needlework, cutting, folding. We are jeopardizing more than simply the demise of crochet

KEEP'

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doilies and dodgy woodwork if we continue to nurture future generations that are manually capable of doing little more than scrolling down your feed.

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'This

“ETHICAL FASHION”

this

“SUSTAINABLE FASHION”

**that complies to
what fashion really is,
that is borne out of**

**PASSION, SKILLS,
HERITAGE, ARTISTRY
& BRAVERY**

IS FASHION.

It's everything else that isn't.'

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WHY MEND?

‘Maintaining’ and ‘caring’ are words that should be associated with everything we do, even if, in order to do so, we need to go out of our way, or outside our comfort zone. Some of the solutions are mere gestures – forgotten, everyday simple gestures – which is why it is so important to reclaim our time to relearn them.

Mending, for instance: it really isn’t that difficult. Sure, there are any number of excuses as to why it’s not convenient, but it’s a small action that will take you on a big journey.

Take a broken zip. In my many years of scouring second-hand clothing sorting warehouses I have seen hundreds of perfect pieces abandoned simply because of a broken zip. After all, what is the point of spending time and money repairing a broken zip when ultimately it is cheaper, quicker and infinitely more fun to buy a new piece, with a fully functioning zip? But can we please stop and consider what we are actually doing when we give up hope on the one that broke? And what happens when we choose to mend it instead?

That broken zip, and the fabric that surrounds it, will either be confined to the back of your wardrobe (the average British woman hoards approximately £285 worth of unused clothing – the equivalent of £30 billion of useless purchases nationwide) or unceremoniously thrown away, despite the fact that 95 per cent of what we discard could be recycled or upcycled.

The piece you replace it with was probably made by a woman (80 per cent of garment workers are young females) in conditions that are, at best, exploitative (because none of the mainstream

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brands we see on our high street are paying their workforce a dignified living wage) and, at worst, downright life-threatening. The 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh killed 1,138 garment workers and injured more than 2,500, the deadliest industrial disaster in the fashion industry, but by no means the first, or the last.

If your garment was made from cotton, there is a very high risk that modern-day slavery was present in its production (more than £100 billion worth of garments at risk of being the product of forced labour were imported into G20 countries in 2017). If it contains polyester, each time you wash it, it will release hundreds of microfibres into the ocean (microfibres have been found everywhere, from the deepest ocean floor all the way to the top of Mount Everest).

On the other hand, if you decide to mend it, you will be challenging the system, because repairing something that was designed to be disposable is a statement against quantity vs quality. It will be challenging your lifestyle by introducing new habits that reduce your impact on the planet, because doubling the useful life of clothes from one to two years reduces their carbon footprint by 24 per cent.

It will take more time – you'll have to give it to someone else to do the job (I don't recommend changing zips at home, unless you are skilled), but that could be as close as your local dry cleaner. Yes, it will cost you probably only a fraction less than buying something new, but there is far more to mending a zip than the cost and effort, and many more systems are supported by the act of deciding to have zips mended, not thrown.

It is a person who mends your zip – a person with different skills from those you have, someone grateful for your custom; someone who, by virtue of a physical connection to the fabric of, say, your trousers, becomes connected to the fabric of your life; someone from your local community, someone tangible. It's a real transaction.

And what about the zip itself? Cheap, mass-produced zips attached to mass-produced clothes by poorly paid individuals working under pressure and overtime are not the same thing as a single zip, chosen to colour-match the one that broke and

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machine-sewn individually especially for you. That's a totally different zip experience, and it feels way better than the fleeting newness of a cheap pair of trousers in a plastic bag.

Lengthening the lifespan of clothes, and improving the things we own by caring for them when they break, means also striving towards an overall improvement of the system, and towards a fashion industry that considers the quality of the products we buy, and the quality of the lives of the people who make them.

Almost everything we buy right now is made in a hegemony of sameness, so customizing and personalizing things to be particular and different is a small but powerful act of sabotage – an antidote to wearing the same clothes as everyone else; your individualism shouting out to be seen.



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ARE EXPENSIVE CLOTHES BETTER?

All this applies in exactly the same way when talking about luxury goods. It is a mistake to think that expensive clothes lead to fairly paid workers, or to significantly superior environmental standards: an expensive shirt may be made with luxurious fabrics, but it will likely be produced in the same factory clusters as the cheap one, by people who are unlikely to be better paid or working in dignified conditions; the materials used in its construction will be just as polluting, and its carbon footprint roughly the same. Sure, it will be better received at your local charity shop, but charity shops are brimming with our unwanted clothes anyway, because donating to charity is no longer an act of goodwill, but an act of dumping our responsibilities along with our unwanted clothes.

Whether you have 'invested' in a designer shirt or whether you buy high-street stuff, the same recipe applies: when it breaks, don't give it up – have it fixed. The shirt will benefit, your community will benefit, as will the planet and the people who make our clothes: because the act of caring for your clothes (as Joan Crawford said, 'Care for your clothes like the good friends they are') is a powerful signal for brands. Just as important as voting with your wallet, you are voting with your common sense, and you are saying: *Slow down, we have enough; we want better – not more.* See? You are starting to go somewhere way further than your local dry cleaner, because you are actively walking towards a more considerate, intelligent future.

There is so much more that you can explore, once you are a bit more confident that what you decide to do will make one hell of a difference. There are thousands of ways to mend broken clothes or to alter clothes that don't fit any more; and thousands of people and places – real or virtual – where you can learn how to do so.

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**'A FRESH
GENERATION ARE
MARCHING FOR
REVOLUTION AND
THEY WANT TO WEAR
CLOTHES THAT TELL
A NEW STORY.**

**LET'S GIVE
IT TO THEM.'**

Naomi Klein, social activist & author.

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