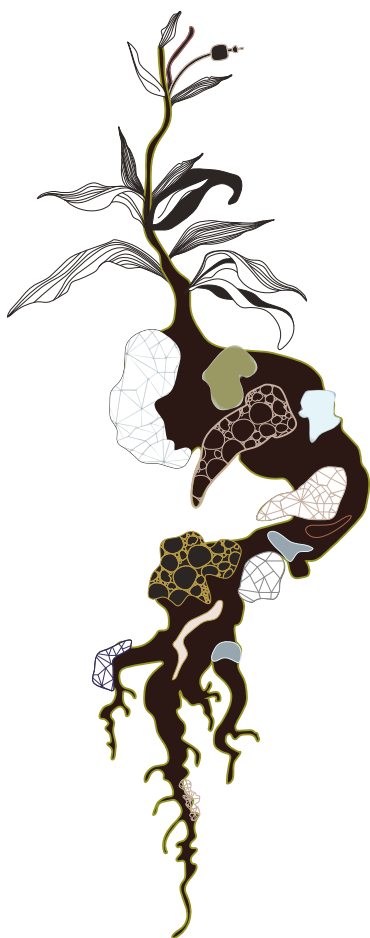


# FASHION ECOLOGY

A Pocket Guide

Kate Fletcher



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## A Pocket Guide

Everything happens somewhere. Fashion ecology deals with the interactions and relationships between garments, people and their environment. This small booklet of definitions charts a first topological map for fashion and place.

### LAWS OF ECOLOGY (including for clothes and their wearers)

All things are interconnected

Everything goes somewhere

There's no such thing as a free lunch

Nature knows best

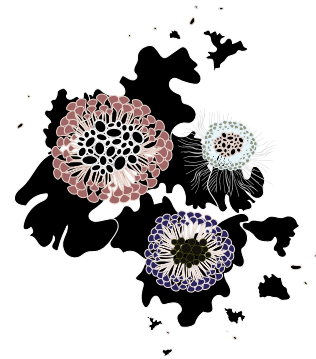
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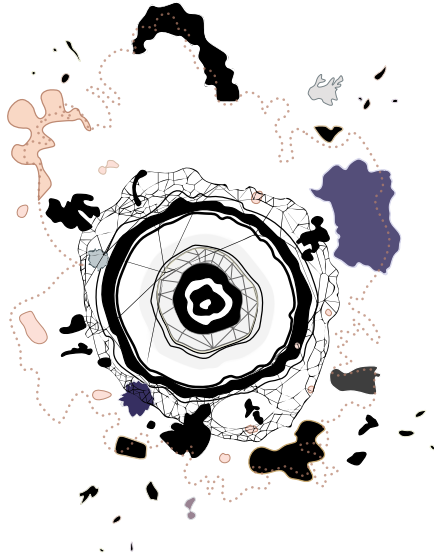
Design and layout by June Stockins  
Illustrations by Ania Zoltkowski

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## SPECIES

A species is a clearly identifiable group, type or practice of textile and garment-related activity, e.g. cardigans, sales shopping, laundering techniques. Individual members of a species occurring in one place often look slightly different from individuals of the same species elsewhere, called 'varieties'.





## HABITAT

A habitat is *where* a dress practice, garment type, colour palette, mending technique or fabric construction unfolds; i.e. its address. Each **species** of fashion activity needs particular conditions in order for it to survive. Its habitat is the source of these conditions.

## NICHE

A niche is how a **species** or type of fashion activity lives. It is the lifestyle or group of strategies employed by a fashion actor or practice to access the skills, resources, knowledge, styles and mythologies it needs in order to flourish.

## ECOSYSTEM

An ecosystem is a **community** of dress types, garment structures and styles, fibre categories or ways of using clothes interacting as a system. These components are regarded as linked together through energy flows and the cycling of the basic elements necessary for fashion provision and expression. There is some exchange of fashion activity between ecosystems, but it is much slower than the exchange inside them. Fashion ecosystems behave in ways that cannot be predicted from knowing about their parts. Thus fashion ecologists hold the whole and explore patterns in complex webs of relationships.



## PATCH

An area of a place or garment differing from its surroundings is a patch. It is often the smallest distinct feature of a fashion **ecosystem**. Fashion ecologists are interested in how the elements that characterise patches, such as their physical form and where they are sited, affect ecological processes associated with garments, e.g. how long a piece lasts, where it is worn, how it looks, how it is valued.



## CORRIDOR

Corridors are narrow **patches** that may act as links or barriers to a heterogeneous fashion **ecosystem**. Functionally important structures to an ecosystem, corridors influence the dispersal of material assets, skills and creativity in the surroundings and thus affect the persistence of a diverse set of fashion activities and processes. Things as varied as powerful business interests, preconceived ideas or celebrity endorsements of consumer culture might form barriers to conceiving of a range of other (shy? less agile? feral?) alternative fashion experiences.





## MATRIX

The matrix is the majority attribute of the surrounding fashion **ecosystem** (i.e., the background system, not the **patches**). Typically, the Global North's clothing matrix primarily consists of the commercial trade of new, standardised garments made in polyester, cotton or a blend of the two. The large proportion of the fashion landscape classified as matrix has profound influences on the ecological processes associated with clothing in a place.

## MOSAIC

Some fashion cultures, fibre types and garments need to exist in a landscape mosaic in order to survive. They require access (via **corridors**) to diverse material resources, skills and particular social practices. Not unlike a lesser horseshoe bat that sleeps in an old tree in mature woodland, then flies along hedgerows to open, wet places where it hunts for flies; certain types of fashion provision and expression are reliant on the continued health and diversity of the mosaic as a whole.



## KEYSTONE SPECIES

A keystone species has a disproportionately large effect on its surroundings relative to its size. It plays a unique and crucial role in the way other, surrounding **species** function. It might be a sewing machine repair mechanic or a Mackintosh. Without it, other fashion species would be different or cease to exist altogether.





## FRAGMENTATION

Fragmentation is the process of conversion of fashion systems with a wide diversity of practices, garments and cultures into more homogenous ones, dominated by high consumption of a limited range of product styles and fibre types. It is summarised in different phases:

- i) perforation (initial small pockets of standardised garments enter the system);
- ii) dissection (larger intrusions of change begin to occur, often along high streets or through key online retailers);
- iii) dissipation (spread and coalescing of homogenous product types); and eventually,
- iv) shrinkage in heterogeneity including reduction of patch size and loss of patches of diverse, locally-adapted clothing-related activity.

## EDGE

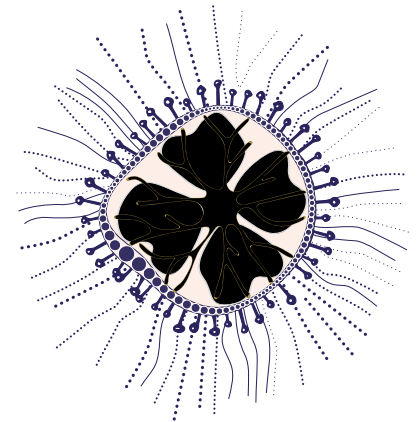
Edges are transitional zones that often have important influences on ecological processes associated with clothing and the relationship with people and place. The liminal zone at an edge is often a place where experimentation occurs, where garments crossover into new uses, or are used in new places with different conditions, and where the greatest diversity of fashion activity is concentrated.

## SCALE

Temporal scales range from short to long. Spatial scales from fine to coarse. Scale is the resolution at which a fashion actor perceives its environment (consider a global brand versus an individual wearer). Different problems require different scales of study and most problems require multiple scales of study. Fashion ecologists are interested in determining the scales which best characterise interactions between different places and the total fashion practices and culture there, and not only those that contribute to economic growth.

## GROWTH

In the ecological world of fashion interactions, organisms – like wardrobes or brands – only grow until they reach mature size, i.e. the size that enables them to successfully occupy their **niche**. Few organisms expand indefinitely. To thrive in a niche, appropriate size counts, as does the flow of energy and the physical circulation of fibre, fabric and garment around the organism. Here the system develops qualitatively without an increase in quantitative size.





## EXTINCTION

Extinction is the elimination of a **species** and with it its unique configuration code and conditions responsible for producing it. The loss of one species affects all, making for a poorer total fashion system. When one type of fashion activity or practice is in trouble, generally the whole **ecosystem** needs protection.

## CONTEXT

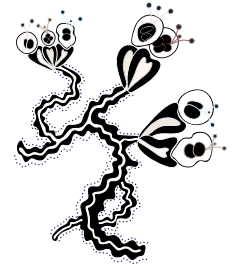
The relationships and interactions between people and clothing at any particular location is affected by what is around that location. Fashion ecology affects a shift in perspective from the garment to the garment embedded in place context.

## BIOREGION

A bioregion is a territory that conforms to some set of natural criteria where the fibre crops, climate, water abundance, traditions, etc. give rise to garment types and dress practices distinctly different from those in adjoining areas.

## COMMUNITY

A community is a convenient grouping of **species** of fashion actors, garments, styles, often found in the same place at the same time.





## METABOLISM

Metabolism is the set of processes that occur within a fashion activity or entity in order to maintain its functioning. These include the transport of material assets between or around it and their conversion into fashion experiences. Fibre, garments, ways of dressing, use practices, etc. enable action by both expending fashion resources and building them up.

## SUCCESSION

The world of fashion activity is constantly changing. Succession describes how one **species** takes another's place. After significant disturbance in the clothing-related life of a place, such as closure of a factory, many original types of fashion activity vanish and new **species** move in. First to arrive are the pioneers, fast-growing, tenacious fashion outlets or practices adapted to life in the changed conditions. Initially the disturbed system struggles to support varied fashion activity and the pioneer species that do thrive are makeshift and sparse. Over time and with creativity and investment, conditions in the fashion landscape improve and begin to support a greater diversity of clothing products and practices. Energy within the system is then diverted towards maintenance, not new **growth**, a more efficient state of operation. More complex systems eventually emerge with highly diverse fashion species and elaborate garment practices that may absorb future disturbances with greater resilience.

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