

It isn't easy being green

Written by Albie Cyclone

Is op shopping up there with the four-minute shower as a green action? Loop explores the ethics of thrift shopping with clothing retailer, Jonathan Head, owner of Cream on Crown, a second-hand clothing store in Surry Hills.

OP-shoppers talk about bargains and 'real finds' but rarely do you hear op-shopping referred to as an ethical or environmental action. Regardless of what motivates people to buy second-hand – whether it's the softness of worn denim, price point, fashion or originality – isn't it all recycling, and whether conscious of it or not, reducing the demand for new?

Sourcing second-hand clothing, Jonathan consistently challenges terms such as 'dead-stock'. It was only last year, for example, that he set free a few hundred pairs of unworn, original Converse hi-tops from the eighties that were rotting in a suburban garage. In some sense it could be said that the demand for bad, or not, original 80's fashion, that dictates such finds, is ethical. But then again, it's still connected to the same consumer urges that drive the mini-cycles of fashion or the mini-cycles of fashion that drive consumer urges.

As well as private estates, Jonathan sources second-hand clothing at markets overseas and it's not until you're surrounded by clothing – literally as far as the eye can see – that the magnitude of how much waste the fashion industry generates is put into perspective. The reality is, there is probably enough clothing already out there in the world to never have to make another garment, ever again; AND still have some level of consumer choice. Jonathan's belief that the potential for second-hand clothing to become ethical fashion, on a large scale, exists, but it encompasses more than retailing. In his own words,

"Finding stuff and putting it on a rack might be saving someone from going and buying a new garment but their still going to get made. People who have shops at the moment don't really take it to the next level that it could be taken."

And this next level that Jonathan is talking about, where second-hand clothing crosses over into ethical fashion, is deconstruction - making new garments from second hand fabrics and reconstructed second-hand garments. Jonathan sources bits and pieces from innovative designers who are doing this on a small scale – whether it's making dresses out of vintage tees or incorporating vintage fabric into new designs. And in very recent times he's come across a Canadian fashion house, Preloved, who have just released an entire range revolving around the reconstruction process; suggestion that there is a market for it.

From a fashion perspective, one of the advantages of making new clothes out of old clothes is, while the garments are being recycled the fashion doesn't have to be; taking clothing apart and putting it back together opens up a whole new scope for creativity. But

deconstruction, as Jonathan says, is not about making kooky “green fashion”; it’s about making the concept of recycled clothing part of the everyday ordinary.

“To appeal to a wide audience you have to make it so it doesn’t look weird, because it isn’t weird. That’s the key with anything a bit different; take recycled water – it’s accepted in other parts of the world as a norm but our Government makes it sound fruity or something, the reality is that it’s not just for hippy freaks.”

As fashion cycles get shorter and shorter the very nature of the second-hand clothing is no doubt set to change and it’s really hard to know what will happen. Jonathan speculates, *“I wonder whether in 20 or 30 years time whether kids won’t be able to say what they were wearing in 2005? Because it’s what we’ve already worn. And what we do make now is not made to last, like it was back in the 50s and 60s. Who knows how this will change the industry.”*

The verdict: the green concept of showering does not leave room for slow awakenings under streaming water. One must be w-I-d-e awake to shampoo, cleanse, exfoliate and condition in four minutes or less. Similarly, second-hand or vintage shopping is not particularly ethical without consciousness. A little bit of reusing might be going on, but a lot of second-hand shoppers are still wired to the mainframe of mainstream fashion, an excessive and exploitative industry.