

RECOMPOSE

AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE THE PEDAGOGICAL ENVIRONMENT AS A REGENERATIVE FRONT-LINE

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Abstract

Fashion education programmes continue to proliferate in parallel with a dramatically changing climate and heavily degraded ecologies. The dominant linear fashion imaginary is incompatible with Earth's cyclical systems. Fashion education programmes therefore should work critically to engage with these crises, introducing a new repository of socio-ecological thinking and practices. Ecological economist E.F Schumacher reminds us that in contexts like these, if we are to have yet more education, then it is going to have to be an education of a very different kind. This paper challenges fibre-centric discourses, as well as uncritical reflections on continued economic growth in the sector, to which, mainstream circular fashion initiatives align. Authors developed the workshop series Recompose for the MA Fashion programme at the Royal College of Art, where the cohort engaged with bioregionalism, regenerative design, and reflective practices through situated environmental learning. The study presents student reflections on this process and further develops these through interviews with fashion designer Lee Roach and practitioners in regenerative fibre and food systems. The paper cautions against practices that are fibre-lucid at the expense of becoming system-blind and invites the fashion education community to adopt regenerative pedagogies tailored to their local contexts, fostering diverse practices that challenge globalised fashion systems and support bioregional fibre production.

Keywords: *Regenerative fashion, Fashion pedagogies, Hemp, Localised production systems, Cultural industrial narratives*

VALUES IN FASHION PEDAGOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF A DESTRUCTIVE FASHION PARADIGM

THE CRISIS AT FASHION'S CORE: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPERATIVES AND THE INCOHERENCE OF GROWTH MINDSETS IN CIRCULAR SYSTEMS

What is the responsibility inherent in working with students who are undertaking design studies in Fashion? The fashion industry's rapid acceleration has positioned the industry at a critical juncture, where its environmental and social impacts are becoming untenable (Fletcher, 2019). Despite an acute awareness of these challenges the industry

is currently not on track to meet several critical international climate, social and biodiversity goals like the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2015 Paris Agreement and the 2030 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) (Vijayarasa & Liu, 2022). Within the context on an industry seemingly incapable of taking the necessary action to transition, away from carbon dependency, exploitation of human capital and the degradation of environmental resources, we argue it is critical for fashion educators to reapproach the educational context, to imagine alternative modes of teaching that account for and engage with this complexity.

In response to these systemic challenges, circular economy models—which consider repair, reuse, recycling, and renting—have been championed across the fashion sector (James, 2021; British Fashion Council, 2021) and these ideas are well established in fashion curricula (Seixas et al., 2021; Sehnem et al., 2023). However, the focus on fibres and materials as sustainability panaceas in these practices we argue overlooks deeper systemic issues. Fibre in fashion is part of a larger, deeply flawed system. While circular approaches such as recycling are crucial (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2022), they often fall short in addressing the complexities of fashion's globalised production system. Mainstream circular economy thinking aligns circularity with economic growth. However, this commitment to growth has been problematised where, efforts to decouple economic expansion from environmental and social damage are elusive and fundamentally at odds with a finite planetary ecology (Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Daly, 1996; Kallis, 2009; Daly, 2019). For example, in fashion, contemporary recycling methods frequently result in higher emissions, and less than 1% of garments made from mixed fibres are recycled into new clothing (Levänen et al., 2021; Pucker, 2022; Textile Exchange, 2021).

The inadequacies of global centric and growth minded circular economy models become apparent when we consider planetary system limits. Circular approaches, while important, do not fully question the larger system of production or the economic acceleration that sustains it. Here, we can evoke Walter Benjamin's critique of power structures, where superficial changes fail to challenge the deeper systemic forces at play. In the case of fashion, merely swapping synthetic fibres for natural ones leaves intact the broader dynamics of overproduction and consumption that perpetuate environmental harm (Benjamin, 1935). Changing the fibre alone does not challenge the underlying mechanisms that maintain the status quo.

Recent efforts to incorporate more holistic approaches, such as doughnut economic principles (Raworth, 2017), reflect a move toward rethinking the industry's future. Cities like Amsterdam have begun integrating these principles into regional circular fashion strategies, aiming to significantly reduce material use and fostering more localised production initiatives (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2024; Doughnut Economics Action Lab, 2020). However, even these

efforts are hindered by the deeper systemic barriers posed by economic growth paradigms. This paper problematises the notion that fibre, as a sustainability solution, can resolve the deeper issues at play. While the transition to natural or regenerative fibres is crucial, it cannot succeed without rethinking the entire system—how we produce, consume, and ultimately, how we imagine the role of fashion in a world in crisis. Given the inconsistencies, contradictions and impossibilities of an incumbent fashion system that fails to regulate itself and with a complete awareness of its destructive impacts: How could fashion be shaped differently? Critical to this is how we then engage with design education in fashion.

MOVING FASHION BEYOND FLIMSY VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities increasingly shape curricula based on projections of uncritical future industrial and economic demands, influenced by a growing reliance on management consultants who prioritise short-term institutional growth (Wieczorek, 2024). Szadkowski (2023) and Shore (2024) critique this trend, noting how the focus on efficiency reduces education to a simplistic input-output model, leaving little room for critical, reflective learning. This marketisation turns education into a consumer product, despite the evident urgency for transformative approaches needed to the face of social and environmental crises.

There is a prevalent idea that fashion education programmes should prepare students for anticipated industrial needs and technological developments (Nguyen & Hahn, 2025), this thinking maintains a modernist idea of linear technological and cultural progress (Ginsberg, 2022) which has derived in a technological lens in circular fashion discourses. The dominant approach to fashion circularity placed technological solutions at the centre, this is aligned with ideas that innovation cycles and new technology solutions will obviate prior methods, tools and processes through 'creative destruction' (Polanyi, 2021). This reliance on technosolutionist and ecomodernist narrative places idealistic faith that 'green' technologies can meaningfully mitigate climate change (Hickel, J., & Kallis, G., 2020).

Irrespective of the mode of production, fashion under a growth oriented economic system will continue to degrade ecologies due to overproduction (Hickel & Kallis, 2020). We argue that as educators we must challenge hegemonies that

present technology as solution and growth as inevitable, to equip students instead with the creative capacities to respond to dynamic and complex change, and to build a fortitude that can counter the temptation towards apathy in the face of escalating crisis (Servant-Miklos, 2024). Fashion education should instead prepare students with critical awareness of contemporary fashion systems and a foresight to recognise that the present model is time limited either by design or environmental collapse.

Current fashion design employment landscape is already precarious, and designers in this space are often so time poor that the capacity to create an original design proposition, reimagine systems and think differently is neutralised by the repetitive and growing collection cycles that expand annually. Fashion students rather than aiming to find a job in current detrimental fashion systems should envision how fashion discipline can equip them to rethink those systems, de-instrumentalising themselves in service of the sector discovering how else to apply their professional capabilities to make significant change.

Tonkinwise (2014) observes that market-driven education often results in an overly liberal approach to ethics and values in design, exposing students to a range of concepts without meaningful engagement. He calls for discipline-specific, ethically grounded pedagogy, warning that without this depth, design education risks irrelevance, overshadowed by capitalist and technocentric agendas. In response, educators have begun integrating curriculum models focused on regenerative values—such as communal regeneration, co-design, and systemic resilience—as countermeasures to environmental and social degradation (Irwin et al., 2015; Cobrero et al., 2023). These initiatives embed systems thinking and ecological awareness, aligning with longstanding sustainability efforts in design pedagogy (Jones et al., 2023).

Fashion education, dominated by urban contexts, frequently separates students from the socio-material contexts being discussed, which Tonkinwise (2014) argues results in learning without depth. This is something that educators have direct influence over, as, in the context of creative education Orr and Shreeve (2018) explore, there are many approaches to the student/educator dynamic, some being more instructive, others less so, but that in the traditional model, the educator

often implicitly embeds values without explicit dialogue or discussion with the students. Regenerative thinking in fashion education requires challenging traditional hierarchies, to consider how knowledge and understanding are co-created through group dynamics, creating the space for fostering self-actualisation and the development of a collective agency rooted in empathy and care (Shotter, 2012., Mountz et al., 2015).

These are values that Meike Cardozo implemented and reflected on through an educational approach that facilitates students in co-creating their educational journeys, emphasising critical reflection, shared responsibility, and the dissolution of traditional hierarchies (Cardozo, 2023). Here, educators become ‘constructive disruptors’ supporting collective discovery over imparting fixed knowledge, yet Cardozo notes the challenge of implementing such approaches within conventional, and ever less flexible academic structures as discussed previously. This transformation depends on reshaping the educator’s role from knowledge provider to a facilitator of student-led learning, encouraging students to reimagine fashion as a socially and ecologically responsible field.

Rissanen (2017) makes the case for a reimagined fashion curriculum that treats design as a catalyst for systemic change. His concept of ‘design for micro-utopias’ envisions an educational manifesto grounded in metadesign, redirec-tive design, and transition design, encouraging students to envision futures beyond conventional industry constraints. Examples of this shift include Lettmann, Hillyard, and White’s (2023) framework at Birmingham City University, which incorporates circular systems thinking and encourages student engagement with local communities. Similarly, Polimoda’s *Textiles from Farm to Fabric to Fashion* course deepens students’ connection to material origins, although it still adheres to traditional production paradigms focused on extraction, processing, and manufacturing (Polimoda, 2024).

REGENERATIVE FASHION ECOSYSTEM: VALUES WITHIN THE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

While the principles of sustainability and circularity are well-discussed in fashion education contexts, a significant gap remains between theoretical concepts and real-world integration of situated fibre systems into fashion design education (Seixas et al.,

2021; Sehnem et al., 2023). Urban-centric fashion education exacerbates the disconnection between students, educators, fibres and their production and distribution within global supply chains. In these environments, we are often insulated from the immediate impacts of the climate crisis where the consequences of exceeding planetary boundaries are experienced indirectly, filtered through reports rather than lived experience (Rockström et al., 2009; Richardson et al., 2023).

Given the challenges of fashion as a global industry and the shortcomings of globalised circular economic models, it must move beyond existing paradigms that maintain structural hegemony to be able to envision a regenerative fashion ecosystem that can embrace and develop a knowledge and application of regenerative approaches. Regenerative design is an approach that seeks to restore, renew, and revitalise natural systems through practices that integrate human activities into the environment in a way that enhances ecological health and resilience (Reed, 2007; Wahl, 2016; Mang & Haggard, 2016). As Wahl (2019) states, “a regenerative human culture is healthy, resilient, and adaptable; it cares for the planet and it cares for life.”

In this context, the notion of a bioregion becomes increasingly significant for fashion education, rather than politically defined boundaries, it focuses on the specific ecology and cultural traits of a specific area. Bioregions are defined by natural elements such as watersheds and account for the interdependence of land, people, and cultures. This approach encourages the use of locally sourced materials, endemic knowledge, and ecologic practices, enhancing the connection between the design, designer and its specific environment. It prioritises context-sensitive solutions over global, universalist methods that in their specificity, are more able to meet the needs and conditions of distinct communities within regional ecologies (McGinnis, 1999; Thayer, 2003). Thus, re-localisation of economies, where skills, capital and technologies are decentralised can be seen as critical in efforts to living appropriately within earth's ecological and human limits, which we are already well outside of on most fronts (Schumacher, 1973; Rockström et al., 2009; Richardson et al., 2023).

Examples of how this situated systemic bioregional approach is being taken to education can be found in the ETH DRRS-Designing

Resilient Regenerative Systems programme lead by Tobias Luthe and Daniel C. Wahl which significantly advance education in a bioregional context but without a specific focus in fashion practice (see Luthe, 2023; Wahl, D. C, 2024). Regenerative Design is being taught at UAL and engages an online community of designers to develop action research projects rooted in their individual and distributed local environments (UAL, 2024). The global conception of fashion should therefore be challenged; we argue that thinking bioregionally, particularly in the context of fashion education can equip future designers to foster ecological resilience, explore alternative economic models, reduce the environmental impact of production & consumption and preserve distinctive cultures.

These educational values, we argue, are vital for advancing regenerative practices in fashion education. However, to challenge the prevalent fibre-replacement narrative in circular systems and address the structural shortcomings of existing frameworks, we believed it was crucial to engage students in practical, reflective activities that re-examine the discipline. The Recompose workshop was designed with these values in mind, aiming to ground regeneration in sites of situated knowledge and foster a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between fibre, place, and production within the fashion system.

ENGAGING WITH LOCALISATION IN THE ‘RECOMPOSE’ WORKSHOP

This paper highlights the challenge of fibre in fashion and the need to think in locally situated ways by integrating concepts of locality, natural fibres, provenance, and regenerative systems into fashion education. We explore this in the context of a workshop held with MA Royal College of Art Fashion students called ‘Recompose’ which was designed to challenge students to rethink the cultural frameworks of fashion and encourage systemic reconstruction from within.

The workshop brought in the fashion designer Lee Roach who has extensive experience in high end fashion, and an independent label to work with the students, this intergenerational aspect allowed for a deeper enquiry into the regenerative education context of fashion and gave students a valuable lived experience perspective of the mechanisms of current fashion systems. Bringing in perspectives from Lee, in systems-based workshops with a younger generation

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<p>Regenerative Spread, where students and lecturers brought spreads made from ingredients sourced within 25 miles of London. This activity highlighted the challenges of acting locally in a globalised world, drawing parallels between food systems and fashion supply chains-both struggling to reclaim local production.</p> <p>Grain Discussion with Andrew Gillespie, (Fresh Flour Company founder) who shared his experience in re-establishing local and ancestral grain production in the UK, illustrating the challenges of re-localising grain processing, such as adapting and hacking machinery for processing endemic local grains (landrace) suited to local climates.</p>	<p>Margent Farm, where the students were immersed in a regenerative hemp farm alongside architecture students. The farm provided students with a firsthand look at regenerative farming. The farm's focus on hemp cultivation for soil health demonstrated how regenerative principles can be applied in agriculture.</p>	<p>Pollinator Pathmaker, a gardening project we visited by Daisy Ginsbery designed for the living interests of insects. This visit sparked discussions on the challenges of maintaining regenerative practices in urban spaces where maintenance comes at the expense of cost saving.</p> <p>Microbial Workshop, a hands-on microbial fermentation and discussion session that micronised system-based thinking into jam jars whilst also challenging the students to think about communities and collaboration through fermentation.</p>

Tab. 01



Fig. 02

THE RELEVANCE OF FIBRES AND PLACE-BASED APPROACHES THROUGH STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS

The key themes that emerged through the responses to the post-workshop questions were:

Holistic Approach to Production: The students emphasised the importance of addressing the macro-level issues in garment and material production, discussing the need to consider entire life cycles rather than isolated aspects. A key observation was that discussions on manufacturing within fashion education often prioritise environmental concerns over human welfare and that the protection of the planet tends to resonate more strongly than the protection of people, despite the interconnectedness of these challenges. Further, the need for community collaboration was noted. Participants agreed that regenerative practices are not truly implementable unless processes and knowledge are shared within the community.

Understanding Material Origins: Students stressed the significance of understanding the material origins in fashion. They commented that a deeper comprehension of the cultural and manufacturing processes behind materials would lead to more considerate design decisions. They suggested that fashion education should empower students with the knowledge to question the reasons behind material choices and explore new material and manufacturing opportunities. Additionally, the lack of accessible regenerative alternatives from suppliers was identified as a significant barrier to experimenting with alternative material systems.

Localisation and Small-Scale Production: Students appreciated how the farm visit demonstrated the feasibility of small-scale production, showcasing how a single fibre can be transformed into multiple products and how the workshop also challenged the conventional city-centric learning model. Smaller exercises, such as creating a local spread, were particularly effective in revealing the challenges of living bioregional. The students reflected that optimising available community resources before considering external materials, would be important things to consider in future in their practices and suggested that incorporating more hands-on, research-driven tasks that directly impact them could be beneficial.

Economic Barriers and Support Systems: Students expressed concerns about the economic challenges associated with pursuing regenerative practices, commenting that working regener-

atively often feels contingent on having significant financial privilege. They questioned the feasibility of such practices for individuals without the resources, especially within the context of urban living. This raised broader questions about the deep inconsistency at present with living regeneratively whilst still being interconnected to mainstream systems of human and planetary decline.

STARTING WITH HEMP AND INSIGHTS FROM DESIGNERS ON THE PRODUCTION CHALLENGES IN REGENERATION

During the workshop, questions emerged around the challenges of regeneration and production. In the context of Margent Farm we discussed the issues of hemp processing for clothing which does not have a well established global infrastructure in the way cotton does. Due to the need for specialised machinery and the labour-intensive nature of hemp processing, costs can be higher compared to other natural fibres like cotton or linen. Startups like Seff Fibre are an example of a UK based company developing technologies to *cottonise* hemp fibre so that it can more easily be integrated into fabric production systems (Fashion for Good, 2024), however, the production of these fibres into cloth still depends on the vast distances and dislocation of fashion supply chains. Currently SEFF is based in Bangladesh and partnered with Beximco, one of Asia's largest textile and garment companies (Seff, 2023).

LEE ROACH ON 'SEED TO FASHION' DISCONNECTION, HARRIET FLETCHER-GILHUYS ON PERCEPTIONS OF BRITISH WOOL

To expand on production challenges in regenerative approaches we interviewed fashion industry professionals Lee Roach and Harriet Fletcher-Gilhuys. Both highlighted the systemic obstacles that span various sectors within fashion, from wool to grains.

On fibre, Lee voiced a wish for greater awareness regarding the journey from seed to fibre to finished clothing in fashion. He observed that the systems are often disconnected from the process with limited education focused on the true origin and holistic environmental impact of materials.

Roach reflects on that while as a society we become increasingly focused on what we ingest, we have placed less focus on the materials that cover

our skin — the body's largest organ.

In conversation with Harriet Fletcher-Gilhuys, the challenges of local resource undervaluation were brought to light. Harriet highlighted significant issues with the infrastructure for British wool, noting the lack of machinery capable of refining it to the quality of merino wool. "The only machines capable of spinning British wool fine enough at present are located in Turkey and Romania," she explained, illustrating the disconnect between local resources and the necessary technology to process them effectively. However, these challenges are not purely technical but also cultural. The preference for merino wool, driven by both economic factors and cultural narratives which position merino wool as the regenerative fashion fibre benchmark. For instance, the Kings Foundation, which aims to "support wool growers across the Commonwealth in combating the rise of harmful synthetic fibres. This positions British wool as less desirable. High-end British and Scottish wool Fashion brands, which, despite retaining classic patterns, primarily use merino and cashmere "merino is seen as the most luxurious fibre; it is what the king wears". This perception issue is compounded by the centralisation of British wool processing, where limited options for grading and sorting further restrict the potential for high-quality local wool production (Fig. 04).

ANDREW GILHESPIE AND ALICE ROBINSON RE-MAKING LOCAL PRODUCTION CULTURES

Harriet's insights revealed parallels with Andrew Gillespie's experience in re-establishing local grain production. His work illustrated the need for appropriate innovation in both technology and practice of a particular scale—hacking and repurposing machines from abroad to serve local needs to re-equip local economies and make capacity produce locally. Both highlighted the difficulties in adapting and innovating within centralised industries that have been designed for large-scale, commercialised production. Harriet's concerns about British wool, like Andrew's with grain, underscore the need for reawakening local production capacities, emphasising the importance of re-engaging with the tools and practices necessary for sustainable, place-based approaches.

Alice Robinson, an MA Fashion RCA graduate, provides a practical example of addressing these challenges from the ground up. Faced with the difficulties of finding traceable British

leather, she focused on building a local leather supply chain. Through her work, she concluded that the only way to operate in a more regenerative manner was to rebuild her supply chain from the ground up. In her case, this involved addressing issues with tanneries. Most British tanneries use chromium and only accept large orders, making it challenging for small designers like Alice to pursue more ecologically responsible production on a smaller scale. Her approach to establishing her own production supply chain highlights the necessity of starting from the bottom, the soil to machinery as is reflected in the case with Andrew, connecting the dots from soil and land to the final product, and establishing networks and production methods that currently do not exist (especially not for smaller scales).

DISCUSSION

Fibres and materials are intertwined with culture, mutually constitutive of society, ecology, and economy. In regenerative design, this understanding should be central, acknowledging the interconnections and ecological care required in the design and making process. Regeneration is often seen thematically, rather than a practice deeply connected to earths and our vitality. The nature-culturing concept (Haraway, 2003; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) highlights the inseparable connection between nature and culture, emphasising their co-evolution. This perspective challenges the nature-culture bifurcation and calls for ethical responsibility and care for the nonhuman world, integrating environmental considerations into human practices (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Student reflections in this study revealed a dualistic notion of nature (planet) and human (welfare) as elements in competition for attention. As we become more conscious here, regeneration compels us to question our understanding as *nature-cultures* and interrogate and contest the axiom of human separateness in educational settings, where situating the human subject differently could reveal other mechanisms for change.

It is important also to consider that material and fibre are active agencies (Ingold, 2013; Braidotti, 2016), beyond western new materialist theory. We can also connect to valuable indigenous perspectives on material animism, which highlight that materials and objects possess life, intrinsic agency and interconnectedness, integral to cultural stories and practices (Descola, 2013).



Fig. 03

As facilitators, recognising the shortcomings in fashion education in the lack of localised, environmentally situated learning, we found that grounding the discussion in the tangible realities of food and grain allowed us to start bridging the conceptual gap between systems in food and fashion. Students were keenly aware of the idealism inherent in discussions of regenerative systems and questioned how these could be realistically integrated into the existing economic and commercial framework of fashion. These discussions are crucial if we are to move beyond oversimplified, system blind thinking in fashion education that overemphasises fibre alternatives as a sustainability panacea.

We argue that narrowly focusing on fibres and materials is insufficient. While cultural storytelling around materials enhances their emotional value and perceived importance (Petreca et al., 2022), this must move beyond stories of materials and fibres in the narrow sense towards a storytelling about fashion systems. A narrow fibre focus overlooks the depth of enquiry into production methods, material combinations, global supply chains, overproduction, product afterlife, and the business models that shape economies

around fibre. This can be likened to a hermeneutic cycle: understanding the whole requires comprehension of the parts, and understanding the parts requires a grasp of the whole, revealing itself through deep engagement.

The material itself is only part of the puzzle; addressing broader systemic issues is essential for meaningful, lasting change, lest we become fibre-lucid at the expense of being system-blind. This represents a shift from the globalised, urban-centric model of fashion education toward a future where designers are more attuned to the ecological, social, and economic realities of their craft as understood in the context of bioregional theory (McGinnis, 1999; Thayer, 2003). While students recognised the importance of bioregional localisation, they also highlighted significant barriers, including economic constraints and the lack of accessibility to regenerative practices.

As the workshop progressed, discussions naturally converged on the challenges of production, particularly the need to re-equip and rethink production at a local scale. The additional insights from various sectors within fashion—wool, fibre, grain, and leather—illustrated by the experiences of Roach, Fletcher-Gilhuys, Gillespie,

Robinson, revealed common challenges in the regenerative process. These barriers, spanning technical, cultural, and economic dimensions, underscore the systemic issues that must be addressed for truly regenerative practices to flourish.

The workshop also brought in a fashion designer with deep experience in high end fashion, and an independent label (two of the classic ambitions of student designers) to work with the students, this intergenerational aspect allowed for a deeper enquiry into the regenerative education context of fashion and gave students a valuable lived experience perspective (rather than academic literature) of the mechanisms of fashion systems, offering a more grounded and reflective perspective. This approach allowed students to learn important lessons in avoiding similar mistakes, and critically engage with real-world contexts through authentic interactions.

In the UK, endemic fibre and material production at the local scale has been so hollowed out that there is a need to redevelop capacities; this mirrors challenges in the food sector. The fashion policy space is preoccupied with growing the retail sector whilst imagining that decarbonisation goals can be met with increasing production and international trade (British Fashion Council, 2024). While Fashion Roundtable (2025) plays a key role in convening stakeholders and policymakers to envision the future of fashion, these discussions largely focus on textile waste and the externalities of production, such as Extended Producer Responsibility (ERP). However, there remains a significant gap in policy engagement with the deeper systemic issues—the links between economic growth, ecological and social collapse, and the urgent need for a regenerative agenda.

Cases like British Pasture Leather, The Fresh Flour Company and what is happening with British wool demonstrate the ways that policy could go deeper, to support networks between material producers and processors domestically, whilst centering more regenerative and locally distinct practices. Fashion education can then build upon this to cultivate designers who can work intelligently, with an understanding of local systems and a transparency that evades most global material systems. Looking ahead, it is essential for fashion designers to engage with the expanding field of design for policymaking.

AN INVITATION TO SPREAD AND DIVERSIFY APPROACHES

What happens when regenerative / more ecological materials encounter unsustainable, non-regenerative systems? How does a direct engagement with an environment inform an understanding of the systemic conditions of fashion creation? Recompose demonstrated the need to engage in regeneration in the educational context beyond fibre discussion and connect this with fashion systems through engaging with locality and systems at different scales. Natural fibres should not be viewed merely as signals but should be appreciated within the broader ecological social and industrial context surrounding them.

The Recompose workshop was a valuable experiment in recontextualising regeneration for fashion education. What emerged was a reframing of the social environment of learning in a regenerative pedagogical context that also considered how we as educators and students could be regenerative, socially with each other. As much as we need to re-approach production and processing technology we need to think about the value of diversity, cultural narratives and the economic systems which could re-shape local and distributed production.

These insights point to the necessity of a more robust support system and a deeper engagement with systemic bioregional factors outside of fibres/manufacturing processes within fashion education to enable students to navigate these challenges effectively. This needs to come hand in hand with a cultural will, especially in fashion education contexts to engage with bioregional systems approaches.

Authors reflect on the conditions needed to field experiments in regenerative pedagogy within fashion education contexts. In our case we brought in practitioners from outside fashion, in food systems, to develop parallels between the two spaces, we engaged with regenerative agriculture through material systems in hemp and made use of locally accessible sites to explore questions in design and ecology, further, we considered deeply how the learning environment would be facilitated, opting for less instructive learning and focussing on the emergent discussions that occurred through a direct engagement with the various activities we facilitated. Approaches such as these are counter to the productivity, efficiency and growth driven imperatives of the contemporary tertiary education sector, where education is transformed

into a packageable output that belies the need for situated learning and collective reflection practices (Wieczorek, 2024, Szadkowski 2023, Shore 2024).

Alongside the perceived legitimacy of the unitary tertiary education sector, decentralised and more collaborative models for education are emerging and should be actively encouraged. One such example is Schumacher Wild, conceived as a regenerative, bioregionally focused learning organisation (Schumacher Wild, 2025). It reimagines its predecessor, Schumacher College, which was shut down—ostensibly due to being ‘perennially loss making’—by the educational charity that managed it. This closure highlights the limitations of the financialised and growth-oriented education sector, rather than the resilience of formats like these.

Whereas Schumacher Wild roots itself in the River Dart bioregion, other organisations like The University of the Underground take a more nomadic and situational approach. Operating across shifting global contexts, it assembles international cohorts in different localities each year, forming what could be seen as a ‘rhizomatic urgency’ that responds to pressing socio-ecological and political conditions, with learning formats dynamically tailored to each research setting (University of the Underground, 2025).

We encourage educators to develop context-specific relationships within their own localities, integrating regenerative practices beyond fashion and utilising locally accessible resources. Rather than replicating the exact methods of Recompose, we advocate for a ‘seeding’ approach—adapting the principles of regenerative pedagogy experimentally to local specificities. This flexibility allows for diverse, context-sensitive experiments to flourish, deepening knowledge and fostering innovation in regenerative fashion education.

We therefore invite educators to critically examine their own systems, experiment with new methodologies, engage with local practices, and foster a diversity of regenerative approaches within their fashion education contexts. Only by doing so can we cultivate a richer, more nuanced understanding of the complex systemic challenges and opportunities for transition that lie ahead.

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Notes on Andrew Gilhespie’s landrace grain introduction; credits: Louis Alderson-Bythell (author).

[Fig. 02] Recompose visit to Margent Farm (regenerative hemp); Credits: authors own.

[Fig. 03] Haworth Scouring - The UK’s only significantly scaled wool fibre scouring facility; Credits: authors own.

[Tab. 01] ‘Recompose’: bioregional localisation activities.

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