



Putting on the Dog: The Animal Origins of What We Wear

Melissa Kwasny

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The earth provides us with the resources we need to stay alive. Unfortunately, making use of those resources usually involves doing damage—to the animals we sacrifice for food and clothing, and through the environmental degradation we cause by growing countless agricultural products, mining metals, drilling oil, and downing trees. Ubiquitous cotton and polyester, which make up eighty-five percent of the world's textiles, are responsible for a distressing amount of air, water, and soil pollution. Living lightly is tough to do, but try we must. And, when it comes to the treatment of animals we use for food and clothing, we can definitely do better.

In *Putting on the Dog: The Animal Origins of What We Wear*, Melissa Kwasny travels the world to investigate the history, processing methods, and complicated ethics of using animals to procure leather, wool, feathers, fur, pearls, and silk. To be sure, those materials are now quite expensive to wear, but Kwasny, a gifted poet and novelist, guides us thoughtfully into conversations about needless, conspicuous consumption, animal welfare, deplorable working conditions in tanneries and slaughterhouses, and Indigenous ideas of reciprocity: it “begins with awareness. It is guided by respect and restraint.” She closes with the Michael Pollan inspired advice to “Buy clothes. Not very many. Made mostly from animals and plants. Then cherish and care for them.”

MATT SUTHERLAND (May/June 2019)

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