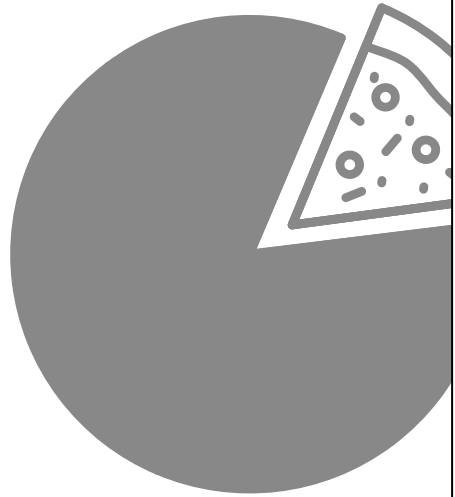


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Thekla Wilkening  
Robin Haring

# The Organic Pizza Dilemma



The Surprising  
Guide to Sustainability

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*To Melitta*

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# Chaos

## Inspiration

**I**n 2012 I started my very first company: *Kleiderrei*. This I did with Pola Fendel, who has been my partner-in-crime since my final year of high school in Cologne. In summer, just about a year after I had arrived in the Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Pola and I found ourselves sitting in the kitchen of some friends. I was in my first semester, studying Clothing Technology at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, while Pola had chosen the arts for her study there. It was a fun evening that would change the course of our lives. It started out as a joke, a misunderstanding. Somebody told, how he had picked up his girlfriend from the fashion department of the library. However, the people present, being rather tipsy, thought he meant that she had borrowed clothes there.

*Kleiderrei* – the bookshop for clothes, was born. The very next day I called Pola – I could not wait to make this project a reality. To borrow clothes was for me *the* solution to save resources, to consume in a sustainable way and to still experiment with fashion. All the solutions, to which I had neither found in my training nor in my studies, at once. And Pola was all in, as the free spirit that she was, forever looking for new adventures. *Kleiderrei* was our new adventure and our new mis-

sion. The last five years we already had exactly done what we wanted and now we did it again: we started a company.

*Kleidererei* works like a library, but for clothes. We have lent clothes to customers for a monthly subscription. First in small stores at St. Pauli in Hamburg – later throughout Germany. *Kleidererei* was for us the alternative to a throw-away society.

This is how far we got by ourselves in 2012, exactly ten years ago now, in expressing our vision in words. Micha, the journalist who wrote a piece about us for the magazine *Brand Eins*, brought us new concepts, like ›collaborative consumerism‹ or ›share economy‹. He had his own theory, according to which we were currently at the start of a new wave, a new change, because we had felt something: We no longer wanted to own those things, most of all fashion, that we bought just because of desire (maybe even just out of lust) rather than because of need. We were not sure if others felt the same way, but, well, we were pretty sure this was the case.

In May of 2013, a full half year after founding *Kleidererei*, the piece was published. It was double paged with pictures of Pola and me – and my mini baby tummy. We were in the middle of it all. We were invited to a conference in Berlin as keynote speakers, besides companies such as *Spotify* and *Airbnb*, and the moderator asked us what someone must do to appear on a double page in the *Brand Eins*. Years later he visited us in Hamburg, during a month-long period in which we organized events at the *Mercedes Me Store* for the theme ›Slow Fashion‹. His question was the same: How did you do it? We did not know it ourselves. To us, the simple explanation was that we were young and that our intuitions matched the spirit of our time.

Or... maybe we were so successful by questioning this ›Zeitgeist‹.

With *Kleidererei* we advanced in the, at that time and in the truest sense of the word, rather ›colorless‹ world of sustainable fashion. In 2012 there was truly not much. If so, then the pioneers of *Hessnatur*, a couple of visionaries like *Patagonia* in the outdoors section. Still, *Armedangels* was still relatively small and we could have only dreamed of something as cool as *Jan'n June*. Secondhand clothing had by that time become less and less popular, as it was mainly associated with the older generation of the environmentally friendly than the young and the hip. To us it was immediately clear: We need colors. And sexiness. That was the vision for our CI, our Corporate Identity: Cool girls (part, of course, from our friend circle), who were all intelligent and therefore preferred to consume sustainably – but who still looked sexy. Basically, we asked ourselves: What is it that we want to see ourselves? What would inspire us?

I would have liked to stop here and be able to say: This is by now old news. Today we find ourselves in quite a different situation since we have come so much further. However, except for the size of the *Armedangels* company, this is not true.

It seems that people, just like before, are lost in a world that tells us that consumption makes us happy. Maybe with the small difference that today there is something like the ›perfect buy‹. It can primarily be found in the big cities or online, under the heading ›bio‹, ›fair‹ or ›vegan‹, with a nice logo next to it. But don't be fooled. These logos are not like the stickers of the bands that we love and put on our laptops. Rather, they are authentication stamps.

Authentication stamps that help us to choose between right and wrong, where what is ›right‹ and ›wrong‹ is understood by no one and felt by even less. This has led to massive confusion caused by the sheer immensity of available authentication stamps, for which websites have emerged to help us to make some sense of them. What complicates matters is that just as we can each start our own band and ›define‹ our own music style; companies can create their own authentication stamp or authentic claim of sustainability. Thus, we can find happy green stickers on jeans today that say ›better‹. Better than in the past, yes, but what does this ›better‹ actually mean and is it already good enough?

There is no patent on the notion of ›sustainability‹ or ›bio‹, no accepted definition that we can all follow.

The idea for this book took shape when my friend Cecilia posted a photo of a pizza advertisement on Instagram: ›*Vegan Yoga Pizza*‹. The subtitle of the packaging read ›with a sauce of hummus and ayurvedic spices‹, with next to it two authentication stamps: ORGANIC and VEGAN. And a third, which said ›5 cents for healthy soils. Such a pizza advertisement lends itself well for an evening of a drinking-game or bingo: »vegan« – check, »yoga« – check, »organic« – check. BINGO! Burp.

I am not saying that choosing a pizza is easy. We have all spent hours scanning through pizza flyers to find the one pizza we want. During our times at *Kleiderei*, pizza was our go-to meal. When we still had our first store at St. Pauli, we would always get the mini pizza from the wood-burning stove at the pizzeria *Alt Hamburg*. We didn't even have to enter the restaurant itself but could order at a little bar outside of it. The wood-oven pizza would be prepared directly under our

nose. This was practical, as chronically time deprived young entrepreneurs. But more about this more later. Let's return to the pizza: crisp, fresh, with a great taste and until today a cult favorite at the Reeperbahn in Hamburg. After we went online with *Kleiderer* and moved our headquarters to Hammerbrook, we kept ordering pizza when we worked late hours on our business ideas (or on our taxes).

Spicy pepperoni or no pepperoni? On a pizza, things that we normally would not eat taste great. Take anchovies for example. Choosing the topics to go on the pizza was always a battle. I once had a roommate in Cologne that managed to tell me at every pizza-party in our kitchen that, originally, just tomatoes, mozzarella, and basil should go on a pizza. It will probably come as no surprise to you that he always thought we were too loud at these pizza-parties. A fitting response to this was made by *Sophie Passmann* in her novel *Komplett Gänsehaut*: »Since a couple of years ago, whenever someone was eating a pizza, assholes would tell that person that pizza *originally was food for poor people*. A few years later these same assholes have opened pizza places that put goat cheese, red beets, and honey on pizzas, and in case someone wants it roasted pine nuts as well. By now, these poor people can no longer afford pizza.«

Pizza is there for everyone! Nothing works better for a hangover than a pizza. Nothing offers more comfort on the couch. And nothing will tell you more about a personality. Steady or fearful people will always order the same pizza (given that consistency and fear are not that different from one another). Wild people love to try something new and are of course sometimes disappointed too, although they do not really care about that. Very insecure people are more often



disappointed by their choice and the only free topping one can find on their pizza is food envy. The smart ones among us immediately make sure that they find a partner to exchange slices with or they will order a half/half pizza to lower the risk of severe disappointment. We don't want to regret anything anyways.

The great thing about pizza is the same as with many other Guilty Pleasures: basically, it makes any form of bodily movement very unlikely – it is a form of slowing down, which can be quite a relief (and therefore something we want).

The post of Cecilia showed a pizza that had no longer anything to do with a Guilty Pleasure, but which instead has turned into a *Organic Pizza Dilemma* that is only interested in telling you the *right* way. This post was a tipping point for us and we wanted to write something that provided a different perspective on this whole perfect consumption blabla. That which had started once as a good thing, with products from the Demeter-farm, had by now turned into a production line that was as opaque and commercial as the conventional industry. And just as it is not true that everything bio is healthy – and therefore of course doesn't make you gain weight – is it also not true that everything is ›great‹ as soon as the label ›bio‹ is attached to it. Why not? Because bio itself does not mean that people working on the production line are paid fairly. And the other way around. More about this later...

We are maybe just a small slice of this pizza that we call ›crisis‹. Environmental crisis, climate crisis, human rights crisis, economic crisis. All those. But how big is our slice? We, citizens who have by now become consumers, are told by a whole industry that it is our responsibility. It is our *Organic*

*Pizza Dilemma!* But what if this is not true? What if this responsibility lies only in part with us? This is something we want to explore.

And there is more. Just as with our favorite pizza-topping, every person should strive for her or his own sustainability. For some it's about small changes in daily routines, for others it's a whole new life.

This book would like to encourage you **to find your own sustainability**.

## Curiosity

In the first place it is about finding out what is good for you. For you, personally. Nobody knows what ›perfect‹ consumerism is and how much influence we have anyways. A popular saying in social networks is that ›your bill is your vote‹. But is there even a choice in this vote? Or is our bill in the end just our opinion? And can opinions change socio-economic structures?

Certainly, perfect sustainable consumerism is not the solution. This way you can only go wrong. And no one, believe it, truly no one, knows what the right way is. So, if someone at the next house-party explains to you how someone can become a decent vegan or that oat milk is so much better than almond milk or soy milk, just thank them politely and go.

## Departure

### Why this book?

**Thekla:** I was 17 when I knew that I wanted to change the fashion industry radically. Concretely, this meant for me: Implementing sustainability. I had a vision, a goal, a task, and I was still very young. I know that this happens rarely and that I have been inconceivably lucky as well.

Today people often tell me that they do not know where to start their sustainable consumerism. They then ask me as well if there even is a way to do it perfectly, because they are afraid that it will not matter anyways. They cannot save the world every day, but should try to do so, right? I write this book most of all for them. And for you. Because since you are holding this book in your hand, I suspect that you already possess the curiosity that we need for a change.

In the first place I was lucky *to feel* at 17 what was right for me. And what is right for you, is also good for the world – and this book is about this connection. This book is full of inspirations for more sustainability. At the same time, it is so handy that you can carry it with you every day wherever you go. It should be your continuing guide in the search of your path for a good life, for you and your environment.

**Robin:** For a couple of years now, I have been asking students in my seminars the same question: ›Is the world improving or ending?‹.

The answer is always the same: The world is ending! Once, my 8-year-old daughter sat in the seminar as well, surrounded

by colorful pens, and decidedly stated: »The world is improving!«.

Since then, I have been thinking about why precisely most of the youngest members of this prospering generation are convinced that their world is ending. Are we really living in a society without hope for a better future?

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# 1 x 1 Dinner Party

*Without knowledge we can only see incomplete.*<sup>1</sup>

Franz Berzbach

**A**fter finishing high school, I decided to start a training as an assistant in clothes technology. When I picked up my diploma, the director of my high school murmured in a slightly bewildered tone something like: »Such grades ... and then a training?«. But I wanted to understand the deeper workings of the textile industry and I thought that a theoretical study would not let me do so. I wanted to learn how to sow, to touch materials, and to start right at the beginning, to gain sufficient knowledge to be able to question the system itself.

This is also how we want to start this book. Beginning with a 1 x 1 dinner party, we introduce you to the seemingly endless universe called »Sustainability«. And, more importantly: we introduce you to some of the limits we have already reached in this universe. This we will do with some humor, since the best recipe for change is humor and we do not want you to get scared. Because fear paralyzes. And we want to *act*.

## Seek confidence - offer a future

*And then suddenly someone asks you: Do you feel hopeful when you think about the next 12 months?*

For a short moment you pause and wonder: Is there actually something that gives me hope? This question has been asked for several years now by the Allensbach survey institute and recently reached a historical low: in the generation of 30- to 59-year-olds, only 22% felt hopeful when thinking about the next 12 months. To compare, in 2015 this was still an impressive 57%. The general mood has plummeted, mostly because of the unpredictable course of the pandemic and the feeling of uncertainty that has emerged from it. What is more, the Doomsday Clock has become more pressing than ever, standing since January 2022 at a hundred seconds to midnight. Since 1947, this symbolic clock shows the time we have left till the end of the world. At the start of every year, distinguished scientists and Nobel laureates meet to debate the new positions of the Doomsday Clock's hands. During the last years, the reasons for changing the clock were primarily the nuclear arms race and political conflicts, but climate change is now becoming increasingly worrisome as well. The clock hands have stood for varying reasons on 7 to 12, on 3 to 12 or again on 5 to 12. Today, the hands indicate 100 seconds to midnight and the world is as close to its end as it has never been before.

Let's listen at this point to the remarkable speech of the Secretary-General of the UN, António Guterres, on »the State of the Planet« in December of 2020 at the Columbia University in New York. No one should listen to the first few

minutes of the speech on an empty stomach, especially since after the introductory words »... the state of the planet is broken«, there is a disturbingly lengthy and scary list of the extent to which humans are destroying planet earth.

- One million species are at risk of extinction.
- Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes.
- Deserts are spreading.
- Wetlands are being lost.
- Every year, we lose 10 million hectares of forests.
- Oceans are overfished – and choking with plastic waste.
- Coral reefs are bleached and dying.
- Apocalyptic fires and floods, cyclones, and hurricanes are increasingly the new normal.

In addition, an ongoing stream of new studies, diagnostics, and prognoses on the imminent end of the world is published every week. Here are just some fragments from these dizzying reports that are actually far too abstract for us to truly understand them to their full extent:

- Air and water pollution kills 9 million people every year, which is more than six times the number of people that were killed by the Pandemic.
- Humus rich soils disappear 10 to 40 times faster than they can be renewed through natural processes.
- Since we started recording scientific climatic data in 1850, we have reached the warmest 20 years in the last 22 years.
- The number of vertebrates has decreased by 60% since 1970. The number of insects has decreased even more.