



Tishman Environment  
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# What Will Change: Timo Rissanen on Fashion, Fossil Fuels, and Activism

 [what-will-change-solid-color](#)

*The next four years will prove to be unprecedented in the roll-back and dismantling of environmental protections. In our new series, What Will Change, Tishman Center Affiliated Faculty reflect on the*

*environmental and social justice  
impacts of the election results from  
the perspectives of their research,  
practice, and passion.*

***By Timo Rissanen***

It has been just over a month since the election, and I cannot say I'm any more optimistic about the next four years than I was on the day after the election. At Parsons I teach fashion design from the perspective that our current unsustainable levels and modes of fashion consumption are inseparable from the blind pursuit of economic growth at any cost, even if that cost means degrading other people's ability to live. That pursuit of growth is inseparable from our carbon emissions. During his campaign President-elect Trump vowed to take the United States out of the Paris agreement on climate. One could argue that the path towards Paris began at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, so the prospect of more than two decades of work being undone by a self-serving President-elect is frustrating. President Obama has admitted that the commitments in the agreement do not go far enough to slow climate change, but it nonetheless created a structure on which to build a long-term plan. While there have been moments since where Trump seemed to have softened his stance on climate, we

need to remain vigilant. It is no exaggeration that today we are designing the conditions in which our great-grandchildren will live. If Trump makes good on his threat, it will be up to companies like Google, entrepreneurs like Elon Musk, and individual US states to lead the way, alongside China and a number of European countries. One of Trump's arguments behind increasing fossil fuel production is job creation. I urge us to begin to challenge this idea of 'job creation at any cost' that emerges at any election in just about any country, particularly when the job creation centers on fossil fuels and other destructive industries. If the cost is a serious compromise to the ability of future generations to live then that job creation is hardly justifiable. We need not look far: the people of Miami and island nations like Kiribati already pay the price. The technology and the resources to transition us to clean energy already exist. The political will to do so is mostly missing, and therefore we must organize in our resistance. We should take note from all who have assembled at Standing Rock during 2016. The recent Army Corps of Engineers' decision to request a full Environmental Impact Statement and reroute the Dakota Access Pipeline was the result of thousands of Native Americans coming together to protect our water. "Water

is Life” has become an easy hashtag.

I urge you to really get it: water, actually, is life. The peaceful resistance at Standing Rock, even in the face of heavily militarized police, provides us with the blueprint for action during the next four years.

Not some day, one day in the future: the time to act is right now, today.

Determine for yourself what is important for you, and join a group or an organization, and if it doesn't exist, create one. Never has there been a more fertile time for your leadership to show up. On a final, personal note, as a gay man Trump's election has me deeply concerned for LGBTQIA rights and safety. While the Supreme Court ruling Marriage Equality is relatively safe, in Mike Pence we now have a vice president-elect who believes in “conversion therapy”. I'll be fine; my concern is for the thousands of vulnerable minors whose parents may be misguided by Pence to place their children in the hands of these “therapists”. Having survivors of “conversion therapy” as close friends, I have zero tolerance for a field that is best described as witch doctoring. “Conversion therapy” is destructive and harmful, and we must stand for our youth. I did not expect to arrive at my 40s and fly the rainbow flag as an act of resistance, however I take what life delivers, and I will continue to fly the flag. Together we have this. [Timo](#)

*Rissanen is an Assistant Professor of Fashion Design and Sustainability at Parsons School of Design.*



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