# Sewing Lives: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Global Garment Industry

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**Abstract**: This paper takes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and uses it as an extended metaphor to investigate the points of destructive alienation and disassociation within the globalized consumption of clothing. The promise of new clothing is a set of garments that function like Victor's dream of creation; materials are stitched together to give objects that match our closest-held ideals. And yet, because of our quick Victor-Frankenstein-like alienation from these 'fast fashion' objects when they no longer please us, clothing becomes, like the monster, an abjected figure for waste and shame, moving around the globe destructively, created from the bodies of the poor and having lost the care of its creator or consumer. Solving the problem of sustainability in the fashion industry involves, this paper argues, taking account of that difficult relationship with the global monstrous, and of the unique ways in which clothes galvanize some of our deepest emotions.

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**Sarah GARLAND**

**Sewing Lives: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Global Garment Industry**

> "The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature".
> -   Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*

**(i)**
Each year amateur and independent sewists come together online to participate in "Me Made May," an annual wardrobe challenge that asks them to commit to wearing more of their own handmade or refashioned clothes. "Me Made May" attracts large numbers of home dressmakers from Australia, America and Europe; May offers a moderate climate in both hemispheres, and lighter weight fabrics are easier to source and sew. Zoe Edwards, who began the challenge ten years ago, describes it as a way to "improve your relationship with your handmade wardrobe," and guides participants to make individualised pledges that steer them away from relying on ready-to-wear clothing for the month (Edwards 2016). An Instagram community offers visual sharing, although this is not required. The challenge instead is meant to be a more personal one, asking participants to "wear your me-mades more often and more thoughtfully to learn some useful lessons about yourself, your style, your body, your creativity" (Edwards 2019).

What I find fascinating about "Me Made May" is not just the impressive levels of everyday creativity, skill, and commitment it demonstrates, but that as a premise it manages to isolate some subtle nuances in the feelings experienced choosing, creating, buying and wearing clothes. People begin making their own clothes for a number of reasons, some of which are environmentally or socially motivated. As Jessica Yen comments in *Seamwork*, the online magazine run by the independent pattern house Colette, "many sewists constantly seek ways to align their hobby with their values. This can include creating clothing that's made to last, reducing fabric waste, sourcing ethically produced, organic, naturally dyed, local, or secondhand fabrics, and other approaches" (Yen, 2019). Although sewing from virgin fibres is not truly sustainable, it does offer one alternative to the social injustices of the garment supply chain at the 'cut, make and trim' stage of manufacturing. Dressmaking for these communities takes in 'make do and mend' approaches to sustainability, and creative 'up-cycling,' as well as a set of choices in favour of 'slow sewing.' It offers a chance to take more care in, and often to be bolder about, the decisions about the way that one is dressed, as well as to perfect a manual skill, and to act with deliberateness about the routes by which clothing might enter one's life. It is a distinctive response to the kinds of contemporary feelings of alienation from direct experience that Bernard Stiegler writes of in *Symbolic Misery* (2014), or that Matthew Crawford brought to a popular audience in *The Case for Working with Your Hands: Or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (2010). "In many ways, sewing one's clothing is the antithesis of modern life," Yen writes. "It's inefficient and time-consuming, analog instead of digital, often more expensive than outsourcing would be, low yield, and lacking instant gratification. Yet sewing is also valuable for these very reasons" (Yen 2015).

This re-inflection of ancient hand-crafts as hobbyists' activity is partly because making clothes at home in the cultural West is now more expensive than buying them, both in time and in the cost of materials. The divergence in price between home-made and ready to wear is directly fuelled by the rise of 'fast fashion,' where the global outsourcing of each element of the supply chain has made it far cheaper to buy a shirt than to buy fabric. Because of this there is an often-privileged element to the making of clothes at home in these areas. The time, training, machines and fabric require a continual outlay that varies according to the amount of salvaged materials used but is nevertheless substantial. This makes it even more surprising perhaps, then, that the subtext behind "Me Made May" is that in the normal run of things makers do not get sufficient wear out of their creations, and that by calling for a re-examination of participants' relationships with their wardrobe, Edwards has highlighted some deep-seated ambivalences. She describes regarding her home-made clothes with a feeling of "weird slight distrust," a sense of disbelief in their status as actual clothes or as an actual 'wardrobe' of pieces. Amy Twigger Holroyd also explores these feelings in depth throughout *Folk Fashion* (2017)*.* In gothic, and deeply paradoxical, terms, a home-made wardrobe is felt as the uncanny, the 'unhomely' double. The 'real' garment, new dressmakers might feel, is the shop-bought one. We might expect harmony because the wearer has more choice about what an item of clothing is made from, how it fits and what its shape might be. Instead, we see a relationship with both home-made and ready-to-wear clothes that shifts continually between absorption, excitement, embarrassment, compromise and pride. These emotions are particularly visible in the blogging, posting and journalism coming out of the sewing community because of that group's highly articulate self-consciousness about dressing, but their very existence might also, if extended more widely, illuminate some of the reasons that the current ways in which most

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consumers buy and make use of clothes remain so difficult to change. If the sewing community are sometimes embarrassed by — or fall out of love altogether with — the creations they invest so much time and energy into, then perhaps a person's relationship with a cheaper shop-bought item is even less likely to be a stable one.

**(ii)**
Part of the growth of the home sewing industry is in response to not just a general twenty-first century alienation from the ways in which our world is physically constructed and maintained, but it is also a response to the specific circumstances of the current fashion industry. To quote British designer Phoebe English, the ready-to-wear fashion industry is now "monstrous," and currently unsustainable at all levels: "The overproduction of 'fast' fashion which will never be purchased or used and the insane speed which the sector churns out new designs almost every week means that the never-ending production of cheap fashion which is poorly made and will last only a few weeks and then be thrown away, has made our sector a monstrous disposable industry" (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 7). In terms of the kinds of currents that often feed the gothic, this is both the Kantian sublime by addition, where the power of something is overwhelming by sheer scale of uncontrolled accretion, and something more like the currents of disgust, where, in William Ian Miller's model in *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997), that which multiplies and teems with life – such as insects or viruses – often revolts us (21). The disconnect between the micro (the holding of a garment in your hands) and the macro (the holding of its supply chains in your head) means that once we are aware of the kinds of findings first outlined for a popular audience in Elizabeth Cline's *Overdressed* (2012), or Lucy Siegle's *To Die For* (2011), consumption without thoughtfulness often relies on a mammoth feat of disavowal. Indeed, many of the recent popular responses to the proliferation of unvalued clothing use strategies of deliberate restriction of consumption to deal with what is felt as the threat of overwhelm. Courtney Carver's "Project 333," where a wardrobe is pared back to thirty-three items for three months is one, the 'curatorial' approach of Colette's "Wardrobe Architect" and "Design Your Wardrobe" schemes are another, as is Anuschka Rees' popular book *The Curated Closet* (2016) and Marie Kondo's anthropomorphic approach to clothing in *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (2014). Carver is American, Rees lives in Berlin, Kondo is Japanese; alongside a global proliferation of clothing we are also given an aspirational global conversation about its containment.

The effects of globalisation on the textile industry have been profound. I am a British writer, and a British consumer, but the majority of clothing in my country is produced in Asia, according to WRAP, Britain's Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP, 19). I will be referring throughout this paper to recent British government-backed research on the textile industry, but the debate, and their sources, are global ones. The construction and supply chain for textiles is one of the most complex, and one of the least transparent, with different parts of the process of making an item of clothing being undertaken in different countries, often in the pursuit of cheap labour or materials (As Dana Thomas points out, the 'made in' demarcation is slippery in itself — on European Union garment labels it only names the country of last alteration and so high-end accessory brands can avoid the mass-market connotations of a 'made in China' label by affixing a handle or a sole in Italy and then labelling the item as Italian, loc. 2978). The highest impact in terms of carbon footprint is the initial fibre production stage, through agriculture or through polymer extrusion (WRAP 12). The production of textile fibre concentrated in the US, China, India and Uzbekistan brings with it the impact of pesticides and fertilisers on biodiversity and on those who farm cotton, where "toxic chemicals from artificial fertilisers and pesticides used in conventional farming – many of which are classed as hazardous by the World Health Organisation – can not only poison wildlife and rivers, they kill an estimated 16,000 people each year" (Soil Association). Water-intensive dyeing and bleaching processes produce highly invasive pollutants which flow into the rivers of China and India (WRAP, 19).

The human, social cost of the 'cut, make and trim' stage, where garments are often constructed in countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam under poor labour practices, has also become increasingly clear, especially in the wake of the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse which killed over 1134 people, mainly women, and wounded 2500 (Fashion Revolution). The recent UK Parliamentary Select Committee report on the future of fashion, *Fixing Fashion*, also speaks of modern-day slavery, "child labour, prison labour, forced labour and bonded labour" throughout the garment supply chain, including in Britain and the EU (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 3). The global shipment, packaging and sale of the finished clothes leaves a large carbon footprint, exacerbated by quality control and speculative ordering practices that result in unsold stock being incinerated, in some instances purely to keep brand prices high (Hendriksz). Once clothes are in the home there is substantial environmental damage from the resources used for laundry, as well as microfibre pollution to water systems when synthetics are

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washed ("16 times more than plastic microbeads from cosmetics," Ellen MacArthur Foundation). When clothes are discarded they are often, again, shipped back to low-income nations for disposal, continuing their polluting lives in landfill, or incinerated. The mixed fibre content of most garments makes recycling difficult, and less than one percent of clothing is recycled to make other clothing (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 3). "Textile production contributes more to climate change than international aviation and shipping combined," *Fixing Fashion* states, and it goes on to cite figures that anticipate a further 63% rise in clothing consumption by 2030 (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 5).

The main driver behind this global system is increased consumption, led in part by fast fashion systems where these supply chains allow companies such as Zara, Topshop, H&M and Primark to respond to trends with quick design and manufacture, to bring new clothes into their shops as quickly as every two weeks, to price them very low, and to make large profits. As a result of this, despite global economic downturns, the fashion industry continues to grow. Fashion is currently the world's third largest industry; estimates of its worth in 2013 were $3 trillion, and its profits outperform even the technology industry (Fashion Revolution).

The swiftness with which new trends reach shops, coupled with their low price, means that there are multiple ways new clothes might be felt to 'expire.' Trends might change again, social media use might produce a feeling of not wanting to be repeatedly photographed in the same garment, low quality clothes may become damaged quickly, cheap new clothes mean that there is no feeling that mending skills will be required. Fast fashion often passes through wardrobes correspondingly quickly, with prices so low in some instances that garments are only being used once, commentators claim (Butler). Greenpeace's report, *TimeOut for Fast Fashion*, states that "the average person buys 60 percent more items of clothing and keeps them for about half as long as 15 years ago" (2). Stella Claxton speaks of a corresponding drop in emotional value in these products. "We have a market where these garments are mainly aimed at young women who are … [gaining] pleasure from what they wear and expressing their identity through their clothing, but the actual value of the item is very low in real terms, in quality terms and in emotional terms to them," she argues (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 6). The analogy with fast food is a useful one—buying consumer items cheap, fast, and regularly produces an initial pleasure, but it also produces significant amounts of non-biodegradable waste as packaging, or as the initial purchase becomes less palatable. As Jonathan Chapman points out in *Emotionally Durable Design*, "plastics, elastomers and resins"—the building blocks for synthetic and blended acrylic fabrics—"grossly outlive our desire for them" (27). If we can move towards a greater consciousness of this emotional relationship with clothing, we may be able to interrogate and change some of the current blocks to a sustainable relationship with the things we wear.

**(iii)**
I have chosen the story of Frankenstein's monster to run alongside this story of making, buying, wearing and discarding clothes, not because I wish to invoke a conservative caution to see technological progression in the textiles industry as 'playing God,' but because Mary Shelley's story might be taken instead as paradigmatic of a difficult emotional relationship with one's creation, and, extrapolated from this, with intimate objects in general. Frankenstein's creation is stitched together from the bodies of the dissecting room; paying mind to the affective dimension of Victor's rejection of his hand-sewn creature might offer a place to begin looking for points of leverage with which to change our relationship with other sewn things. Frankenstein's creature is made out of the bodies of the poor or criminal (hanged murderers were sold for dissection), stitched together in an obsessional mode where the quest for new knowledge overrides empathic connection to the humans who the creature is made from. The people that Victor uses as raw material become first the underclass, then "bones from charnel-houses," "dissecting room and the slaughter-house," and then the creature itself (48). Globalised exploitative labour markets create clothes for high-income countries as Frankenstein stitched together his monster. Fast fashion is a creature built on the unacknowledged contributions, and sometimes the very lives, of the unprotected citizens of poorer countries.

The foundational crimes in Shelley's novel are those scholarly obsessions which block Frankenstein's empathic responses to life and lead him to emotional numbness—"Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm" (45). Shelley makes this concentration on emotion clear in the Preface: "The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops [sic]; and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensively and commanding

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than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield" (1). And, in high-income societies, it is our emotional relationship with clothing—our "human passions"—which are driving the desires and attitudes that allow fast fashion to thrive. Bruno Latour uses *Frankenstein* as a moral fable to illustrate how a post-environmental relationship with the objects of science and technology might help do away with the binary opposition between a retreat to a non-interventionist environmentalism and a forward-marching scientism that does not plan for unintended consequences. For Latour, "Dr. Frankenstein's crime was not that he invented a creature through some combination of hubris and high technology, but rather that he *abandoned the creature to itself*" (italics in original, 19). Whilst my sphere of analogy is restricted to the clothing industry, Latour's framing of *Frankenstein* as a story about failed parenting remains salient. *Frankenstein* is a story about what happens when we cease to love, and then devalue and abandon, what has been created. The creature is both a thing made and a sentient being, and Shelley's story tells of the consequences of that object's lingering in the world, lonely, enraged and terribly alive, after it has been discarded.

The mere matter of the creature's existence after his abandonment by Frankenstein is one of Victor's most persistent terrors. The acceptance of the fast fashion industry depends on the forgetting of all stages of the lifecycle of clothing aside from the brief period where the wardrobe shelters currently favoured garments. It depends on the forgetting of the process and the materials of making those clothes before they reach the shop, and it depends on shoppers orphaning their clothes at a relentless pace, of going through a process of desire, love and rejection to transform objects into persistent and recalcitrant mountains of textile waste. The routine elision of labour is part of a Marxist model of commodity fetishism, but it also seems frequently to be part of the subtle psychic movements of identifying with an object, of growing to see it through the lens of ownership. Fashion Revolution week (www.fashionrevolution.org), held globally and falling in April each year on the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster, seeks to use to increase transparency on the part of producers and brands by bringing manufacturing conditions into the consciousness of the owners of clothing. Fashion Revolution provokes by asking manufacturers #whomademyclothes and encouraging them to reply, including local photos and statements from the workers under the tag #imadeyourclothes. Globalised access to the Internet has also offered an opportunity for some of those in the countries that make clothes for the West to directly speak to consumers too. For example, the French, Berlin-based, fashion designer and vlogger Justine LeConte's YouTube critique of fast fashion attracted comments such as the following:

> I don't know if I am the first Bangladeshi to comment here. But in case someone else hasn't said it here before me, I will just try to address the Western consumers of Bangladeshi clothes, "please watch what you are buying." … I remember passing a garment factory everyday on my way to school. And for those seven years, I have never seen that factory's 'immergency exit' open. It just used to be there. One time as I was coming back from school our rickshaw stopped, there was a crowd of people in front of the building, they were scared and fighting. Some were trapped inside the building. There was a fire in the building, some workers ran out and the security locked the door with the rest inside. The manager said, "there is no fire. The workers will steal our clothes". So some of those scared workers were trapped inside while the others were wailing outside. Luckily, that fire didn't kill anyone. But not many were as lucky. There have many such incidents that escaped the notice of international media. […] So please, don't buy cheap clothes to feel good and throw them in a month. Sorry for the huge comment. But I hope it reaches at least one person. (Mahbuba Akhtar).

Clothing for many of the women surveyed in *Women in Clothes* is intensely debated and intensely storied, and adding the stories of makers, or those local to them, may be a key to making clothing less disposable. Globalism, the philosopher Albert Borgmann argues, leads to a disassociation from the relationships brought about by emplacement which encourages over-consumption: "When we can enjoy the pleasure of use without experiencing, or even witnessing, the effort of production, he argues, we begin to perceive goods as being available without limits, and consume at an accordingly rapid rate" (Holroyd 191). At present, though, this direct communication from the regions of manufacture is still unusual. Instead, the brand, and sometimes the designer, functions as point of origin, erasing the identities of those who created the item. Personal stories such as Akhtar's are a way of localising knowledge, of bringing back the labour and the context of the specific area of production back into the garment.

**(iv)**
Allan Lloyd Smith argues in *Uncanny American Fiction* that reproduction and creation are inherently uncanny. He is describing writing, but the sentiment holds true for clothing too, I think, which sits close to our bodies, taking on their heat and shape: "Writing doubles nature, doubles thought, doubles us,

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which reminds us of death; writing animates a dead realm, creates something that seems to be alive (and is that so naive, after all?) and writing is a repetition: when a pattern is repeated, perhaps with slight differences, we perceive the uncanny" (ix). Our intense relationships with our clothing casts garments as *doppelgängers* for ourselves, once as part of aspirational purchasing, and again as we reject our own bodily traces evidenced in the wear and tear of the textile. There is another obviously gothic reading of clothing that could be undertaken that would see mass-produced clothes as monstrous not just because they are doubles of the wearer's body, uncannily animated, like Frankenstein's monster, by human agency, hopes and fantasies, but also because their multiplication in the millions through off-the-rack design makes them clones of other identical garments—the clone is a figure that, as W.J.T Mitchell points out in *Cloning Terror*, embodies the very essence of reproduction, as well as biopolitical power (loc. 43) (This is particularly resonant in an era where the mechanical 3D printing of clothing is expected to enter, and potentially radically change, the garment industry). Seen through the lens of cloning, globalisation of fashion might look like a homogenisation of international style, and perhaps of aspiration too, where the international circulation of images alongside commodities has also produced a situation where, for example, Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward estimate, "perhaps the majority of the people in the majority of the countries of the world are wearing blue jeans on any given day" (2011, 1).

Whilst the recent explosion of fashion vlogging seems to have increased the travel of international fashion styles—the spread throughout Europe of the Brooklyn-identified fashion for large beards and tattoos on predominantly young, white, men is a case in point, as is the change in the British and American fashion silhouette in favour of the un-darted, cropped and wide-legged styles that have a longer legacy in Asian dress practices—it looks to also have increased the visual diversity of styling practices on the local level, as well as its blending and hybridisation in the 'glocal.' On the global level, though, there is less diversity; globalised style has also globalised the communities that use these styles, with the result that, as Helen Coffey wrote in the *Independent* a couple of years ago (whilst sitting in a craft brewery in Ho-Chi Minh City), hipster culture, particularly as it is spread by expatriate entrepreneurs, may be the new globalism. "Globalisation used to be synonymous with big chains making everywhere feel homogenous, killing off the local flavour of a neighbourhood store by store. A McDonald's in the Vatican. A Starbucks in a Japanese ski resort. A Domino's Pizza in Milan. But now the opposite creates identikit cities. The businesses in question may be staunchly independent, yet they all look and feel the same: hip, quirky and very, very Western," she argues (Coffey). These currents flow from East to West too. As Minh-Hà T. Pham points out in her work on Asian personal style bloggers, Japanese cultures of 'cute' now have global reach, and the distinctive products and approaches of K-Beauty and K-Style are following them (Pham, 35). As I write this, K-Pop band BTS have the number one selling album of the week in the UK. They are the first Korean band to do this, and indeed BTS's video for "Spring Day" (2017), Suk-Young Kim argues, engages with both the Sewol ferry disaster and the consequences of fast fashion by presenting its wasteland in the form of a pile of abandoned clothes (11). The sheer reach of the spread of global brands, and globalised styles, might be seen as monstrous, both in unstoppability and ubiquity.

Nevertheless, the motivations of consumers are generally, like Victor Frankenstein's, not intentionally mendacious. Mary Mann, part of the collective who collated and organised the 639 surveys that form the bedrock of the collection *Women in Clothes*, recalls her mother saying that in the hospice where she works, "you notice sometimes people are happier when they're wearing their favorite thing. Obviously, they can't go anywhere. Nobody is going to see them. But still. It makes a difference" (Heti, Julavits, Shapton, Mann 86). Alison Guy and Maura Banim argue that a woman's relationship with her clothes is dynamic, based on ideas of "The woman I want to be," "The woman I fear I could be" and "The woman I am most of the time" (316). "The woman I want to be" might, paradoxically, be one we feel either we once were, or that is being overshadowed by current circumstances, and clothes offer a way to feel like we are changing that. Clothing choice also offers a way of approaching congruence in our non-verbal signals, and of making connections with others from that position of congruence, holding out the prospect of that same type of social affirmation the lonely Walton in *Frankenstein* dreams of ("I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me; whose eyes would reply to mine," "a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans," loc. 92), and that Frankenstein's creature longs for. Linda Grant's essays in *The Thoughtful Dresser* draw out this sense of a complex companionship with one's clothes to include a relationship not just with the people that clothes draw close or alienate, but, by proxy, with the clothes themselves and their remembered, imagined and hoped-for effects:

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> As if the textile itself has memory, formed as it does out of its intimate closeness with our bodies, a coat or a dress or a pair of trousers is a witness to the fact that once we went for a job interview, or on a hot date. Or that we got married. The dress was there with us, it's proof of who we once were. The clothes we wear, they comfort and protect us; they allow us to be who we want to be. They tell others what we want them to hear. We come to understand whether or not we can depend on them. There is the loyal comrade which, whenever we put it on, behaves just the same as it ever does; it reliably is the same from wearing to wearing. I'm here for you, it says. Don't worry, we'll get through this day together and I won't let you down. And there are those fickle acquaintances that sparkled at a party a month ago and now, released from the wardrobe, in a fit of pique insist on being too tight (when nothing else you have is too tight), or weirdly having changed colour into a shade which doesn't suit you. Or taking on the sudden appearance of that shopping catastrophe, the mistake. (loc. 1127)

The creation of or shopping for an item that reveals our desires and hopes for ourselves also lays us open to the shame of vulnerability. This is in part what is happening when an outfit is too formal, too casual or too revealing for its occasion. Clothing is not always the *doppelgänger* it might be because garment choices can also sometimes fail to mirror the wearer's intentions. Sophie Woodward's ethnography in *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007) gives an excellent scholarly exegesis of the many nuanced judgments that might be made in the act of dressing; as Woodward makes clear throughout her book, there is an ongoing and subtle negotiation between our feelings about ourselves and our feelings about our garments, and both are subject to constant change. The moment at which Frankenstein abandons his creation is the moment it is born, but also the moment it fails him aesthetically. "By the glimmer of the half-extinguished light," Victor sees "the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs," and then a visceral disgust takes over:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room. (loc. 630)

There is a case for considering aesthetic recoil as part of the more general set of conditions that the movement towards 'emotionally durable design,' first broached in Jonathan Chapman's book of that name, looks to overcome. "In designing perfection, you also design an unstable and highly vulnerable relationship between subject and object. The moment that fragile illusion of perfection falls under threat, so too does the relationship that is founded upon it," he argues (131). "Durability is just as much about desire, love and attachment, as it is fractured polymers, worn gaskets or blown circuitry," he continues (131). The fragility of relationship with objects is even more pointed in the fashion system which at present works almost entirely on the allure of the new. As Kate Fletcher observes, "fashion posits an idealized moment before time enters, before the garment has been on the body of an actual person" (2014, 13). Frankenstein's creature could never live up to the "beauty of the dream," and a garment held up to an ideal newness will always be orphaned faster than one that is not.

This recoil against putative imperfection is another part of what makes home sewing still a minority alternative to fast fashion. For beginners especially, sewing mistakes may show, fabric quality may be lower than ready-to-wear if the maker has been practicing with cheaper materials, fabric choice and fit may be unintentionally idiosyncratic, and shape may be unusual (Holroyd, 84-89, 189). Mistakes in a ready-to-wear garment would relegate that garment to the manufacturer's waste or seconds pile, but mistakes in a home-made garment are often let stand, balanced by the hours of more or less successful work already undertaken. Nevertheless, the comments throughout "Me Made May" suggest that this is felt under current conditions as a small act of social bravery. Other websites seek to remedy this, offering sewists advice on how to make work look 'hand-made' rather than 'home-made,' but by switching home-made for hand-made and tacitly leaving intact an opposition between these amateur modes and ready-to-wear, the touch and labour of clothes made in a globalised market by garment workers abroad are erased: ready-to-wear garments are also hand-made. As Mark Sumner points out, "fast fashion's overproduction and overconsumption of clothing is based on the globalisation of indifference towards these manual workers" (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 3); whilst the consumption

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of clothing from a globalised system provides growth and employment opportunities for low-income countries, it also, he reminds us, "leaves them with the bulk of the environmental and social costs" (5). Indeed, as Tim Marshall details, Victor Frankenstein's connections to the grave-robbing that often stocked medical dissection rooms also saw him working with the bodies of those who were too poor to afford the protection of the new leaden coffin, registered in 1817, the year before *Frankenstein's* publication (58).

The call for 'slow fashion' and entreaties such as Vivienne Westwood's, to "Buy less, choose well, make it last" (Devaney), and Kate Fletcher's call to consider a "craft of use" (2016), suggest that part of the solution to sustainability is also to reanimate cultures of mending and care. Latour argues that "our iniquity is not that we created our technologies, but that we have failed to love and care for them. It is as if we decided that we were unable to follow through with the education of our children" (20). Latour is writing about the human relationship with scientific invention as one where, Frankenstein-like, new technologies are launched and abandoned to development and 'unintended consequences,' but this metaphor might be taken more literally when those abandoned objects are clothing. Practical skills across the disciplines are currently side-lined in British schools in favour of English and STEM [Science Technology Engineering and Maths] subjects, and indeed the *Fixing Fashion* report suggests to the UK government that textile education, including mending, be re-prioritised in British schools to combat deskilling. The "Transition Network" initiative seeks to create entire Transition towns where these skills are actively fostered across the population. The issues felt with the time-intensity of many of the more sustainable solutions such as mending or refashioning also points towards the underlying problems of overwork and income inequality that make fast food, fast fashion and fast furniture so attractive in the first place to exhausted, time-poor or low-income consumers. Textiles education might well also educate consumers about what might make a 'good choice,' in Westwood's terms, although this too is a nuanced debate. Fast fashion offers what might feel, especially if consumers have difficult lives, or lower or precarious incomes, like taking an emotional 'good choice' to experience access to abundance and variety: "Discounters ma[k]e ordinary folks feel rich by putting a wide selection of goods within easy reach of all but the most meager budgets. Someone ha[s] to pay, of course, but that someone need not be the customer," Ruppel Shell writes.

**(v)**
Ingrid Fetell Lee's work on affective design in *Joyful* (2018) suggests that there are certain material properties or sets of resonances that occur in environments where humans are, in general, happier. Associated qualities such as energy, abundance, surprise, harmony and renewal form the basis of the enchantment of, for example, confetti, or spring blossom, or bright colours, and it is not difficult to see how these kinds of emotions might feed both the allure of the high street and of new clothes. Some of the enticement of shopping for clothes may be speaking to a periodic need for self-renewal, or at least the imagination of self-renewal, and it is these desires that make entreaties to buy less and own things longer difficult to weigh against an attraction to the new, however unsustainable. Experimental clothing technologists such as Studio XO are therefore looking to pave the ways towards giving this delight and enchantment more sustainably by designing "interactive and evolving" future garments that might run from apps where the print, colour or pattern is re-programmed by the wearer each morning (*The Next Black).* Re-styling old clothes in a manner that gives a new experience or permutation offers a present-day way to do this; another may be clothes-swapping with friends. Even swapping, though, has its affective difficulties, and one of the hurdles for the sustainable clothing movements is that the alternatives to fast fashion can, under current social conditions at least, often cross the fine line of excitement to take the consumer into the realms of more 'gothic' emotions such as shame and disgust. "I love to borrow but hate to lend. Sometimes I make up excuses about wanting to wear items of my own wardrobe so others can't wear them. I never understand where this sheer meanness comes from, but it happens and I hate it. I fear our slow homogenization," says one respondent in *Women in Clothes*" (18). "To me, clothes are really personal, so I'm offended that someone would think that she and I are interchangeable," says another (285).

For Bruno Latour, sustainability requires a view of "the process of human development as neither liberation from Nature nor as a fall from it, but rather as a process of becoming ever-more attached to, and intimate with, a panoply of nonhuman natures" (20). This is in keeping with post-human approaches such as those articulated through Jane Bennett's call for attention to "vibrant materiality" (vii), as well as more on-the-ground approaches such as the 'New Materialism' outlined by Andrew Simms and Ruth Potts who argue that "Liking 'stuff' is okay, healthy even" and urge us to "wherever practical and possible develop lasting relationships with things by having and making nothing that is designed to last less than 10 years," and to "love stuff—mend, maintain and re-use things until it is no longer possible, then

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recycle them" (Holroyd 15; Simms and Potts 27). This is a distinct move away from arguments that imply that commodity fetishism should be replaced by an ascetic renunciation, in part because the renunciation and devaluation of the material looks like it is powering the global systems of overconsumption and over-quick disposal. Instead, these thinkers propose that the emotions of desire, hope and attachment which help feed commodity fetishism are acknowledged and channelled in support of a more durable, slower, cooperative co-existence. Debates about clothing, as Alice Payne points out, mirror current environmental debates where theorists such as Latour see a way forward in using textile technology better to tame the ecological Anthropocene, whereas commentators such as Fletcher and Holroyd write effectively of forms of garment "rewilding" which, she argues, attempts to "seize back fashion as cultural expression from industry's neomania and profit motive." "Fashion-as-industry may be bound to the imperative of constant change in the form of new garments" she argues, "but fashion-as-culture need not be. Humble rewilding actions may include making, mending, repairing, hacking of existing clothing—and promoting these activities to 'users' rather than to the more passive audience of 'consumers'" (14).

More optimistic stories of the continuing, post-manufacture, entwinement of human and non-human than *Frankenstein* might thus be seen, alongside the recuperation of the stories of labour, as a potential part of this movement away from fast fashion. Indeed, Emily Spivak's collection *Worn Stories* (2016) presents 'sartorial memoirs': "The clothes that protect us, that make us laugh, that serve as a uniform, that help us assert our identity or aspirations, that we wear to remember someone—in all of these are encoded the stories of our lives. We all have a memoir in miniature living in a garment we've worn," she writes (7). For this reason, one of Fashion Revolution's strategies for sustainable consumption is the love story: "fall back in love with the things you already own. Share a story or write a love letter about an item of clothing that means a lot to you," they urge. Kate Fletcher sees the future of sustainability in a post-growth model of fashion that looks to move past the current paradigm where identity is based in consumption and which settles it instead into a relationship that moves beyond the moment of first encounter into the many resourceful and creative ways in which wearers already tend, remake, and live in their clothes (2016, 14). This is what is so enjoyable about reading the responses of Julavits, Shapton, Heti, Mann and 639 others in *Women in Clothes*— real world thinking about these objects is so much broader, intimate and idiosyncratic than anything coming out of the fashion presses, with their advertising-led remit to encourage purchasing. Frankenstein's recoil against the imperfection of his creature needed to change, as the individual appeals of the new and the now of the fashion system needs to change. Fletcher argues:

> we need prudence, self-control and willpower—but these are qualities that are very difficult to maintain against a backdrop of cheap, instant gratification, and that can only be cultivated through time, training and a process of social learning and education. Perhaps, then, what we need are fashion systems that promote precisely these traits, by evoking an idea of commitment to long-term security as a counterweight to the call of the individual, immediate moment. We need to change the social narrative, so that the idea of progress is no longer tied to economic growth through increasing the number of market transactions alone, and old patterns can begin to shift. We need to build a more integrated picture of social and material assets and connections, using fashion as a medium. ("In the Hands" 13)

Fast fashion, however, is not often able to sustain a 'craft of use' because its creations are frequently of insufficient quality to survive as clothes in the long term. Materially they linger in landfill or recycling bundles, but, again, creature-like, their physical degeneration may make it difficult to feel affection for, or indeed to wear, these garments. The worn patina of a 'favourite dress,' or the textile equivalent of this - texture, colour, 'hand' perhaps - is also part of an ongoing affection for clothes. A cotton or linen garment that washes until it is beautifully soft, jeans that are broken in, or fabric bleached by the sun, or by multiple washes, is often a garment we prefer to a new one. Equally, though, a bra that has greyed or a jumper that has pilled or pulled might be felt to give out social signals that we might not wish to own. Ways of reviving surface such as home-dyeing, brightening, de-pilling, deodorising, ironing, starching and weekly laundry are everyday negotiations of this, albeit again, not fully sustainable ones. Part of sustainability, then, is looking to how materials age and not, as Victor Frankenstein did, overlooking the processes of decay—"Remember, I am thy creature," Frankenstein's monster prompts.

Other alternatives are developing, too. Textile technology research by Susanne Lee at Biocouture currently includes fabrics made from microbial cellulose which is grown in a laboratory from a 'mother' in a manner similar to the brewing of kombucha. The organisms multiply to fill the shape of their container and then are made into fabric to producing a material with very low waste at the start of its lifecycle. Future developments might involve a self-healing garment where the cellulose grows back to repair itself (*The Next Black*). From this perspective, Frankenstein's laboratory, his "workshop of filthy

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creation," might also become part of the future of sustainability as clothes are instead 'parented' by microorganisms. This solution too, though, offers complex emotional challenges. Many people I have spoken to about the idea of brewing microbial garments in a vat respond to its science-fiction qualities with a sense of bodily disgust, again feeling the common recoil from bacteria and matter that teems with life (to return to William Ian Miller's terms). In order to pass into use bio-engineered fabrics their marketers might come to actually invoke one form of the 'forgetting' that I have written about above. The manufacturing industries currently use vocabulary that is already potentially gothicised; a garment has a 'cradle to grave' lifecycle, and that which does not sell is referred to as 'deadstock.' Challenging this might also mean coming to terms with these gothic elements in the sense that a recycled garment is a reanimated one (known as 'cradle to cradle' design), and we may wish to consider wearing 'deadstock,' or textiles that are brewed from microorganisms, or that are mechanically cloned, or, as Bolt Threads does, that use yeast to produce the liquid proteins of spider silk (https://boltthreads.com/).

Similarly, second-hand clothing offers another way to lengthen the lifecycle of a garment, but this too has its emotional challenges, this time in the form of the abject. If new clothing is part of a monstrous global gothic, second-hand clothing also has its gothic dimensions. Many people in Europe and North America currently do not want to wear thrifted clothing not just because it has historically signified poverty in those regions, but because it signifies a boundary violation and provokes fear of contamination; marks of wear, and the smell of inhabitation may bring the wearer of secondhand clothes too close to the previous owner (Clark and Palmer, 3). In Julia Kristeva's terms, if they feel the life of the previous owner in the garment, and the proximity of that unknown bodily life to our own skins, "The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into banished, fascination into shame" (8). 'Forgetting' may be the way that those who do use second-hand clothing negotiate the potential for abjection. Karen Tranberg Hansen writes of how the second-hand clothing trade in Zambia has a hierarchy where Western clothes, shipped out as part of the resale schemes that form part of the charity clothing chain in high income countries, are worth less if they look like they have been worn by Zambians than if they look fresh from the *saluda* bales (113). Here it is the perceived proximity and relative status of the local user that taints, not the second-hand nature of the garment. In another hopeful re-inflection of the Frankenstein story, this distinction offers some hope for schemes that hope to create a circular supply chain for garment production. Reclaiming fabric from used garments for re-stitching might be able to circumvent the threat of abjection under current social norms if it is re-merchandised and rebranded, substituting a designer, shop or remaker as point of origin. By moving to another space for reorganisation these leased clothes may be allowed to shed the stories of their previous wearers' bodies in preparation for new ones to be assigned.

In the absence of way in which to radically overhaul current cultural revulsions and stigmas about other human bodies (a stigma which Shelley's *Frankenstein* tells us is at least as old as the industrial revolution), ensuring the happy longevity of very intimate objects such as clothing needs us to work continually to remember the stories of and act respectfully towards the makers of global garments, and to allow ourselves to try out new ways of living with clothes that may necessitate forgetting more proximate stories that appear to us currently as somewhat monstrous. Either way, sustainability in the garment industry depends on the management of the potent kinds of affect linked to the clothes we wear. Frankenstein's creature lived on after his abandonment to tell a story which was essentially an allegory of learning, couched in terms that might move the listener to empathy. Despite this, Victor and the creature were overwhelmed by emotions that led to destruction, and Shelley gives this to us as tragedy by letting us know that their relationship could have happened differently had Frankenstein cared for his creature over the longer term. As Fletcher writes, new garments "should be judged not for what they are at the point of sale, but for what they are capable of becoming" ("In the Hands" 13).

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