

Weaving Connections

Introduction - Closets to Climate Crisis



FOR PROFIT FASHION *and the Climate Crisis*

Fast fashion is one of the biggest contributors to the climate crisis, causing ecological degradation, biodiversity loss, and social injustice from the initial point of design all the way to delivery. It's business model **mass produces high fashion designs at 'low costs'**, creating '52 seasons' of output. The industry [produces over 100 billion garments a year and 87% of these will end up in a landfill or an incinerator](#) (approx. 40 million tons).

Not only do the profits of the [US\\$ 1.7 trillion](#) industry remain in the hands of a few owners and investors, the **for-profit economy creates and perpetuates** low wages and unsafe working conditions, pollution, soil erosion, toxic waste, child labor, and inequalities **as the cost of doing business.**

Clothing is killing us, but capitalism is the culprit. By hypnotizing us into believing that our personal wants trump the collective needs and societal wellbeing, this economic system has **normalized competition and idealized individualism.** As the fashion industry continues on its destructive growth path to chase profits, it promotes and cultivates delusions of grandeur that only [fill in the brand] can deliver. Meanwhile, **consumers continue** to chase 'dreams' (equating happiness with accumulation), all the while **remaining ignorant** to (or intentionally ignoring) how their **purchases contribute to the climate crisis.**



OVERCONSUMPTION *and the Disconnect*

Over the past several decades, the fast fashion industry has created a ‘**new normal**’ for **consumers** where buying quality over quantity clothing has gone out of fashion. Today, we **no longer** save up to pay the [true cost](#) of a well-made garment - the one that is crafted to last and constructed with natural fibers. **Immediate gratification is what we are conditioned to expect.**

Cost, convenience and quantity influence our buying decisions these days and most consumers choose cheap (cost and construction), convenience (click to buy or return) and quantity (more, rather than coveted, clothing). It is not entirely our fault. In fact, the fashion industry has **applied** [behavioral insights](#) (the study of why we act as we do) to **influence our purchasing habits**. In doing so, we’ve not only consumed and discarded more.

Most **consumers don’t realize that clearing their overconsuming conscience and closets** by donating their unwanted wares to ‘charity’ only contributes to the fashion industry-induced climate crisis problem, as only [1% of discarded clothing is actually recycled](#).

If instead of donating or discarding, **consumers wore their clothing for nine months longer**, carbon, water, and waste footprints would be [reduced by around 20–30%](#) according to a research report by Waste and Resources Action Program (WRAP).



SECONDHAND *Supply Not Solution*

The **secondhand market** (valued at [US\\$ 177 billion](#)) **utilizes** the donated and discarded textile ‘waste’ and turns them into ‘wants’ by diverting textiles from landfills and sorting the good from the bad and the ugly. Quality made garments are then **resold** to budget conscious buyers, luxury brand seekers and/or vintage lovers primarily in countries of the global north and **shipping off the lower grade garments to global south countries.**

Shopping secondhand is gaining traction. According to ThredUp (one of the largest online platforms for secondhand apparel), it’s annual [2023 Resale Report](#) stated that **over half of Americans** have shopped secondhand. So, that’s good, right?



In some ways, yes. However, **secondhand retailers don’t sell all** their merchandise and **must also find channels to divert their surplus stock.** They, too, need a place for the ‘waste.’

Despite initially diverting these donations, **around 87% of discarded textiles globally end up in landfills anyway**, of which more than 90% are reusable and recyclable. Why? Because fast fashion - poorly made and of **non-biodegradable fabrics** - [accounts for 88%](#) of the clothing industry. This lower grade secondhand stock is increasingly rejected by the global south consumers that it’s being dumped on.

By continuing to produce new non-biodegradable clothing at unsustainable rates, the curse of fashion will continue.



ALTERNATIVES *Degrowth + Business*

Businesses - whether for profit or non profit - operate in a similar fashion: they employ, take in revenue and provide goods and services. The difference, of course, is that the **purpose of non profits** is to increase societal and ecological wellbeing that **benefits all**, while **profit-driven companies reward** only the owners and shareholders **as they grow**. For profit corporations like ThredUp - despite their focus on secondhand - are no exception.

Can degrowth show us the way? According to researcher Schneider, F. (2010), [degrowth](#) is the downscaling of production and consumption while enhancing wellbeing. The economic theory and activist movement **prioritizes purpose, people and the planet over profits**. Degrowth is not 'business as usual.'

By applying a degrowth lens, researcher Nesterova, I. (2020) describes a [degrowth business model](#) as having **three elements** that focus on benefiting (and not harming) **the environment and people**, and **deviating from the profit maximization imperative**.

An example of a degrowth-aligned business is the **first secondhand shopping mall - ReTuna** - in Sweden that opened its doors in 2015. Designed to help **tackle rising consumption on a local level**, ReTuna is owned by the **municipality Eskilstuna Energi och Miljö (EEM)**, ReTuna is operated for the **benefit of its residents rather than private profit**.



According to the ReTuna website, “**ReTuna is more than just a marketplace. It also aims to be a public educator.** ReTuna organizes **events, workshops, lectures**, theme days, and more – all with a **focus on sustainability.**”

According to a [CNN](#), “In Sweden, **four other municipalities are aiming to start similar initiatives**, while in neighboring Norway, a second-hand mall in the town of Hamar has been given the greenlight...”

ReTuna is an innovative example of using degrowth by putting degrowth principles into practice - environment (**local reuse of discarded clothing**), people (**benefiting communities**) and deviating from profit (**municipality-owned**).



MODEL FOR CHANGE *Public Library Partnerships*

Public libraries. They, too, are **municipality-owned** entities that **focus on benefiting** the people they serve. They are the cornerstone of communities, **providing a physical space** where people are welcome to gather and learn in a supportive, inclusive environment. **Considered a ‘third place,’** (social surroundings other than work and home), public libraries are **important designations for creating and fostering connectedness.**

As a provider of **books, workshops and events for free, public libraries** are another great example of a **degrowth-aligned business model.**

While digital readership is up at public libraries, **visitation has [dropped by 21%](#) since 2009** and with it, dwindling community engagement. In response, **libraries offer a myriad of new programming** to increase visitation like [seed libraries](#), [tool libraries](#) and [library of things](#).

This kind of forward-thinking, community beneficial programming **incorporates the familiar public library model** (borrow for free for a set amount of time), **convenient locations** (often built in neighborhoods for easy access), and **existing database** (of public library members) to increase the potential of **early and widespread adoption.** With the **existing network of public libraries** across the nation, **alternative models** such as these **can spread** while remaining true to each community's **local needs.**