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Not too shabby: what will it take to make secondhand clothes mainstream?

Through mending, lending and adopting a fast-fashion ethos, secondhand shopping is slowly shaking off its stigma in Australia.

When it comes to fashion, we didn't always have a fetish for newness.

Just ask historian Robyn Annear. The way she tells it in her new book, *Nothing New: A History of Second-Hand*, the Industrial Revolution changed everything. Before then most of humanity wore secondhand. (...)

Once factory-made clothes came on the market, "people were encouraged to buy new stuff and to want new stuff and to afford new stuff," Annear says. The quality wasn't always amazing, but new clothes were marketed as respectable, hygienic, even patriotic. Of course, they were also on budget, and on-trend.

Because the new stuff looked so new, it made the old stuff look *old*. So secondhand became a charity case, fit only for those who had no other choice. In the popular western imagination, old clothes symbolised poverty or sloppiness or neglect. (...)

But now that stereotype has grown a bit old too. One recent study from the US online thrifting platform thredUP predicted that America's secondhand apparel market will double in the five years from 2018 (US\$24bn¹) to 2023 (US\$51bn). (...)

So what makes secondhand work for 21st-century eyes used to novelty and mass production? The thredUP model is geared towards an Instagram-friendly, outfit of the day churn, where customers update their looks fast. Ownership doesn't last forever. The secondhand outfit is purchased, worn, enjoyed, uploaded to socials, and then recycled back into the sales network. (...)

So how do we make secondhand work for us now? We shop smart, we mend and embellish and, if needed, we lie. The cult of newness hasn't unravelling just yet. But its secondhand challenger isn't looking too shabby either.

Jo Walker, theguardian.com, November 19th, 2019

1. bn = billion