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## Entanglements of a Dress Named Laverne: Threads of Meaning between Humans and Things (and Things)

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**Abstract:** This is a narrative about a dress named Laverne and a woman named Elizabeth told through Ian Hodder's proposition about entanglements. Elizabeth Withey wrote a blog called *Frock Around the Clock* about her lived experience of wearing the black dress "Laverne" every day for one year. Through Hodder's three themes of entanglement — humans depend on things, things depend on things, and things depend on humans — the interdependencies between a woman and a dress are uncovered. Laverne is a thread within a web of other threads of entanglement driven by her relationship with a person. This is demonstrated through Hodder's illustration of sequential staging and the vast network of things required for Laverne's existence. Laverne and Elizabeth's interdependent relationship is further developed through a close examination of their interactions, including how Laverne is reliant on Elizabeth to acquire and maintain agency. In turn, Elizabeth finds comfort during a tumultuous year by constructing and reconstructing her identity with Laverne as a kind of transitional object. Our discussion concludes by offering three general insights into the entangled and complex human-clothing relationship. The complexities of a human relationship and interactions with a dress are exposed in this case study through an in-depth dive into slow fashion that reveals significant insights into the entangled relationships and interactions people have with clothing.

Keywords:

Blog  
Case Study Research  
Lived Experience  
Reflexive Research  
Slow Fashion

# Introduction

On the surface, human-thing relationships and interactions appear to be uncomplicated, similar to how humans aspire to have uncomplicated relationships and interactions with each other. In reality, relationships and interactions are filled with explicit and implicit details and expectations, making them extremely complex.<sup>1</sup> People relate to, interact with, and use things from the time they wake up (e.g. sheets, alarm clocks, towels), during morning commutes (e.g. buses, fuel, walking shoes, coats), when at the office (e.g. computers, pens, coffee mugs, suits, ties), at lunch and dinner meals (e.g. pots, plates, forks, tablecloths, napkins), and until the time their bodies sink into bed (e.g. toothbrushes, reading lamps, pajamas, pillows, comforters). For the most part, many human-thing interactions often go unnoticed and are considered quite banal, with the exception of when people comment on the things that do not work as expected or the tediousness inherent in taking care of things (e.g. washing the laundry, repairing a missing button, finding a blouse that matches a skirt). This article unravels the relationship between one woman (a writer) and one thing (a simple black dress). Throughout our exploration of the human-thing relationship and interactions, we begin to untangle a web of threads that reveal characteristics on the nature of a dress as a thing and the inherent interdependencies that thing has with a person and other things. This web of threads is complicated, dynamic, messy, and riddled with shifting agency.

<sup>1</sup> Complexity theory in terms of human-thing relationships has been a topic of interest for nearly four decades. Along with Hodder (2012) see, for instance, Callon (1986), Law and Urry (2004), Barad (2007), and Ingold (2008).

Ian Hodder's seminal book, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (2012) explores the entangled relationships and interactions between humans and things. Scholars of fashion studies and material culture rely on theories to guide their understandings of the world, including human-thing relationships. Yet Hodder indicates that scholars should no longer simply look at theories alone; they must also explore how theories work in relation to other theories both within their discipline, and beyond (14). As such, in his book on entanglement, Hodder brings together various theories into a more holistic proposition called entanglement. Hodder's proposition asks two central questions: how are researchers entangled with their work, and how do humans and things relate to, and depend on, one another and vice versa — he presents these questions in the quest to better understand the agency and complexities of humans and things. For Hodder, dependence is defined as "reliance on" and as being contingent on the particular thing relied upon (17). Hodder explains that his focus of the word is on "the ways in which humans go towards and identify with things while at the same time trying to shrug off, deny or forget the identification and dependence" (17). He does not elaborate upon the term interdependence; however, meaning is implied through his account on the multiplicity of human-thing, thing-human, and thing-thing dependencies. For our narrative, and due to the results of our case study that we detail throughout this article, we expand on Hodder's wording from dependence to interdependence. While Hodder's overarching conceptualization of human-thing relationships seems large and all encompassing, he summarizes human-object relationships with three key themes: humans depend on things, things depend on things, and things depend on humans. These three tenets point to the complexity of human-thing relationships and interactions and provide a unique means of exploring the depth and breadth of the meaning of things in people's lives.

In order to gain some traction in developing understanding, we explore the relationship and interactions between one woman and one thing.<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge that in doing so, we are looking to another thing: the woman's blog. In our research and this article, the blog is an important actor<sup>3</sup> that was examined because it holds the contents that illustrate the specific interactions that Elizabeth had with Laverne. As researchers, we are fortunate to encounter a project that allows unique explorations,<sup>5</sup> and in the case of this project we are fortunate to know the woman (Elizabeth),<sup>4</sup> the dress (Laverne), and to have access to the blog. We are very grateful to Elizabeth for documenting her unique experience of wearing the same black dress every day for one year. We also acknowledge that as two researchers we have unique values and views on clothing and fashion, and in the spirit of Hodder have engaged in our research reflexively (see authors' biographies).

<sup>2</sup> While some scholars use the words "thing," "object," and "stuff" interchangeably, Hodder specifically uses the word "thing." He writes, "The word 'object' derives from the idea of throwing in the way. We are more likely to use the word object for things that are relatively stable in form— so while we might call a cloud a thing, we might be less likely to call it an object...The term 'object' is very tied up in a long history which opposes subject and object, mind and matter, self and other" (*Entangled* 7).

<sup>3</sup> Various scholars such as Latour, Law, Callon, de Laet and Mol, Barad, Ingold, Hodder, Bennett, Michael and others propose that "actors" are comprised of both humans and nonhumans. Within fashion studies scholars such as Smelik (2008), Parkins (2008), Kaiser and Reboloso McCullough (2010) and Entwistle (2016) have begun to propose and explore clothing studied from this non-anthropocentric perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Author one knows Elizabeth socially but the goal of this article was to analyze the dress through the blog only and not to interview Elizabeth. Interviewing Elizabeth is for potential future research.

<sup>5</sup> The authors know the dress Laverne only through the written words of the blog and photographs; neither author has seen the dress in person.

Along with having particular relationships with clothing as women, consumers, makers, and researchers, we look to Hodder's three themes of entanglement as a lens to disentangle Elizabeth Withey's blog about her interactions with the black dress. Elizabeth's blog, *Frock Around the Clock*, introduced the dress on January 1st, 2015. She writes candidly and passionately about her lived experience during, around, with, and about life while exclusively wearing this one dress through the year, along with various accessories and other garments. In Elizabeth's first blog post she gave the dress the name "Laverne" (Withey, "Introducing Laverne"). Laverne happened to be the style-name chosen by the designers of Workhall Studio, and Elizabeth thought it was fitting to refer to it by this name. Throughout this article we will refer to Elizabeth's black dress as she did and call it Laverne.



**Figure 1:** Laverne, the black dress. Elizabeth Withey. "Introducing Laverne," *Frock Around the Clock*, 1 Jan. 2015, <http://frockaroundtheclock.tumblr.com/post/106845623573/introducing-laverne>.

## Fashioning Contextual Entanglements

Within fashion studies, as in many interdisciplinary fields, there have been various research moments that are all intrinsically linked to the dominant epistemologies of the time. These ways of knowing have taken fashion studies from structuralism to poststructuralism and have most recently landed on posthumanism.<sup>6</sup> The posthumanist turn,<sup>7</sup> situated in the work of Gibson which presents a more holistic ecology and interconnectedness of things (1977) led (for the most part) by scholars such as Latour (2000, 2005), Ingold (1993, 2008, 2011), Hodder (2012), and others, contextualizes and interconnects humans with nonhuman agents into a complex assemblage that breaks down dualism and proposes a less anthropocentric view. Within posthumanism there is an emphasis on considering materiality differently, which then has deep consequences surrounding how scholars can consider objects of study such as clothing. On the surface, Latour, Ingold, and Hodder appear to present similar theories, when in fact Latour's notion of actor-network theory, Ingold's proposition of meshworks, and Hodder's theory of entanglement differ significantly. Despite variances in these theories, they all present a kind of "new materialism" (Rocomora and Smelik 12) that is a re-appreciation of material and sensory aspects (Smelik 49) of the designed world. It therefore naturally follows that scholars of fashion studies have begun to explore "...fashion as materially co-produced in a complex network of interconnected human and non-human actors" (Smelik 49). There is some evidence of scholars exploring new materialism, such as Kaiser and Rebolloso McCullough's (2010) research on "entangling" fashion through a case study on the African diaspora, and Entwistle and Slater's (2013) critical review of actor-network theory, as well as Entwistle's (2016) research on the potential for fashion studies scholars to "focus on the whole life history of clothes and people's relationship to them as material objects" (272) through actor-network theory. Furthermore, research on the material culture of clothing (Miller 2010; Woodward 2007; and Woodward and Fisher 2014) and research in affect theory and fashion (such as Crepax 2018; and Sampson 2018), suggests that exploring material culture, affect, and/or entanglement towards an analysis of fashion leads towards a more contextual and relational knowledge and therefore a better understanding of new materialism. Consequently, with the relatively limited number of studies that focus on theories presented in new materialism, the case study presented in this article aims to put the theory of entanglement to work in order to present knowledge about fashion studies in an alternative way. This is accomplished through a method that embraces a kind of research assemblage that complements the very nature of the material trace studied: a blog.

<sup>6</sup> See Rocomora and Smelik (2016) for a summary on pages 7-15 of posthumanism and "new materialism" in fashion studies and Strickfaden and Brown (2016) for a brief summary on page 385 about posthumanism.

<sup>7</sup> When reviewing Braidotti (2013), Herbrechter (2013) indicates that the heart of posthumanism is: "The decline of human(ist) exceptionalism, the crisis of 'anthropos', and thus the current challenges to traditional anthropocentric world views..." (2). This perspective provides an opening up for fields of study that focus on object or thingness, such as design and fashion studies. For more on posthumanism see, for example, Barad (2003) on posthumanist performativity and Braidotti (2013) on posthumanist theory in general.

## A Reflexive Case Study Research Assemblage

The information contained in blogs are “assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari 2002) that are reconstructions and representations of fragments of the practices of being in the world with objects such as clothing. Further, blogs are material evidence of individual experiences that are like other forms of material evidence; they are embedded with abstract meanings that are in flux and depend on interpretations within context (Hodder, 2003). Blogs are becoming valued as sources of data<sup>8</sup> when studying fashion and dress, because they have the potential to demonstrate how the material traces of clothing are intrinsically contextualized with people and other things.

In the case of the blog reported in this article, the context is defined as including the researchers, the time period in which the interpretation of the blog took place, the time period in which Elizabeth wrote the blog, and the social positions of researchers and researched. As such, reflexivity (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000), a research practice often used in feminist qualitative research,<sup>9</sup> is central to the interpretation of the blog. Reflexivity played into the research process through the interpretation of the material traces of the blog, which was performed through writing (Kleinsasser 2010) and making enquiries into the tensions between text and context as these define and redefine the other (Hodder, “The Interpretation 157”). Using writing as data analysis, according to Kleinsasser, is the process of “untangling the personal and theoretical” (155) where the researcher engages in “deep learning and unlearning” (156). By using writing and conversations about writing as a data analysis approach, we embrace Geertz’s (1975) proposition that the qualitative researcher is like a data collection instrument, similar to how textile analysts study fabrics and fibres while looking through a microscope. We would argue that reflexivity is the best way to “tune” researchers into focus. Throughout the analysis of the blog we engaged in reflexive interpretation that was data driven and allowed for deep engagement with the written text and photographs created by Elizabeth in her blog.

Further, our study of Elizabeth’s blog can also be described as a case study that aimed to put the theory of entanglement to work and to provide an alternative way of thinking about clothing within a relational context that breaks down dualism. Case study research is increasingly valued within design studies<sup>10</sup> and is beginning to be used within fashion studies.<sup>11</sup> Case study research provides precedents for educators and designers to better connect theory with practice. According to Yin (2017), case study research supports explorations about relationality, communities, environments, and phenomenon, which lend themselves towards research assemblages that support understanding less hierarchical relationships between humans and nonhumans (Bennett 2010; Latour 2005; Smelik 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Some examples of studies on fashion that examine blogs and blogging are Orepax (2018) on androgyny and fashion through blog analyses using Tumblr; Rahmawati’s (2016) doctoral dissertation on Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs; Ehlin (2014) on reblogging fashion using Tumblr; Rocamore (2013) on digital self-portraits; and Connell (2013) on queer fat fashion blogging.

<sup>9</sup> Rice’s (2009) research on “the other” is an example of how feminist qualitative research is produced through reflexivity.

<sup>10</sup> For an argument on how case study research is valuable for the practice of designing see Buchanan and Breslin (2008).

<sup>11</sup> See for example case studies by Smelik (2018) on Iris van Herpen’s winter collection; Khan (2013) on mythology and Alexander McQueen; Jenkins (2013) on masculinity and sexuality in the new *Doctor Who*; and Michael (2000) on walking boots.

The case study reported here was based upon problematization rather than extensive literature reviews that focus on gap spotting (Sandberg and Alvesson). Problematization is about “challenging assumptions” (33) and is a way of “...rethinking established ideas and ways of ordering/freezing the social world into specific phenomena...” (33). It is less common than gap spotting but is considered a valid and creative way of conducting “disruptive research” (39) and is especially useful when an unique case is identified as having the potential to contribute to a field of study.<sup>12</sup> We took the opportunity to study Elizabeth’s blog about Laverne because we felt it was well suited to exploring the theory of entanglement, a theory that has the potential to produce alternative ways of thinking about clothing and can perhaps become another means for clothing practitioners to consider when designing clothing. In sum, the intention is not to report a case study in totality,<sup>13</sup> but to rather present a story about the case through the lens of the theory of entanglement.

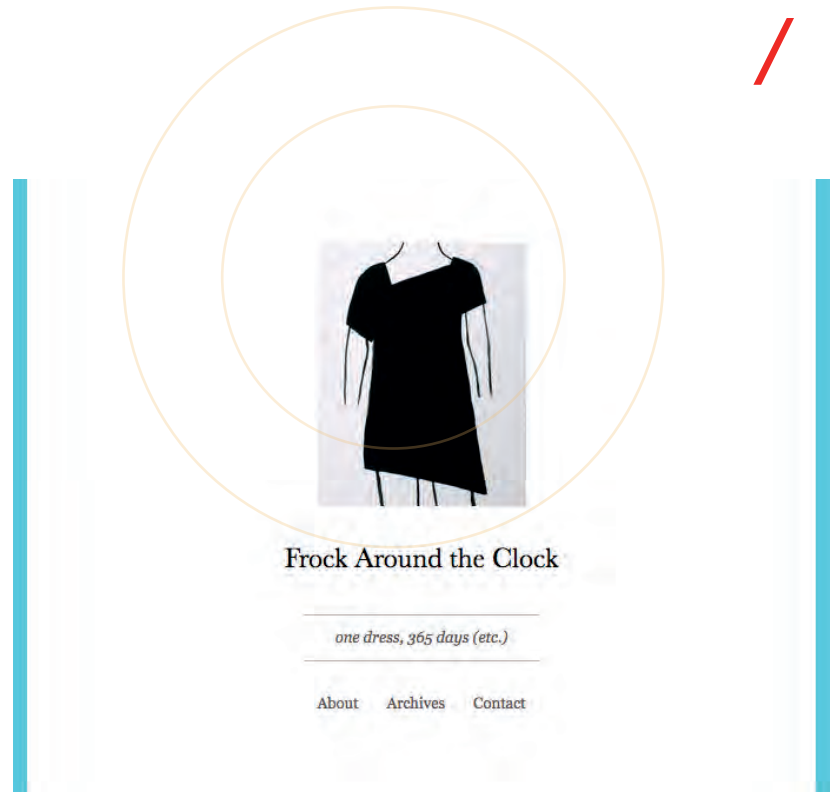
## The Case Study: A Woman and her Blog

Elizabeth Withey is a professional writer who set out to document her slow fashion experiment on a Tumblr blog. She committed to two key aspects: first, she would wear the same garment every day for a full year; second, she committed to stop buying clothing, accessories, jewelry, and shoes. Elizabeth’s mission was to document what it was like to disengage from consumerist and materialistic activities within the realm of fashion.<sup>14</sup> From the start, Elizabeth clearly stated her goal: “I like shopping, more than I’d like to admit. Clothing and fashion and the inherent materialism exert an annoying and sly dominance over my life, and I resent it. I would like to focus my energies on better things — my child, creative ideas, reading, my family and friends, wellness, dreams, anything, anything else” (Withey, “Introducing Laverne”). It seemed that purchasing fashion-related things was no longer bringing joy or meaning to Elizabeth’s life. In fact, it was clear that consumption was a burden that was linked to “inherent materialism” in the society Elizabeth found herself living in, where she felt she was accumulating things even when she did not really need them (Withey, “Introducing Laverne”). Elizabeth clearly felt a need to take action by making changes in her own practices of on-going consumption that included trying on clothing, pairing garments with other garments, repairing garments, and washing garments. Consequently, in the late months of 2014 *Frock Around the Clock* was born.

<sup>12</sup> This article pushes against normative ways of doing research and instead embraces a mode of doing research differently towards a kind of “...critical rethinking of...” (Sandberg and Alvesson 38/39) fashion studies research through problematization.

<sup>13</sup> This case study follows the concept proposed by Haraway (1988) that all research is partial fragments of reality. With the work reported herein, we acknowledge that the object of study (blog, dress, woman) and researchers are situated within positions of privilege.

<sup>14</sup> Ironically, instead of removing herself from these activities, Elizabeth deeply engages in consuming and maintaining the materiality of predominantly one item.



**Figure 2:** Screen shot of the *Frock Around the Clock* blog. Jessica Kennedy. *Frock Around the Clock*, <http://www.frockaroundtheclock.tumblr.com/>.

When *Frock Around the Clock* was launched Elizabeth was based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, though she currently resides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Elizabeth is trained as a professional writer who holds a Master’s degree from the University of Oxford and a postgraduate diploma in professional writing from the University of Victoria (Withey, “Bio”). She identifies herself as someone who likes clothing, but she does not consider herself to be a fashionista (Withey, “Frock Around the Clock in the news”). As a writer, Elizabeth is self-reflective and articulate, cares about style and clothing, and identified her relationship and interactions with clothing as perplexing and perhaps even overtly problematic by questioning the “sly dominance” clothing, accessories, jewelry, and shoes take in her life (Withey, “Introducing Laverne”).

Over the course of the 2015 year, Elizabeth published over sixty public posts documenting how she felt wearing Laverne for 365 days. Her blog posts reveal the struggles of the monotony of wearing the same garment each day, the demise (wear and tear) of Laverne, and how aspects of her personal life entangled with and evolved through the story of Laverne. While Elizabeth sought to write a blog about slow fashion, her candid style of writing about her experiences reveals a great deal about the interdependent relationship she had with Laverne. While the blog and Laverne is perhaps of interest to readers who have access to a computer and the internet (along with an interest in slow fashion) we must acknowledge that the narrative we unspool is one of privilege, inherent in Elizabeth’s (and the authors) ethnicities (or whiteness); location (as descendants of Euro-Canadian and American settlers); and social status (the freedom and time to reflect on, and enact change within, one’s wardrobe), among many other privileges. We also acknowledge that Elizabeth’s blog is simply one narrative, where she had access to a computer and a platform (Tumblr), and that she is an established voice within the literary community — many other narratives are not given this accessibility (which, again, speaks to the privilege inherent in *Frock Around the Clock*).





**Figure 3:** Elizabeth practicing yoga while wearing Laverne. Elizabeth Withey. “Look, Ma, I’m HALFWAY!” Frock Around the Clock, 1 Jul. 2015, <http://www.frockaroundtheclock.tumblr.com/post/122976116293/look-ma-im-halfway>

## Humans Depend on Things

Human-thing relationships and interactions are intimate, subjective, innate, and often taken for granted. People’s daily lives are ingrained with their dependency on things: layers of clothing to keep warm, shoes to identify who they are (e.g., feminine, sporty, professional), and jewelry that defines whether they are coupled or single (wedding and engagement rings). According to Hodder, (2012), “we have practical everyday needs for things, to eat, drink, clothe us, to comfort us, to delight us” (*Entangled* 19). There are times when we are reflective on our relationships with things, and other times we are unable to see our dependencies (19). Furthermore, Hodder also indicates that, “dependencies are not inherent in the things themselves but in the interactions between humans and things” (18). It is through people’s use of things that this dependence is formed, highlighting the entanglement between humans and things. It does not take much abstraction to understand that humans depend on clothing.

The real question, when it comes to this case study, is how exactly does Elizabeth depend on Laverne? To begin, Elizabeth’s dependence on Laverne is punctuated by the fact that Laverne has a name. Elizabeth could have easily have written “the black dress” or simply “the dress,” yet the dress is called Laverne and is even referred to as having a gender through the terms “she” or “her” (Withey, “Introducing Laverne”) and not just “it.” Interestingly, even in the most trying times with Laverne, Elizabeth never refers to her as an “it.” By naming Laverne, Elizabeth enters into a relationship with “her,” allowing for interactions with “her,” and making Elizabeth open to evolving with “her.” By untying Elizabeth’s dependence on Laverne, we identified two important themes: (1) that Laverne was instrumental in triggering a construction and reconstruction of Elizabeth’s identity; and (2) that Laverne acted as a kind of transitional object.

## Constructing and Reconstructing Identity

The self-identity of a person is a complex and dynamic concept, and it is well known that clothing plays a significant role in the formation of the self.<sup>15</sup> Sophie Woodward (2007) examines the complex question of women's self-identities in relation to clothing in her book *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. She looks into questions that women ponder when choosing what to wear each morning: Is this me? Can I pull this off? Does this outfit go together? Will this work for all of the places I will be at (office, playground, restaurant, etc.)? According to Woodward, answers to these seemingly innate questions are markers towards understanding how women construct and reconstruct their identities on a daily basis through what they wear. As Woodward explains, "identity through clothing is a process of construction through the materiality of clothing; it is also the moment at which the individual and the social and the ideal and the actual come together" (30). In her blog, Elizabeth wrote extensively about the (often) long and exhausting process of getting dressed.<sup>16</sup>

I am tired of trying to decide what to wear every morning, forever and ever amen. Tired of changing my mind, then unchanging my mind, then changing my mind some more after that. I am tired of trying this with that, and that with the other, and those with this, feeling fat or somehow ill-proportioned in some (OK, most) things.

Tired of harmonizing the outfit with my brassiere colour and panty lines. Tired of doing 360s in the full-length bedroom mirror under mercilessly bright lighting, all the while silently criticizing and self-loathing. Tired of muttering when the thing most needed is in the dirty laundry basket. Tired of humming and hawing, then soliciting the validation (or brutal honesty) of loved ones.

<sup>15</sup> Fashion studies scholars have looked to theorists such as Simmel (1904) and Bourdieu (1984) to better understand clothing and identity in relation to gender, age, and other factors. Seminal research into clothing and identity includes Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992), Feiberg, Mataro, and Burroughs (1992), Crane (2000), and Twigg (2009). Works on clothing and identity most closely related to this study are Freitas et al. (1997) and Kaiser and Reboloso (2010).

<sup>16</sup> This again speaks to the privilege inherent in Elizabeth's clothing experiment and blog. The experience Elizabeth refers to—the struggle of finding an outfit that "suits" her — not a universal phenomenon, but one that is intrinsically linked to the privilege she holds.

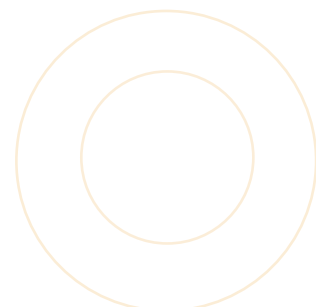
Tired of co-ordinating or deliberately clashing, digging through the bowl of earrings for something that goes or will at least do but won't blacken my earring holes, contemplating what the outfit says about me to the world, laundering, ironing, stain-removing, cursing the spills and snags and loose threads. Tired of reminding my son to keep his bacon fingers away from me because the grease will show on this particular fabric. Tired of ordering the dog to keep her snaggy claws down, DOWN! Tired of window shopping, wanting but not needing, purchasing, regretting, returning, coming up with reasons why the return should be honoured even past the return period, hiding new purchases from my spouse or under-reporting the cost, stewing in guilt, rationalizing, purchasing something else, and ooh that, too ...

I don't like how it's reduced me: to a materialist, a self-hating, never-good-enough covetous fool, a superficial materialistic consumer, a D-cup-wearing D-bag on a mission for more, more, more. (Withey, "Frock Around the Clock in the news")

We can read several things through Elizabeth's description of what getting dressed looked like for her on a daily basis when she had multiple clothing, accessories, jewelry, and shoe options. First, this particularly long quote from Elizabeth's blog mimics the rather arduous process Elizabeth describes on getting dressed. Second, Elizabeth acutely relays the dynamic actions and multiple actors involved in selecting what to wear within the context of her busy life with work, family, a pet, society, and her own body. She describes a human-thing dependency that she believes is unhealthy for her. It seems that Elizabeth's identity prior to meeting Laverne was not reflective of her values. She was unhappy with her self-image of being the wrong shape/size, needing validation, having her clothing (and purchases) affect her relationships, and being a "materialistic consumer" (Withey, "Frock Around the Clock in the news"). Committing to Laverne for a year was a means for Elizabeth to free herself from her indecisive and critical self. Additionally, Elizabeth seemed to hope that being emancipated from having to choose what to wear each day might even free her from constructing her identity. Interestingly, it did just the opposite: it made her more reliant on and deepened her relationship with Laverne, and supported a reconstructing of her identity through a single garment rather than through multiple garments.

It is clear through Elizabeth's writings in *Frock Around the Clock* that she relied on Laverne to construct her identity. This was illustrated by Elizabeth's rejection of her existing wardrobe and reliance on Laverne as her sole garment. When people demarcate what *is not* them, they begin to bring into clearer focus what is them (Hodder, *Entangled* 23), a concept that is also identified by Freitas et al. (1997) as "identity NOT" and Kaiser and Reboloso McCullough (2010), who extend "identity NOT" into "identity (K)nots" through the metaphor of knots as entanglements. As Hodder indicates, "as I identify with one thing I reject something else and so produce cultural and social boundaries" (*Entangled* 23). Through the rejection of her existing wardrobe — and all the behaviours and actions required to maintain it — Elizabeth rejected the multiple elements of the self-identity she associated with the ownership of her wardrobe.

By wearing a single dress, and committing to not purchasing any goods over the course of the year, Elizabeth made a dramatic shift in her identity by defining herself by the actions she would not take. She was in essence attempting to remove herself from what she perceived as a capitalist system imbued with consumption and materialism and instead placed herself in the milieu of slow fashion. It might also be described as an attempt to distance herself from what Otto Von Busch (2015) describes as fashion supremacy, which is "a structural regime of domination, where ideals of beauty and hierarchies of values are weapons of repression and where ideals reinforce submission ... It is also ingrained in the collective psyche of consumer society's dressed and embodied normativity" (276). Either way, it is a rejection of what is. Hodder proposes that, "our dependence on things often seems to involve trying to escape from them as much as it involves identifying with them" (2012, 21). Elizabeth's escape from dependence on multiple clothing options was trumped by her dependence on a single dress. Elizabeth depends on Laverne to define herself for "who she is not," which is explained by Hodder as being connected to the way that people's "cognitive action depends on external stimuli ... so the external environment becomes a key extension to our mind" (2012, 35). In short, Elizabeth would not be able to reflect upon and instigate change without the use of things (external stimuli/environment), meaning that as much as Elizabeth's intentions seemed to be a need to get away from things (clothing and her relationship and interactions with them), she still needed to depend on things (at least one dress) to do so.



## Transitional Objects as Things that Comfort

There are few certainties in life, but change is one of them. With this inevitability, objects have the ability to provide comfort to humans. In particular, transitional objects are temporal in nature because of the ways that they can assist people in providing solace during times of change. Hodder suggests, “things provide a psychological comfort after tragedy and loss. Things stimulate our cognitive capacities, flowing through our neural processes, leading to reflection upon reflection, creating pathways that stay with us” (*Entangled* 38). Transitional objects are those things that aid people in getting from one mindset to another in some way; for example, a child’s blanket can help them to learn to sleep by themselves or to feel better when their parents are not present. People often rely on transitional objects during difficult times; for instance, when author two’s grandfather passed away, her grandmother held one of his handkerchiefs in her handbag from the time of his death and then in her hand during his funeral. Interestingly, Laverne seems to act as a kind of transitional object for Elizabeth while she is going through the changes happening in her life during 2015. By default, Laverne became a thing of comfort largely because the dress had a constant presence in Elizabeth’s life. In *The Comfort of Things* (2008) anthropologist Daniel Miller describes the human-thing relationship as “material and social routines and patterns which give order, meaning and often moral adjudication to their lives; an order which, as it becomes familiar and repetitive, may also be a comfort to them” (296). For Elizabeth, the daily routine of wearing the same dress gave her a sense of order, routine, repetition, familiarity, and the opportunity to reflect upon her life — where it had been, where it was, and where it was going.

In 2015, while Elizabeth was writing *Frock Around the Clock*, she was faced with many changes, some anticipated and others unforeseen. For instance, Elizabeth started a new job, separated from her husband, sold her family home, moved into a new house, relinquished ownership of her pet dog, began joint custodial parenting, and had her son start kindergarten (Withey, “It wasn’t supposed to go this way,” “Transition is a hectic place,” “Cosmic yolk”). These numerous personal changes in Elizabeth’s life occurred in a relatively short period of time and with Laverne consistently present. Perhaps, because of what Elizabeth described as having her “life blow up” (Withey, “What I babbled about at brunch”), Laverne is easily described as a transitional object that helped guide her through it all. Elizabeth writes: “my dress has soaked up more than a few tears, curled up with me in bed on several occasions trying to shut out the negativity, the deceit, the humiliation and fury and grief. Laverne’s that strong, silent sort of friend who makes you feel better without saying a word, and she’s got a good shoulder to cry on, a soft, slightly linty one” (Withey, “*Frock Around the Clock* in the news”).

As Elizabeth faced the unexpected end of her marriage, just a few weeks into her slow fashion experiment, the bond took hold: “Laverne and I have been going through some sad stuff. We needed a change of scenery, needed to get out of Edmonton, just for a few days. We ran off to the desert to do some thinking non-thinking. Laverne is holding up beautifully. Me, less so” (Withey, “A note from the Mojave”). At this stage in their relationship and interactions, there is a softness when Elizabeth writes of Laverne, describing the dress as “classy, modern, easygoing, cool, forgiving, tough, smart, well-travelled, but true to her roots, incredibly versatile and – best of all—a big softie” (Withey, “Frock Around the Clock in the news”). What seems to be most significant is that Laverne is physically there for Elizabeth, which in turn allows Elizabeth to write about Laverne as though the dress is a person with agency. Together they travel to Iceland, Hawaii, California, and Nevada; go adventuring in the outdoors (i.e. toboggan, ice skate, hike, and camp); and care for each other (Withey, “It wasn’t supposed to go this way,” “Scene Change,” “Laverne visits the Blue Lagoon,” “Le camping, c’est beau”). Elizabeth describes her experiences of wearing Laverne as teamwork: “it’s just Liz and Laverne here. ... We’re in it together, Vernie and I” (Withey, “A Note from the Mojave”); and in May, Elizabeth writes of visiting a friend in Hawaii and described going surfing while “Laverne watched patiently from the shore” (Withey, “Scene Change”).

As *Frock Around the Clock* progresses into the year, it is evidenced through Elizabeth’s writing that she seems to rely less and less on Laverne as a transitional object. It seems as though, at least as readers of her blog, Elizabeth was taking control of her life and beginning to sort out her complex feelings towards fashion, materialism, and consumption. Along with this, Elizabeth was also finding new meaning and reconstructing her identity in her new job and her new marital status with Laverne as her sidekick. Like every great sidekick, Laverne had provided stability, comfort, and a type of security that enabled Elizabeth to transform. Elizabeth writes, “I am wearing the same dress every day. But every day I am changing, underneath it” (Withey “What I Babbled About at Brunch”).

## Things Depend on Things

The story of humans depending on things seems evident; however, people do not often think about how things depend on other things. Hodder writes: “any thing is dependent on the other things used to make it, to use it, to repair it, to discard it” (*Entangled* 47). When considering this, it is clear that things are very dependent on things, and in fact so dependent that there is a clear interdependence among them. This interdependence of things presupposes that “things are not isolated” (48). Furthermore, within this notion that things are dependent and entangled with other things, Hodder proposes that things are part of a chain of interactions called “sequential staging” (56). Sequential staging is about things having interdependence with other things, or being connected to other things as “in chains” (56). These chains act as a series of connected tasks, components, or actions that are part of the lives of things. For the most part these chains carry a sequential logic where certain behaviours or actions must occur before others, which create a chain of interactions. That is, “tasks have to be completed in order” (Hodder 54). With these chains of interactions between things, there seems to be a need for scheduling and the relationships between things are not equal. As Hodder states, “Everything depends on everything else getting done, but some things have to be done first” (54). In regards to scheduling, it simply means the pattern of a dress needs to be created before it is sampled, and the fabric must arrive before cutting can begin. But as Hodder also states, not everything is equal. The relationship between the material, the thread, and the tension setting on the sewing machine are of greater importance than the relationship between the sharpie marker and the paper to mark the pattern. As well, when thinking of the imbalance of things, constraints and limitations need to be addressed. Only a finite quantity of fabric was ordered for the Laverne style of dress; had errors occurred in any phase of production, the total output of dresses may have been compromised. When it comes to Laverne, the questions are: what are the sequential stages and chains that connect the dress with other things? How many other things are there? And how does Laverne relate to, or interact with these other things? This section explores these questions by considering Laverne within a context of other things, and by examining how Elizabeth supports and performs Laverne’s sequential staging.

## Things Are Not Isolated

The context of things is most definitely a web of other things that are human and nonhuman. This is emphasized and elaborated upon by scholars already noted such as Latour, Barad, Ingold, Law, Callon, and fashion scholars such as Kaiser and Entwistle; but for the purpose of this article we turn to Hodder's theory of entanglement to continue our exploration. Hodder echoes the context of things by stating, "connections are very heterogeneous such that human and thing, subject and object, culture and nature are all thoroughly intermingled" (*Entangled* 48). In the case of Laverne, she or any other dress can never be looked at in isolation — as simply a dress — because there is no dress that exists without human hands, needles, and threads. In making a dress, and Laverne specifically, there is equipment that made her threads woven into fabric, designers that created the silhouette of the dress, scissors that cut the fabric into a flat pattern, and hands that ran sewing machines to stitch together the pieces. Furthermore, Laverne had labels that indicate her manufacturers and designers, labels that instruct purchasers on how to care for her, and labels that help sell her to potential wearers. When wearing Laverne, she must be worn in combination with other garments in order to adhere to societal norms, to cover and protect parts of the body, and to protect from environmental conditions such as inclement weather. For instance, Elizabeth could not simply wear Laverne through all seasons and places without the use of leggings, sweaters, outerwear, and footwear. The web of entanglements that connect Laverne to other things is potentially never ending.

Uncovering one entanglement leads to another: the sewing machine that produced the dress needed needles, bobbins, spools, threads, as well as items for its ongoing maintenance and repair — maybe oil and a screw driver. It also required electricity, which relies on municipal infrastructure. What about the hands guiding the garment through the machine, and the foot used to apply pressure to the foot pedal? Perhaps the employee received a form of currency for completing the sewing job, though if they did, it is unlikely that it would be equitable to standards Elizabeth is accustomed to in Canada. That employee also required a means of transportation to and from the production facility, a roof over their head, food and water in their belly, and clothes to wear. The employee also required fabric to complete the job, and in turn, the fabric of Laverne needed a cotton plant, land, water, and sun to grow, tools to be harvested, and machines to be processed. The cotton then needed a mill in which to be woven, and once complete, a facility to be stored in, and transportation vehicles to get it to the production facility. The complex web of interdependences is tightly woven into Laverne.



## Sequential Staging

When considering the web of things that Laverne is entangled within, it is important to consider the chain of interactions that support the relationships between the things. Hodder writes sequential staging as interlocked chains where “everything depends on everything else getting done, but some things have to be done first” (*Entangled* 54). The sequential staging related to Laverne involves soap and water so she can be washed after being worn, and a sink for the washing to take place. But earlier than this, Laverne required a retail store to be hung in and to be purchased from, and a shopping bag in which to be brought home. Prior to being displayed in a shop, as noted earlier, Laverne depended on thread and machines to be sewn and a box to be shipped in from the manufacturer to the retailer. The stages of manufacture and procurement occurred long before Elizabeth had to even think about caring for or maintaining Laverne through washing, drying, and ironing. According to Hodder, sequential staging for just about any object includes procurement, manufacture, use, maintenance, repair, and finally discarding it (55). Laverne naturally follows these sequential stages, but what is most important is to consider the sheer complexity of how a single dress can relate and interact with many other things across its lifecycle. Typically speaking, we do not often think about the lifecycle of a dress like Laverne, however, in our case study we were able to witness three of the six sequential stages — use, maintenance, and repair — all through interactions described by Elizabeth. As Elizabeth writes about Laverne over the course of the year she becomes more and more disillusioned with the various other things required to keep Laverne going. Laverne is something like a child’s teddy bear that first loses an eye that is replaced with a button, then continues by splitting a seam that requires needle and thread to close it up, is then washed gently in a basin of soapy water after falling in a puddle making it smell like detergent, and eventually begins to become an amalgamation of the original bear combined with other smaller things. As Laverne ages she takes on worn, aged, and tatty characteristics that require her to depend on Elizabeth, adding to how things depend on things and turning our focus towards how things depend on humans.

## Things Depend on Humans

Laverne’s dependence on Elizabeth is linked to how Laverne depends on other things, because Elizabeth is the steward who takes care of keeping Laverne intact. People do not often realize the dependency things have on them. If we return to the example of a child’s teddy bear, we know that children will often go to great measures to keep their bears no matter what. This is interesting because humans (even those who are very young) seem to have an innate understanding that things depend on them. Although people do not always acknowledge exactly how things depend on them; they know that things do fall apart and require maintenance. Hodder eloquently states that “things are not inert [...] they rot and decay” and even seemingly static things change over time (*Entangled* 4). With the reality of things beginning to, and eventually falling apart “...humans [are drawn] into their care...” (68). When people bring things into their care, they are giving agency to that thing or allowing that thing to have agency over them, like Elizabeth did for Laverne. This uniquely shows the symmetry of the relationship and interactions between things and humans where, in essence, people sometimes dominate and other times things dominate. This section untangles Laverne’s dependence on Elizabeth, first through examining the point where the tables turned and Laverne began to fall apart, and second through exploring Laverne’s agency.

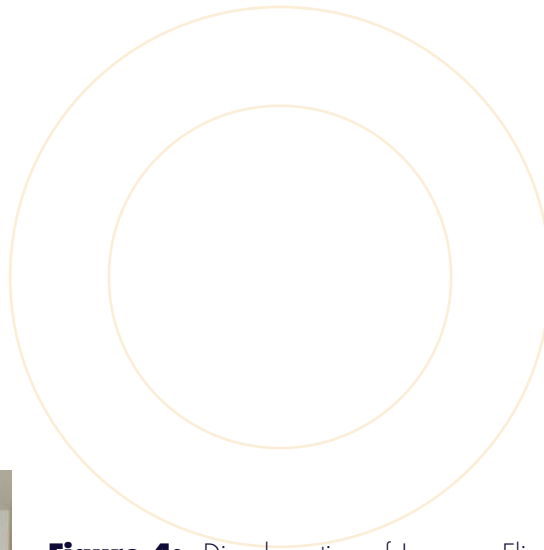
## Things Fall Apart

Over time and through exposures to environmental conditions (e.g. greasy fingers, pet claws, dirt and dust), necessary care (e.g. washing, drying, ironing), and prolonged use, things begin to wear down. When this happens, a tipping point occurs where the threshold between new and worn is crossed, and the web of entanglement riddled with interactions weaves another turn. That is, when people's (especially beloved) things, that may have previously been taken for granted, begin to fall apart, they are reminded of their deep relationships with these things. The owner of the things is then called into action.

Initially Elizabeth described Laverne as "tough" (Withey, "Introducing Laverne"), yet it was only a few weeks into the year-long journey that Elizabeth took note of how Laverne was wearing down. In these early weeks, Laverne was calling to Elizabeth to intervene while simultaneously closing the circle of interdependence. While Hodder reminds us that this is inevitable: "It is the nature of things they break, get dirty, decay, disperse. Even small things falling apart can have large consequences" (*Entangled* 70). Elizabeth notes that when it comes to fashion, people are not often faced with concern for clothing becoming worn or worn out. Given the ever-revolving nature of women's wardrobes, it is much more likely that a garment goes out of style or no longer fits. Elizabeth writes, "the experiment is certainly demonstrating that clothing does wear out — which is obvious, but it's something so few of us (at least as 'haves' in the first-world) actually experience these days" (Withey, "One Month Down, Eleven to Go"). Just over two weeks into Elizabeth's slow fashion experiment she documents, "day 19 and Laverne is already getting PILLY. The pills are mostly along my hips" (Withey, "Hang in there, Laverne"). Elizabeth described a device that she owned and used on Laverne for removing the pilling that sometimes develops on the surface of certain fabrics. The pills continued to form over the course of the year, largely due to the fabric content being a cotton/bamboo blend, and Elizabeth continued to battle them. In May, Elizabeth spilled a bottle of clear nail polish onto Laverne, and while it was clear polish, it dried to a "horrible off-white bodily excretion colour, and even a little crusty" (Withey, "Say hello to my little friend"). Elizabeth, again, was called by Laverne to intervene. This time a black marker did the trick.

In July, approximately halfway through Elizabeth's slow fashion experiment, Elizabeth notes a concern about Laverne's colour, "I'm a little worried about Laverne's colour. Can you see ... how she's turning a bit purplish red? I'm told she's not see-through, but the summer sun is beginning to take its toll on her inky black charm. Obviously, I can't expect her not to change at all. Everything is temporary, I get it" (Withey, "Le camping is beau"). Through Elizabeth's candid style of writing and attention to detail we can connect Laverne to Hodder's expression that "things are not inert" (*Entangled*, 4). Hodder further explains that people tend to see objects as "stable and fixed" (*Entangled* 4), yet things do not have these qualities; he says that "even the hardest of inorganic solids change — rocks erode into sands that are sorted and carried in water down to the seas" (*Entangled* 4). As Elizabeth noted earlier, she was witnessing Laverne actually wearing out and becoming a pilled, faded, and stained dress. By September, Elizabeth wrote: "Like me, she is showing signs of ageing. She is quite spotty with indigo patches where the black has faded away, and I have to say I'm feeling pretty shabby wearing her out and about"<sup>17</sup> (Withey, "Transition is a Hectic Place"). Because Laverne was depending on Elizabeth for stewardship and care, Elizabeth was called into action once again to transform Laverne into a newer-old version. Elizabeth reaches out to the retail store where Laverne was purchased, *Workhall Studio*, to inquire about a fabric dye she could buy to give Laverne a face-lift. In the end, the storeowner offered to re-dye Laverne. It was during the process of re-dyeing Laverne that it was discovered that diluted hair bleach used on Elizabeth had accelerated Laverne's discolouration — illustrating another entanglement of things (Withey, "Black to the future"). The interaction of bleach and fabric caused a physical reaction that had consequences affecting both Laverne (by changing her colour) and Elizabeth (who took action to transform Laverne).

<sup>17</sup> Even though Elizabeth stated that she did not want "the inherent materialism [to] exert an annoying and sly dominance over my life" ("Introducing Laverne"), it was clearly present. This is another example of von Busch's fashion supremacy, "Fashion may not be violent, but it still enforces violence on the social and psychological environment, on social relations and subjects" (278). Here Elizabeth is projecting fears of what von Busch would describe as a micro-act of violence through a disparaging comment of a co-worker, acquaintance, friend, or family member (278).



**Figure 4:** Discolouration of Laverne. Elizabeth Withey. “Black to the Future,” *Frock Around the Clock*, 20 Sept. 2015, <http://www.frockaroundtheclock.tumblr.com/post/129506625563/black-to-the-future>.

Nothing, other than perhaps the desire for Elizabeth to look good in Laverne, forced Elizabeth to intervene towards continuing to transform Laverne over the course of the year. It was Elizabeth’s choice to do so. However, had she not acted, Laverne would have surely fallen into disarray. Hodder elaborates that “things cannot exist for humans, in the ways that humans want, without human intervention” (*Entangled* 69), and so by wanting to wear Laverne for 365 days, Elizabeth was committed to such intervention; after all, she was in a relationship with Laverne. In many ways, Elizabeth surrendered to Laverne as though she was a friend that needed consoling. De Laet and Mol describe the type of individual required to work with such “fluid technologies” (227)<sup>18</sup> and it could be argued that Elizabeth fits the bill: “non-modern subjects, willing to serve and observe, able to listen, not seeking control, but rather daring to give themselves over to circumstances” (253). While Elizabeth embarked on her slow fashion experiment to illustrate her rejection of the “sly dominance” she felt materialism and consumption played over her life (Withey, “Introducing Laverne”), she did not succeed in that goal. In fact, Laverne exerted an overt dominance over Elizabeth, and through this Elizabeth was exposed to a web of entanglements not always apparent between a woman and a dress.

<sup>18</sup> Fluid technologies refer to objects that develop agency (or act as an actor) and are fluid in the sense that “it is not clear when exactly the [actor] stops acting, when it achieves its aims, and at which point it fails and falters” (de Laet and Mol 227). Laverne is an actor who acts — and is fluid and mutable.

## Agency of Laverne

Laverne's dominance over Elizabeth as evidenced through the level of care that Elizabeth provided for Laverne illustrates Laverne's agency. Agency is the ability of an object to be an actor or an agent that exhibits control over another object or a subject; it is developed within things through their relationships and interactions with humans. It is through these relationships that agency is born and from which things are able to take a hold on humans. As Hodder explains "things do have a primary agency, not because they have intentionality but because they are vibrant and have lives and interactions of their own. As they grow, transform or fall apart they have a direct impact on human lives" (Entangled 68). Laverne indeed had her own vibrant experiences. As Elizabeth described in March, "people like to talk about Laverne when I meet them. 'Is that her?' they ask. 'Is that Laverne?' They want to examine her, \*be with\* her" (Withey, "Looking up"). Interestingly, Elizabeth is competing for attention with Laverne, and there was such interest in Laverne that Elizabeth became a backdrop. In essence, Elizabeth was the human mannequin displaying Laverne the dress. In this way, Elizabeth became Laverne's object, while simultaneously Laverne was Elizabeth's object.

Laverne was dependent on Elizabeth and as Laverne interacted with Elizabeth, the dress was able to gain further agency. By providing the dress with a name, the agency of Laverne was established at the beginning of *Frock Around the Clock*. Elizabeth even assigned attributes to Laverne, describing her as "young and giving, classy, modern, simple but not plain, comfortable, tough, and incredibly versatile" (Withey, "Introducing Laverne"). From the beginning of their project together, Elizabeth saw her relationship with Laverne as that of team members. They were in it, together, tackling the world: "today, we headed to the south side to give blood. Laverne's got short sleeves, which made things easy when it came to the elbow pit track-mark inspection, blood pressure check, and the big poke" (Withey, "Lesson 1: avoid campfires"). But Laverne's agency did not emerge from her name and attributes alone; it was through the control that Elizabeth surrendered to Laverne that the dress acquired deeper agency. When Elizabeth committed to having Laverne as her primary garment for a year, she deferred to Laverne, thereby giving Laverne agency. And once Laverne developed agency, Elizabeth began to experience emotions caused by Laverne alone.

Three months into the one-year journey, Elizabeth admits that Laverne is beginning to affect her much like spending too much time with a friend or family member will do: "she annoys me at times with her shapelessness and increasing magnetism for pet hair and random bits of fluff" (Withey, "Looking up"). And in the summer when a heat wave enveloped the city Elizabeth writes, "I'm a little fed up with Laverne, It's [...] not even the notion of wearing the same thing every day. It's the weather. It is SWELTERING in Edmonton right now, and while I'm normally all over hot weather, I don't love picnicking or jaywalking or playing beach volleyball under the beating summer sun in a black dress" (Withey, "Hot dress in the city").

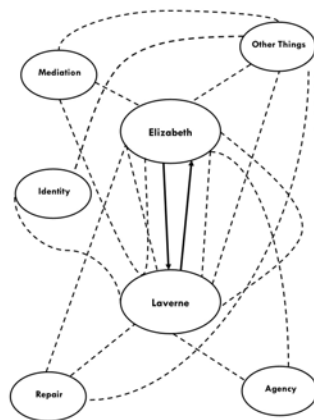
Up until *Frock Around the Clock* Elizabeth had free will over her wardrobe — she chose what to wear. When Elizabeth surrendered herself to this project she gave some of her personal power to the dress, and because of that shift of power, Elizabeth begins to resent Laverne. It's not until closer to the end of the year that Elizabeth's emotions intensify, "people ask, are you bored of Laverne? Of course. Absolutely. There are moments, increasingly so, where I want to tear her off, leave bits of pilly black cotton strewn<sup>16</sup> all over the bathroom floor, a metamorphic pile of evidence" (Withey, "The Mummy Fiasco"). Just a month after that, Elizabeth reflects on changes in her own behaviour due to her reliance on Laverne. Again, this speaks to the agency of Laverne and her ability to have a certain degree of control over Elizabeth. On November 29, Elizabeth remarks that she has noticed that she puts off getting dressed in the morning — instead making coffee and blow drying her hair in a bra and underwear — anything to delay putting the dress on, in a blog post titled "If I have to wear this dumb dress one more time ...". In the same post, she admits to leaving her parka on at work for her appointments. Elizabeth is embarrassed by Laverne who has faded further (yet again) and has "chalky white deodorant stains in the armpits" (Withey, "If I have to wear this dumb dress one more time ..."). Elizabeth doesn't want to be seen wearing Laverne. She is fed up. A month later (and with only 11 more days of the year remaining), Elizabeth writes:

I find myself treating Laverne rather callously. Until December, I was really careful with her. I avoided sharp, pointy objects and rough surfaces that she might snag on. I protected her from smelly foods and cleaning products that could stain her. I hung her up every night in some respectable, high-up, even prominent spot in the bedroom. I hand-washed her with delicate soap and let her drip-dry over the bathroom vent. No more! I've grown apathetic, even abusive toward Laverne. I observe my behaviour with interest. For example, a blob of chipotle sauce oozed out of a sandwich onto her the other day at the library and I didn't even bother going to the staff washroom to give her a rinse. At night I leave her in a heap on the floor to chat with the toenail clippings and dust bunnies. I STEP ON HER when I get up in the morning. What has she done to deserve this? (Withey, "Apathy, even abuse. Twelve more days")

Elizabeth has come full circle in her interdependent relationship and interactions with Laverne. She now realizes the agency that Laverne has, how that agency controls her actions in some ways, and controls her reactions to Laverne's agency.

## Threads of Meaning between Humans and Things (and Things)

We have gained insight into the dress named Laverne through Elizabeth and her blog by engaging with Ian Hodder's themes on entanglements. Within the academy we certainly understand, if not implicitly, that clothes are connected to a vast network of other things that manufacture, maintain, and eventually play a role in discarding them. Figure 5 summarizes elements of Laverne and Elizabeth's network or web of entanglement.



**Figure 5:** . Laverne's web of entanglements. Jessica Kennedy, November 2017.

Our analysis emphasizes what fashion scholars looking into clothing and identity have already established: that clothing is deeply meaningful. This is evidenced through Laverne and Elizabeth's relationship and interactions, documented in *Frock Around the Clock*. What is interesting is that through Hodder's work, and the work of other scholars of new materialism, we can acknowledge that Laverne had many human and nonhuman interactions with other things (many of them will never be precisely known) prior to being selected by Elizabeth. We can also see that Laverne and Elizabeth have two kinds of relationships: one where Laverne supports Elizabeth and the other where Elizabeth supports Laverne. And within these relationships we can better understand Laverne's relationships with other things. What is most important, however, is that due to the closed (and even monogamous) relationship between Laverne and Elizabeth, we get a magnified view on meanings between humans and things, and other things. Furthermore, Laverne's web of entanglements, comprised of various threads, reveals a great deal about people's relationships and interactions with clothing. Our insights provide three significant threads of meaning about people and their clothing in relation to other things: (1) clothing is tied to people's identities; (2) clothing has the potential to carry more or less meaning; and (3) clothing within slow fashion practices encourages human problem solving and investment.

First, in line with Woodward's (2007) analysis, and that of other fashion scholars, on how clothing relates to people's identities, our research reiterates the value of clothing and illustrates how clothing is intrinsically tied to people's identities. To elaborate, when we consider Elizabeth and the intersectionality of her life, where she is a woman, a writer, a thinker, a mother, a wife, then not a wife, we can see that Laverne was involved in the fluid interplay of identity formation and reinforcement. That is, the various intersections of Elizabeth's identity were sometimes emphasized, at other times deleted, and also moved her through transitions in a dynamic process that was not fixed. Furthermore, in line with well-established theories in fashion studies, whether a person has many or just a few articles of clothing, people have the propensity to use clothing to understand themselves and their relationships with others. As the primary garment for Elizabeth for one year, Laverne had big shoes to fill. Because Elizabeth recorded her feelings about Laverne, we were able to follow how Elizabeth constructed and reconstructed her identity with Laverne. Who Elizabeth was, first as a married woman then as a separated woman, was magnified through Laverne. Interestingly, when Laverne was breaking down, the dress began to press on Elizabeth's identity as a professional. This pressure that clothing puts on a person's identity can occur in other forms; for instance, if an article of clothing goes out of style or no longer fits properly. Clothing functions to aid people in developing an identity, first by choosing the style that is worn by a particular group and then by refining identity across time as it is linked to career, professions, roles, and age; as such, particular items of clothing are on one hand expendable and on the other hand NOT expendable, because people need clothing to help them to define themselves as they move throughout their life course. Once again this points to the fluidity and mutability of how people's identities shift, evolve, and fixate over time, and how clothing plays a key role in this dynamic process. By having access to Elizabeth's day-to-day relationship with Laverne, we have gained insights into the specifics of how a single dress can sometimes support identity and at other times can be a burden, through the temporality illustrated in the blog.

Our second thread of meaning is that clothing, as an expendable thing, may not always carry a high value. That is, we speculate that the more clothing people have, and the more they buy into fast fashion (purchasing inexpensive and large quantities of clothing), the less likely these clothes will carry meaning. We come to this conclusion because of Elizabeth's slow fashion experiment, where she put herself in the position of being able to get attached to a single garment. Although Elizabeth found meaning in and with Laverne, we believe this may not be the case if a person does not invest the time and energy required to build a deep relationship with a single item. As noted earlier, Laverne had value similar to that of a much beloved teddy bear, which is not the case for many other clothing items in the current era of overabundance for persons living in privilege. That said, it is well known that people do become attached to specific items of clothing that, for example, have been made by a friend/loved one or been acquired on a special trip.<sup>19</sup> This, however, is not the case for all garments, and may not even be the case for every person's wardrobe. While some or even most clothing items may not carry overt value, the ones that do lead people to problem solve, keeping the beloved items they have intact.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Kaiser, Freeman, and Chandler (1993) on favourite clothes.

The third and final thread of meaning that we discovered through our study is that clothing within slow fashion practices encourages problem solving, and the more people invest in specific items the more likely they are to continue to invest in them. This is much like people's relationships and interactions with other objects and people's relationships and interactions with other people. It is clear through Elizabeth's blog that she engaged in deep problem solving to keep Laverne intact. Indeed, this was out of necessity due to Elizabeth's commitment to her experiment; however, it is well known that if a person puts effort into making or altering a garment it is more likely they will keep it around longer. For instance, when a garment is purchased that requires costly or timely alterations, a person will likely wear it more often because it fits well, and will likely go to greater measures (through problem solving) to mend or refurbish it if the garment is compromised.

In line with prior research, we know that clothing is deeply meaningful to people for various reasons, even when it seems to be superficial to the observer. We believe that people's interactions and relationships with clothing varies depending on the individual person and the clothing itself. On the one hand, single articles of clothing can bring deep meaning and value. For example, a hand-beaded belt given as an heirloom may be connected to valued human relationships while simultaneously representing tradition, craft, and culture. On the other hand, multiple articles of clothing can be put together and recombined and certain articles can be exchanged for others, and still bring a person a sense of belonging within a specific group. These, and our three threads of meaning, are reminders that human interactions and relationships with clothing are complex, diverse, ongoing, dynamic, ever changing, and, to quote Miller "not superficial" (*Stuff* 13).



## Conclusion

This article delves into the person-clothing relationship through Ian Hodder's proposition of entanglement by exploring the nuanced ways in which humans depend on objects and vice versa. By using *Frock Around the Clock* as a case study, we explore and highlight the dependencies between humans and objects and how complicated these dependences are. Although others before us have examined fashion through new materialism — specifically material culture, actor-network theory and affect — this article provides an unpacking of Hodder's theory in detail through a contextualized story about a woman and her dress. Hodder (2012) states that "we need to go beyond accounts of materiality to look at the objectness of things and the dependences and dependencies of things on each other, all of which draw humans into a skein of tangled, sticky or tightly woven relations" (*Entangled* 59). We took Hodder's challenge and looked deeply into Laverne's entangled relationship with Elizabeth and other things. We discovered that Elizabeth depended on Laverne to construct her identity (both by rejecting all other clothing, and by explicitly choosing Laverne) and that Laverne provided comfort during times of immense change (in the role of a transitional object). Laverne depended on other things in a specific order (things for production were required before things for procurement and maintenance), and highlighted that things are never isolated (the entanglement of other things in the relationship between Elizabeth and Laverne cast a wide web). We also discovered that Laverne depended on Elizabeth to gain agency. As such, we believe that the relationship and interactions between Elizabeth and her dress were indeed "tangled, sticky [and] tightly woven" (59).

In closing, we return to Hodder who writes that the complexities of thing-thing relations as: "[they] are never just about things; they are also about obligations and dependences. The smelting of iron is not just about hammers and tongs. It is also about debts, duties, identities, sexual metaphors and relationships with the divine" (*Entangled* 44). We believe that this can be extended to all tenets of entanglement: human-thing and thing-human, too. It's not just about Elizabeth and Laverne, or even about a woman and a dress — it's a narrative of the entwined web cast between humans and things (and things). While we may find comfort in the idea of rejecting materialism and its undeniable "sly dominance" (Withey, "Introducing Laverne") over people, this is not an accurate portrait of our world; human dependence on things is so innate and really quite deeply beautiful. Perhaps it's time for a cultural shift towards truly valuing material possessions — by reflecting in more detail upon the things people own towards a better understanding of human relationships with things, other people, and themselves.

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Jessica Kennedy is a part-time student in the Masters of Arts, Material Culture program in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta (Canada). Having received an undergraduate degree from the same department in 2004, she went on to co-own a women's clothing store in Edmonton, Canada. After a decade in the fashion industry she transitioned to other pursuits in 2012, but found that she was still deeply entangled with her clothing. She imposed a 13-month shopping ban in 2013, and later participated in Project 333, before enrolling in graduate studies.

## Author Biography



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Megan Strickfaden is a professor at the University of Alberta (Canada) and an adjunct professor at the University of Hasselt (Belgium). She is a design anthropologist in her 27th year of teaching and researching on design processes, material culture, disability studies, and specialized product design. Strickfaden began her career as a maker and design consultant who worked on creating various fashion-oriented products using human-centred design processes. She has a love of making processes, natural materials, hand-made, and witty objects, and finds herself attached to things that are connected to the many places she's lived and the people she's known.

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