



# Illustrated Sustainability

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### ABSTRACT

Brazil is a strong representative of world production in the textile sector. The fashion industry has economic benefits for the country, however it is responsible for negative impacts on the environment. In the search for sustainable alternatives, concepts and techniques emerge that aim to mitigate the impacts caused by the growing demand, including zero waste disposal. Fashion illustration is an area of fashion that has gained greater visibility, and presents concepts, meanings and symbologies through graphics. This article approaches fashion illustration as a way to disseminate reflections on the zero disposal of textile waste. Thus, it presents illustrations that give new meaning to waste, inserting in its graphic composition textile elements arising from the construction of fashion artifacts. Therefore, the illustrations can be explored through reflective symbologies providing contributions to a cleaner and more sustainable fashion.

**Keywords:** fashion illustration. textile materials. zero waste disposal.

## Sustentabilidade ilustrada

### **RESUMO**

*O Brasil é um forte representante da produção mundial no setor têxtil. A indústria da moda apresenta benefícios econômicos para o país, entretanto é responsável por impactos negativos no meio ambiente. Na busca por alternativas sustentáveis surgem conceitos e técnicas que visam amenizar os impactos causados diante da crescente demanda, entre eles o descarte zero de resíduos. A ilustração de moda é uma área da moda que tem ganhado maior visibilidade, e apresenta conceitos, significados e simbologias por meio gráfico. O presente artigo aborda a ilustração de moda como um caminho para disseminar reflexões acerca do descarte zero de resíduos têxteis. Assim, apresenta ilustrações que ressignificam resíduos, inserindo em sua composição gráfica elementos têxteis advindos da construção de artefatos de moda. Portanto, as ilustrações podem ser exploradas por meio de simbologias reflexivas fornecendo contribuições para uma moda mais limpa e sustentável.*

**Palavras-chave:** *ilustração de moda. materiais têxteis. descarte zero de resíduos*

## Sostenibilidad ilustrada

### **RESUMEN**

*Brasil es un fuerte representante de la producción mundial en el sector textil. La industria de la moda tiene beneficios económicos para el país, sin embargo es responsable de los impactos negativos sobre el medio ambiente. En la búsqueda de alternativas sostenibles surgen conceptos y técnicas que tienen como objetivo mitigar los impactos provocados por la creciente demanda, incluida la eliminación cero de residuos. La ilustración de moda es un área de la moda que ha ganado mayor visibilidad y presenta conceptos, significados y simbologías a través de la gráfica. Este artículo aborda la ilustración de moda como una forma de difundir reflexiones sobre la eliminación cero de residuos textiles. Así, presenta ilustraciones que dan un nuevo significado al desperdicio, insertando en su composición gráfica elementos textiles derivados de la construcción de artefactos de moda. Por lo tanto, las ilustraciones se pueden explorar a través de simbologías reflectantes que aportan contribuciones a una moda más limpia y sostenible.*

**Palabras clave:** *Ilustración de moda. Materiales textiles. Eliminación de residuos cero.*

## 1. INTERFACE

The world of fashion is made up of several strands that largely communicate through textiles (in the material and representative sphere). Styling, modeling, photography, journalism, marketing, consulting, illustration, all converge, directly or indirectly, to work with textile materials.

The industrial revolution, the advent of capitalism, interested in producing and profiting as much as possible, and socialism with its mass production to compete with capitalism meant that for decades both systems presented to the fashion industry a conception that natural resources they were unlimited. Fashion in the context of industrial reproducibility. Naturally, with the emergence of global warming, the destruction of the environment, pollution and the negative impacts on the maintenance of the human species, a fashionable debate about the relationship between production, creation and the environmental issue was created.

A recurring and necessary subject in fashion is sustainability. The textile industry is responsible for a large portion of solid waste generation. Thus, the greater the textile production, the greater will be the generation of waste improperly disposed of in the environment. This leads to the search for techniques that minimize these issues, and the absorption of textile waste, zero disposal, is one of the techniques that can generate positive results, and therefore, it needs to be reflected in the various aspects of fashion.

This article presents fashion illustration as one of the ways to reflect on the impacts of the textile chain, inserting in its composition textile elements arising from waste generated by the construction of textile artifacts.

Illustration is an expressive medium for narrating memories, behaviors and events, and translates reality through the imagination. Thus, to illustrate is to tell a story through visual communication.

As it is composed of several genres, the field of study of illustration is wide. This genre can be presented through various techniques such as painting, collage, embroidery, sewing, digital media, among others. In essence, illustration, art and design are intertwined, and here, illustration will be approached in the artistic genre within the universe of the fashion designer.

For Santaella (2005, p. 14), by interacting with mass communication and using new media technologies, artists “[...] expanded the field of arts to interfaces with industrial design, advertising, cinema, television, fashion, youth subcultures, video, computer graphics, etc.”

This article starts from the premise that the fashion designer's social thinking dialogues with the role of graphic design, which, according to Werneck (2012):

[...] it continues to be the act of conceiving and designing visual languages to transmit specific messages, working with the organization of information, which will have a format that should be linked to its content and this will be understood and absorbed by a given society. (WERNECK, 2012, p.12)

The creative gesture of an illustrator with awareness of sustainable action makes him more than a technical professional inserted in a job niche, it makes him become an actor involved with sustainability, with the protection of the environment, a critic about the way that society produces and consumes in contemporary times. His illustrations become mediators within a democratic state of access to

information, helping the individual to better relate between fashion and environment.

Those who only receive information about the environment will not create a critical repertoire, only informative about the subject. There is a shortage of interpretive capacity and the ability to form an opinion, whatever it may be about the topic. Illustration is a type of text, therefore, for the production of knowledge and that stands as an alternative discourse to the one who has access.

Therefore, the article addresses the interface between fashion illustration and sustainability. It presents illustrations that mix drawing and painting techniques with the use of textile waste and textile elements to compose illustrations that are presented beyond graphic representation. Here, the illustrations go beyond graphic borders and present symbolic contributions within the concept of zero waste, zero disposal of textile waste, incorporating artisanal weaving, embroidery and sewing techniques in the construction of visual narratives allocated to the intangible. Traditional techniques previously linked to fashion products gain other contours and characteristic meanings that are transformed into visualities.

Working with illustrations immersed in the textile context and materialized with textile inserts is one of the possibilities for rethinking the impacts caused by the improper disposal of textile waste. The introduction of this approach to illustrations marks their presence in the world of fashion not only through the look, but through a reflection on sustainability issues.

## 2. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES IN FASHION

According to ABIT – Brazilian Textile and Apparel Industry Association (2020, np), Brazil is the largest complete textile chain in the West, “from the production of fibers, [...], to fashion shows, passing through spinning mills, weaving mills, processing, clothing and strong retail”. The number of formal companies reaches 25,500 throughout the country and its average textile production reached, in 2020, 2.04 million tons, with an average production of 9.04 billion pieces.

For Zonatti (2016, p. 20), the textile segment generates environmental problems due to the “significant volume of solid waste arising from industrial processes”. Whether using natural fibers or not, the entire textile production process, especially in the processing stage, involves some waste, inappropriate disposal and environmental pollution. According to Saraiva (2014, p.23), the steps that most generate solid waste are weaving (with fibers, filaments and threads) and cutting the fabric, with scraps resulting from the mold.

According to Lucietti et al (2018, p. 2), the current fashion market is dominated by the fast fashion system (rapid production policy), “in which retail stores provide collections with pieces and limited numbers to force the turnover and the perception of opportunism, of immediacy in the consumer”. This would be a type of strategy for undisciplined consumerism, influenced by the speed of access to information, products and services. Fashion has a system of rapid renewal in which the production, consumption and disposal of products takes place in an accelerated way and this affects sustainable development.

Fashion is a mediator between social thinking and its imagery configuration. Fast and unrestrained consumption

does not allow the individual the ability to reflect on their own identity, which is reflected in the way they dress.

Manufacturing and consumption on a mass scale only informs those who consume what they should use, but does not clarify or propose relationships of meanings. Thus, this type of behavior inhibits the individual from thinking about the materials that clothing was made, whether the manufacturing process respects environmental laws, whether manufacturing practices take into account professionals and their physical, mental and economic health, among other elements . It is a fashion that represents what Han (2019) reflects on the aesthetics of plain:

Why do we find smooth, these days, beautiful? In addition to the aesthetic effect, it reflects a universal social imperative. He embodies the society of current positivity. Smooth does not break. It also does not resist. It requires likes. The smooth object extinguishes its opposites. All negativity is put aside. (HAN, 2019, p. 07)

In search of cleaner fashion, concepts and techniques appear that aim to reduce textile waste. So, in opposition to fast fashion, there are some concepts such as slow fashion, upcycling and zero waste.

Slow fashion aims to preserve natural resources and, in this way, prioritizes local producers and natural resources, values artisanal work and generally maintains small-scale production, valuing diversity.

Upcycling, according to Lucietti et al (2018) is a technique that consists of reusing scraps, leftovers and pieces that would be discarded for the construction of new original parts, without spending more energy on reusing them, unlike recycling, aiming at reducing of the waste of raw materials. "It is a recovery process that transforms wasted waste into

new products or materials with superior quality and environmental value" (ANICET; BESSA; BROEGA, 2011, p. 3).

Upcycling can be thought of as a segment of the zero-waste method. According to Saraiva (2014, p.51) "zero-waste is a design practice that introduces a new model of clothing design and production, which aims to eliminate the production of waste from clothing production". This method can follow two aspects: as a modeling method, which consists of the total use of the fabric, or reuse of fabric residues, in which the modeling is traditional, but all the scraps are used. This second aspect is similar to the principle of upcycling, in which tissue remains are reused, but not only derived from the modeling cut, but in general.

The practice of reusing scraps – for economic reasons – has been present since the 16th century when peasants in Catalonia created blankets, known today as patchworks rugs, with scraps cut from worn clothes and sheets, weaving a new product.

When a towel, a shirt, a sheet, after many years of use, were completely scratched and deteriorated, they were not thrown away. They were cut into thin strips and reweaved a new warp of cotton threads. The result was a thick, rustic, irregular and mixed-colored fabric, taking into account the varied origins of the weft threads. (BRAHIC, 1998, p. 17).

The example above presents a primordial action in society which is the creation of discourse through actions. The strips from other clothes that end up creating blankets are reconfigured as a means of identity for a community. It's not just anything that is done with strips, but discourses that refract in the social imagination and are inseparable from the human condition. To Benjamin (2017):

The authenticity of a thing is the sum of everything in it that, from its origin, can be transmitted, from its material discourse to its historical testimony. And since the latter is based on the former, the historical testimony of the thing is shaken with reproduction, in which its material course escapes human beings. And certainly just him; but what is shaken in this way is the authority of the thing, its traditional weight. (BENJAMIN, 2017, p. 284)

Gradually, sustainable concepts and techniques are introduced in the fashion market and the growing awareness of the damage caused by exacerbated consumption to the environment gains space and (re)creates 'fashion', which leads consumers to search for changes in life with prioritizing more natural, handcrafted, sustainable products.

### **3. FASHION ILLUSTRATION**

Among the various segments of fashion, illustration has gained prominence through advertising campaigns in which brands intend to link identity, concepts and values through graphic visual representations worked with different techniques.

According to Duarte (2010), illustration is a drawing or image, in figurative or even abstract form, that has a function. It is an image that can explain, inform, synthesize, interpret or indicate a narrative or idea. For Reis (2013, p. 61) the expression "abstracted" would better define the "abstract form" to which Duarte (2010) refers. "The illustration ends up serving as a channel that exposes several points of connection with the message you want to convey, even if there is no verbal language." (SILVA; NAKATA, 2016, p. 2)

It is the illustrations that capture the imagination, that remain with the viewer and that connect the moments of our personal history to the present. [...], the illustrations have the role of defining important moments and periods over time. On a larger scale, it's fair to say that illustration recorded man's achievements, interpreting them in a way that was not possible before the birth of photography. (ZEEGEN, 2009, p. 12)

In the history of fashion, illustration plays a fundamental role. For Cavalcante (2010), the first detailed engravings of clothing and contemporary fashion illustration, even with different intentions, register clothing, human behavior and cultural values in specific times. Clothes and fabrics have followed the inspiration of many artists who, through their works, portray the history of clothing. Fashion drawings, prints and illustrations have great documentary and artistic importance.

For Oliveira (2005, p. 32), art and fashion come together through the visual elements and creative characteristics of the artist and the stylist. “[...] it is from the visual language [...] that there is a link between the art-fashion interface, as both the artist and the stylist work with these elements in their creative paths.” Confirming Oliveira (2005), Lugli (2014, p. 3) explains that “Illustration moves between art and design, as it combines visual expression, identity and representation technique with the ability to communicate ideas and values.”

According to Rocha and Held (2019, p. 109), “Illustration has its origins in the art of printmaking, which means that, in this period, the boundaries between artist and illustrator were so blurred.” For the author, the graphic representations that preceded fashion illustration had an informative character and did not allow openings for a more subjective interpretation.

When working with the analysis of fashion illustrations, Reis (2013, p. 95) states that “What determines whether an image is or is not a fashion illustration is the motivation and discourse present in the image”. The author clarifies that while the fashion sketch has a predilection for lengthening the lower limbs of the human figure, the illustration does not follow rules and can present figures in different configurations, sometimes close to reality, sometimes with exaggerated deformations of the trunk, limbs and head or even through abstract figures.

In a time of inflation of images from mass fashion, the individual ends up deprived of the ability to create spontaneous speeches. The use of sustainable illustrations, not only in the choice of materials, but of a sustainable awareness in the entire artistic process turns out to be an alternative for re-encountering the innate conditions of social creation, both for the public and for the author. According to Solomon (1990):

[...] the essence of a culture is a reflection of the objects that are created. Such objects can be a conscious application of popular style and find their formal expression through all the paths manifested by a society. [...] A style or trend will remain until certain changes within a culture dictate new directions, giving rise to new styles that, in a way, were influenced by those that preceded them. (SOLOMON, 1990, p. 10)

For Morris (2009), contemporary fashion illustration looks to the past in search of inspirations that blend with modern techniques. Thus, new techniques are explored beyond manual drawing, such as collages with creative materials, embroidery, paper sculptures, digital illustration and interference in photography. Gagnato (2008, p. 47) observes that when analyzing contemporary fashion

illustrations “it becomes even clearer that this type of representation refuses traditional classifications; it finds and follows its own paths, amid trends and new digital technologies”.

This myriad of techniques, based on a discourse grounded in sustainability, allows the illustrator to show the public elements that are not observed in fashion consumption spaces, especially with regard to retail and, nowadays, in social networks. An activist illustrator, who stimulates debate on a topic that, in the first analysis, society is favorable to, that is, the preservation of the environment, on the other hand, finds rejection when the actions involve some type of economic impact. In a society mediated by likes, an illustrator of this nature is a necessary critical actor. According to Han (2019):

The internet of things, which connects all things to each other, is not narrative. Communication as an exchange of information counts for nothing. Just lists. Fine are narrative links. Today, addition supersedes narration. Narrative relationships recede from informational connections. Adding information does not result in a narration. Metaphors are narrative relationships. They carry, with each other, things and events to language. (HAN, 2019, p. 106).

It is up to the illustrator, through his poetics, to connect with the world and with people. Morris (2009), among several fashion illustrators, presents two contemporary illustrators who work with textile elements – patchwork, yarn and thread – in their productions, Paula Caballero and Louise Gardiner.

Paula Sanz Caballero is a Spanish artist and illustrator, Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Valencia (Spain) and Master of Graphic Design at San Pablo CEU, Valencia (Spain). According to the illustrator, her career as a painter

began with participation in gallery shows nationwide. It was in the late 90's that she started with textiles and embroidery in her illustrations and thus, this technique started to replace ink in her visual narratives. (Figure 1)

According to Morris (2009), Paula Caballero believes that her greatest achievement was to rethink the techniques and materials used in her illustrations and this is her greatest vocation. Caballero's illustrations are featured in magazines, publications and advertising campaigns around the world and among her clients are names like Neiman Marcus, Chie Mihara, Harper Collins, Vogue, WWD and The New Yorker.

Figure 1. Paula Sanz Caballero. Pencil and tissue on paper.



Source: PAULA SANZ CABALLERO (2019).

British artist and illustrator Louise Gardiner, graduated in Textile Arts from Goldsmiths University of London and Master in Illustration from Manchester Metropolitan University, inserts textiles in her productions through

machine embroidery associated with drawings and paintings (figure 2). For Louise, contemporary embroidery is a stimulating medium, with endless possibilities.

Her energetic approach blows the cobwebs of this underrated craft and she has proven that intricate handmade fabrics can inspire a surprisingly thoughtful and intense response from an extremely diverse audience. (LOUISE GARDINER, 2017, n.p.)

Figure 2. Louise Gardiner. Embroidery on textile.



Source: MORRIS (2009, p. 105)

Louise Gardiner creates her illustrations with free drawings worked with thread and needle in a sewing machine. The drawings are built on a base of linen and canvas, with a precise and dynamic technique. According to the artist, the illustration and embroidery are unique and take time to complete. In her portfolio she presents works for private and public clients around the world, working on advertising campaigns such as for the Pukka Herbs and

Liberty London brands and artwork commissions for Hospitals in the UK. The illustrator shares her techniques in lectures and workshops in India, France, New Zealand and Australia.

### **3.1 Fashion illustration in favor of sustainability: zero disposal and conscientious consumption**

For Nascimento (2011, p. 217), the images “help to provide traces of a new way of seeing, doing, acting and saying”. The images make it possible to question “how we became what we are and how we could no longer be what we came to be”. (Ibid., p. 218)

Images not only materialize, in pictorial, sculptural and visual terms, ideas, but also contribute to consolidating current interpretations or causing changes in the way of seeing, recording and interpreting. (Ibid., p. 217)

Corroborating with the statements of Nascimento (2011), Dias (2018, p.128), he reinforces that “[...] the illustration has a high power of referentiality of images, recognition and identification of its objects”.

When considering these premises, it is understood that fashion illustration can promote a discourse that intervenes in favor of an awareness of the urgency to review sustainable concepts and practices, dissolve resistance imposed by the fashion system and develop a new perspective on consumption. As an image, illustration has the power to “[...] consolidate interpretations, highlight possibilities of resistance, transformation, rupture and becoming.” (NASCIMENTO, 2011, p. 217)

In advertising, fashion illustration plays the role of awakening the desire for consumption. Elman (2017) states that advertising, in the economic circuit, is the main link between production and consumption. It humanizes the product through symbolic and social relationships. "In the advertising world, a set of social and cultural values is activated". (ELMAN, 2017, p. 155). Thus, when inserting the sustainable concept in advertising fashion illustrations, the influence of images and the persuasive power of advertising are associated. This junction can provide a greater impact and promote changes in the way of seeing, thinking and acting regarding the consumption, disposal and use of textile waste.

Aware of the power of influence and persuasion of fashion visualities and the environmental problems generated by the textile sector, the article intends to highlight sustainability in the fashion sector through zero waste, with the use of waste incorporated and re-signified through of fashion illustrations. Thus, the illustrations, here explained and explored from an artistic perspective, intend to play a role in reflection on sustainability, acting as a warning tool for waste disposal and consumerism.

### **3.2 Sustainable illustration in practice**

In this research, fashion illustration goes beyond the graphic visual language with the insertion of textile elements that communicate sustainable practices. Just as the artists Paula Sanz Caballero and Louise Gardiner use textiles in their works, the illustrations presented here use textiles to strengthen their borders, working with art, fashion, design and sustainability in lines, embroidery and sewing with a symbolic and significant character that intersects with the

urgent need to review concepts and values amid the great impact that textile waste generates on the environment.

Here, the illustration symbolically and materially absorbs textile waste generated by the production of fashion artifacts with the intention of alerting and communicating about zero disposal and conscious consumption through visual language.

To encompass this sustainable insertion in the illustrations, firstly follows a practical example of the absorption of textile residues in fashion products: the handmade collection of bags Cores de Chita (figure 3), built with textile residues generated by production and repairs of garments and worn textile pieces. The production of the collection was based on the upcycling technique practiced in artisanal weaving. The end of production, although sustainable, still generated textile residues that were again used in the development of a new fabric that generated new products.

Figure 3. Colors of Chita bag collection developed with textile waste.



Source: Personal Archive.

When considering this sustainable production, an effective alternative for its dissemination and promotion of sustainability (absorption of waste and conscious consumption) could be working with textile waste, generated in the production of the collection, for the creation of advertising and/or artistic illustrations that transmit the essence of the collection. Thus, it would be possible to develop fashion illustrations with concepts related to each bag in the collection and work with sustainable reflections.

Guided by this thought, the illustrations shown below were developed, in addition to graphic resources (drawings and paintings in India ink, gouache, watercolor and dry pastel), with textile waste, from personal collections, collected during the production of pieces and used textile burrs of clothing repairs. These stubbles are stored for later use in other techniques, and used here to compose illustrations.

Some of these residues were re-signified through the construction of new handcrafted textiles from free machine quilting and handcrafted fabrics built on a nail loom. The fabrics developed from quilting consist of layers in which the residues are sewn between a layer of raw cotton and a canvas, forming a new fabric with a unique texture and print. The fabrics developed at the loom are composed of warps with textile threads, twine and threads and wefts worked with waste and scraps.

In addition to working with textile overlays, other textile elements such as lace worked on a pin loom, braiding, embroidery on fabric and paper, and collages with ribbons, zippers, threads, fabrics and paper make up the illustrations. (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7)

When considering the physical and material aspect of the illustrations, some observations are essential to carry out

the process and achieve the intended result. As it is a work that uses paper, fabric, yarns and graphic techniques with washes of ink, textile techniques are introduced in the illustration after its finalized graphic configuration.

Embroidery and sewing, worked by hand or machine, can be built directly on the paper or fabric for later gluing. Free embroidery on paper is delicate and needs to be carefully analyzed to avoid undue perforation of the needle that could cause the paper to break. Another issue to be observed is the weight of the paper, which must support both more watery paints and needle perforations and the thickness of the threads worked on the paper.

Figure 4. Dressed in dreams. Illustration with paper and handmade textile, patchwork and yarn overlay.



Source: Author's illustration.

Figure 5. Between frames. Illustration with handmade textile overlays and embroidery on leftover interlining.



Source: Author's illustration.

Figure 6. The comings and goings. Illustration on paper with textile collage and overlay of fabric built with waste.



Source: Author's illustration.

Figure 7. Palette. Illustration on paper with collage of textile waste and hand embroidery.



Source: Author's illustration.

The intertwining of the graphic visual language with textile elements physically present in the illustration strengthens signs contained in its entirety. Thus, the visual power to arouse desire penetrates the sensory and emotional, through the insertion of sustainability concepts and practices, in an attempt to incite a new look at the textile sector and stimulate new forms of consumption.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Fashion illustration carries with it the power of persuasive communication that can inform, reflect, denounce, stimulate desire, consumption or acceptance of new paradigms and social codes. Aware of this visual power, the illustrator can work with representations and symbologies that provoke, encourage and strengthen sustainable practices.

Stylists, designers and fashion illustrators have an influential tool – images – with the power to direct the consumer's gaze to environmental issues caused by the textile chain and break resistance to urgent and necessary new standards. Textile scraps and residues can be worked on in a creative and attractive way, and re-signified not only through illustrations, but through means that collaborate to an effective change in terms of consumption and sustainable practices.

The idea of sustainable fashion in contemporary times should not be considered as a utopia, that is, as a collective objective of inventing or building a new world, once inserted in a globalized world, utopia no longer has credibility as a collective act of ideas. However, based on individual dreams, actors involved in fashion can multiply transhumanist actions, research material solutions and new technologies that harmonize with the biological, use artificial intelligence to realize not only a sustainable fashion, but that it becomes throughout its development a social identity.

Artistic illustration makes contributions to the fashion field through product conceptualization and brand identity, but its power can go further. It can promote reflections, provocations and criticism of the consumption patterns imposed by the fashion system, it can act as a propagator of an environmental and social awareness by addressing questions not only about sustainability and consumerism, but also about other topics on the agenda in the world of fashion such as manual and handcraft production, traditional knowledge, culture, among others, with the dissemination of reflective thinking that lead to action.

Fashion professionals working in the sector focused on sustainable products and conscientious consumption may consider the joining of the visual power of artistic fashion

illustrations and advertising, in this era of likes, as a way to produce, on a larger scale, an impact in the propagation of a more concerned and directed look at the problems generated by the fashion industry, which may open space for the construction of a new consumption paradigm.

Whether through new technologies or traditional techniques, textile waste can and should be re-signified and worked on in order to promote a more conscious consumption education, covering not only the fashion sector, but also disseminated and inserted in various sectors that include and absorb these residues.

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