

Patched

by Otto von Busch



Neophilia. We love the new. It calls to us with its tacit promises. Like having cash in your pocket, it offers to fulfill a dream or yearning, promising something about the future.

Fashion, by definition, is the new. It is also a transformation. Coming out of the store with a newly acquired garment gives the rush of promise. Even the most stubborn anti-consumer may be drawn to new fashions, not unlike how new hit singles sneak up on us over the radio and we find ourselves singing along with tunes we didn't

even know we liked. As with the scent of a perfume, fashion stalks us through the ether, and it is almost impossible to shut it out or turn away from it.

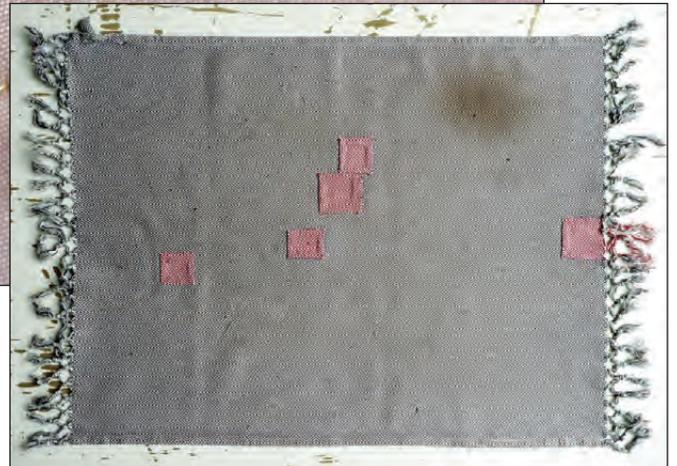
Yet the new also seems to bring with it less welcome acquaintances, not the least greed and the aversion and delusion that come with craving more. In this way, the modernist paradigm of progress and continuous technological change has played well together with social mobility and meritocracy; every new time has its own gadgets, styles, and heroes. New "stuff" comes along

ABOVE: KATE FLETCHER *Wellington Trouser Patch* (from the *Local Wisdom International Network* project [2009-ongoing]), mend detail from a Wellington, New Zealand community photoshoot (March, 2013) coordinated by Massey University. Featured in Fletcher's book *Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion* (2016, Routledge). Photo: Aliscia Young. www.alisciayoung.com
INSETS: Vintage repair kits from the collection of AINO ALLERHEIM (1911–2007), grandmother of author and designer OTTO VON BUSCH. Photos: Otto von Busch.

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ABOVE: MARGREET SWEERTS AND SASKIA VAN DRIMMELEN
Golden Joinery Detail, gold thread, hand embroidery. Photo: Fan Liao.
RIGHT: TOM OF HOLLAND (TOM VAN DEIJNEN) *Mended Tea Towel*.
Photo: Tom van Deijnen.



with a new job, hobby, or lifestyle. The intoxicating arrival of the new tends to amplify ego-centered drives of self-satisfaction and to drown out other forms of generosity or virtues. Especially for clothes—our affection for them often ebbs before their material quality declines. In an era of cheap consumerism, we fail to accept the finitude of all things and expect our belongings to be there for us, even as we invest no devotion in return.

In this sense, repair may be almost the opposite of the new. Repair is an act of patience and care. At its best, it encourages a cautious handling of the world, a special form of attention, an awareness imbued with hope. As opposed to consuming something new, the act of repair embodies a sense of commitment and trust.

But with its ties to history, the repair always acts in the shadow of the past. The repair will always be judged by how well it compares to its golden days. The perfect conservation or invisible mend is a repair that erases itself from history.

This is where the patch comes in. Of course, the patch is a form of repair but of a special kind. It adds something more to the original substance. By adding some form of cover, it explicitly perverts and manipulates the original. Like the “hack,” the patch intervenes on a material level with the broken object, but also transforms its symbolic and cultural status. The patch is a form of patina operation, it displaces and repositions use, distorts original intentions and ideas of pristine authenticity. In its most radical form, this idiosyncratic aesthetic of brokenness can offer a glimpse into a post-progress or post-growth¹ future.

There are many forms of patches, and they all act and signal their own message. From the simplest textile patch on children's clothes to the abstract and intricate patched software application. Or the hasty duct tape patch (the most obvious quick-fix “hack”) or the most carefully patched sock (adding a layer of care and investment of time onto an ephemeral consumer object).



TIMO RISSANEN *Norwegian Sweater* detail of elbows patched with Swiss darning technique (part of his Zero-Waste fashion paradigm).
Photo: Timo Rissanen.

The practice of repair and patching in a time of cheap and easily accessible consumerism may offer a glimpse of a post-growth mindset. This is a central trope in Kate Fletcher's book ***Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion*** (2016, Routledge), where she has collected examples of used or mended clothes together with statements from the wearers. Captured in community photoshoots all over the world, Fletcher's *Local Wisdom International Network* project exposes how users engage with clothes, preserving memories and stories, and subverting the novelty-obsessed neophilic worldview that brand so forcefully propagates.

Fletcher's study is but one in a resurgence across the realm of textiles. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the many forms of repair. Japanese techniques, such as *kintsugi* (golden mending), have provoked textile initiatives, such as the ***Golden Joinery*** by **Margreet Sweerts** and **Saskia van Drimmelen**. In workshops, Sweerts and van Drimmelen use golden

threads and patches to repair garments wherein the aesthetic of the patch is an essential part of the repair. *Sashiko* and the seductive aesthetics of *boro* cloth have also been acclaimed once again as an intricate form of mended patchwork.

In each case, the patch reveals itself as a small component in a larger assemblage with all its imperfect stitches, golden seams, or ripped duct tape. Each piece exposes its own connection, care, and commitment. From such a point of departure, the world is an endless patchwork; the value of the world lies in the stitches and connections—the attachments we create, the loyalties and commitments we make. The world "out there" is only worth as much as we dedicate ourselves to it: that we patch it up, and make the decision to help mend some of its flaws and ripped seams.

In ***The Visible Mending Programme***, textile artist **Tom of Holland** (Tom van Dijnen) encourages repair in its many forms and shapes; noticeable traces of the mending process in his

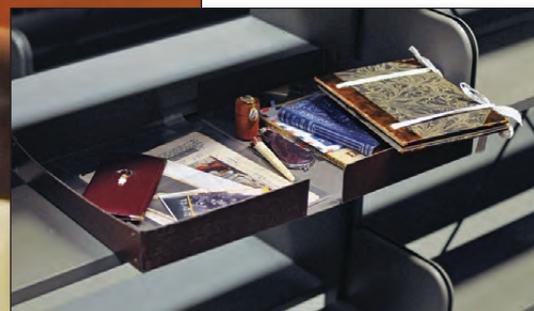
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LEFT: OTTO VON BUSCH studying the GILLIS GÖRLL mending archive at Gothenburg University Library, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2014. Photo: Christopher Kullenberg & Lorna Bartram.

INSET BELOW: Detail of mending ephemera and journals in an archive box of GILLIS GÖRLL at Gothenburg University Library, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2014.

INSET LEFT: Vintage repair kit from the collection of AINO ALLERHEIM (1911–2007), grandmother of author and designer OTTO VON BUSCH. Photos: Otto von Busch.



RIGHT ABOVE: OTTO VON BUSCH suX-movement fan "UrnX" sports his patched punk vest with his son in Brooklyn, New York, 2015.

RIGHT BELOW: Buttonhole Surfers (suX-movement) 2015, screen-printed textile patch, 4.3" x 2.7". Photos: Otto von Busch.



work can be seen as a medal of commitment, even in something as mundane as a mended tea towel. A similar example can be seen in the darned elbows of the **Norwegian Sweater** by fashion designer **Timo Rissanen**, who uses a Swiss darning technique to highlight a level of craft fidelity in a realm too often connected to the superficial and ephemeral.

I recently experimented with inventing two opposing archives representing two distinct approaches to mending and patching. In the book ***A Scar of Belonging: fragments of fashion by Gillis Görll (1901-1975)***,¹ I trace the history of a tailor-turned-fashion mystic who devoted his life to seeking God through invisible mending. The persona Gillis Görll left behind an archive box with the tools of repair and worship, together with a series of aphorisms. Born in Fickel, Estonia, Görll sought a frail and mystical unity of spiritual togetherness, seeing every ripped seam as a window of vulnerability. From his perspective, mending becomes an act of care and mutual recognition that stitches bonds between wounded souls.

My second project was the invention of **suX-movement**, a sustainable underground hard-core movement that runs parallel to straight edge hard-core and “crust” punk. The *suX* hardcore style rejects the “do-good” hippie aesthetic of the sustainable mainstream to advance a more rebellious frustration with the fast fashion regime. The *suX* patches are signs of rebellion and resistance more than reconciliation and resilience. Paraphrasing



hard-core and metal bands, they bear the names of the movement’s sewing “juntas,” and embody the ethic of a wholehearted rejection of fast fashion’s sartorial betrayal.

There are thus many ways in which patches mark and mend the world. Yet they all share a way to embrace finitude

and the imperfect, and celebrate the world of use. The patch is as much a token of longevity and hope as it is a radical act against the neophile culture of consumer society. The patch does not shy away from the realist zero-sum game that everything is doomed to entropy and death; yet it affirms the hope of a material striving for life and a reconciliation with finitude. The patch, in its silent modesty, is a form of mending as much as amending, hope as much as devotion.

¹The term *post-growth* defines an overarching approach to global futures that looks to proactively respond to the limits-to-growth dilemma—the fact that, on a planet of finite resources, economies and populations cannot grow infinitely.

Kate Fletcher: www.craftofuse.org
 Margreet Sweerts & Saskia van Drimmelen:
www.paintedseries.com & www.goldenjoinery.com
 Tom of Holland: www.tomofholland.com
 Timo Rissanen: www.timorissanen.com

—*Otto von Busch is a Swedish author, hacktivist designer, and associate professor of integrated fashion at Parson's New School for Fashion Design in New York City. He lectures and conducts fashion hacktivism workshops worldwide. www.selfpassage.org*