

ENHANCED PERISHABILITY -
SURRENDERING KNITWEAR
TO EMBODIED FLUX

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Enhanced Perishability - Surrendering Knitwear to Embodied Flux

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Keywords: knitwear, matter-in-motion, perishability, sweat

My thesis asks us to consider our relationship with matter – the matter around and within us, while questioning their boundaries – focusing on clothing and fashion. I am contemplating the difference between material and abstract values, while considering change and deterioration as means to find more meaningful connection with materia.

The value systems concerning matter are highly contextual, and yet seem self-evident at times. Therefore, the research is conducted through a philosophical approach applied to writing, reading other writers' works, contemplating, journaling, knitting, wearing, and sweating. As well as materialising oneself in knitwear, sweat is also used to think about the meanings behind clean and dirty. I want to demonstrate the importance of seeing underneath the surface of clothes by using water soluble thread, unravelling, and wearmarks as ways of putting time and fade into knitwear, while also considering how accepted or unaccepted this may be.

As the system of values involves a vast array of intertwined insights, many of which rely on individual perceptions, I cannot attempt to provide an overview. I would rather arouse thoughts and encourage people to take things less for granted.

Introduction

The current fashion system operates as a tree-like capitalist system, in which big firms and brands make up the trunk, contributing to a hierarchical, linear system. The tree-like fashion system continuously grows and expands its fixed order and dominant system. But within that system there is always the possibility to continuously create new rhizomes . . . (Bruggeman 2018: 15)

Despite its material existence, fashion is largely composed of abstract values - a sense of a brand, ideas of sophistication, belonging to a "club", trends etc. Without enough emphasis on matter, we become disconnected from its reality – to constantly undergo change. Considering all the social and environmental crises fashion is currently experiencing, it becomes clear that it has created inaccurate expectations regarding the material world. The disconnection is not just a fashion issue; it pervades different aspects of our society.

Through my work, I examine how we consume matter critically. Our attitudes toward material and abstract value are highly contextual, which is why I believe it is important to take a philosophical approach in order to attempt to make sense of things and to cast doubt on their self-explanatory nature. The encounters we have with matter are so common and everyday that we do not notice nor question them, rather quietly accept their status quo. I am not attempting to develop a commercial product within this thesis. We are rarely asked what our work is NOT about, but I find it to be very useful. I am more inclined towards the rhizomatic philosophy by Deleuze and Guattari, which opposes the hierarchical and arborescent systems of our society, focusing on the connections between social factors, arts, sciences, organisations, etc., without apparent order (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987). By contemplating, I am attempting to grow my own alternative rhizome in the fashion tree – a tree that is made of big brands and mass production, and is "watered" by mass consumption. It is more pertinent that I discuss how I can put matter, along with its most relevant measure - time, back into fashion rather than pursuing a specific end-result or product

The first chapter examines why and how our lives, our things, and our

expectations do not always correspond to reality in motion – specifically, how things are made, maintained, and disposed of. I examine preconceived ideas that the product should remain stable. The first section concisely explains why the forms of things are not predefined, the distinction between completed and unfinished things, and why our society can be regarded as abstract rather than material. The second section discusses maintenance – why this word already connotes staticity, what it means to preserve a fully finished object, and how the processes of cleaning, sorting, and discarding are involved. Why should objects be devoid of indications of ageing? What is reality-based maintenance? Why shouldn't things evolve on their own accord?

The second chapter discusses the materialisation of human life through wear marks on clothing. The human being can also be viewed as a material, and the distinction between material and immaterial can be redrawn. What significance do wear and tear and perishability have on clothing? Why ripped denim can be referred to as "permissive perishability?" Through my first set of experiments, I am looking at unravelling using water-soluble thread. Could wear marks be used purposefully to fill the garment with a higher significance – with life?

The third chapter will explore the attitude toward one's own materiality – namely sweat. Is sweat impure? What role does perspiration play and when does the modern human sweat? Is it possible for sweat to be beautiful? Sweat glands appear to be an ideal tool for creating deliberate wear marks due to their regular activity. In the second set of experiments, I make clothes responsive to sweat, which is the body's indication of its flux, thus playing with ideas of dirty and broken. Sweat is a physical manifestation of our emotions, actions, environment, and time – in short, life. What if our clothing could then be designed to be sweat-sensitive on purpose? In the third set of experiments, I am returning to "permissive perishability" – ripped denim. I use "clean" and "dirty" humidity on knitted denim to see the difference between sweat and rain markings. When a sweater deceives our collective acceptance into believing it's denim, I wonder if it's "allowed" to be ripped.

I carry this exploration through writing, reading, and thinking. I am keeping a diary and collecting images¹. I knit, wear and sweat and I

ask others to wear and sweat. To improve our relationship with matter, it is important to play with the values of fashion and not take them for granted. In order to create conditions to see beyond what is on the surface, I am exploring ways to create sensual engagement with the fashion product through its active matter. It's experienced through the body that is alive – a lively substance itself.

¹ Images are used as inspiration, reference, documentation or presentataion. Unless cited otherwise, they are author's copyright

Kootud kaduvus — Silmuskudumite ja keha kahekõne

Mood koosneb, oma materiaalsele vormile vaatamata, suures osas abstraktsetest väärtustest. Üheks selliseks on eseme emotsionaalne elukaar, mis sageli sõltub valitud materjalist. Kui me materjalidele piisavalt tähelepanu ei osuta, ei oska me ka hinnata nende omadust pidevalt ajas muutuda. Sestap keskendun ma oma töös sellele, kuidas materjali osatähtsust ja tundlikkust moes suurendada, andes riitele selgema ajas kulgemise väljendusoskuse. Viimase tarvis võtan appi kaduvuse kui nähtuse ja rakendan seda omale olulisemais meediumis - silmuskudumises. Püüdes näha rõivaste pealispinnast sügavamale, mõtisklen läbi erinevate protsesside kui vastuvõtlikud me tegelikult kaduvusele oleme.

Meie suhteid materjalidega määravad väärtused- ja arusaamad olenevad suuresti kontekstist, kuid ometi tunduvad nad tihti iseenesestmõistetavad. Seetõttu läheneb töö teemale filosoofiliselt – mõtiskledes, kirjutades, lugedes, kududes, kudumeid seljas kandes, higistades ja visuaale kogudes. Minu praktiline töö koosneb kolmest eksperimentide seeriast, milles on keskne roll kudumise ning veeslahustuvate niitide kombineerimisel. Oma esimestes katsetustes uurin *kantavat kaduvust*. Vaatlen mustriliste silmuskudumite hargnemist veega kokkupuutel ning küsin, kas sääraseid soodustatud kandmisjäljed aitavad hoida endas kandja kogemusi ja mälestusi ning seeläbi tugevada emotsionaalset sidet kanatava esemega? Teises katsetuste seerias analüüsin higile reageerivaid kampsuneid, mängides seejuures mõistete katki ja räpane tähendustega. Higi kui meie emotsioonide, tegevuste, ümbruse, aja möödumise ja isegi ajastu tunnusmärki paneb küsima: Kas higi loob rõivaste sisse elu? Millal tänapäeva inimene higistab? Mis juhtub siis, kui riided on higitundlikud? Kolmandas katsetuste kogumis tegelen *lubatud kaduvuse* loomisega, mis on inspireeritud lõhkiste teksade kultusest. Antud juhul kasutan nõ musta ja puhast niiskust, lastes vihmal ja higil silmuskootud teksakangaga reageerida, ning mõtisklen kollektiivsete arusaamade üle. Kui kudum suudab meid ninapidi vedada ning uskuma panna, et ta on teksamaterjalist valmistatud, siis kas ta "tohib" katki olla?



Detail from
the sweaty
sweater
Photo:
Albert
Kerstna

1. Cult of Staticity

Time is an illusion created by entropy. Entropy, in a simplified language, is an increase in irregularity – something that is characteristic of the whole universe. (Vaigu 2020) Entropy makes life possible – it is even life itself. As stated by a philosopher Olli Lagerspetz, a person spots different forms of it in their material world and works tirelessly to tame them. People's relationship with their environment may be defined as one in which they are in charge of the surroundings and the surroundings depend on them. This is at least the way people themselves mostly see it. Therefore, the meaning of "dirty", "broken" "worn out" or "messy" comes from the interaction between people and things. (Lagerspetz 2020: 372) I am hereby attempting to discuss making, maintaining and throwing away in the general sense and of a fashion product's life span in the context of yearning for static existence. Where, when and why does it emerge? Why does it not coincide with actual reality?

Immaterial making of staticity

On a first thought, making is forming matter according to one's will. But what are other forces at play? Do we still know these forces, given that the essential act of making with one's hands appears to be slipping away from us?

Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes that according to common current discussion of art and technology, making is the imposition of form on the material by an agent who has a design in mind. This is how matter has become to be seen as something passive and inert. This idea dates back to Aristotle, according to whom to create anything meant bringing together form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*). It involves reading creativity backwards, from a finished object to the agent's initial intention. This hylomorphic model has become deeply embedded in western thought. Exactly like the grammatical constructions of subject and object, agents describe their intention as the cause and the action as the effect. (Ingold 2010) When we name where the subject begins and ends, we are often moved by fantasies of the uniqueness of human nature in the eyes of God, of escaping materiality or of mastering nature (Bennett 2009: 9). But can the

decisions and ideas stand independently from the motions and physical laws of reality?

The hylomorphic model is exemplified by Western cultures' proclivity of moving away from the tactile and sensual understanding of line and surface that guided practitioners through their diverse materials and giving way to geometric forms that are conceived in an abstract way on paper, in the form of lines, without texture or body, before being realised in material form. This is how the technical and the textilic parted ways, while the former was elevated above the latter. (Ingold 2010) Ingold brings an example from architecture, where projecting of the forms is done with lines and angles, and the help of the material is not required (Alberti 1988: 7 apud Ingold 2010: 93). There are similarities to it in the fashion industry.

Fashion houses commonly cite the creative director as the author of a collection, even if most of the work on the actual garments is done by others. "Artists need not handle the materials from which the artwork is made to remain an artist" (Becker 1982: 19). Some designers sketch finished garments, while others create an atmosphere or concept. Nowadays one of the most important jobs of a creative director however is communicating the brand's abstract image or sense. Mostly they are not engaged in all of the stages of making. The assistant of a Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo describes how the designer gives a concept for a collection to the patternmakers who then create a number of styles from muslin. After choosing the ones that best fit her idea, Kawakubo would ask for some adjustments to be made. (Kawamura 2004: 146-147) Appointing Kawakubo as an author suggests that abstract ideas, which are intangible, are valued more than the process of making, which is usually ". . . debated as mere craft" (Ingold 2010: 93).

Design researcher Namkyu Chun discusses the relationship between fashion design and making in his dissertation - *Re(dis)covering Fashion Designers: Interweaving Dressmaking and Placemaking*. The author cites Ingrid Loschek, who claimed that during the 19th century, clothes were classified as handicraft products, as they were made by a variety of craftspeople, including tailors and seamstresses. In the modern era of

haute couture and pret-a-porter, clothes have now become a product of designers working with a team of people. (Loschek 2009: 175-178 apud Chun 2018: 52) As dressmaking was regarded as a frivolous and domestic activity, development of the fashion design profession lagged behind that of overall design. The author sums up the ideas of Angela McRobbie, according to whom, the term "fashion designer" first appeared in popular usage during the interwar period (1920-1930), and it was used to describe practitioners who created sketches, which were then translated into garments. To secure its place in art schools, fashion design needed to be distinguished from the dressmaking tradition. In fashion design education, the image-making aspect began to be emphasised and it became more relevant than dressmaking. (McRobbie 1998: 29 apud Chun 2018: 51) This encouraged fashion design and production to be separated. (Chun 2018: 50-52)

Ingold accords a greater degree of significance to the act of making, claiming that forms emerge from areas of force and material flow, not from a preconceived idea. Practitioners create by intervening in these force fields and following the flow lines. They need to listen to and join the processes already going on. This is reading creativity forward through an ongoing, generative movement, which is at once itinerant, improvisational, and rhythmic. "Thus the line grows from a point that has been set in motion, as the plant grows from its seed" (Ingold 2010: 91). When a skilled woodsman uses an axe to work on timber, the blade penetrates the grain and follows a line already incorporated into the wood from its past growth history as a living tree. (Ibid.) "Form is the end, death. Form-giving is life." (Klee 1973: 269 apud Ingold 2010: 91) Making is seen as more dynamic in this approach. Forces act on materials before, during, and after the maker works on them. Notice, and keep these forces alive and the "thing" will live.

What are the forces to consider in my speciality of knitting? The most common form of "raw" yarn is either in a ball, hank or cone. When the yarn turns into a textile in knitting, it is acquiring a curved state – a loop. These loops can then be pulled straight until they bounce back again. *Kasvatamine* – "growing" – is the Estonian word for increasing the number of loops in knitting. When one loop grows two new ones on top of itself, the knit becomes wider as well as longer. When each loop

only grows one, the width of the material remains the same, but the length grows. They are reliant on one another as a result of being grown on top of each other. When one breaks, it puts all the ones below it (and possibly above it, depending on the structure) at jeopardy. As the yarn ravel, the material's force is released, the yarn becomes untamed, and one feels a loss of control. And that may cause slight anxiety. Stepping back and letting things collapse is against human nature; the urge to intervene at the last minute to prevent disintegration is strong (DeSilvey 2017: 15). The unravelled yarn regains some of its rawness, but only partially; it cannot totally let go of its memories of being a loop. In the following chapters, I'll be returning to the generative forces of knitting and yarn.

This ignorance of matter undergoing transformation (Ingold 2013: 31), has contributed to the concept of "finished products." Design studies expert Cameron Tonkinwise asserts that this is what divides man-made artefacts from what we refer to as nature. He refers to these categories as *techné* and *phüsis*, following Aristotle's lead. The distinction is that the first is a finished product of making, whilst the latter "simply is." While technical objects are considered to be at rest, *phüsical* objects are always in formation; they exhibit a dynamic presence. (Tonkinwise 2004)

A table is not a table until it is finished. It is not what it aims to be until it is completed. When it is done, when the making is over, the table has no becoming but instead is finished . . . This is very different to a tree, which is never over and done with . . . Though never completed, the tree is at every moment complete as a tree. Even when a sapling, a seedling, or a seed, and also when rotting wood, it is never (at) an end, but rather has its end as and in what it is. Where techné aims to finish (making) something, phüsis involves things being sustained, that is, the maintenance of things, in their changingness, continuing their change, or their continuance by changing themselves. (Ibid.: 6)

This way, things *phüsical* would not turn obsolete. They do not have categories like our things do, such as new, worn out, or "in satisfactory



Plastic concealed loops to
forever stop unravelling
Author's experiment

condition". They have all the characteristics that Ingold argues must be considered while making technical things. After all, the latter is developed from the former. How to elevate *phüsis* to a greater level in *techné*?

Seeing everything as a product may lead to the mistaken belief that everything is complete and static. We would simply see objects. What is troubling here is viewing everything as mere means, assuming their beginning has ended, as if they have no inherent process. (Tonkinwise 2004: 7) These products are robbed of both their past and future. The conventional definition of a high-quality tailored clothing, such as a suit, would exclude any process signs – no chalk marks, no hanging threads. Everything is encased in a gleaming lining. It must appear to have been created by an angel rather than made by a human being. Especially created and not made. Process is deemed irrelevant. It must maintain its ideal shape for as long as necessary. When all modifications and alterations are concealed, we are more inclined to regard the work as complete, and to take it as an index of the artist's intention (Ingold 2010: 99).

When our garments lack signs of process, the actual effort that went into their making is lost for their wearers. Elisa van Joolen turns donated sneakers inside out for her project "Invert Footwear" (2012/2013). The exposed seams on the inside of the shoes, which were sewn by factory workers, reveal traces of the actual production process. By doing so, she calls into question the source's and outcome's value and significance. She erodes the sneakers' function as a representation of a particular brand by revealing how and where they were actually made. (Bruggeman 2018: 13) These sneakers serve as a critique of the industry's practice of obfuscating the maker from the final product.

According to Tonkinwise, the task of design is therefore "continuous design" – creating the conditions for the thing's continued presence over time. It is thinking beyond the initial function and considering the role the product will play in the user's life – it is designing maintenance. "Design things that are not finished, things that can keep on by keeping on being repaired and altered, things in motion." (Tonkinwise



Invert Footwear
Elisa van Joolen
2012/2013
Photo: Blommers/
Schumm

2004: 10) How can we transform the passage of time in clothing into a distinct and visible identity? Making complete things whose “thingliness” lies in their completeness, in their being finished objects, leads to things of no lasting value (Ibid.: 8). And short lived value means discarding or storing, that will be further discussed later on.

But there may be psychological barriers to imperfection and incompleteness. Any drive to finish a task creates tension, which is normally released only once the task is completed. Because preventing completion has no clear goal, this sense of tension remains. (Bilgin 1988: 129 apud Tonkinwise 2004: 12) Would designers enjoy making incomplete products? Does the work feel less worthy to its maker when one cannot predict what will happen in time and there are no guarantees? Semiotician Silver Rattasepp, asks us to think about the line between us and our surroundings – to question whether the line is clearly a membrane of our skin. Perhaps we extend further? When we accomplish something with our hands, pouring all of our energy and skill into the process, and if it gets lost or destroyed, we may feel as if part of ourselves was lost or wrecked. (Rattasepp 2010: 31-32) Indeed when time came to prepare yet another project for evaluation as part of my textile/fashion design courses, I couldn't help but feel as though I myself were being evaluated, as a village fair piglet on a show. I was in the handwoven rug on the floor and in the knitted sweater worn by the mannequin. How simple is it to achieve gratification in work that has no immediate outcome or in work that provides a temporary outcome – satisfaction in the work itself? Is it always necessary to end the process of making garments with a lasting result, even if the meaningfulness of the result is debatable?

The process of making itself, on the other hand, has receded from the modern person's life. We simply do not know how to make. The modern, western world is frequently accused of materialism and a preoccupation with material values. However, if one interprets a materialist in the manner of a captivating last century mediator Alan Watts, “. . . as a person who loves material, and who reverences it, and who delights in using it to its best advantage” (Watts 1973), it is highly dubious. In his 1973 audiobook, he describes our education system as “exclusively bookish” existing to train “bureaucrats, bankers’ clerks,

insurance salesmen, teachers and – we hope – intellectuals”. There is almost no knowledge of material competence and understanding of the material world is not promoted. Students who otherwise would be dropouts in secondary school sometimes choose to take courses in carpentry, auto mechanics or cooking, but this is provided “. . . only regretfully, as an afterthought . . . in a slovenly fashion.” (Ibid.) Even if a person has excellent material knowledge in their specialty, but no formal education, they would likely be considered uneducated.

Children are only prepared for life, instead of living life in the material world of the here and now. (Ibid.) Many of the professions that come from conventional education recognize the computer as their primary tool. Aside from working behind screens, screens are also many people's idea of a good time. After work, one can be found absorbed in social media, Netflix, or video games. Screen has no smell, no structure. Here, your main role is to witness passively, maybe leave a comment or like here and there.

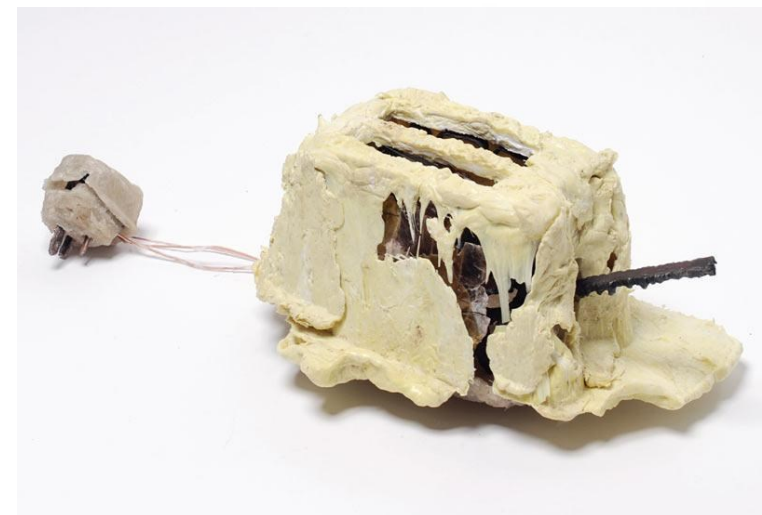
This has left us further removed from the sense of touch. In her delicately sensitive installation for her thesis – *Plain Perceptions: Returning to the Material Through Weaving*, Ingrid Helena pajo shows why touch remains the primary sense through which we are able to connect to the present moment of the reality of life (Pajo 2021: 14). Upon feeling the material, one also feels and relives one's own body – the materiality of a human body. We've quickly progressed from making just about everything ourselves in our farmhouses to purchasing almost all we need. The absence of touch of handling matter, along with the stress associated with the never-ending process of preparation for life, has resulted in a surge in interest in meditation – to re-learn how to experience your own body's currents. Stress balls and kneadable “slimes” have entered the market to allow us to engage in shaping an actual material while sitting in front of a computer all day. Perhaps it's unsurprising therefore that an American youtuber in her twenties earns millions of dollars by hand-making, playing with, and selling slime (Castillo 2018).

The fact that we have very limited ideas of the surrounding materials, their functions and technologies is vividly illustrated by the famous

"Toaster Project" by Thomas Thwaites. By constructing a nearly functional toaster from scratch, he demonstrates how disconnected we are from the processes, systems, and materials that underpin the majority of the technologies and items we rely on in our daily lives, as well as the complexity required to slightly burn a piece of bread every morning. The method involved collecting iron from ore, tracking down mica in Scotland, and attempting to hand-create all 404 components of the device. The process was filmed and then released as a book. (Dunne and Raby 2013: 80, 82) Those who actually make the toasters would be occupied with assembling or producing a specific detail rather than being present from start to finish. Fashion and textile industries are also dominated by this method of production. Modern production systems date back to the Industrial Revolution in the 18 century, when the societies of Europe and North America began to transform from agrarian to industrial. Fordism further rooted them in the early twentieth century, when Henry Ford introduced assembly lines and standardised products. In this sense, even the actual makers of a product are distant from what they make. They are not makers – they are only able to use one machine and perform one operation on the assembly line. But lack of knowledge causes negligence. In the absence of knowing the matter, it is easy to see the things around us as static and dead.

The similar lack of knowledge of processes of making or mending textiles or garments, is represented by YouTube tutorials on "wonderful hot glue gun crafts" or "sewing with a hot glue gun." The use of the term "hot glue gun" in the same phrase with "craft" or "sewing" is rather controversial, as it implies a lack of regard for the actual traditional skills that we are too busy to learn. "We are not the people who love time" (Watts 1973). Why do we want to get things done as fast as possible and therefore get rid of time? Time is, however, a measure of matter (Ibid.). We plan and govern time, race it, but do not sense it; we are disconnected from it. One fears what one does not know.

Watts comes to the conclusion that, rather than being a materialistic society, ours is an abstract one, in a material world. Instead of being tangible, our values are abstract. We're more interested with how it looks than with how it feels, with how it appears rather than with how it



Toaster Project
Thomas Thwaites
2008
Photo: Thomas Thwaites

tastes. We ". . .do not love material, do not love matter, the mother. Materia." (Watts 1973) Likewise, according to a philosopher Jane Bennett, regarding materials as passive, the environment is turned into something abstract for us (Bennett 2009: 115). In fashion, the idea of abstract value is well illustrated by a classic suit, that often serves to feed the idea of a specific image of manliness or sophistication. Fashion is an industry in which non-material meanings often drive the purchase of material commodities (Fletcher 2016: 140). "Fashion's capitalist Ego reduces the actual matter and materiality of fashion to something worthless, valueless, exploited for commercial aims" (Bruggeman 2018: 49). The worth of garments is occasionally derived from the abstract concept of a brand, on which the aforementioned creative directors have worked tirelessly, rather than from their materiality.

It has been shown in this subchapter that the immaterial making of staticity manifests itself in the hylomorphic model of a solid idea and passive matter, in creating products that seem complete and finished, and in not understanding how to handle matter, which results in not appreciating the forever changing state of materials. The next subchapter will discuss maintenance and throwing away together, since the latter frequently follows the former.

Maintaining and disposing of durables

Users handle the materials through maintenance and throwing away. According to conventional understanding, maintaining garments means preserving their finished state – proper and clean. So the idea of maintenance is derived from the love of the static – the process of becoming has ended, and now one must preserve this state. Whenever this is no longer possible, or for a number of different reasons – the item can be thrown away. How is maintenance (or lack of it) carried out? How is it promoted? Is it effective from the perspective of a fully finished product?

Repair has traditionally been an essential part of preservation.



"Crocheted " plastic lace doily -
imitation of memories.
Photo diary

Nowadays, replacing tends to be more comfortable than fixing. The business model of fast fashion revolves around replacing. Often, there is no immediate reason to repair or prolong the life of a garment. It is more indirect – someone else says it's important. Through numerous campaigns and documentaries with shock value, a sense of duty, or a sense of pity, they aim to bring attention to a wide range of issues, from the destruction of natural habitats to violations of human rights. There is *Riverblue* (2017), *The True Cost* (2015), the European Commission campaign *Beyond Your Clothes* (2021) etc. These should work to a certain extent, because evolution has taught us to care and cooperate based on mutual prosperity. Due to the biological adaptation of the emotions, no man exists in isolation from the other, as each is a component of the other's utility function (Warsh 1989). The actual seriousness of the issue and its solutions, however, are equally difficult to comprehend. People's survival instinct does not seem to extend far enough to understand by default that our own survival may depend on that of our surroundings. The "subjective expected utility" theory has proven very effective and universal when making people adapt desired consumption habits (Ibid.). It means that people are likely to make consumption choices based on what they deem to be the best and most comfortable option for themselves.

Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist, says people consume and replace to form and re-form their identities. With the help of identity kits supplied by the market, consumption offers plenty of opportunities for new starts and rebirths. Establishing identity requires a lifelong effort. If new options promise excitements never before experienced, why settle for what one has already built? ". . . the chances of any particular identity being placidly accepted as the ultimate one, calling for no further overhaul or replacement, are equal to the proverbial survival chances of a snowball in hell" (Bauman 2007: 112). Unexplored opportunities abound in every moment, but if they are left undiscovered, they will die unnoticed and undiscovered. No matter how many experiments are conducted, there will always be an infinity of opportunities. Therefore, the curiosity to explore new possibilities and impatience with disappointing results will not decrease. (Bauman 2007) This is building

a brief abstract identity, self-representation, and an idea with the help of material items.

Constant re-building of identity works well for fast fashion manufacturers, because they have learned to use a closely related valuable tool called psychological obsolescence. That has little to do with the traditional concept of obsolescence which meant wearing off (Burns 2010: 43). It indicates that overconsumption can't be resolved by products that last a lifetime. Fashion research professor and sustainability activist Kate Fletcher reasons that "Making a garment last is a very different thing from making a long-lasting garment" (Fletcher 2016: 186). When collecting hundreds of user experience stories, she found that "durability was not an inert quality of experience" (Ibid.: 185). Psychological obsolescence plays a more significant part in the lifespan of a fashion item. A piece's longevity is largely determined by aesthetics or societal tastes – or even changing waistlines – rather than by the robustness of the material. (Ibid.: 196) A Dutch born fashion designer Pascale Gatzzen writes: "Fast fashion is successful because it preys on people's need and desire to belong" (Bruggeman 2018: 32).

So durability is not particularly emotional durability. This relates to the ideas discussed in the last subchapter – an unchanging product is cast into the ever-changing world. When passing time is ignored, the item loses its vital connection with people and their lives (Till 92: 2009 apud Fletcher 2016: 102). Modern over-emphasis on product permanence means items are overlooked, abandoned, stored or rushed through our homes. In this sense, manufacturing drives consumption, not the other way around. Plastic packaging and one-time-use plastics illustrate the controversy about durability from another perspective. (Tonkinwise 2004) It is paradoxical that these are the things designed to be thrown away while they degrade for hundreds of years. Everlasting products may mean everlasting waste that will be around for eternity – never to rot.

The waste occurs when we cut the connection with the item - when the caring relationship between an object and its owner has ended. Responsibility and expectations are given up. In our culture, "away" stands for waste ground – the symbol of resigning from responsibilities.

Disposable durable - a plastic glove with wear-marks
Author's experiment



The relationship between us and our garments is characterised by a network of mutual demands. Things need to function properly if they are to meet our requirements. (Lagerspetz 2020: 330) If they do not, we may see it as a "fault" of the items, rather than ours. In case of psychological obsolescence mentioned earlier, we may see ourselves to blame. We might feel a touch of regret, giving up an item in perfectly working order. In order to feel better, we can then take it to a reuse centre or charity. We can tell ourselves that the lack of clothes is the biggest problem people in need have. "Better than simply throwing it away", we might conclude – hoping that our consumption sins have been redeemed. Giving up responsibility is the same – we wouldn't know what would happen to it. But what if clothes disappeared entirely while you were wearing them? In that case, there would be no long-lasting textile waste piling up and you would have a new piece for every occasion. There would be no notion of "worn off" in this case. Many garments perish in our minds even before they reach the closet, so why should they not perish in actual life? However, this kind of reality might be difficult to imagine, as we have evolved into who we are today somewhat due to our caring relationship with a lasting object (Lagerspetz 2020: 323).

Items that last provide a solid foundation for our essence to rest on (Pajo 2021: 18). We are no longer in control when our garments begin to decompose into non-existence on their own while we are wearing them. We would be unable to determine when we are ready to give them up. Regardless of what we think, the garment quits and begins to shrink and evaporate of its own accord. The idea of garments fading away was explored by a fashion designer Jef Montes, in his collection Resolver. Montes collaborated with the TextielMuseum Tilburg to design a woven fabric made in part of water soluble polyvinyl alcohol thread. He showed his clothing on models that came into contact with a big amount of water on the catwalk. The garments, which began as silver, gradually melted away from the bodies, revealing the black weft yarns as web-like textures. Clothes were ripped and often vanished entirely. (Montes 2016)

The transience of fashion – captured in a show... In times where fashion seems to revolve around quotes such as "Fashion is

Dead" (Li Edelkoort) and "Why fashion is crashing" (Suzy Menkes), I think a lot about my future as a designer . . . this season I wanted to start with a clean slate by literally resolving garments. "Fashion dying on stage and models crashing like fashion" What is left? A blank page, the bare-naked truth, purity, love – RESOLVER is an abstract and highly personal response to the current speed of the fashion industry. (Ibid)

Is it necessary for the clothes to last in the transient world of fashion? In 2016, Hussein Chalayan raised similar questions about the lifecycle of a garment when coats "melted away" during a fashion show due to a shower of water, revealing dresses beneath.

Storing is somewhat related to throwing away or giving up. Things, in the "special storerooms" that no one ever goes to, are not used, not even looked at. They are pushed aside from life. Things have meaning only in the midst of life (Lagerspetz 2020: 333). Storage places tend to become cluttered with things. There are 3 of the same thing - ". . . one old but still working; one not so old but not working; one new but difficult to make work. . ." (Tonkinwise 2004: 1). We call them our things, but we do not maintain them or sustain them. We only add when we feel like cleaning and organising – some of our belongings are downgraded from life to storage. In the world of excess, sorting, storing and throwing are in close relationship with cleaning. It would be almost the same as being dirty if we never threw anything away throughout our lives. It is regarded as messy when items are strewn about in our rooms without any order. And people who are considered dirty are already one step removed from humanity. For us, humanity stands and falls with dirtiness, and vice versa (Lagerspetz 2020: 23). Clutter feels like neglecting our surroundings, rather than like a caring bond with our belongings. So we accumulate clutter in areas where our lives are not taking place.

A disciplined and balanced environment is one of the most significant aspects of modern western life. This is why, rather than throwing things away, we now "let them go," as though disposal is a good thing. "Does it spark Joy?" is Marie Kondo's famous slogan from her Netflix tidying show, and it has become an online meme. "Does this spark joy?" people will ask themselves as they hold an item in their hands. If the answer is



Resolver
Jef Montes
2016
Photo: Team Peter Stigter

yes, keep it; if the answer is no, thank it and "let go." It does not need to spark functionality, or durability - it needs to spark joy. Therefore, disposing is widely considered more positive than storing.

The dominant method of production does not promote keeping the material's already active currents alive, as a craftsman could notice and grow them. As a result, users of these items would be unaware of and unappreciative of these streams. We are unable to maintain and sustain our materials because we lack the ability to make, as we live in a material world but largely not in a materialist society. Yet one cannot expect materials to retain the forms required of them indefinitely (Ingold 2010: 93). Artificial things retain their natural characteristics to the extent that they age in time. At these times, products re-establish their "being-in-time" by *phüsicallly* withdrawing from the technical system into which they have been requisitioned. (Tonkinwise 2004: 8) Even when they are designed as "ends," they change and degrade over time, displeasing us as users. Thus, in addition to things that are psychologically obsolete, disposable but durable, and not able to spark joy, there are items that simply physically, materialistically wear out. Therefore, in addition to abstract qualities, clothing must also meet material expectations. And they often degrade in such a way that we feel compelled to discard them. They wear off, but they do not decompose. Their creators (not makers) have not designed conditions that allow the material to degrade gracefully; rather, it degrades into something we see as unholy. The deterioration process must be allowed to continue out of sight, so it would not disturb us or the discipline we have established in our homes. Their fading does not feel natural to them - it feels ill-suited. It does not have the same melancholic beauty as perishing vibrant autumn leaves or a fallen tree coated in birch polypore.

Fletcher describes people's complex relationship with the marks of passing time on the garments. Sometimes we discard pieces that are ageing or jaded, and other times we buy pre-distressed clothes. Yet, all too often, pre-distressed garments overlook the pleasure of marking the passage of time as it gets stored in the items, forming our memories. (Fletcher 2016: 198) The abstractionist society has evolved ideas about wearing mended clothing. Repairing is akin to



Hot glue gun style of mending
Author's experiment

befriending inevitable ageing and accepting it on our terms. Not giving up on the garment, we would have to "build" new material in the place of the hole by stitching. As hard as we try, it cannot be done in a way that is completely invisible, so it may be preferable to do it in a contrasting colour. Publicly acknowledging our acceptance may feel uncomfortable, as if we lack the means to fight perishing. 19th century writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau explores the question in his classic "Walden":

... I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience. ... I sometimes try my acquaintances by such tests as this; who could wear a patch, or two extra seams only, over the knee? Most behave as if they believed that their prospects for life would be ruined if they should do it. It would be easier for them to hobble to town with a broken leg than with a broken pantaloons. Often if an accident happens to a gentleman's legs, they can be mended; but if a similar accident happens to the legs of his pantaloons, there is no help for it; for he considers, not what is truly respectable, but what is respected. (Thoreau 1990: 20)

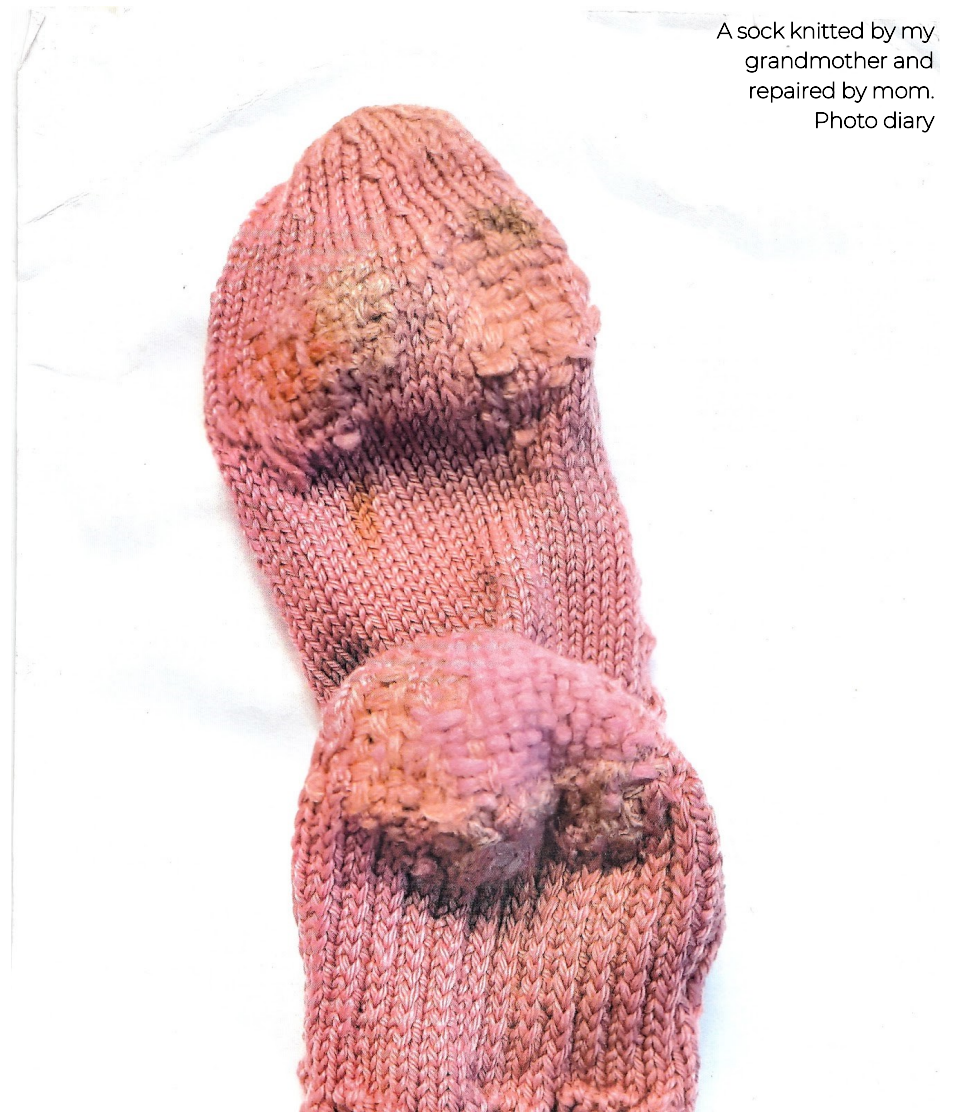
The aforementioned question about the outline of a human is again relevant. What are clothes but insignificant external objects we use to cover up our unsightly nakedness? Or are they rather significant parts of ourselves, preferring elegant looks in stylish clothes to an amazing body dressed in rags? (Rattasepp 2010: 31-32) Is the breakage in my sweater about to spread to me, making me somewhat broken? Does the hole mean I have stopped looking after my whole self, let myself go? The repair of this hole can either be obvious or as inconspicuous as possible, just as we can either embrace our own weaknesses or hide them.

When a garment is considered "broken", it implies that there must be an ideal state as well. The essence of an object involves, among other things, understanding how it can be damaged or ruined (Lagerspetz 2020: 75). Brokenness is a function of the expectations we have for our things (Ibid.: 76). Our common understanding of the ideal state of

clothes may be distorted by pre-distressed clothes – these items are in a state that is unique to most other garments. What if clothes were programmed to start showing signs of deterioration after some use intentionally? When is the ideal state reached? And when are they broken?

Letting the garments be exposed to the wearer's body and actions, and allowing them to perish accordingly, is living with them in their incomplete form. Rather than an over-programmed narrative for user engagement, it is ambiguous so users can experience artefacts through their own individuality, as designers can only loosely direct the experience, but never control it (Chapman 2005: 127). This creates maintenance in action, in response to the emergent, rather than maintenance in durability. Wouldn't that make materiality more significant in terms of clothing value for us? If clothes become more personal, more unpredictable, perhaps one would maintain them without being told to? However, we live in a world where ideas emerge and die rapidly. Perhaps the gradual deterioration until complete disintegration as a result of wearing corresponds to fashion's nature? Perhaps even the intended symptoms of perishing in clothing are too much for many? Do we love everything shiny and new too much?

2. Wear Marks



A sock knitted by my
grandmother and
repaired by mom.
Photo diary

Embracing perishability

I say, beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made to fit? If you have any enterprise before you, try it in your old clothes... Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles. (Thoreau 1990: 21)

Allowing perishability to work its magic in order to achieve incompleteness necessitates relying on entropy, which is profoundly entwined in physics' most fundamental laws. And, while we would rather not see degradation anywhere around us, it is nevertheless one of those common things. We all need comfort, even if it is bittersweet, because we all share the same fate. And the beauty inherent in common decay can be revealed by observing and allowing the material's currents to grow in the midst of life. These same dynamics store a significant portion of the code that governs how perishability will manifest.

Caitlin DeSilvey, a cultural geographer, brings together ideas from a variety of authors to explain entropy as a prospect. Structures that are conserved or consolidated have limited options for configurations, but decayed and deteriorated structures have many more (DeSilvey 2017: 10-11) – "... an element of chance enters into the equation" (Ibid: 11). Rather than viewing entropy as chaos and disorder, it might be viewed as an actual possibility (Ibid.). Material conservation, in the heritage sense, is an attempt to preserve the relation between self and surroundings (Vinegar and Otero-Pailos: 2012 apud DeSilvey 2017: 13). However, memory does not need to rely on a stable physical form as long as it is seen as a dialogue between mind and matter (Pétursdóttir and Olsen: 9 apud DeSilvey 2017: 14). It might be that a state of gradual decay provides more opportunities for memory making, as well as more engagement points (Pile 2005 apud DeSilvey 2017: 14-15). Memory is nothing stable.



Eroded wall
in Põhjala
Tehas
Photo diary

We need to get back to nature in the sense of focusing on the material presence. It is the very notion of "environment" that may hold us back from engaging with the world, as it refers to something that surrounds us - but it is not us. We could see it as a vital matter instead – "vital materialists are selves who live as earth." (Bennett 2009: 111) And being linked to the material world can begin with the most common process it undergoes – deterioration. If we were ancient Greeks, we'd know that egress, evasion, and eluding are part of everything's nature (Tonkinwise 2004: 9). We would define made products as being at rest, not static, rather than permanently present; finished in a specific way, but not altogether completed (Ibid.). It was not only the ancient Greeks – it used to be a common understanding of people from indigenous cultures to be part of impermanence. Like the ancient philosophy of wabi-sabi according to which degradation, attrition, corrosion and contamination make the expression richer (Koren 1994: 28). It is asking you to come to grips with what you deem ugly (Ibid.: 51). The focus points are aligned at the point of tacit knowledge, or where materia meets the idea.

Most thinkers agree, according to fashion designer-researcher Julia Valle-Noronha, that fashion is not solely about matter, nor is it solely about abstract values, pictures, images, and concepts. Fashion is composed of material and immaterial entities that are continually in flux and have an effect on one another. People and things are inextricably linked – they define one another's existence in the world. Clothes can elicit thoughts and actions due to their materiality. In this way perhaps, ". . . we can take our experiences with making and wearing clothes as tools to make sense of fashion?" (Valle-Noronha 2019) Our clothing's materiality is continually present – whether it's an itchy woollen sweater or a tight skirt – requiring us to adjust the length of our steps. When I discover a hole in my sock, it is not simply the abstract concept of diminished value that prevents me from wearing it any longer; it is also the unpleasant sensation of my skin touching the chilly floor.

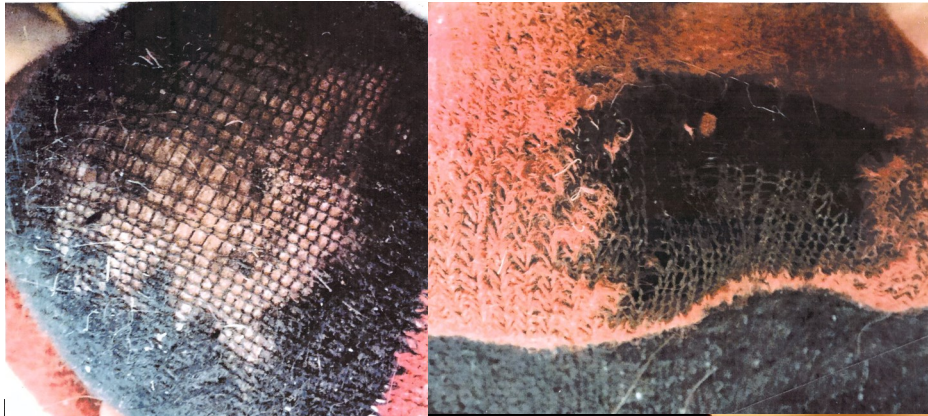
"Matter deserves to matter more" (Bruggeman 2018: 49). Fashion researcher Anneke Smelik discusses new materialism, which is the belief that everything, including things, products, art, fashion, and even humans, is formed of matter, or a combination of mineral, vegetable,

and synthetic materials – inevitably linked (Smelik 2018). So the disobedience of nature affects also these entities - including ourselves. When you look at matter through this lens, the traditional distinctions between material and immaterial, human and non-human, alive and inanimate, start to blur (ibid: 39). Material perishability, engendered by the history of wearer, item, and life becoming together, can carry with it the tacit sense of melancholia and nostalgia. In light of this as well as the wear and tear discussed previously, perishing becomes a connection between materialism and immateriality.

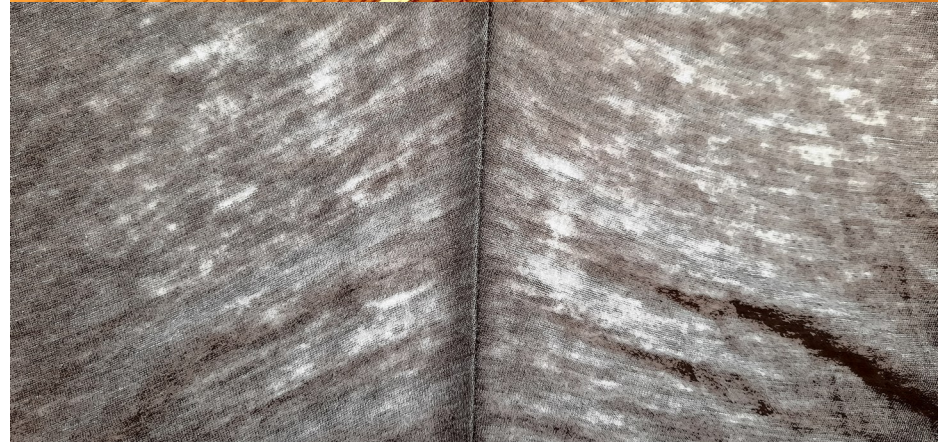
In their initiative "Golden Joinery", Saskia van Drimmelen and Margareet Sweerts want to repair clothing with a "golden scar". This is based on the Japanese Kintsugi method, which embraces broken or damaged things. Instead of working from the value of the new, they prioritise values of care and love for the damaged. "The broken is not just what needs to be fixed, but also has its own desires, values and affections." To have a more ethical relationship with clothing, it is necessary to focus on alternative value creation – reclaiming values that have been lost or commercialised by capitalism. (Bruggeman 2018: 34) By fixing wear marks while enhancing their visibility, the value of experience can be materialised.

Smelik states that fashion studies have claimed that clothes are "dead" when they are not worn by a human body. Elizabeth Wilson argues that there is an "eerie quality" to old clothes displayed in museums or hanging in a deceased person's closet because they ". . . are so much a part of our living, moving selves" (Wilson 2003: 1 apud Smelik 2018: 43). If the garments are storing the movement of a living person in wear marks, could they be storing the life itself ? ". . . absolute absence of motion - is death. Movement is life" (Johnson 2007: 16). Wear marks become valuable for tracing the life and movements of their previous, possibly long-deceased, owner.

When I examine the back of my trousers or my socks, I notice erosion - the body has been gradually fading the garments, quietly abrading away material. Perhaps it piled it elsewhere? Similarly to how the wind sculpts sand into boulders and water carves canyons. These are the small surface formations that life



Eroded clothes, photo diary



has created on my surface. Only life is capable of such organic design. (Authors diary 16.01.2022)

According to the user experience tales that Kate Fletcher gathered for her research, old age is frequently viewed as vibrant (Fletcher 2016: 185). When asked to select a meaningful item from their closets, the participants occasionally chose anything with wear marks from a significant event or person. There was a ripped shirt from tree-planting in Canada, or dad's jeans turned into shorts that needed to be clipped and stapled every now and again to keep them together (Ibid.: 200, 261). When we consider our garments physically ageing well, we may begin to value them not just for what they are now, but for what they and we might become together. "Fashion experiences that are alive with authentic relatedness to the broader world – with our relationships with others – are the stuff of change" (Ibid.: 283). "Good" ageing occurs when clothes become alive in their materiality in relation to life.

But as discussed before, people's relationship with the marks of passing time on the garments is complex and sometimes controversial. The only fabric that is widely and unequivocally accepted to be ripped and distressed, is also the most common and universally recognized fabric in the world – denim. According to fashion historian Emma McClendon, the process of distressing denim sets it apart from other fabrics in the clothing industry, as no other fabric is treated in this manner at all market levels. While pre-washing, bleaching, and abrading denim physically weakens the fabric, the weakness adds to the textile's perceived value. This is a total reversal of traditional clothing values. (McClendon 2016: 27)

"At the most basic level, denim can be defined as a warp-faced twill woven from cotton thread with the warp threads dyed blue from indigo and the weft threads left undyed or white" (McClendon 2016: 13). Nowadays, many others may be referred to as denim, like chambray. Considered tough and durable, denim was originally developed as an ideal fabric for workwear, most notably in the clothing produced by Levi Strauss & Co for nineteenth-century fortune hunters in the USA. So it became known as the marker of the working-class, whose jeans faded and occasionally ripped from hard work. Distressed jeans first made a



Different types of "denim" -
plastic and printed
Photo diary

statement in the 1950s, when American biker gangs wore them, followed by hippies subverting society's growing consumerism in the 1960s, and punks and rockers in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, ripped jeans have historically embodied an anti-establishment sentiment. (McClendon 2016) For several decades last century, clothing was purposefully ripped and worn beyond its breaking point in order to challenge established social trends. Those dressed in distressed clothing were recognisable as representatives from an alternative direction. Wearing clothing that was "decent" was therefore an integral part of being a member of a "decent" and "law-abiding" community.

However in the 1980s, when pop stars such as Madonna were seen wearing them, torn and shredded denim became a major fashion trend. Stone washing, acid washing, and strategically placed rips and tears became popular denim features across the market. (McClendon 2016: 28) Distressed aesthetics gained additional acceptance with the "revolution" of Japanese fashion designers in Paris at the same time, who introduced deconstruction to the western world. Deconstructed clothing poses the question of whether hanging threads or unfinished fabric edges compromise the garment's aesthetic. (2011, English: 124) Since then, distressed denim's popularity has remained unaffected by passing trends. The same is true of denim in general, which has long shed its working-class image and evolved into a quintessential casual wear textile that is also inextricably linked to high fashion. According to Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, denim is one of these "blindingly obvious" subjects. It is so common and taken for granted that we have become blind to its presence and importance. (Miller and Woodward 2011: 2)

Estonia was behind the iron wall as denim gained popularity in the West. Locals got their hands on jeans thanks to illawful "businessmen" in the streets, and they were more expensive than a month's salary. Some were also lucky enough to obtain them from their "domesticated" Finn across the bay, or from kinfolk in capitalist west. A pair of original jeans was much more than a pair of trousers; they were a symbol for everything that went on behind the iron curtain. (Ojavee and Pupart 2018: 130-131) This is why "sincere" socialists would refer to wearing jeans as "bowing down to the West." Jeans were a silent



Jeans worn and mended by Kristjan.
Photo diary



Mario wearing jeans
mended by his
grandmother
Photo: Grete Riisik

protest and a message of longing for freedom on this side of the globe also, as well as a status symbol. Jeans were thus considered sacred during the Soviet era, and while those that made it here were frequently sanded, it was not considered acceptable to have an actual rip in them. Due to the fact that living was marked by austerity, mending clothing was a natural course of action. From this era, one unique breed still remains – grandmothers who mend everything. And, while they are no longer shocked by the ripped knees, they occasionally end up asking whether you are not homeless. Thus, some of us have discovered that upon returning from grandma's house, the rips in our jeans have miraculously acquired a patch beneath them. Typically, this mystery force operates only while the owner is not looking. Are eastern European grandmothers one of these disobedient forces of nature to reckon with?

Classic jeans fade gradually due to a unique dyeing technique that makes the colour durable but not totally fixed. We remain fascinated by the quest for the most durable trousers – jeans that will last a lifetime while gradually developing unique wear marks. "Our jeans become a family friend telling stories of their own with each stain, rip or repair" (Dawson 2014). Jeans, in this sense, are never complete. A hundred years after Levi's jeans promised to give you a new pair for free if your old pair rips in 1890, Levi's jeans guaranteed to shrink, wrinkle, and fade in the 1990s (McClendon 2016: 12). Jeans are responsive to life. There are even terms for the wear lines on them, such as "hige" or "honeycomb," which allude to the natural creases on thighs or the back of the knee, accordingly (Friedrichs 2014). McClendon describes how much of the denim nowadays is polished with sandpaper in precisely laid out spots to resemble natural wear patterns found on worn denim. Natural wear patterns emerge on denim as a result of stress points created by the wearer's body and lifestyle, such as how they sit, what they keep in their pockets, and so on, resulting in fading that is unique to that person. Artificial wear patterns, on the other hand, will be consistent across a product range, appearing in the same areas and forms on every garment. (McClendon 2016) So it turns out that the most ubiquitous clothing item in the world can be used as a case study for a seemingly unexplored idea of clothing programmed to display signs of deterioration after some use. This is the "permissive

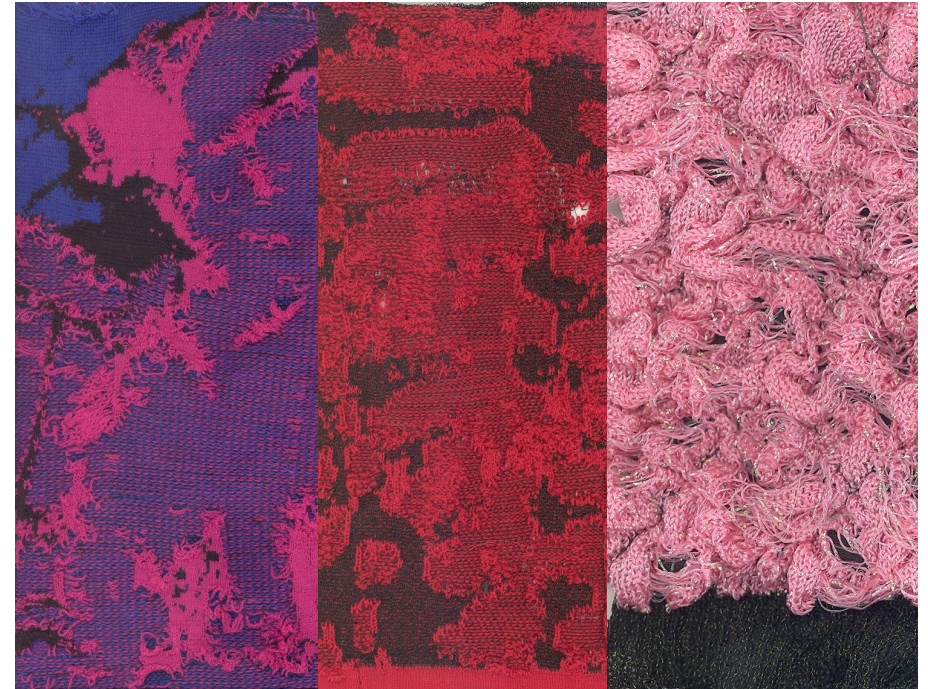
perishability". This makes it all the more surprising that, with the exception of a few fashion-conscious individuals, our understandings of other materials in this matter have mostly remained unchanged.

Programming perishability into clothes means the categories of the state of the garment are not emphasised. Embedded emergent features only become visible through engagement (Chapman 2005: 127). Clothes will grow as you do, and growing older is not considered as a negative or even evident thing, but rather as an exciting aspect of life. One's life is materialised into a garment. The designer can set the stage, but the wearers are in charge, intuitively, unconsciously, and willfully, as they move around the world wearing their clothes. Nobody else can mark clothing quite like you can. Emergents arise through the engagement of materials, makers, wearers, and surroundings – there is nothing to plan beforehand on paper.

Unapologetic unravelling

Materials are constantly and persistently undergoing transformation, regardless of the external forms in which they are currency cast (Ingold 2013: 31). As a quintessential property of the world, this transformation deserves serious emphasis. For my first set of experiments, I am returning to the fact that loops are "grown" on top of one another in knitting – this provides insight into the generative currents that should be noticed for pre-programming perishing in knitwear. It is the process briefly discussed previously – unravelling. Unravelling is frequently feared and under-explored. This is an unique process in the material world – nothing unravels like the knitted structure as the loops get released. I now turn to "thinking through making" – in my case – knitting.

To allow the unravelling to take place, one must first conquer the fear of dissolution. Loops have to be left or they need to become loose. Just like other materials, they long for running amok (Ingold 2013: 17). The material can be removed piece by piece to free the loops and allow the form to emerge. Looking to facilitate the removal of some of the material after knitting, and to experiment with unravelling, I turned to



Above - Ravelling tests after the PVA has melted - Stoll ADF
Below - Before and after the PVA has melted - Silver reed 840
Author's experiments

the water soluble PVA thread that I knitted into the material. PVA stands for polyvinyl alcohol, a thermoplastic, non-toxic, water-soluble, biodegradable, and flexible synthetic polymer with a high tensile strength. PVA thread is used as a supplementary material in textiles, fashion, and tailoring for temporary tacking, weaving various mesh fabrics, temporarily fixing tags, ect. The thread comes only in white colour.

While washing, water dissolves the PVA stitches in the pattern, releasing the yarn stitches, leaving behind a world of structure that is both regulated and random. This structure now begins to unravel. Unravelling, even more so than the static stitch alone, reveals the essence of knitting. It generates dynamic conditions by exposing the material in multiple stages – the stitch and the frizzled yarn that had just been released. When yarn is wound into a ball, it is at its most basic - it is simply yarn. One senses it as a beginning. If a few loops begin to ravel on a sweater, the yarn returns to it. Opening up a garment to unravelling removes the focus from the "ideal state" and "finished" or "broken" loses its significance. Sweater obtains a constant state of becoming instead (Koren 1994: 49). Sweaters that intentionally ravel are made with the purpose of allowing the yarn to fight free. While the planning and creation process will predict the next stages to some extent, the piece can continue to live on its own, gradually reverting to yarn.

As time passes, more and more released yarn will emerge, resulting in an increasingly disordered structure. The amount and location of the liberated yarn would illustrate the passage of time. Different activities would lead to the unravelling of different parts of the structure. It's almost as though you can hear the loops loosen up when you stretch your arms. Perhaps one would feel that certain acts should be withheld in order to prevent the sweater from unravelling too quickly? It's possible the yarns might become tangled in things and serve as a constant reminder that you're wearing them. Perhaps the woollen threads and loops will begin to felt together and will not ravel beyond a certain point?

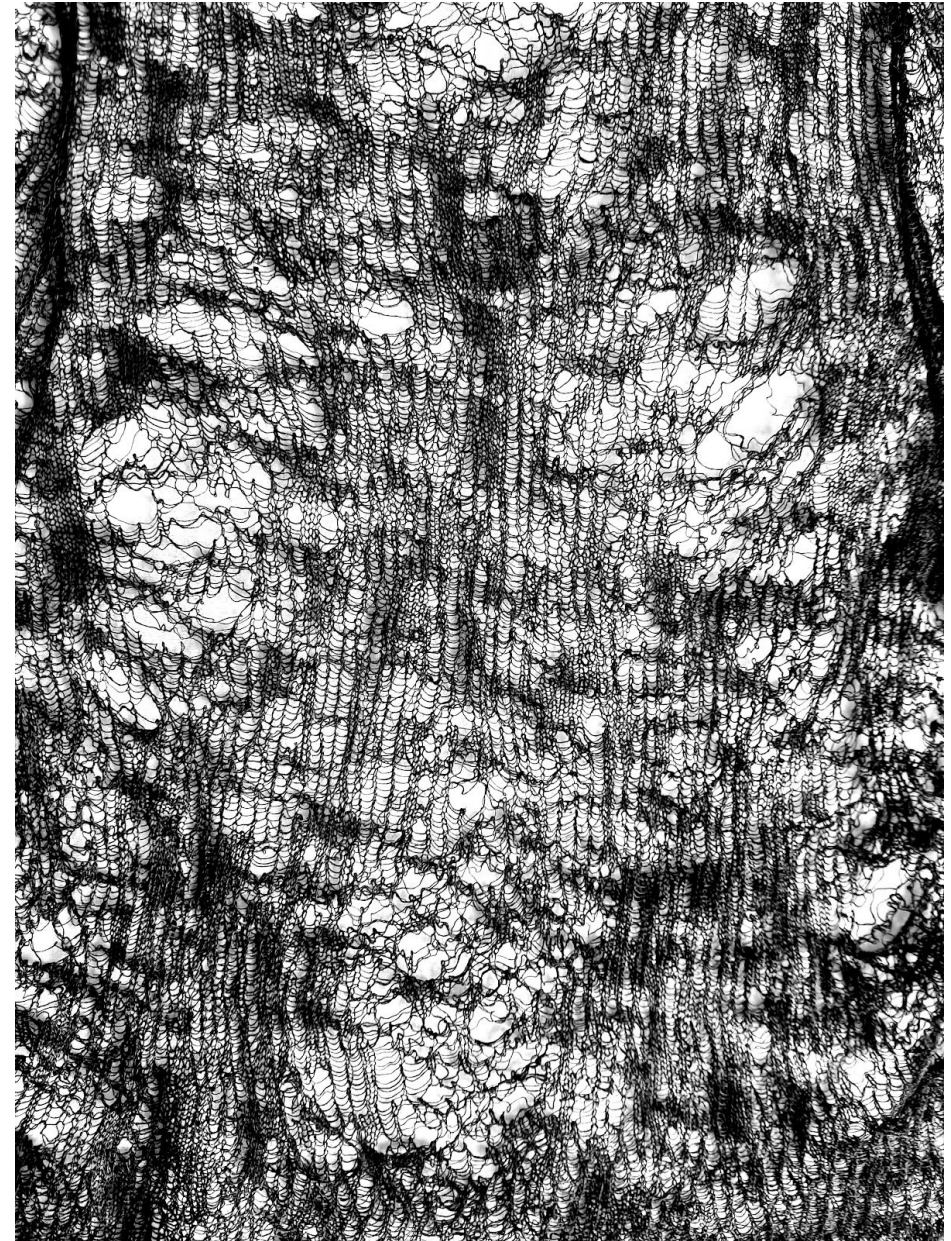
The closer anything gets to nonexistence, the more exquisite and



Sweater 1
Before and after
Photos: Kirke Talu

evocative it becomes, according to wabi-sabi (Koren 1994: 50). What if the core of a sweater, rather than its function, is its delicate ability to unravel into non-existence? Even after it has been reduced to a single ball of yarn, where it once started, the wavy texture of the yarn still serves as a reminder that it once was a sweater; it is still in the memories of its former wearer too. To "unravel something" is a term used in several languages to refer to the process of dealing with something mysterious or unclear in order to comprehend it or obtain clarity. When the enigma begins to reveal its secrets, it is said to be "unravelling." It is a notion that exists between the material and the immaterial. Additionally, a bundle of tangled yarn requires unravelling, and when the "thread of thought" begins to unravel, understanding is near. So perhaps going back to the beginning is the best way to gain clarity.

However, unless one intentionally ravel the sweater, it most probably won't unravel completely back into a ball of yarn while being worn. Furthermore, it is possible to knit entire columns of insoluble stitches on top of each other from the bottom till the top of the sweater. They will reinforce the structure in specific areas while allowing the stitches in between to unravel spontaneously, without causing the sweater to fall apart. Thus, this type of "perishability" is easily wearable in a material and practical sense. However, how can I infuse the sweater with even more life and its wearer? This will be discussed in the next chapter.



Detail from sweater 2

3. A Pretty Sweaty Human

Human life can be stored in the material of the garments we wear through fading, wear marks, and unravelling. As previously discussed, the passage of time, along with fade and decay, is not always tolerated or acknowledged. But how do we feel about the materiality of ourselves that acts on the garments, causing the fade?

According to the aforementioned ideas of new materialism, humans are material too. "This means approaching the human body as an assemblage of material forces, just as much as nature or things are shot through with material forces" (Smelik 2018: 49). One particular type of wear mark constantly serves as a reminder of our materiality and material forces - the sweat mark. Its chemical composition gradually erodes the fabric, transforming it into something wholly unique and uniquely ours. Our materiality is defined in large part by water – our body, which is composed primarily of water, naturally exudes humidity in the form of sweat and other bodily fluids. Sweat stains, on the other hand, are the last thing we want to see on our clothes, and we don't think of them as a sentimental remembrance of personal tales, but rather as something repulsive. We feel a sense of shame about many of the processes that constitute our material being – metabolism, sexuality, illness, etc. – they are something we should keep a secret (Lagerspetz 2020: 182-183). But what if sweat is used to "design" garments while they are being worn? Given that individuals may sweat several litres per day, this appears to be an effective tool for generating intentional wear marks. This chapter will delve into the ideas of body materiality, sweat and their associations with clothes.

Sweat may serve as a reminder that we are corporeal humans, rather than only a lovely concept. Our bodies are analogous to fashion in this respect, as they are composed of a network of immaterial and material values. While we may exercise to maintain a healthy body and feel physically good in it, it frequently coincides with the pursuit of a certain image of a contemporary beauty ideal.

Once again, where does our materiality begin and end, what is the interior and what is the exterior? Lagerspetz explains that we can refer to our bodies as distinct from ourselves, as in "I look after my body" or "I look at my hands." However, "I" can refer to a physical body as well, as in

"I weigh 67 kg." Additionally, it may make no reference to the body at all, – "I am worried." (Lagerspetz 2020: 346) Furthermore, even if you only have stains on your clothes, you might say: "I am dirty." So it is not unambiguous whether the body is ours, or if we are the body.

And then there is the body-mind dualism, which occasionally elevates the mind above the body – as in "inspirational" internet quotations that go something like "You can build a strong body but first you must build a strong mind". According to philosopher Mark Johnson, this is characterised by the illusion of disembodied thought – the popular presumption that if one could simply remove one's body, one could achieve something akin to pure unadulterated thought (Johnson 2007: 6). Separating ourselves from the material refers to a desire to be more than a piece of meat, more than a body. The concept of a soul that can continue to exist in some form after the death of the body is present in all major religions, and even atheists frequently find this concept soothing. Paradise, Valhalla, heaven – you must leave your body behind to enter. Thus, there is the belief that the mind can exist independently of the body. Perhaps all of this has contributed to the multitude of ideas and understandings about the less-than-positive networks of feelings associated with some of our body's physical processes, including sweat?

A frequent issue with sweat is its association with filth. However, what does the word "dirty" refer to? Similarly to the fact that a human's metabolic activities should be kept secret, every substance that exits or falls away from the body is transitional and so suspicious – saliva, blood, urine, vomit, hair, nail clippings, perspiration, and so on (Smith 2007: 34). Famous idea of Mary Douglas describes that when substances exist in the "wrong" spot, they become suspicious and dirty – "matter out of place" (Douglas 1984). When matter is not in its "normal" place, such as hair on our heads, blood, or water within our bodies, it becomes dirty because it is in the "wrong" place - external to us. Sweat happens in lots of areas of the body on a daily basis and is one of the most uncontrollable of our bodily secretions – hardest to keep a secret. Is sweat already filthy as it appears on our bodies, or does it become filthy only when it adheres to clothing and becomes a stain? Lagerspetz, describes that no particular organ secretes literal dirt. However, dirt can

be characterised as a foreign, unwelcome substance adhering to a host object, such as clothes. When does my sweat become foreign to me? (Lagerspetz 2020: 343-344)

Occasionally, a word pair – "mine – not mine" – might be used to evaluate if something is dirty or not (Lagerspetz 2020: 348). As previously said, clothing can be viewed as an extension of one's self. As a result, when we wear another person's garments, we may feel out of place. At the very least, one should wash them prior. When my own sweat can become foreign to me, it follows that the sweat of others is primarily dirty by default (unless when one is very close to someone). Therefore, if I tried on a friend's sweater that was "shaped" by their sweat, how far out of place would I feel then?

So, dirt is frequently a highly contextual concept – what is dirty in certain circumstances is not dirty in others. My dishes will not become dirty while I am eating (Lagerspetz 2020: 78, 335), they will turn dirty once I am finished and have put them in the kitchen sink. The word sweat however appears to be pre-loaded with a sensation of dirtiness. It forms on top of your skin to cool you down, so it is not a "matter out of place" when it is still your skin. Or is it? When I'm running in my exercise clothes, my clothing doesn't feel particularly dirty while I still move, despite the fact that it is getting sweaty. When I come to a halt and stop by a supermarket before returning home, I feel unclean because there has been a change in activities. My training clothes become particularly dirty once I remove them and toss them in the laundry basket.

Lagerspetz states that another reason for something to be dirty is if its function is disrupted (Ibid: 76). This may be the case with sweaty clothing, which stinks and physically disturbs other people, as well as yourself. However, there are already materials developed for athletic clothing that eliminate or significantly reduce odour. Therefore, if sweaty clothes have no odour and are simply sweaty, does this impair their function as clothing? It is possible that it impairs your self-image. To comprehend how something can be dirty, one must first recognise the host object (ibid: 75). As a network of abstract values, fashion is critical in representing your abstract image. And when sweat stains, or



Thinking about the body
Photo diary & distortion

any stains for that matter, are considered dirty by the general public, sweat does indeed inhibit the self-repetition function. But values change?

Consequently, "hygiene historian" Virginia Smith asserts that there is one overriding reason for many people today to practise personal hygiene: self-representation. The time from 1945 has been depicted as one of fully secularised personal hygiene – a new sort of highly individualistic narcissism for the United States and the Western world. The concept of 'BO' (body odour) and the usage of underarm deodorants originated in America, and were popularised by a huge advertising campaign in the 1950s, along with the American habit of showering. The so-called "hygiene hypothesis" proposes that we have all become too clean for our own good, and that this is the cause of the alarming rise in allergic and auto-immune illnesses (hay fever, asthma, food allergies) in urban societies with high hygiene standards. (Smith 2007) Showering daily or washing clothes exceedingly frequently is a relatively new practice for Estonia, which was separated from the west for a long time in the previous century. My parents only got a shower in the 1990s, and my grandparents on the eastern border still don't have one, and they only go to sauna once a week, strictly on Saturdays. I'll return to saunas later.

Today, gender may also play a role in determining whether someone is "sweaty and thus dirty" or simply "sweaty". Boys, unlike girls, are generally taught to value their accomplishments over their appearance or smell – fathers continue to pass on the traditional male right to perspire without shame: "Sweat is a sign of hard work, nothing to be ashamed of, a fact of life" (Smith 2007: 341). As a result, sweating may be considered more "appropriate" for men. Does this mean that men are more readily accepted as "true material beings" than women are? Classifying "dirty" or "not (so) dirty/okay to be dirty" accordingly, reveals little about the actual situation, but rather about yourself – your perceptions, beliefs, and values; where, when, and to which family you were born to.

Naturally, the desire for cleanliness is not novel or contemporary. Simply said, standards have shifted, and they continue to do so. Smith

describes how running water and purification are integral parts of religious rites dating all the way back to ancient times, such as India's Kumbh Mela festival by the Ganges. Additionally, the terms 'clean 'n' decent', 'clean 'n' tidy', or 'sweet 'n' clean' were not coined yesterday. (Smith 2007) "The effects of cleansing and cleanliness can genuinely be counted as one of life's great pleasures – gladdening the eye, sweetening the taste, inviting the touch, and delighting the nose" (Ibid.: 13). At the same time, the term "dirty" is associated with moral deficiency. As much as we desire to be clean and avoid being dirty, we cannot precisely define a person's ideal condition of cleanliness or dirtiness, which is always and everywhere accurate. What we assume to be filthy is frequently neither harmful nor unhealthy – like the sweat on my clothes. Given that dirtiness is a deviation from the ideal condition (Lagerspetz: 295), we might ask what the ideal state is for a human being. Unlike the majority of our possessions, individuals, according to many philosophers, cannot be characterised by their teleology – their ideal function or purpose – since such things do not exist. Medicine also does not specify the ideal level of cleanliness. (Ibid.: 345) Taking the preceding into consideration, the links between perspiration and filth are largely contextual and not conclusive.

Sweat is, after all, critical: in addition to cooling us down, it serves to eliminate undesired wastes such as excess salt, lactic acid, toxic metals, urea, etc. Perspiration formation beneath our palms and soles has aided in our survival by giving a firm grip. (Aaland 1978: 10) This is why, even now, when confronted with a stressful circumstance, we notice how our palms become sweaty. Sweatglands in the underarms have another purpose: they produce feromones, which are human sexual scent-indicators (Ibid.). And because the modern individual, with their deodorants, synthetic clothing, and sedentary lifestyle, probably does not sweat much, the sauna is a place where you can sweat off your waste substances. Sweating in the sauna is purposeful – one of the primary purposes. In a sauna, sweating is not dirty. However, in the past, saunas and sweating had a broader, more personal, and even magical significance. A photographer and sauna enthusiast Mikkel Aaland writes in his book:

The warm, dark, moist ambiance inside a sweat bath is easily

likened to a womb, even the womb of Mother Earth herself. A tired, dirty bather climbs into the confines of the sweat bath, assumes a foetal position, sweats out physical and spiritual impurities and emerges refreshed and cleansed - reborn. The sweat bath prepared bathers for the rituals that attended birth, adulthood, marriage and death rites of passage; times when awe of the unknown was highest . . . The Russians say, "If there are few banias¹, we live in unity; but if there are too many, we are lonely because one does not visit the other". (Aaland 1978: 16-17)

Thus, sweating brought people together, and it still does in public saunas. Russians, Finns, Native Americans, Turks, and Japanese, to name a few, each have their own type of sauna. Additionally, sauna was, and still is a vital component of life in Estonia.

Saaremaa celebrates sauna day today. Since I was a child, it has been held on every Wednesday and Saturday in my family; additionally on Christmas Eve, New Years Eve, and Midsummer's Eve. I'm always giddy with anticipation before sauna; it never gets old. My favourite sauna begins at a temperature of 100 degrees, which is precisely what it is today. I experience shivers as I climb onto the stand (lava) in the steam room due to the movement of the hot air. Shivering from hot air is a really unusual sensation. With lei² caution is required in a sauna that hot. As soon as I begin to sweat, I feel it has been enough: my skin begins to stitch under my nails. I retreat to the anteroom to cool down and prepare for the next round. This is when I get very sweaty. It has been 5 minutes. (Authors diary 10.04.2021)

Last century ethnographer Tamara Habicht has researched Estonian saunas throughout. The term *saun* (sauna) appeared in Estonian at least in the third century BC, while the word *lei* is thought to be even older. The most important thing to do in the sauna was *vihtelemine*³ and sweating – washing was a secondary and less significant function that also appeared later in history. Sauna's therapeutic effects were

¹ Humid type of sauna , typical to Russia

² Hot sauna steam emanating from hot stones in contact with water

³ Beating of the body with soaked branches



Saaremaa sauna
21.05.22
Photo diary



believed to be mostly due to sweating. Perspiration was nearly magical – people presumably noted that sweating enhanced a sick person's general state. The sauna served as the poor man's physician – "If the sauna does not cure the illness, death will end it." (Nõo parish) For centuries, medical science's advancements benefited mainly the ruling class. The peasant sought assistance from traditional wisdom – the sauna and sweating – in association with witchcraft, conjuration, and other magical components. It was once believed that peasants survived to a ripe old age exactly because they knew how to harness the healing powers of saunas and sweating. The greatest sauna virtue and medicine, hot *leil*, was identified with the ethnicity and social class of peasants, whereas it was considered dangerous for German landlords. Sauna culture was indigenous to the native people, not to the nobles. Sauna rites also helped prepare for maturity, childbearing, and marriage, as well as "eliminate sloth" from children. As a miraculous and healing environment, sauna was also the safest place to give birth. (Habicht 2014)

Additionally, these times were marked by strenuous physical labour that resulted in increased perspiration. On this side of the globe today, people are encouraged to exercise due to a dearth of manual work. When do I sweat? Where do I sweat? How much do I sweat? I am a near-city dweller in the twenty-first century. Someone who daily applies deodorant and showers. Who performs little physical labour, except for simple tasks such as cleaning or knitting on a machine. My workouts are infrequent and light. Am I sweating enough?

I sweat when I am anxious about social situations, new environments, or being evaluated in my speciality context. When I eat spicy Asian cuisine, which is a novel experience for us Nordic people. I sweat when I awaken at night, panicking about whether I am keeping up with my future success plans, and as a result of a mild fever following my Covid 19 vaccination. I sweat when I am embarrassed. The sauna at my childhood home is one of the few places where sweating is pleasurable and unrelated to stress. (22.04.21 Authors diary)

So are my emotions my perspiration? They're as though they're

seeping through my skin to the surface. If perspiration is filthy, are my emotions and thoughts also filthy? Returning to the subject of whether the mind is distinct from the body, Johnson uses a claim by a psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist Don Tucker, that actions are motivated by the brain, which constantly evaluates the environment based on sensory information. Memory, awareness, or musical appreciation are not faculties separate from our bodily functions that float in the mental ether. (Don Tucker 2007: 58 apud Johnson 2007: 99) Johnson uses the term "body-mind" to emphasise that there is no such thing as a mind without a body. One of the signs he provides that perception is physical and embodied is the metaphors that lend tangible meaning to abstract values. We are familiar that "warmth" equates to affection, that "hunger" equates to lust, and that "dirty" equates to amorality. (Johnson 2007)

Without a body-mind dualism, there can be no soul apart from the material. Then there can be no such thing as a pure intellect in a not-so-pure substance. "Embodiment can be understood as the lived experience of human beings" (Bruggeman 2018: 29). When there is no distinction between mind and body, can my emotion truly become tangible in the form of sweat? And if I then believe that my stress, concerns, worries, or feelings are something that is wrong and awful, and that my mind, composed of all these things, has now turned into filthy sweat, then maybe I need to reconsider what it is to be human? Sweat is symptomatic of being present in the moment, in the present emotion, when the presence causes the body's currents to move.

At times, it's frightening to gaze too deeply into oneself and feel too touched. At times, it's frightening to allow the current moment to get too near. It is easier to occupy the senses with something light and distant - something that does not touch yet keeps the brain steady. Remote is secure. But does it help me become more human? (Authors diary 25.12.21)

Is the sweat mark then a manifestation of the mind moulded into form and substance? Does sweat enrich the material, the clothing, with soul? Perhaps the composition of sweat varies according to the mood or action that produces it? What if it mixes with the humidity of the



Sweat mixed with PVA
and polyamide
Author's experiments

environment? Is a particular action or emotion more pure or more impure than another? Which circumstances result in the most beautiful sweat marks?

Sweaty sweaters

Dirty and broken are closely related – as both represent a departure from an item's ideal state. Something that is dirty must be cleaned, and something that is broken must be repaired. (Lagerspetz 2020: 76) These two adjectives already convey an indication of the necessary action to resolve them. Garments that cast doubt on these two concepts, however, seek to de-emphasize their obviousness – to rethink them. I now intend to return to knitting, wearing and sweating in order to pursue this subject further.

I opted to experiment with sweaters since, along with socks and mittens, they are one of the first items that come to mind when thinking about knitting. Furthermore, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, one of the old meanings for the word "sweater" is "clothing worn to produce sweating and reduce weight" (1828) Even earlier, the word meant "one who works hard" (1520s). Sweaters appear to be "sweat-suitable." So for the second experiment, I made three similar ones (the only difference being the sizes) almost entirely out of PVA thread. Only the hems and collars are made using traditional materials - two are made of wool and one is of hemp. These blain sweaters represent a rather anonymous wardrobe basic, something we all have in our closets.

While I began knitting, I realised that the sweaters were not intended to last, but rather for a brief existence. However, I did not feel sorrow or as though the work was in vain; rather, I was eager to see them come to life on the body. I reminded myself that it is the presence that counts.

What if I can use the sweaters to create a physical "sweat diary" of a 21st-century city dweller, prompting the body-mind to continue making the sweaters, thereby transforming them from anonymous to personal?

Sauna sweat
Above : Me in the sauna
anteroom cooling down
Below : Photo by Albert
Kerstna



Because panic attacks and embarrassment are unpredictable, I chose a sauna to be the sweat setting for myself. I invited two of my friends to wear the remaining sweaters, to see the different formation on different bodies – one while working out and the other while eating extra spicy Asian food. My special friend sweats excessively when combining spicy food with drinking tea. Both of these actions are rather "modern", even trendy and were not practised in the olden days in Estonia. Fascinatingly, sauna has remained trendy through centuries.

And when the perspiration begins to work, the wearing process becomes a study in which emotion, action, time, environment, and body – in addition to the material and technique – are all intervening. Intuitive design is being taken to a new level when dynamism of living is in charge. Still wishing to be present as a creative mind, I was preparing the material for interaction with life. This is more than letting things happen by a mere chance. And while the wearer continues to make - it is unconscious, yet conscious as putting your ego on the back burner is not only difficult, but also unnecessary. One simply has to allow things to happen – making develops into growing.

The knitting technique is right here – it is not concealed nor anonymous; it is emphasised. It is simply knitting, but more than that – it collaborates with time life. And, as with the aforementioned "eroded" sock heels or faded trousers, a similar physical ease and effortlessness begin to emerge. This is the embodied life that gets moulded into a form. Their slow descent towards perishability does not feel like death; rather, it feels as if they are becoming increasingly alive. Fragility and disintegration feel natural, as does the drive toward oblivion, which appears to be alive. And perspiration transforms into something delicate and vulnerable. These sweaters could not be washed from sweat due to the fact that water does not make them clean – it makes them completely disappear.

Perhaps by wearing these garments, you can get excited about determining which situations cause you to sweat the most aesthetically? Perhaps the PVA material might be further improved to indicate the chemical makeup of sweat and to react differently to hot

Workout sweat on Mario
Photo: Albert Kerstna



and cold sweat? And in this way, we might gain new insights about our sweating, or even develop a greater appreciation for it, as it might no longer be seen as something filthy – and hence alien – but rather something precious and personal. Perhaps you learn to embrace your anxiety when it manifests as an excitingly delicate surface?

After all, most human actions contain phases that soil us in some way. A person who totally abstains from soiling is renouncing human life. Dirt is authentic, genuine, and revolutionary; while cleanliness represents restraint. (Lagerspetz 2020: 31, 343) Thus, it may be beneficial to rethink and possibly redefine the boundaries of filthiness from time to time, rather than taking them for granted. Perhaps by occasionally pushing some boundaries, you can discover more diversity in life and live a more unpretentious existence?

Permissive perishability

For my third set of practical experiments, I'm returning to the concept of "permissive perishability" – denim. I'll be working with sweaters once more, extending my exploration of the notions of dirt, cleanliness and perishability.

Distressed sweaters are slowly making their way into the closets of the young eager for expression and a few gutsy people, but they are far from widespread acceptance. Meanwhile, the concept of "ruined" jeans is ambiguous. Distressed denim aesthetic is so embedded in the collective memory of many of us that we do not question it. We are familiar with it; it is self-evident. So, what if a sweater could deceive your instinctive, tacit recognition into thinking it's denim? If it had the same attitude, would it become an example of permissive perishing in our intuitivity? Ripping appears to be a good match for denim's energy because of its relatively tough and rigid nature. Firm denim emanates a strong personality; it is not gentle in any way, and tearing it simply adds to its self-willed attitude.

Thus, for these sweaters, I'm going to experiment with our instinctual,



Asian food and tea sweat on Piret
Photo: Albert Kerstna



Knitted denim
Author's experiments

implicit knowledge of distressed denim by attempting to knit a denim-like fabric using water soluble yarn that is once again accessible to being moulded by life. I mixed PVA thread with blue cotton yarn to make knitted "denim" for several experiments and came to compare two distinct structures – one for sweat and one for rain – to play with "dirty" and "clean" humidity.

Rain, like perspiration, forms wet patches on clothing. Their size and position are determined by the activity at hand – how the body moves. Additionally, it is dependent on the intensity of rain as well as direction, and speed of the wind. Contrary to sweat, rain is the ultimate emblem of purity and new beginnings. Thus, the former causes the clothing to become dirty, whilst the latter causes them to become clean.

As briefly indicated above, ancient purification ceremonies were inextricably linked to natural flowing water. Death and decay were opposed by life, and goodness, wholeness, and purity were all supernaturally associated with fertility and regeneration. Goddesses of fertility were strongly associated with the earth, spring, and water and rain (Smith 2007: 33). Thus, experiments involving the combination of perspiration and rain are fascinating. One originates from within, with clothes becoming more reliant on the body-mind. The other comes from the outside, making garments more environmentally sensitive while still leaving plenty of space for the embodied. Therefore on these two different occasions, I tend to put my "denim" to the test.

"Denim rain sweater" required several sessions and hours of rain to become what it is now – It does not rain much in spring and bigger showers are uncommon. Though with several walks in the drizzle, I succeeded. "Denim sweat sweaters" were knitted using a special "weave" technique. Consequently, the pattern is still organic after sweating, but it is no longer delicate like the pure PVA sweaters. It is rather clumsily organic. At the same time, rain denim is more fragile looking. Is this the "appropriate" character for a shared understanding of outer and inner humidity? As one of my grandparents asked about my thesis, I showed them the sweat sweater. The exact words were: "See on ju jube"⁴. After being offended in secret, I thought: "Is 'ugly' bad?" While I love my

⁴This sure looks terrible

platform crocs, I think they are ugly. Fashion is often no longer about beauty. Many more people than ever before have access to "beautiful" things. Beauty is now a commodity. Is it even boring? I see people playing with beauty, disrupting it. According to Carolyn Mair, a cognitive psychologist who specialises in fashion – the brain has an easier time processing "normal" or average objects, but it gives more attention to more complex or unusual items. Though it may be perceived as unaesthetically pleasing, wearing something different that draws attention can be construed as a form of risk-taking, which can be interpreted as exciting, adventurous, and fun. (Igneri 2021) Ugly may not be just ugly anymore. Designed by sweat or rain, ugly-pretty denim sweaters – are they in the end beautiful or are they ugly, dirty or clean, broken or whole?



Denim rain sweater - making, waiting, its working! Photos: Pawel Orynicz



Denim sweat sweater – before & in sauna

Photos: Pawel Orynicz



Denim rain sweater
Photos: Kirke Talu





Denim sweat sweater
Photos: Kirke Talu

Conclusion

In my master's thesis, I examined and contemplated the importance of recognising the alive matter that surrounds us, with a particular emphasis on fashion. I attempted to examine our encounters with matter critically – in order to make a greater sense of everyday objects such as clothing while also considering other items we consume. That was done to call into question the obviousness of our practices regarding our material possessions, such as how we manufacture, store, dispose of, and wear them. Through reflection, reading, journaling, knitting, and wearing, I initiated a discussion with myself and discovered that the value systems governing these practices are not self-evident and thus should not be considered final.

I discovered that our abstract system of values and meanings has caused us to disregard time in the physical world. And that emphasis on durability may contribute to the matter in motion being further overlooked. I suggested that a more complete understanding of the material world could start from a better understanding of its fundamental deterioration characteristics. I discussed the complicated relationship we have with marks of passing time on our clothes. And I speculated on ways to reintroduce time into clothing – specifically knitwear – by conducting experiments on "in-programmed" perishability and unravelling.

As wear marks and passage of time are inextricably linked to one's own materiality, I discussed our thoughts on this, particularly our sweat. I discovered an intriguing labyrinth of ideas and values surrounding sweat – its relationship to dirt, gender, emotions as well as old beliefs about its healing qualities, to name a few. I came to the conclusion that perhaps sweat is our mind transformed into matter. I wanted to investigate why sweat marks on clothing should not be a beautiful and meaningful feature, contrary to popular belief. Additionally, these experiments explored concepts of dirty, clean, broken, and ugly, as well as "permissive perishability" in reference to widely accepted distressed denim.

By creating conditions to see beyond the surface of a sweater, I aimed not to take established fashion values for granted. This encouraged bodily engagement with the clothes' active material.

It is much more complicated to fully understand how we consume and relate to matter than this work could possibly cover. I could only begin to question, and even understand, the status quo. Even though design's inherent optimism is essential most of the time, it can cause a great deal of trouble by denying that the problems we face are more serious than they seem, and that the only way to resolve them will be to change our beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviour (Dunne and Raby 2013: 2). My thoughts and speculations about the systems of these values and beliefs would never reach their actual scale, let alone change them. This entire system has the charm of most of its parts being perceived individually, and so it is impossible to predict. However, speculating and challenging what is by asking – "what if?" – can provoke thoughts or questions. It keeps one dreaming, as well as contemplating and thinking.

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