ABSTRACT

Fashion suX is an artistic research project of imaginative utopia creation in the tradition of Thomas More. But instead of an imaginary society on an island, the project explores how a radically different fashion culture could emerge in the footsteps of hardcore and Straight Edge metal. The project specifically examines the underground fashion and craft movement that called themselves suXers (sometimes referred to as “sustainable fashion Straight Edge”). Radically opposing the “do-good” ethics of consumerist sustainability, the suXers embody an ethic that imbues not only clothes and lifestyle but also an infuriated rejection of the fashion system’s sartorial betrayal. Opposition needs other motivations than pure virtue, and anger can be one such motivation, as exemplified by the suXers.

KEYWORDS: fashion utopia, sustainable metal, fashion design, rebellion, anger is an energy

The Straight Edge hardcore movement at the end of the twentieth century managed to achieve a remarkable inversion of lifestyle values. Turning
their lifestyle choice of no drinking, smoking, and drugs into a cool thing, not a good thing, they exposed how rebellious ethics mixed with anger and aggressive youth culture can make a powerful and energetic mix. Their inversion of the lifestyle values of the rebel and hedonist generation just before them could in turn be folded upon itself in continuously new ways, turning anger toward many social ills into processes of awareness-raising as well as social mobilization. In the realm of fashion, could a utopia of sustainable consumerism perhaps also be folded and queered in similar ways? Indeed, one has to ask, What would sustainable fashion look like if it was to be aggressively cool, and not ethical and do-good in the kind and careful spectrum of emotions?

In order to tackle this issue, I have for some years been expanding an idea of documenting an unknown sustainable underground movement, a sibling to the punks and hardcore crust punks, called the suX movement. The work finds itself somewhere between an ethnography of my own and other's experiences across the spectrum of metal scenes and a fictional account of a made-up “movement” turning lifestyle values explicitly against the consumerist mechanisms of the dominant fashion industry. Even if fictional, the practices documented in the suX movement have been part of various metal scenes, at least since the punks, so the framing of the topic is not fantasy. Instead, it is a modulation of processes common within many “alternative” scenes in the West over the last decades, with its artifacts, clothes and accessories, posters and patches, and lyrics and images. Thus, in order to manifest the suXers I also set out to produce the artifacts of the community: the clothes and accessories, patches and posters, zines and spoken word poetics, all tiny maps of another type of fashion utopia.

Not unlike the visit to the imaginary island of Utopia described by Thomas More, my participatory observation of the suX culture is an ethnographic “visit” to study a sustainable alternative or complement to our own limited imaginations in the realm of fashion design. Also, in More’s tradition, my effort has been to sprinkle the narrative with substantial bits of satire. As a designerly tool for imagining another shade of sustainable fashion, the suXers may help us unleash wider creative as well as critical visions around the ethical economy of care, yet without becoming moralist or ascetic or becoming romantic historicists with subdued do-good minimal aesthetics. Ethics and care are good, but could anger also be an energy for sartorial sustainability?

What if we stop reducing craft and repair to small acts of therapy and care to instead mobilize them as expressions of rage and anger?

One and Many Utopian Crafts

In the way mentioned above, the suX movement is of interest not only to historians of subcultures but especially for those engaging in issues concerning sustainable fashion. The reason for this is that the movement had a radically different approach to sustainability and utopian practices than what became the dominant paradigm from the 1990s until today: the idea of win-win consumption-based change, that is, the proposition that the ethical consumerism of the rich will without friction benefit the situation of the poor. This win-win promise proved doomed to be empty or a wishful dream of consumerist consensus. The ethical promise of change was betrayed from within. Thus, like their counterparts in the Straight Edge movement, suX was based on anger and aggression, not desire and hypocritical virtue. Their ethics was not based on historical revisionism, like, for example, the romanticism of the Arts and Crafts movement, but, rather, on alternate praxis in the now. On a similar note, the suX did not start a new sustainable culture but tuned the existing political frustrations within the hardcore and Straight Edge scenes into craft and fashion practices: utopian and prefigurative as much as manifested and applied, yet also satirical as much as political.

As we will see, the suXers were proto-craftivists who put great effort into merging subcultural rebellion with sustainable fashion and crafts. Craft is often influenced by utopian thought, as Buszek and Robertson notice; the very concept of “craft” is tainted by a desire for how things ought to be. For example, historical utopianism is prominent in the work, writing, and political convictions of John Ruskin, William Morris, and the Arts and Crafts movement, as made explicit in Glenn Adamson’s discussions on how the very category of “craft” emerges as a distinct response to modernism and mass production. Similarly, this amalgamation of spiritual and manual utopianism can be found in the work of Alfred Richard Orage and his guild socialism, which in turn bear marks of theosophy and the spiritual utopianism of Orage’s influencers, the gurus George Gurdjieff and F. D. Ouspensky. Many contemporary books on "craft-Bildung" follow such a trajectory, thinking of
utopia as a practical process, as much spiritual as hands-on, and a path rather than a destination. This kind of paradox is also common in science fiction. Take, for example, the importance of craft in Philip K. Dick's alternative history novel *The Man in the High Castle,* with its romanticism of tradition and artisanship, or the popular sci-fi books of Jack Vance, for example, *Emphyrio,* where wood carving becomes the primary technology and mass production is forbidden, yet labor is still exploited by the feudal lords. What many sci-fi writers build upon with craft is a certain form of attention and knowledge that seems marginalized by modern society and thus alternate and utopian in their work. Freeman-Moir argues that craft is part of artistic utopias in a special way in that it puts emphasis on co-creation and not passive reception. Freeman-Moir notices that educators such as Morris and Dewey suggest certain types of artistic and attentive ways of being in the world, in itself a utopian endeavor, and he uses Sennett's idea of craft as a special "technique of experience." With its connection to action, craft can be a powerful way to manifest utopian dreams and political struggle. As noted by Faith Wilding and the Critical Art Ensemble, craft has acted as an important predecessor to feminist struggle: "The organizing cell for the first phase of feminism was the sewing circle, the quilting group, or the ladies' charity organization." In correspondence to such an approach, Bratich and Brush see activism inherent in many forms of craft acts on many political levels, in correspondence with the German word *Kraft* (power, skill, capacity) but, more importantly, as a form of cunning, capability, or ability (*potenza* and *puissance*). Craft is at its foundation a form of manipulation, a tinkering with the material orientations of the everyday: "We can think of English versions like tradecraft, statecraft, spycraft, and witchcraft: the set of skills and practices that have systematic effects in the world." In her work on craftivism, Betsy Greer emphasizes how craft is in itself a powerful form of agency, as a political ability to act and put a sustained mark on the social world. Greer notes, "Craftivism is about more than 'craft' and 'activism'—it’s about making your own creativity a force to be reckoned with. The moment you start thinking about your creative production as more than just a hobby or 'women's work,' and instead as something that has cultural, historical and social value, craft becomes something stronger than a fad or trend." As an example of such mobilization of craft politics, the suXers have over the last decades taken a front seat in sustainable fashion practices.

The sustainable underground, or suXers, has long lived in the shadow of its more widely known musical siblings, Straight Edge hardcore and crust punk. All three subcultures emerged in the early 1980s, in the radical backwaters of the punk movement, merging the punk lifestyle with political activism, antiestablishment rhetoric, DIY empowerment, and rejection of the do-good mainstream and fusing this mix together with aggressive music and concerts steeped in furious energy. Yet the formation of the culture is not obvious, and what to call the loose affiliations of music, craft, politics, fashion, and lifestyle-fused relations mobilized among the suXers is a tricky task. As noted by media theorist David Hesmondhalgh, the terms *scene,* *subculture,* and *tribe* highlight processes of belonging, yet also fail to capture the many diverse cultural practices that make up temporary or sustained collectivist behaviors. In the case of the suXers, to emphasize the often hands-on activities of the participants, Wenger's phrase "community of practice" may be more fitting, as it points to the shared practices that make up the loose but crafty ties of the suXers. Even if most suXers would disagree with being called a "movement," I will still use this term to describe their collective practices, especially as many participants highlight how their values stand against the false individualist-centered myths of mainstream fashion media.

The suX movement underlines the lifestyle commitment seen in other music subcultures and applies this approach to clothing to uncover layers of ethics under the studs. With its mixture of crust punk aesthetics, enclosed Straight Edge values, and radical recycling crafts, the suX hardcore style rejects the "do-good" hippie aesthetic of the sustainable mainstream. As an alternative the suX advances a more rebellious frustration with the regimes of dress and fast fashion, with intense hatred against mainstream fashion's polite submission to exploitative capitalism under the banner of "conscious collections." Gravitating around social craft formations, what are within the movement called "juntas," rather than bands, suX groups often infuse the names of their musical idols with craft references. Reminiscent of their musical counterparts, the juntas are steeped in aggressive anticonsumerism and frustration with the political and social ills of today. Yet the aesthetics of crust-crafts, with their tender repairs, often with dental floss, denote the crusts' concern with ethics of care and merciful preservation. It is an ethic...
that not only imbues clothes and lifestyle but also embodies a wholehearted rejection of sartorial betrayal. Whereas many academic studies of Straight Edge have been produced over the last decades, not many recognize the intertwined practices of its dressed parallel expression, the suXers. Even in studies of "sustainable underground" no traces of the suX show up, and similarly no trace is shown among the "punk crafts," which means that the suXers still lack a serious historiographical account. Some important studies have integrated a wider perspective on musical subcultures and lifestyles, including gender, crafts, philosophy, and economics, yet fail to mention the important heritage of the suXers.

Rise of the suX Juntas

Whereas punks distanced themselves from the “peace and love” of hippies and turned their slogans of harmony into straightforward manifestations of conflict, they still continued the dropout philosophies of the 1960s. In contrast to this, the Straight Edge rebellion of the 1980s was partly a response to this rebellious and “free” living of the 1960s, challenging “sex, drugs, and rock ’n roll” with defiant puritanism. By refusing sex, drugs, and alcohol, Straight Edge became an aggressive scene steeped in an almost religious fervor of puritanism. In a similar vein, the suXers can be seen as a response to the high life of cultural consumerism, the birth of fast “democratized” fashion, and also the implicit consumerism that seeped into even the rebellious underground movements, especially in its wild form during the 1980s. As Vivienne Westwood turned punk into high fashion and started mass producing the industriousness of rebel hands, the suXers turned their loose philosophy into a lifestyle dogma: there must be clothes and crafts outside the scope of capitalism and exploitation.

Emerging in conjunction with the Straight Edge (sXe) scenes, the thrift, repair, and sartorial carefulness of the suXers were an urgent reply to the ever increasing frustration with consumerism together with reports of global environmental disasters, yet also an approach to revitalize a dressed form of “green peace” beyond tie-dye and dropout pacifist aesthetics. Like the Straight Edgers, the suXers were not afraid of taking the fight.

The suX scene emerged as an unbaptized twin to the sXe and hardcore music scene. However, whereas sXe was mainly a music scene, the suXers put their emphasis on sustainable style and crafts. The informal crews, or “juntas,” had the social form of the bands they associated themselves with but were often unknown to their musical counterparts. The juntas were in many ways the “bastards” of the hardcore scene, a love child of sorts: creative followers not necessarily unwanted but often tacitly shunned. The band Minor Threat was followed by the suX junta Minor Threads; the junta Chain of Stitches was the illegitimate lovechild of the band Chain of Strength and a group of radical antiwar knitters. The list can go on, with juntas such as Yarn of Today, Agnostic Fiber, Bad Braids, Reused, Guerrilla Stitches, and The Misstitches, just to name a few. Some juntas acted in concert with their musical counterparts, while others had neither any contact nor any correspondence in ideology or ideas at all.

Other juntas that earned respect among suXers were, in no particular order, Cro-Ches, Black Tack, Dead Kardigans, Bad Raveling, Needle Assault, 7Stitches, Sheer Textiles, Sartorial Distortion, Nepalm Lace, Megamend, Filament, Darn Angel, Satin Terror, Overcast Ivy, Buttonhole Surfers, Darn to Nothing, Merciful Mend, Darn Tranquillity, and Double Cross, just to name a few. Also retro-juntas from the United Kingdom had a great impact, not least the Pin Pistols and Judas Patch, whereas the 1990s saw the rise of the explicitly communist- and hip-hop-inspired Mend Against the Machine.

Not only textile and musical crafts united the suXers but also zine culture and underground exchanges of lyrics and poems and mixed media events and spoken word performances. Many of the artifacts left over after the suXers bear witness to a living zine culture and discursive exercises mobilizing members through a mix of rebellious articulations of anticorporatism and the production of suXer props: jeans and clothes repaired with patches naming the juntas, studded shoes, and accessories, as well as pins and repair kits.

The relevance of embroidery to the suXers also draws from their grounding in craft technique and especially the realm of mending. The cross-stitch is an essential sewing technique and usually the first embroidery stitch taught in craft class. Similarly, this stitch is also a popular way of tackling a patch to a garment and the preferred way to darn a basic hole. In this way, the X is more than a symbol to the suXers; it is the very foundational materiality of their cause. The X-stitch proves how punk attitude, skilled hands, dental floss, and a sustainable approach to lifestyle can be merged to wage war against the dominant, wasteful, and hypocritical values of mainstream “sustainable” society.
A specific role is played by zines among the suX. The rough photocopied style, with high-contrast imagery and crude handwriting, gives a very coarse and brutalist expression to the insurgency against hi-fi consumer culture and glossy fashion magazines. This echoes punk zines and early street fashion zines such as s-D magazine, and still today, many of the suX publications have a rough and rioting style, yet always with a socially engaged and sustainable edge.

The Oral History of a Sustainable Underground

When writing the history of the suXers, one can notice how the scene gathered around the material component of clothes from a conservationist or sustainable practice, in conjunction with the lifestyle or musical performances of the sXe. Focusing on the suXers’ relation to matter and textiles brings forth what sociologist Noortje Marres has called “material publics,” where the physical world becomes an attractor for intersecting political activism, public engagement, lifestyle, and discourse. suXers produce public discourse and tangible engagement as a form of “dirty art” (as opposed to fine art). The force of gravity for the suXers has always been the material conditions of garment repair, and this can also be traced in the oral history of the suXers. One suXer witnessed how material culture helped shape her own suXer identity:

We would sometimes go to the local record store and go, “Have you got any Minor Threat records?” And they’re like, “Yeah, we sure do.” And we would hang around listening, and we would see these awesome embroidered patches and posters with great textile Xs on, and some flyers of some craft gig at a local community center, and we would like, “What’s that cool shit?” We would go to the show, and there’s all this subversive and sustainable kids around, doing all kinds of noncapitalist lifestyle stuff—farming, bike repair, sewing, and shit, and all this to the angriest bands ever, such fucking energy man! We would first hang around looking at what they were doing and then get more hands-on. And suddenly you were part of a great, engaged movement. That textile X was just this mark of recognition, like a black flag of protest. (Interview by the author, 2011)
A key component of the movement involves the core techniques of desegregation and antialienation. The scene actively works to overcome the distance between band and audience or designer and consumer. Fans get access to the microphone at gigs, leading the audience to sing, or share crafting tools and works, working together. Similarly, designers and consumers mix at the craft gigs into one huge DIY movement, sharing ideas and making together, for example, the Minor Threads quilts that have traveled with the band on tours, or even the puritan embroidered bandana of Mike Judge, or the backstage batik saris of the Krishnacore bands. For many kids this was the ultimate experience of the culture: to share equally the intensity of the music and ecstatic craft with fellow fans and makers.

The shows tend to be violent, with a wide range of aggressive dance styles, from windmilling fists to flying kicks, stage diving, and head walking. The audience alternate dancing and taking part in the craft events, often at the back of the space or in some cases even onstage, as in the gigs of experimental composite bands such as Youth Craft and StiXShift, where craft and playing merge into one. The adrenaline levels go high, moving from the craft stage to the mosh pit, and floss skin stitches altered with DIY tattoos get rubbed against sweaty skin as the event space turns into a violent playground. As another suXer confessed,

The shows were just rad. Of course the bands were what drew the large crowd, but some of the suXers were just purely wicked, stage diving rolled up in yarn and drawing threads across the whole room. At a show in Baltimore, Buttonhole Surfers had brought in two sheep that they started shearing just before the show, so the full crowd was all up spinning threads as the band was playing. I remember the guitarist having all this wool tangled up in his strings. And the smell, that fucking wool smell and sweat. It was such raw energy. And it itched like hell when we came out in the cold. (interview by the author, 2012)

Similar to Straight Edge, suXers do not "participate" in a social movement in the ways scholars typically think of movements. There are no strikes, demonstrations, lobbying, or signing petitions. The collective is not formed by synchronous or centrally organized activities. Rather, the groups are organic and fluid. The collective is loosely bound by their critical agency and united through commitment to their ideals. As one participant noticed, "When the rebels are in it for the drugs or the excitement, we are in it for the skills. We want a reskilling of society, of our scene. It is a growth from within, a resilient resistance, rather than loud protest" (interview by the author, 2011).

The suXers customize their participation to meet their own skills, interests, needs, and local situation. And they do this mainly via craft interventions, repair, and careful attention to clothes.

Parallel to the sibling subculture Straight Edge, with its emphasis on no drinking, smoking, or sleeping around, the suXers aim to turn values of sustainable consumption into a lifestyle. Whereas Straight Edge youth turn the X mark, a signal to club workers not to serve them alcohol, into a symbol of defiance, the suXers turn repair into a symbol of sustainable defiance, of resistance, self-actualization, and social transformation. "Fashion clean-living" is a banner of taking the punk DIY ethos into a lifetime commitment, rather than quasi-sustainable thrift store consumerism. For the suXers, the stigma of not having the "privilege" to drink is a symbol of pride, expressing "not only can't we drink, we don't want to drink." In a similar vein, the suXers explicitly claim that, even if we can afford to consume, we repair because "we are at war with consumerism!

As opposed to punks' "no future" DIY hedonism and their radically unsustainable "live fast, die young" attitude, the suXers turn the "question everything" mentality to face itself, combining the raw energy and aggressive style of punk to instead engage with the future and especially the fashion consumerist lifestyle of today's youth. With the Straight Edge "clean living" ideology, the suXers see consumerist self-indulgent rebellion as no rebellion at all, instead suggesting that rebellion reinforces the capitalist culture's grip on cultural and individual expression. In this way, the suXers embody a radical position of utopian practices. The only way out, according to the suXers, is to fight with the skills of guerrilla "war-craft." As in the spoken word lyrics of the Yarn of Today's "Craft More," their suX version of Youth of Today's "No More" from 1988,
A selfish, hardened society
Craft More
Community rage beyond myself
Turn fashion into something else
Craft More
I won’t participate

Where the sXe make the rules of no drink, no drugs, and no careless sex into their commandments, the suXers turn consumerism and fashion on their heads in a refusal to participate in the mainstream fast fashion extravaganza. But whereas the sXe rallies around the original three commandments, and also split up between further commitments, such as veganism, anti-abortion beliefs, and so on, the suXers’ rules lack dogma. Compared with the righteousness of the sXe, the rules of some suX cultures seem a flexible guide, as one follower witnessed,

“I don’t like when fashionistas view the guidelines as a set of rules, where you have to follow the commandments of 1, 2, and 3. I don’t think that’s what it’s all about. It’s not like the twelve-step scheme. It’s about living your life the best way you know how but also to kick ass. It’s a quest towards sartorial justice, and justice is not tidy; it is crafted out of anger. You can’t put that into rules” (interview by the author, 2012).

One witness of the early expressions of the scene said that she never intended the guidelines as a formal set of rules: “You have to be interpretive about these things. You can’t just look at the X sign and think, Oh, now it’s all about absolution and negation. Now I’m not supposed to do or think this or that. I see the X as a double negative: the ultimate positive affirmation” (interview by the author, 2013). Some local scenes have created their own micro-environments with emphasis on certain ethical stances, where “scenesters” (members who rarely miss a show or craft-in) are spokespersons for larger engagements with the values of mainstream society. For example, the West Coast scene is known for embroidered muscle shirts; the New Jersey crust scene, for dental floss woven patches; the Denver scene, for sashiko-inspired free-form repair techniques; and Baltimore, for foreclosure knits and colorful camo quilts. ‘The rallying cry of “supporting your local scene” makes members show their loyalty by going to as many events as possible and also participating with high energy and commitment, often volunteering and making their participation its own reward.

Opposition to mainstream fashion is at the core of the suX, and the participants seem especially provoked by all forms of “eco-fashion” and its noncommitted promise to change. As expressed by a suXer, it is a matter of a pure countercultural response to fashion:

“I feel a lot of the suX rules have been predominantly shaped by dropout fashionistas. It’s about opposing the cultural dominance of power through a very narrow sense of sexuality and consumerism. We are bombarded by these images and energies, to be aggressive and promiscuous buyers of brands. Instead I see suX as a sign of loyalty, of attention and care, sort of a spiritual guidance for real social sustainability, justice, and eventually some sort of contemporary street form of enlightenment. Just think of the Buddha’s patched-up robe from the pyres—that’s real fucking proto-suX!” (interview by the author, 2012).

Another participant argued that repaired clothes are like weapons of the disadvantaged, or “the spear poking the side of the body of consumerism,” with clear parallels to James Scott’s studies of the “weapons of the weak.” On a similar note, many suXers connect their engagements to the open culture of digital resistance among hackers. This constructive element of crafting stands in bright contrast to the anticonsumerism of boycotts and subversions, not least Adbusters’ “no shopping day” and “subvertizing” campaigns. Instead, the suXers take on proactive and hands-on sartorial protest in a highly material manner, even if their forms of opposition often remain deliberately subtle, nonconfrontational, and X-marked. One follower noted:

It feels like consumerism offers only some very limited forms of resistance, like limited boycott, false compliance of goods, feigned ignorance of brands, or even pilfering, slandering, flight, or footdragging with your spending. But when I come together with fellow suXers, all new possibilities opened and were vividly discussed and implemented. We crafted and networked and started our own repair services and exchange systems. But it was more like a mosh pit than some form of sixties dropout commune. Some sissies see it as some moral economy of care, or whatever, but every stitch is an ember of revolution. Every stitch is a fuse. (interview by the author, 2014)
Yet, all through the years, there has been an uneasy compromise within the scene with “corporate punk bands,” from the Sex Pistols of the late 1970s to Sum 41 and Blink 182 of the 2000s, which also mirrors the inherited challenges and debates of whether there was ever an “authentic” punk scene that stood outside the economy. Issues such as these have been at the forefront since the rise of the preppy “fashioncore” scene in the 1990s, where indie rock influences merged with hardcore sXe. With their ultratight black T-shirts and form-fitting jeans, the fashioncores started a new and trendsetting approach to dress, which was popularized with bands such as Atreyu.

Especially on the West Coast, with its jock-inspired scene, “craftcore” and “paincore” turned into popular events, perhaps matched only by the Renegade Craft Fair. Also at Ozzfest, one of the biggest metal events in the United States, where sXe bands such as Strife and Earth Crisis played, undercover body-craft studios appeared in the surrounding campsites, operating the scene from their so-called craft-refugee centers. The spoken word lyrics of “Craft Pain” from 1995 by West Coast band Xsted express some of this energy:

Hear my words—feel the pain
Eats my flesh—aesthetic gain
Sustainable opposition—skin recognition
Murder your ideal—it’s the new real
Planet reign—Craft pain
I will give to you
Craft pain

Just like the early sXe and suX scenes subverted the hedonist youth culture and introduced abstaining from consumerist self-indulgence, “paincores” aimed at transforming teenage self-mutilation from a sickness in need of therapy or medication into an aesthetic lifestyle expression of social sustainability in resonance with other discourses of cutting, making sense of pain. Such craft articulations turned the body into a canvas of the struggle of the future, and the craft itself became the ultimate tool for self-control, the point of departure for total commitment to the goals of social change, releasing similar bodily experiences as the violent mosh pits of Straight Edge.

With Strife, Earth Crisis, and Vegan Reich, which some may argue are among the most politically explicit and adamant bands of the U.S. sXe scene, the animal rights and social justice engagements of the members have become more explicit. The suX scene spends more time strategizing how to develop critically engaged crafts, using the U.K. Greenham Common protests and peace camp in the early 1980s as leverage and inspiration. With popular zines such as SweatShoX from Boston, RadiX from Chicago, and X-Crime from Olympia, Oregon, some radical parts of the suX scene have even been portrayed as eco-terrorist cells in some media.
The Fragmentation of Dissent

Yet, over time, similar to the developments within the sXe, the anticapitalist guidelines within some circles of the suX culture keep fragmenting the scene. As designer Sam Slap says, "When I got into suX, it was simply keeping a low profile of consumption and more about repair and care, but after some time it got more rigorous and judgmental, even aggressive at times. Veganism, Freecycling, Anarchism, Primitivism; all these things kept reinforcing the sustainable commandments until we were basally bootstrapped with a kind of Stone Age style." Some see problems with the suXers' connection to the ever more conflict-ridden sXe scene, which tends to become self-immersed and radically elitist, where kids, after doing some basic introspection and ethical consideration, come to regard themselves as perfect. For many fans, Straight Edge is a goal in itself, rather than a means to change the world: a scene limiting itself by its own arrogance and pretentiousness. Instead of honest self-betterment and redemption, many fans of the scene come to look down on other people and their habits. In their own self-betterment they end up hating others.

The suX scene is not immune to this development either. Repair becomes a purpose of its own, an emblem of the sustainable aristocracy, often tainted by white-rich-kid-elitism and a reproduction of fashion ideals, yet under the ethical slogans of vegan leather, recycling, repair, and craft. Masculine aggression, female perfection, spiritual elevation, and corporeal refinement echo the self-improvement columns of Vogue, and many in the scene are as ascetic and spiteful as the most serious New York City fashionista. The exclusive craftsmanship of the old guilds, with its principles of purity and dismissing rituals, also seeps into the scene, producing new forms of ethical craft fascism.

By the mid-1990s, as Straight Edge and suX rose in prominence, the issue of "selling out" became tenser among different fractions of the intertwined scenes. As some members turned entrepreneurs, staring record labels and distributing ready-made craft kits at shows, tensions also rose, and some members felt disappointed that the core values of the scene were being compromised. Merchandise, or "merch," such as homemade patches, zines, recordings, T-shirts for low prices, craft utensils, and dental floss, has traditionally been sold by the band members themselves, with all profits going straight to the band. This micro-economy has traditionally been a core merger between...
the DIY ethos and DIY economy of the bands, paying for the tours and not much more. It was the economic lifeline of the scene. As Hanefler notes, "Kids viewed buying merch not only as an exchange of money for goods they wanted, but as a duty to keep the scene alive." But the selling of merch has also been an Achilles' heel, where capitalist values and logics have easily entered the scene, with tragic results, especially as it merges with the more popular "craftivist" expressions of the new century. One of the most infamous episodes was when Singer was to release a new embroidery machine in the early 2000s and included some suX patterns. Singer had organized a release in one of the industrial spaces at the Williamsburg waterfront where some of the more forward suX juntas would also be hacking together some knitting machines with some fellows from the techoart scene Eyebeam. The whole event turned sour when an organized group of violent stitchcores calling themselves "the cavalry of the ravelry" stormed in, smashing the machines to "cleanse the temple" of tech in a manner reminiscent of the classic Luddites. The night ended with sewing machines dumped in the East River and several ambulances tending to those stabbed with knitting needles.

Within the scene itself, the critique of the perceived commodification of merch has led to many parodies of the suXers themselves. One typical example is the suX ploy band ShitStiX, which made gigs parodies of the craftiness of the suXers, especially their famous cover of Sham 69's "Hey Little Rich Boy," which they turned into "Hey Little Stitch Boy":

Hey little stitch boy
Take a good look at me
Hey little stitch boy
Take a good look at me
You think you're all cool and repaired
But your fake utopia is just fascist despair

The Culture of suX Today

If analyzed as a culture, the suX scene exhibits traits of what Albert Cohen called "mutual conversion": scenes of intersectional transitions between beliefs and practices. These practical traits can also be interpreted as a "conversation of gestures," that is, engagement with highly localized and almost site-specific
scenes and practices of transition, or even explicit rites of passage, in order to develop and maintain identity. This perspective especially resonates with the suXers' focus on hands-on practice and craft interventions, as the focus of the scene is on action, on the transformation of doings, rather than expression or judgment of style. The focus on making, craft, and the traces of the hand is also an integrated form of authenticity within the scene. Many artifacts of suXers have an aura of action, programmed by the garment's role as canvas in an event or workshop. This in turn produces values of authenticity similar to those of the sXe scene, from the highest position, where the garment is made at an event; to objects traded or bartered; down to gifts. Within the culture any act of sale or monetary exchange would spoil the function of the garment and also break the taboo on anonymous consumerism. This anti-Etsy stance may be why merch has become less prominent within the scene over the last decade. The suXers act; they do not sell.

However, over the years, especially from the early 2000s onward, the suX scene has lost much of its defining character and merged into hybrid forms of the "craftivist" scene. Today, the distinct history and practical lifestyle of the suXers seem to disappear behind labels of "indy-craft" and branded experiences of craft, such as the success of Etsy. As a generation of youth has turned older, their craft approach has also turned toward the domestic crafts of nesting and new adult alliances, not least those documented in surveys such as those of Amy Spencer and Betsy Greer.

Yet the heritage of the suXers is just now becoming apparent, including the reemergence of a call for sustainable lifestyles beyond the "do-good" ethics of eco-fashion and corporate recycling within the "circular economy." In fact, a series of workshops and events at Parsons School of Design in New York in fall 2012 rallied old and new fans and crafters to again take on the heritage of the suXers.

The sustainable approach of the suXers still lives on, yet still in the shadow of the mainstream and do-good utopianism of "ethical" or "conscious" fashion. Many of the initiatives of the movement have fused into everything from craftivism to socially engaged art, but to the suXers the frontiers are still there: fingers will be pricked, and battles need to be waged. The egocentrism of fashion still reigns supreme, especially within the new wave of sustainable and righteous eco-fashion, putting its emphasis on making sustainable fashion a utopian vision of environmentally friendly egotism. This narcissist sustainment of consumer individualism resonates with what Bill McKibben calls the "I-dolatry" of individualism, that feeling of "you are the most important thing on earth." Today, in mainstream fashion discourse, there is still little anger or dissatisfaction with fashion itself. The main concern of people is how to make fashion kinder to the planet and to workers overseas. Utopia for the fashion industry is preserving the fashion cycles in a permanent status quo. Hope is put into new types of circular economies or eco-designs that promise profits will grow while the planet is saved.

But to the suXers saving the planet or workers overseas is simply not enough. Ethics and environmentalism will not do the job alone, and these values stand little chance against greed and vanity. There is a need to fight back, to resist, and to let the frustration and anger out. Uncoupling sustainability, utopianism, and ethics could do some good in developing new approaches to aesthetic expressions such as fashion. As the suXers would have it, rage is the emotion of utopianism, not flat and do-good worthiness. Opposition needs other motivations than pure virtue, and anger can be one such motivation—and indeed, a strong one. Its healthy impact must not be disqualified. Like the song by Public Image Ltd goes: "Anger is an energy!" And in our current world, far removed from utopia, anger seems like one of the most sustainable energies we have.

OTTO VON BUSCH is an associate professor of integrated design at Parsons, The New School for Design. He holds a PhD in design from the School of Design and Craft at the University of Göteborg, Sweden, and was previously a professor of textiles at Konstfack, Stockholm. He has a background in arts, craft, design, and theory, and many of his projects explore how design, and especially fashion, can mobilize community capabilities through collaborative craft and social activism.

Notes
1. Craftivism (craft + activism) is a form of craft-based activism, where practices of craft, especially "domestic arts," are employed as means (and sometimes ends) in activist endeavors.

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5. With "craft-Bildung" I denote a certain form of craft-inspired self-help books where craft practices resonate as wholesome paths toward the Good Life. In this type of work, craft acts as a venue in the German tradition of self-cultivation (Bildung). For example, whittling, knitting, and repair become processes of both personal and cultural maturation, as well as deep personal transformation, often in stark contrast to the shallow vanity of consumer culture.


13. Ibid., 233.


