

# Between Uniform and Life-Form – Uniforms in the Artwork of Andrea Zittel

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“Some artists make objects, my work is the organization of a life.”<sup>1</sup>

Under the artistic ‘corporate identity’ *A-Z Enterprise*, a name based on her initials, American conceptual artist Andrea Zittel (b. 1965) has been creating textile sculptures, inhabitable installations, furniture and food since 1991. She describes them as “experiments in living”. Yet, Zittel’s *A-Z Enterprise* is not so much a design studio as an ongoing autobiographical artistic experiment. Her conceptual starting points include individual restrictions, social ordering systems and social conditioning, whose rules and structures she questions, while engaging in self-experimentation. More simply put, the artist is interested in understanding just what rules are and the origin of the human need to construct them. In the process of producing designs that respond to her own living circumstances, Zittel critically investigates modernism’s history with the critical intent of revealing its guiding assumptions. This genealogical approach furthermore corresponds to an archaeological point of view, providing a kind of ethnology of one’s own particular culture that traces the manifold differences of modern art and design history.

Emulating the simplified modernist design idiom of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zittel focuses on how the perception of human needs is socially constructed. In the project entitled *A-Z Personal Uniforms*, she chooses the body as a base material and artistic object of research. At the heart of her work is individual striving through the creation of ‘personal’ and yet highly structured systems and rules that create temporary spheres of freedom and continually revise those rules that determine our everyday lives and are for the most part no longer questioned. Here, the case to be examined is uniforming.<sup>2</sup> In examining this artistic paradigm – i.e. the creation of spheres of action combined with the sense of social responsibility that characterizes the contemporary artistic attitude – Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Cherry Kaplan, “Social Study: An Interview with Andrea Zittel,” *Db artmag*, April 16, 2004. <http://homepage.mac.com/allanmcnyc/textpdfs/zittel1.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> This essay does not conceive of uniforming as an instrument of state and authoritarian control and power. This was the case, for instance, during the Nazi dictatorship, which aimed at a standardization and appropriation – that is, a uniformization – of society. Instead, in what follows, uniforming will designate a vestimentary practice that constitutes a “fundamental body technique and action [...] which culturally shapes the body and makes it communicable.” Cf. Gabriele Mentges, “Uniform – Kostüm – Maskerade. Einführende Überlegungen,” in *Uniformierungen in Bewegung. Vestimentäre Praktiken zwischen Vereinbeilichung, Kostümierung und Maskerade*, ed. Gabriele Mentges, Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, and Birgit Richard (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2007), 13–27 (p. 14).

course and his concept of habitus<sup>3</sup> will play an important role. It is moreover those “stereotypical repetitions”<sup>4</sup> of incorporated human thought, perception and behaviour patterns which Judith Butler appropriately terms in reference to the concept of habitus a “theory of body knowledge”.<sup>5</sup> Andrea Zittel has made this the focus of her creative work, much as if she were heeding the call of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze: “The world is such that it consists primarily of perfect, stereotypical repetition. Within this world, we constantly rejoice in small differences, variations and modifications.”<sup>6</sup> Another parallel to Bourdieu’s habitus theory is expressed in Zittel’s critical distance to the constraints of these norms, established through constant repetition. This will be analyzed in the following on the basis of the uniform project.

The following discussion represents the initial results of my dissertation, which focuses on the oeuvre of Andrea Zittel.<sup>7</sup> First, the genesis of Zittel’s textile sculptures will be elucidated in order to then examine the role of uniforms in art and her conceptual approaches. Inquiring into Zittel’s production methods, forms and materials will make it possible to identify the shifting and re-establishment of boundaries of traditional artistic genres (painting, sculpture, architecture) and related disciplines (design, handicrafts) in her work. Zittel’s approach is a prominent example of contemporary art that deals with design and its pervasive impact on everyday life, without claiming to be design itself.<sup>8</sup> In the intersection of art, design

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu developed his habitus theory within the context of his socio-anthropological research on the evolution of internal social structures in Algeria and his art theoretical investigations. According to Bourdieu, during socialization, most human thinking, perception and behavior patterns, language, posture, gestures, habits, etc. are either socially mediated or individually learned, class-specific in their generation and mostly unconsciously incorporated through regular repetition. Social actors are able to organize the world with the help of the habitus, which, in turn, simultaneously neutralizes this practice. Bourdieu describes the habitus as systematic, which in his opinion explains the phenomenon of uniform lifestyles. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabylischen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) and Markus Schwingel, *Pierre Bourdieu zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2005), 73.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Differenz und Wiederholung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1992), 12. Claus Pias, “Multiple,” in *Dumonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus Butin (Cologne: Dumont Verlag, 2006), 219–224 (p. 221).

<sup>5</sup> As in Bourdieu’s habitus theory, Butler uses this concept to describe the body as a site or receptacle of those customs that a particular culture creates and maintains to ensure belief in its own inevitability. Thus a “social reality” is manifested in the body that could not exist without it. Judith Butler, *Haß spricht. Zur Politik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 237–238.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, *Differenz und Wiederholung*, 12. Pias, “Multiple,” 219–224 (p. 221).

<sup>7</sup> Kathrin Engler, “Patterns of Life – Andrea Zittel’s ‘A-Z Enterprise,’” Freie Universität Berlin.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Andrea Zittel, well-known representatives of a design-based art include Tobias Rehberger, Liam Gillick, Jorge Pardo, Angela Bulloch and Richard Artschwager. Nonetheless, this is not an identifiable group of artists. Rather, these contemporary artists draw upon certain avant-garde precursors and, in the attempt to re-contextualize art as a critical intervention, disrupt the traditional boundaries between ‘fine’ and ‘applied’ art (i.e. design). The British art critic Alex Coles coined this artistic practice as *design art*, a term that I

and handcrafts, the artist strives to create individual spaces of action: “All of my work keeps coming back to the idea of individual empowerment.”<sup>9</sup> These aspects should be understood from a genealogical perspective of artistic practice and conceptually applied art that stems from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially the 1990s.

### *From Uniformity to Diversity – Uniforms in Art*

The history of the uniform is closely linked to the military in its origins. Indeed, uniforms were initially developed as military paraphernalia. In modern times, so-called unit clothing in business and politics guaranteed predictable behaviour and continues to shape traditional notions of the term ‘uniform’. Its function, on the one hand, is to strengthen social cohesion within the respective group. On the other hand, it serves as a means of delineation from, and communication with, non-group members. The uniform’s traditional characteristic is consistent with its etymological origin, i.e. unity (*uniformité*) in opposition to diversity (*variété* and *diversité*).<sup>10</sup> Even today, the historical-semantic interweaving of military or unity and uniform evoke associations of “authoritarian controlled conformity and de-individualization”.<sup>11</sup>

In view of this cultural lineage, an analysis of the role of uniforms in the arts is all the more compelling. In this context, they provide for an extension or even re-establishment of the traditional uniform concept. (Even if the performative moment of dress conforms to comparably rigid rules, in the arts there is usually an overt reference to otherness or a demarcation of the masses.) Further, although serialism<sup>12</sup> emerged in particular in the era of industrial mass production along with

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find problematic for a variety of reasons and therefore only refer to it here. Cf. Alex Coles, *DesignArt. On art's romance with design* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Kirsten Hudson, “Andrea Zittel Interview,” *SuperNaturale*, <http://www.supernaturale.com/articles.html?id=149> (accessed February 25, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> On this, see also Gabriele Mentges, “Die Angst vor der Uniformität,” in *Schönheit der Uniformität: Körper, Kleidung, Medien*, ed. Gabriele Mentges and Birgit Richard (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005), 17–42, (p. 19).

<sup>11</sup> Regina Henkel, *Corporate Fashion. Uniformen in Unternehmen. Textil – Körper – Mode*, vol. 5 (Berlin: edition ebersbach, 2008), 11. Jochen Ramming deals with the negative connotation of uniforms, which emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in congruence with the broader concept of “uniformity”, and refers to the “industrial massification of consumption and culture”. Jochen Ramming, *Die uniformierte Gesellschaft. Zur Rolle vereinheitlichender Bekleidungsweisen am Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts. Beamtenuniform – Rabbinertalar – Nationalkostüm* (Würzburg: Veröffentlichungen zur Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte, 2009), 10.

<sup>12</sup> The terms of the serial or serialism in the following refer to not only industrial production methods, but also repetitive structures as “constitutive elements in the designing” of artistic productions. Elke Bippus, *Serielle Verfahren. Pop Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art und Postminimalism* (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2003), 192.

In his dissertation about uniformity in the visual arts (“Uniformität in der bildenden Kunst”), the art historian Sven Drühl divided artistic techniques of serialism into four categories: re-

the advent of sophisticated reproductive technologies, repetitive structures did not make their first appearance in artistic practice in the modern era. Artistic reproduction techniques such as casting, engraving, embossing or etching were already in use in ancient times. In the Middle Ages, the printing press revolutionized the magnitude of print circulation. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the invention of photography, film and sound technology enhanced traditional art genres to include new reproducible forms of expression. These developments prompted the philosopher Walter Benjamin in the mid-1930s to write his influential essay *Das Kunstwerk in Zeiten seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*). In it, he addresses the loss of “aura” in artworks and a “tendency to surmount the uniqueness” and attests to a “sense of similarity”. At the same time, he introduces these very techniques as a new aesthetic category in art.<sup>13</sup>

With radio and television becoming a pervasive part of everyday life in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the reproduction process turned into a mass phenomenon. By the 1960s at the latest, Pop and Minimalist artists began to seriously engage with Benjamin’s writings and contributed to a positive understanding of the serial or uniform in the artistic context. Pop artists like Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg did so not only by adopting serial processes in the production of their works. They also elevated seriality itself to the level of discourse as a way of coming to terms with consumer and popular culture at a time of great economic growth and mass consumption. By contrast, representatives of Minimalist art, such as Donald Judd and Allan McCollum, primarily created systematically arranged works from mostly industrial products such as brick, neon tubes and steel plates. Individual artistic gestures were to be avoided. Instead, the central themes of this art were the importance of resisting meaning, the tautological presence of the objects and the objects’

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production, series, variations and multiples. Reproductions are an exact “technical reproduction” of a particular work of art, such as a photographic copy in print media or on digital storage media. Series are understood as works of art which are conceived as production-line sequences or as part of a larger group, vary slightly and are moreover interconnected by a system of constants and variables. Variations are modifications of one and the same theme with minimal differences. They may have come directly from the artist’s hand or have been produced by someone else. Multiples usually refer to three-dimensional art works that are composed “of a certain number of *serial*-made objects that are economically, physically and aesthetically *equivalent*” and have been authorized by the artist. Each multiple is also an original, although not one of a kind. In theory, they are well-suited to mass production. See Sven Drühl, “Der uniformierte Künstler. Uniformität in der bildenden Kunst,” in *Uniformierungen in Bewegung. Vestimentäre Praktiken zwischen Vereinheitlichung, Kostümierung und Maskerade*, ed. Gabriele Mentges, Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, and Birgit Richard (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2007), 75–88 (pp. 75–76); and Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 126, 160, 169, 195.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk in Zeiten seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), 11–18.

reference to nothing but themselves.<sup>14</sup> Since then, reproductive structures are no longer typical of only industrial manufacturing techniques and characteristic of handicrafts, but rather recognized art forms that have expanded the traditional boundaries of art.

In parallel with the ongoing development and establishment of serial production processes, serial reproduction techniques also became more prominent in the vestimentary practices of artists. Sven Drühl distinguishes between two basic types of “artist uniforms”, which can vary greatly in their individual designs. First, artists create so-called “individual artist uniforms”<sup>15</sup> as a unique feature or an expression of an (artistic) habitus, or as Drühl defines it: “The individual artist uniform signifies for a person an archetypal, fixed style of dress with a high recognition value. It does not fundamentally change, but only in the details. It also does not depend on the prevailing fashion. [...] The individual artist’s uniform often even signals a deliberate move away from fashion.”<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, individual artist groups use a uniform style of dress to create a collective look or a kind of “corporate identity”. The *A-Z Uniforms* series of works by Andrea Zittel show a combination of USP (*unique selling proposition*) or artist habitus and a putative corporate identity. The artist has produced the uniforms since 1991 in the course of her continuing efforts to bring together art, design and handicrafts.

### *The Genealogy of the A-Z Uniforms*

Zittel’s original idea for the ongoing *A-Z Uniforms* project came out of a financially precarious situation and a time when she found herself as a gallery assistant faced with the expectation of having to dress in a prescribed manner every day. The artist moreover questioned the habitus (in consumer societies) of changing clothes on a daily basis: “[...] social etiquette dictates that we wear a different change of clothes every day. Sometimes this multitude of options can actually feel more restrictive than a self-imposed constant. Because I was tired of the tyranny of constant variety, I began a six-month uniform project.”<sup>17</sup> As part of her artistic experiment, Zittel created the first *A-Z Six-Month Personal Uniform*<sup>18</sup> (1991), in which she prescribed to herself the rule of having to wear a design every day for an entire six

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Barbara Hess, “Pop Art,” in *Dumonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus Butin (Cologne: Dumont Verlag, 2006), 245–250 and Sebastian Egenhofer, “Minimal Art,” in idem, 210–214.

<sup>15</sup> Sven Drühl, “Die individuelle Künstleruniform,” in *Schönheit der Uniformität*, 115–138 (p. 115).

<sup>16</sup> Drühl, *Der uniformierte Künstler*, 78.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004\\_1\\_andrea-zittel/](http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004_1_andrea-zittel/) (accessed October 26, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> The exact designation of the uniforms changes continually over time.



ANDREA ZITTEL. *A-Z Uniforms*, 1991–2000. Andrea Rosen Gallery, Gallery 2, New York. January 23–February 21, 2004. © Andrea Zittel, courtesy the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

months. There are currently well over seventy varieties. Each *Uniform* is now no longer worn for six months, but instead manufactured in three-month cycles for the corresponding seasons.

The first generation of *A-Z Personal Uniforms* (1991–1995) consists of sewn and straight-cut wool garments. The individual designs change from simple cloth garments to silk appliqué with tulle patterns and elaborate wool petticoats.<sup>19</sup> Next were the so-called *A-Z Personal Panel Uniforms* (1995–1998), which borrow from the geometric patterns and shapes of the fabric and clothing designs of the Russian Constructivists. Drawing inspiration from Varvara Stepanova's<sup>20</sup> axiom

<sup>19</sup> Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith (eds.), *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, exhibit. cat. (Houston; New York; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 70.

<sup>20</sup> The designs of Russian graphic designer, fashion designer, costume and set designer Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958) were inspired by the language of technical design. Together with other artists Stepanova embraced a socially responsible art that is intended to be good for society as a whole, suitable for everyday use and also, using advanced techniques, lends itself to mass production. Notably, Stepanova also designed uniform-like overalls as work clothes. Cf. Mel Byars, *The Design Encyclopedia* (London: Laurence King/New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 708–709.



that “the *faktur* of the material”<sup>21</sup> should be preserved, Zittel appropriated the design postulate of the group by manufacturing her clothing out of the basic rectangular form of the material. The garment’s square-based design language is upheld, even after minimal intervention in the design through the artist. In designing the uniforms, Zittel continually customizes and expands upon her rules: “I firmly believe that it is easier to be creative when one has guidelines. I have always been interested in creating parameters and then of going wild within that particular set of parameters.”<sup>22</sup> In the case of Zittel’s *Personal Panels*, the artist first draws on the design principles of a previous artistic movement, only to then gradually replace them with her own self-determined rules.

In her *A-Z Rough Uniforms* (1998), Zittel achieves expansion by means of reduction, as she directly tears off material from the bolts of cloth, while making only slight modifications. Safety pins hold the straps to the uniform’s funnel-like remainder and fabric ends. This manner of production not only reduces Zittel’s expenditure of time, but also enables her to develop a design that appears attractive and sophisticated, despite its simple and reduced concept. During the same year, the artist refined her original concept even further with her *A-Z Single Strand Uniforms* (1998–2001). Instead of utilizing prefabricated materials, she produced her uniforms using only wool yarn and crochet hooks. The latter were soon substituted with her own fingers, which significantly reduced the manufacturing process to the raw material thread and her own body: “I liked crochet because it required the least number of implements possible in the construction of the garment [...] I liked the purity of this idea, as it reminded me of an insect spinning its own cocoon, but instead I would be using my body to weave a covering for itself.”<sup>23</sup> As a result of the improvements to Zittel’s crocheting technique, the geometrical patterns of the crocheted uniforms have lost their linear structure and given way to irregular, organic shapes. In addition, the artist has developed a way of working that is sensitive to the perceived personal limitations of her nomadic lifestyle, since it does not depend on location and can be taken anywhere and be done anytime.

Andrea Zittel has now reached the point of also being able to produce her own materials in her work-in-progress oeuvre. With the *A-Z Fiber Uniforms* (2002–present), items of clothing are created from materials she has felted herself. The artist observes: “After I had finally reduced the tools of production to simply using

<sup>21</sup> Quote from the Moscow evening newspaper (*Wetschernaja Moskwa*). “Von der Kleidung zur Zeichnung und zum Stoff.” Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Nikolaewitsch Lawrentjew (eds.), *Warwara Stepanowa. Ein Leben für den Konstruktivismus*. (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1988), 180.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Zittel, “Representing Experience,” in *Where Does Art End, Where Does Life Start? Proceedings of the conference on September 12 and 13, 2008, on the occasion of the exhibition “Andrea Zittel, Monika Sosnowska: 1:1” at Schaulager Basel*, ed. Annamira Jochim and Theodora Vischer (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2009), 67–72 (p. 71).

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004\\_1\\_andrea-zittel/](http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004_1_andrea-zittel/) (accessed January 14, 2012).

my own hands, I then began to consider the material that I was using. What if I could trace the strand of yarn back to its original form as fiber? Now I am finally beginning to make the most direct form of clothing possible by hand ‘felting’ wool directly into the shape of a garment [...].”<sup>24</sup> The *A-Z Fiber Uniforms* are the result of a continually scaled-back mode of production, where the aim is to develop materials and manufacturing techniques that are made for everyday use, “incredibly primitive”,<sup>25</sup> and yet elegant and sophisticated. Zittel thus shows over the course of two decades how an attractive design can emerge from extremely limited resources. As curator Trevor Smith remarks: “This process led her to realize that it is easier to be creative when the parameters are narrowed than when all options are possible.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in making her designs the artist has created a production process that increasingly becomes a kind of work with her own body. From the technique of finger crochet, a forward motion which generates no wasted material, to felting, which turns raw wool into clothing, Zittel’s artistic approach is a way of producing something that is “made by the body for the body”.<sup>27</sup>

What conclusions might be drawn from this artistic practice and what significance does it have in the current context of art? Well-known examples of the artist’s uniform being displayed on the body with its associated presentation practices are found in the cases of Joseph Beuys (wearing jeans, white shirt, vest, fur boots and a felt hat) and Bruce Nauman (wearing a plaid shirt, jeans, western boots and an Old-West-style cowboy hat). Andrea Zittel also creates an individual iconography with her *A-Z Uniforms*, whose recognition value is at once a means of presentation and stylization. The fact that her individualized artist’s uniform is not only worn in public, but also in private, makes her clothing both part of her artistry and her personal identity.<sup>28</sup> The uniform has the character of sculpture in her work and, as a drawing shows, is virtually a “signature on one’s own body”.<sup>29</sup> Of far greater significance, however, is the fact that her ‘do-it-yourself’ approach, in contrast to her avant-garde precursors, pursues the idea of creating a self-determined

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004\\_1\\_andrea-zittel/](http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004_1_andrea-zittel/) (accessed January 14, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., (accessed January 14, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Trevor Smith, “Andrea Zittel,” <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/397> (accessed February 29, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Oliver James, “Andrea Zittel at Regen Projects,” <http://slamxhype.com/art-design/andrea-zittel-at-regen-projects/> (accessed September 10, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> In her dissertation *Sixties Dress Only. Mode und Konsum in der Retro-Szene der Mods*, Heike Jenß remarks on the identity-generating function of clothing that promotes a “personal situatedness.” Gabriele Mentges also examines the construction of individuality through fashion, which, as a cultural-based behavioral technology, is linked “with modernity’s promise of individualization,” “because a social independence of action is presumed along with the expectation of the self-determined visual/material design of the individual person.” Cf. Heike Jenß, *Sixties Dress Only. Mode und Konsum in der Retro-Szene der Mods* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2007), 12–13 and Mentges, *Die Angst vor der Uniformität*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Drühl, *Der uniformierte Künstler*, 135.





ANDREA ZITTEL. *Two Public Sculptures*. 1999. Pencil on paper. 22 × 30 inches (55.9 × 76.2 cm). © Andrea Zittel, courtesy the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

identity by means of a more active, critical and creative form of consumption. Zittel herself repeatedly uses the phrases “individual empowerment” or the “empowered consumer”.<sup>30</sup> The creation of individually posited norms – which she introduces in place of social and culturally accepted, but, in her view, not (sufficiently) reflected conventions – is Zittel’s method of acquiring autonomy and freedom. In the tradition of Bourdieu, Zittel recognizes fashion as a material cultural and a behavioural technology of consumer cultures. Through fashion, individuals and social actors aim to assign themselves to particular social groups or delimit themselves from other classes. The fashion researcher Jennifer Craik describes this habitus as follows:

“Everyday fashion plays an important role in the lives of most people. Systems of fashion and cycles of popularity percolate through contemporary life. Styles, conventions, and dress codes can be identified in all groups, including subcultures, ethnic groups, alternative lifestyles, workplace and leisure cultures, and in all the mundane places and institutions of everyday life.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Kirsten Hudson, “Andrea Zittel Interview,” *SuperNaturale*, <http://www.supernaturale.com/articles.html?id=149> (accessed February 25, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994), xi.

Clothing practices are thus expressions of the respective habitus, by means of which the social actors not only order the world but also situate themselves *in* it. Similarly, one can describe the comparable preferences for certain clothing habits as similar ‘dispositions’,<sup>32</sup> to use another Bourdieuan term. Zittel investigates the everyday cultural technology of dressing with a very systematic approach. She shows how the human need for control and security has caused this habitus to become a silently incorporated norm, that structures but also restricts our daily lives. Nevertheless, she succeeds in the case of her *A-Z Uniforms* to bring together unreflected normative vestimentary practices and a personal limitation in something that is progressive “and demonstrates how they can become the basis of countercultural and emancipatory action”.<sup>33</sup> Through the ‘redesign’ of her own clothing technology, Zittel transforms the body as a medium for storing everyday rituals and opposes ‘social reality’ with her own.

In her quest for autonomy and control, she also parodies the manufacturing techniques of industrial mass production, marketing and business strategies such as corporate branding.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to these standard means of production, Zittel utilizes a manufacturing process that is itself a ‘creative gesture’, while the daily wearing of the same uniform clearly breaks with traditional fashion-industry practices. Likewise, the artist’s lifestyle becomes her source of inspiration, out of which she generates a new form of social action in the artistic field. The reestablishment of public and private, in turn, indicates her ‘role’, for she not only cares about people and their lives and regulatory structures, but also makes her art into an extension of her own life. One could also say that she has transformed her life into a lasting work of art.

Assuming that uniformity and individuality are in fact diametrically opposed to each other, Zittel’s effort to present her body and her self through uniforming may seem absurd at first. But it is this logic of the paradox, this co-implication of normally conflicting categories, which runs through Zittel’s work like a common thread. She designs objects which illuminate concepts such as freedom and control, public and private, authorization and limitation. On the one hand, Andrea Zittel brings common notions of uniformity<sup>35</sup> together with an ‘individual uni-

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu characterized dispositions as “tendencies – mediated by the habitus – to act in a specific way under certain circumstances.” They precede the habitus. Due to Bourdieu’s constant revisions of the term, a precise definition is not possible and must be inferred from the particular context in which it is used. Eva Barlösius, *Pierre Bourdieu* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2006), 187.

<sup>33</sup> Paola Morsiani, “Emancipated Usage: The Work of Andrea Zittel,” in *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, ed. Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith, exhibit. cat. (Houston; New York; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 16–29 (p. 17).

<sup>34</sup> Corporate branding or brand formation refer to companies’ targeted creation of brands with the aim of producing, establishing and ultimately increasing the value of a distinctive image. Franz-Rudolf Esch e.a., *Corporate Brand Management. Marken als Anker strategischer Führung von Unternehmen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wiesbaden: Gabler, 2006), vii.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 2.

formity', placing a restriction on autonomy and freedom that inquires about "the conditions and forms in which difference and the construction of personal and social identity are materially expressed and represented."<sup>36</sup> She is therefore interested in transforming the view of the reality of dressing behaviour, which is characterized by a "synthesis of uniforming practices and individualization"<sup>37</sup>, and in creating new categories for her explorations of the social dimension of the contemporary clothing reality.

With a mixture of archaeological and ethnological insight – which furthermore points to Bourdieu – Zittel's uniform project takes a critical look at fashion as a tangible cultural and consumer object. It examines "the associated behavioural processes and contexts of action"<sup>38</sup> and creates a work whose "constitutive design elements"<sup>39</sup> are a repetitive structure that is set against uniqueness as the previous sense-giving principle of a work of art.

Zittel uses the mediality of clothing techniques, which has become especially important in Western cultural societies as a means of expression for the representation of individuality but also for group membership as well as the structuring principle of uniformity. The uniformed body not only stands out from the crowd – it is the bearer of the 'institution' *A-Z Enterprise* and a representative and integral part of its organization. For Zittel, design functions as a vehicle for restructuring, while also serving as a seismograph of human needs and desires, as well as their unconscious social conditioning. In this way, Zittel follows her own developed, self-imposed and constantly changing restrictions and 'rules' in order to merge social concepts of autonomy, freedom, individuality and control. She endeavours to continuously expand them and tests the majority of their limits, while continually broadening the traditional boundaries of art in the process.

During the months of wearing one and the same outfit – something probably unthinkable in most Western societies given today's social conventions – Andrea Zittel finds the limited choice to be liberating. As she describes it: "What makes us feel liberated is not total freedom, but rather living in a set of limitations that we have created and prescribed for ourselves."<sup>40</sup>

## References

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<sup>36</sup> Jenß, *Sixties Dress Only*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>39</sup> Bippus, *Serielle Verfahren*, 192.

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Zittel, "These things I know for sure," in *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, ed. Paola Morisani and Trevor Smith, exhibit. cat. (Houston; New York; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 14.

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