The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed

BEN CAIN AND
TINA GVEROVIĆ

IMPRINT

BEN CAIN
TINA GVEROVIĆ

The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed

PUBLISHER
CIMO—Center for Research of Fashion and Clothing
https://www.cimo.hr

PROJECT
BoSA— / Briefing on Soft Arts

PROJECT BOSA LEADERS AND CURATORS
Tonči Vladislavić i Lea Vene

EXPERT ASSOCIATE
Maja Arčabić

EXHIBITON COORDINATOR
Marina Perica Krapljanov

TRANSLATION
Petra Lučić

PROOFREADING
Kristina Ferenčina

DESIGN
Barbara Majnarić

TECHNICIANS
Damir Živko, Tihomir Stančec, Mladen Škrnjug, Krešo Kupres, Martin Duilo

PRINT
Ars Kopija

PRINT RUN
100

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY
City of Zagreb and The Ministry of Culture and Media

Republika Hrvatska Ministarstvo kulture i medija
Republic of Croatia Ministry of Culture and Media

MUZEJ GRADA ZAGREBA
OPATIČKA 20

cimo / centar za istraživanje mode i odijevanja
center for research of fashion and clothing

12/11-27/11/2022
Zagreb, 2022

BEN CAIN

Notes on Workwear

What do we think traditional workwear is? What does it signify? What sorts of activity or subjectivity might we associate with workwear?
Perhaps it's the design and the physical quality of the workwear that influences the wearer's understanding of what that workwear 'means', and it's the design that influences our perception of the wearer.

Twill that's a generation or more old, worn and washed hundreds of times resulting in a second skin that knows your body and how it wants to move.

Can we distinguish between workwear that's used for wearing

to work and workwear that's worn for 'leisure'? It's probably the difficulty of not being able to distinguish between work and leisure that is what draws us to want to examine workwear as a subject. Good design and good quality fabrics are more comfortable and more enjoyable to wear – good design helps to make the wearer feel at home in the clothes, and in turn to some extent at home in the job, because the manager's investment in the clothing, in ergonomics, in fabrics, translates to investment in the worker. Poor design, and poor fabrics represent a disregard for the worker/wearer, and in this is revealed a toxic relationship between workers and those who manage them.

When you're wearing workwear you're announcing something – you're performing the worker, you're representing the employer, the industry you're part of, you're saying that you're at work, in service, that you're essentially being directed by someone or something else. That 'something else' might be a machine that demands a specific sequence of bodily moves.

Like S&M bondage wear, workwear can restrict the body in a way that suggests domination and control. Is it useful to think about mapping the pleasures of bondage and fetish wear onto contemporary workwear? Clothing might discipline the body, and if so we might want to think about whether or not that discipline is welcome? Workwear, perhaps good quality workwear, also carries a dignity with it, and the *belonging* that the workwear indicates might be a source of pride and solidarity in equality.

Do all forms of workwear protect and unify? Does contemporary *faux* workwear, workwear that's made for the fashion industry also protect and unify? Does not-for-work workwear announce the same things as genuine workwear? It doesn't, but it might want to!

Workwear offers the wearer temporary authority, anonymity, a mask, the relief of not operating as an independent (solely responsible) individual but rather as an objective operative. In

contemporary working conditions and everyday life, being able to make meaningful decisions, being powerful, can be hard to come by, and political agency and financial freedom are scarce. With this in mind, workwear might offer elevation, relief.

The dispossessed.
Does workwear offer Belonging.
Interests in workwear stem from thinking about complicated and changing characteristics of contemporary work, namely instability and precarity associated with today's jobs or 'professions'. Workwear seems compatible with an identifiable single skill-base, and no doubt we most readily associate it with heavy industry and the accompanying world of unions, communities and class. Trans-disciplinarity in what's now called the 'creative sector' or soft sector around 20-30 years ago was an exciting space of diverse thinking, and moving between a variety of ways of working was exhilarating, and importantly, it was a choice. It seems now that being actively involved in a broad range of disciplines or practices is an economic imperative, and is something that comes with a lack of space for mastery, control, sense of ownership and competence in one's field, and perhaps this generates inferiority, and subservience rather than agency and self-worth.

Is workwear to be associated with the ways in which work, a working life, might be empowering? We're faced daily with ideas about patterns of contemporary work that are damaging for society and for individuals, and workwear, whether 'real' or 'faux', might seem to voice a plea for quite a different relationship with work? Does wearing workwear when you're not working say something about 24-7 always-on work patterns?

The pride in belonging to an organisation, being within a collective body of people who might even wear the same clothing (workwear), is now scarce because status and value is associated with entrepreneurs, people who have their own business rather than 'workers'. But freelancers and entrepreneurs perhaps have to

peddle quite hard, working on their gregarious, infinitely capable worker identity for whom any visually unifying clothing would be anathema.

The contemporary worker is broken, can hardly function, is function-less. Some of the clothes presented here are similarly dysfunctional. But while some might present an idea of current work conditions, others might point to future conditions.

We were reading about a woman who said that she wears workwear because it 'allows me to explore a gender-free style while feeling safe'.

Contemporary faux workwear is all about associating with the positive aspects of what work can do for individuals, community, society. Today's (non-)workwear is a clean symbol of a non-existent physical relationship with work, pointing to a desire for the body to impact the world, for hands to touch materials, to shape things. It's a sign of community, and amidst a dearth of quotidian craft-related (not 'artisan', which is quite different) production in the workplace, it's an emblem of need and nostalgia. It's anti-capitalist, and this is paradoxical. It's inevitably about class war, desiring commonality, equality, but people also wear faux workwear because they don't want to make creative decisions about which clothes to wear.

Today's fashion workwear that has nothing to do with work is often dull, mundane and characterless, which in itself is a statement. The wearer wants to express a refusal of radical individualism and a market that's saturated with choice. Do they want to say 'I align with the working class' or at least with worker solidarity, unions and the left? Doubtful. But few people wear workwear to work anymore, and the definition of the working class is no longer aligned with the sorts of industry that require workwear, or at least certainly not the type that's found in Highstreet and high-end fashion stores.

It's romantic.
Honesty, safety, trust.

The pieces that combine traditional workwear with abstract shapes such as large square and oblong sheets refer to the idea of workplaces that demand ultra-flexible workers, able to fit into any format instantly, to morph, to be chameleon, to be super-adaptive. Today's job market can be quite opaque. What do people actually do to make money? There are few clearly defined roles now.

In workwear colour is all about categorisation - departments, positions, hierarchies, clearly defined roles. The indigo dye of blue workwear jackets sought to mask the dirt and grease that would result from the work environment. This was especially important when the frequent washing of clothing was not possible or extremely labour intensive.

Workwear is attractive because it's about identity and livelihoods. Because it contains complex ideas about our changing idea of what work is. Because it's inevitably about class, because it expresses a desire to work differently and to imagine a different societal structure that's focused on communality, egalitarianism, and the worker's agency. Because it performs non-spectacular consumption. Because it allows us to think about how we work now, how we worked previously, and how we might work in the future – and the question of how we work is the question of how we live and how we relate to others.

The questions about workwear are questions about exploitation, over-production, toxic progress, all sorts of injustice. Because workwear is a space of protection, care for bodies and care for workers. Because workwear is about conditioning the body, as well as care, it's about oppression and constriction, wage bondage and S+M bondage are close.

TONČI VLADISLAVIĆ

The place where aura returns – the real image of workwear

Peter Greenaway's film *The Pillow Book* (1996) observes the body in a very particular way, seeing it as reading material. Even though that body has meaning written into it, it presupposes a body that was devoid of and untouched by text, i.e., the meaning. Such a body is a neutral body and is just ready for the construction of the subject. Such a body is anthropometric, contained only in measures.

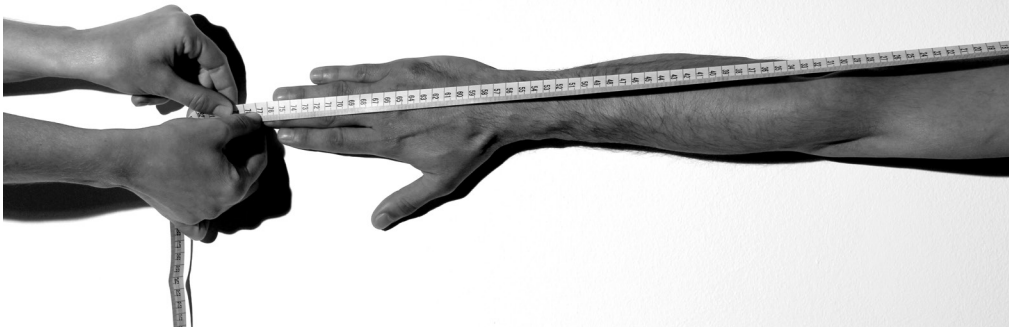
Branislav Gajić's book *Body and the Suit – a Relationship*[1] presents and systematically explains the making of YUS[2], which is a complex process of creating a system of anthropometric measurements of the body for the textile and clothing industry of the time.

This anthropometric measuring was conducted in the then Autonomous Province of Vojvodina on a sample of 5600 people, aged between 2 and 55, via survey cards containing 65 key body measurements. Former Yugoslavia joined ISO[3] quite early (1

1 Gajić, Branislav, Odnos tela i odela (Body and the suit - a relationship), Union of Textile Engineers and Technicians of SR Serbia, Belgrade, 1972.

2 YUS (JUS) the Yugoslav standard

3 ISO – International Organisation for Standardization, an international organisation for establishing systems of measures and standards for consumer products started in 1946.



January 1950), as it was a necessary tool to develop the fast-growing production of textile and clothing goods.
This book describes the measuring process and its results in detail. Although that was just a test project, and measurements were intended to be taken on a much larger scale in the future, the results of the measuring were used in the production and training of clothing designers, and very soon industrial clothing items were marked with measurements according to YUS. Although the approach was modernist, tailoring and sewing "according to YUS" later became a derogative term, an expression denoting a poor cut.
Regardless, the fact remains that these measurements (or this *process of measuring*) helped raise awareness of a new approach to designing clothes in line with the modern approaches. In early socialist production, the emphasis was put on the production of functional clothing for work and sports. It is precisely workwear that inherits all the features of such a scientific approach. Cuts made according to YUS represented a minimalist pattern standard determined by function, devoid of any decorative or fashionable elements.
For working purposes and in line with the modernist approach,

a system of anthropometric studies in the name of maximum functionality was developed. In the 1960s this meticulous approach to clothing design was intended to ensure peak human performance under working conditions in industrial production. The modernist approach wanted to ensure the efficiency of such clothing, but it also indicated a level of investment in the humanization of labour that is much more significant than any equivalent today, when this concern is primarily motivated by the achievement of greater work performance and, consequently, profit.

In their newest work entitled *The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed,* Ben Cain and Tina Gverović focus their interest on workwear using the *dust coat* (hr. kuta) as a semantic centre of working history and of the social image of the worker.

This work of art is oriented towards symbolic mutations and the development of workwear as a symbol, delving into the complexities of the layers of its meaning, especially those that are no longer visible in the constant consumerist rush. Their interest is therefore focused solely on the original intentions, techniques and elements contained in this object. In a way, just like the title of the aforementioned book, they break down the syntactic relationship between the body and the clothes by renewing and analysing the perception of the body in that moment in history, or better said, the fragments of that body. Their interest is directed towards the analysis of the anthropometric measuring, the method of anthropometric treatment and the structure of the system of measurements within which the individual elements of the body are observed, but not the body as a complete unit. In the documentary photographs of the measuring, we can see the measuring of the elements of the body – the circumference of breasts, waist, and hips – as well as detailed displays of joints, hands, fingers, legs; a total of 65 data elements taken from 65 body measurement points that make up the anthropometric chart. But the body as a whole is not present. It is precisely this fragmentation that, in some unusual way, raises questions about creating records

of the body – the means to do it and the place where it is done. In that way, it is exposed that the body is essentially hidden in the anthropometric measurements that only show a potential image as the sum of these elements; it is therefore a "body without organs" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari)[4]. In one part of this complex work, Ben Cain and Tina Gverović, using the issue of workwear, go deeper in the search for the treatment of the body by using the method of analytical immersion to the pre-language of form, where there is no such thing as the subject. By recreating the moments of the measuring of body parts and photographing the act of measuring through re-enactment, they also recreate the outlook of the intentions at the time of the measuring as an archaeological stratum worth reviving. In their workwear models, they thereby activate a kind of aura that such clothing has lost in its battle with fashion. In that regard, it is necessary to focus on their models of workwear as clothing objects displayed on tailor dummies without a head, thus without any indication of the existence of the identity of the body itself.

It is interesting to note here that this kind of anthropometric measuring, when YUS was being established as a system of measurements for the clothing industry, was soon surpassed and it advanced to technologies such as computer systems for digital body scanning, which enable 3D scanning of the body surface, anthropometric determination of the measurements on the body, posture and body shape analysis, but which also, for its measuring, requires a body that remains invisible, and therefore negated.

By the act of repeating this way of taking bodily measures, i.e., the act of re-enactment, the artists document this repetition with the real touch that is needed, a touch that perhaps reactivates a humane approach in the darkness of technology. Likewise, their works about workwear use a similar process that makes the experience of workwear the actual experience of creative touch.

4 Deleuze, G.: Gattari, F., Kapitalizam i shizofrenija 2: Tisuću platoa (A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia), Sandorf & Mizantrop, Zagreb, 2013

Using the same, standardized measures, they envisage a neutral body (a mannequin) as the place where the relationship between the body and the clothes is formed. Their garments manifest a leap into the symbolic narrative regardless of the absence of an actual body. That non-existent, imaginary body nevertheless feeds the fantasy by affirming the life of the garment as a true, real display of workwear.

In standard invisible measurements as a state of pre-language, they find the basis for the development of an active language of the garment. As Dejan Sudjic, author of the book *The Language of Things*, would agree, the authors place the garment in the language as the place of the most real existence. It is precisely in the affirmation of standard workwear, in the symbolic layer of these models, that they locate the places of celebration of the return of aura to the world of workwear that reality tried to hide.

LEA VENE

Dust coat as a fetish object[1]

The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed collects material evidence and traces of work clothes, primarily dust coats, which summarize the different layers of human work, practical wearable functions, but also the inscribed transformative powers of that particular clothing item. Work clothes and uniforms evoke a feeling of control – over the body, movement, posture, and behavior. Uniforms carry the tensions of a series of opposing attributes: discipline versus spontaneity; group identity/conformity versus individuality/expressiveness; formality versusinformality; compulsion versus choice. At the same time, there is a disjunction between the apparent meanings of uniforms – as the embodiment of sameness, unity, regulations, hierarchy, status, roles – and the experience of being in a uniform. Very often the experiences of wearing a uniform include formative moments associated with breaking through or moving away from normative codes by some form of rebellion or subversion.[2]

The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed deviates from the usual normative codes of uniforms, and these

1 More info about fetish objects in the fashion and clothing context: http://vestoj.com/notes-on-fashion-as-fetish/

2 Jennifer Craik (2003): 'The cultural politics of uniform'. Vol 7 issue 2. Berg Publishers, str. 128.

reimagined garments actually speak of subversion woven into the patterns and cuts of workwear. Transgressive dust coats speak of the complex fetishistic relationship between the body and work clothes; a place where the potential of the possibility to take control over the passive body is realized. New work uniforms are based on visually unifying and easily recognizable dust coats, upgraded with seemingly impractical and restrictive elements such as handles on the back, orthopedic aids around the neck, oversized sleeves, and reflective strips. The practicality of the dust coat and its possible roles in carrying out work duties are subjected to an imposed system of control that creates a space for physical discomfort. However, the fetishized dust coat frees itself from utilitarian everyday life and assumes an experience in which trauma and work are intertwined, and feelings of emancipation, self-confidence and power articulated. Such dust coat now stands as a powerful, magical and transformative garment that subverts the norms of the proper way to wear a uniform.

The Collective-Work Clothing Department is Not Closed juxtaposes the transformed and upgraded dust coats with musealised pieces of work uniforms from the collection of the Museum of the City of Zagreb. Archiving workers' culture is not only done by collecting uniforms, but also many other items of memorabilia such as workers' badges. Precisely such badges engulf one of the dust coats, separated from the rest of the exhibition material, and placed in a showcase where it is treated as a rare but raw document of exhaustive and dedicated work. The absence of the body in the exposed garments leaves a somewhat eerie and ghostly impression, accompanied by

a feeling of incompleteness of the uniform presented without a body. The dismantled body appears only in the surrounding photographs, an indication of the process of working with the objectified body as an inanimate material in the process of tailoring the transgressive dust coat. Dust coat as a fetish relies on a blurred voyeuristic representation of the anonymous body, and together they confront the usually unopposed readings of the cultural role and material interpretation of the uniform.

BEN CAIN works across a range of media and materials, and with a variety of other people, most of the time being interested in these things: the affects of new conditions of labour -in particular the contemporary alignment of leisure with work- on the body and upon notions of the self, as articulated through objects, materials and actions.
Solo exhibitions of Cain's work have been presented at institutions such as Wiels Centre for Contemporary Art in Brussels, and Zagreb's Museum of Modern Art. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Tate Britain, Busan Biennale Korea, Manifesta 9, South London Gallery, London's National Portrait Gallery, Belgrade's Museum of Modern Art, and Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu, among other venues, and he has recently completed public sculpture (with Tina Gverović) for Reading university Campus UK. Cain also works as a theatre scenography designer and teaches Fine Art at Central Saint Martins London, ISIA Urbino in Italy, London Metropolitan University and WHW Academy Zagreb, and co-runs a long term exchange programme with The Academy of Fine Art in Zagreb Croatia.

TINA GVEROVIĆ works with installation, drawing, painting, sound, text and video. Her work – often in the form of immersive, disorientating installations – explores the economy and history of materials. One of the key questions in her work is where lies the potential of the political vision and re-invention.
She finished MA at Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht and holds a doctorate from Middlesex University in London. Her work was recently shown as part of the Folkestone Triennial, 57thVenice Biennial, Corner DC, WKV Stuttgart, Museum of Arts and Crafts Hamburg, Trigon – Post Environment in Künstlerhaus Halle für Kunst & Medien Graz, Suzhou Documents – Biennial, Tate Modern, and Busan Biennial. Her public art commission conceived in collaboration with Ben Cain was recently installed in The University of Reading Campus. She is Course Leader of Sculpture at Camberwell College of Arts and she held teaching posts at Slade School of Arts, Dutch Art Institute Roaming Academy, and WHW Academy in Zagreb.