

The Clothed Condition. Centre for Style by Matthew Linde

by
Anna Gritz

(...) he was a glorious, but isolated, interpreter of our clothed condition (...)¹

The Pant Suit
The Sweater Dress
The Hot Pants
The Tracksuit
The Crop Top
The Wrap Dress
The Turtleneck
The Palazzo Pants

Just like any other industry fashion also has a world attached to it that functions like a hidden infrastructure, or a supply unit of sorts, communicating, hanging, collecting, fitting, and displaying clothes and accessories. A world made of jargon, paraphernalia, window displays, detritus, seamless undies, belts and instantly dated mannequins styles. In this context Centre for Style was created by the fan boy follower Matthew Linde and his modest, yet radical quest to create a space that discusses, supports, sells and displays fashion in its broadest sense in Melbourne, Australia. Less concerned with the wearability of clothes and much more with the conditions of their circulation – the project looks at clothes as image, text, witness and exhibit, inviting the potential of an independence from the wearing body.

The artist Matthew Linde started Centre for Style in 2013 with a retail enterprise in the basement of a gallery that sold work by recent graduates and selected pieces by designers such as Rare Candy, H.B. Peace, Anne Karine Thorbjørnsen and Pageant. Often works were tracked down through Linde's laborious online research, seeking out rare and discarded graduate-show pieces or editorial

side projects not meant for the mass market. Linde detected a common spirit in these pieces and in works by artists from his closer circle, a sensibility for their position in a wider cultural conversation, as something that lives between concept and use, that is borrowed, worn in, repurposed, misused, discussed, and looked at and that runs counter to luxury consumption, mass market and the cultural phenomenon of the fashion blockbuster exhibition.

After several exhibitions in Australia and Europe, a tour of the US and a presentation at the 9th Berlin Biennale curated by the collective DIS, the multifaceted endeavor has recently moved to New York City. However through his elaborate internet network and overall online activity, Linde has created a growing nexus of associated artists, musicians, writers and designers like Susan Cianciolo, Marlie Mul, Odwalla88, H.B. Peace, Harry Burke, and Anna-Sophie Berger, for whom affiliation subsists geographical location. Linde's Centre for Style engages in a meta-conceptual and playful engagement with the fashion cosmos as something in between surface and support. It operates in a tradition of groups and parasitical artistic existences attracted by a surplus of an industry side production that has only a tangential relation to the use value of the main product. With the growing activities around CfS, it began to situate itself in a historic tradition of fashion outgrowth influenced by the writings on fashion by Stéphane Mallarmé, Thomas Carlyle, and Roland Barthes, and by industry gate-crashes such as Salvador Dalí, James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol and their displays at the Bonwit Teller's department shop window. Further influences







include the spectacles that Victor Hugo Rojas did for Halston, crossbreeds like Susan Cianciolo, the Bernadette Corporation enterprise and temporary happenings such as the iconic *Fashion Show Poetry Event*, that brought together poets, artists and designers around the organizing principle of the runway show.

The *Fashion Show Poetry Event* is particularly interesting here as it unites art, fashion and language in a semi-improvised yet reflective manner that CfS is deeply indebted to, especially the consciously confused and anti-hierarchical approach to genre. Organized in 1969 by Hannah Weiner, Eduardo Costa & John Perreault at the Center for Inter-American Relations, the *Fashion Show Poetry Event* invited poets and artists to design a garment of any shape or form based on instructions for a runway event on the occasion of which the invited poets then translated the worn creations back into a type of poetry highly aware of the current style of fashion copy. Artists such as Alex Katz, Marisol Escobar, and Les Levine reconsidered their work under the umbrella of fashion and filled the runway with their creations taking the shape of the description of a dress on tape (“designed” by Claes Oldenburg and “worn” by a blindfolded, nude Schneemann), Les Levine’s optical fibre dress and strap-on torso-casts displaying male and female characteristics that allowed a night out in drag (by Andy Warhol) and their poetic translations receiving wide coverage and even being circulated back into the fashion mainstream through a two-page spread in *Harper’s Bazaar*.²

Language both “loosely and lightly” about fashion has been a part of CfS from the beginning, in events such as *Mode No.1 Fashion Reading* as part of which people like Christopher L G Hill, Dolci & Kabana (Ricarda Bigolin & Nella Themelios), Holly Childs, and Matthew Linde himself read their poetry on a small grey leather two-seater, mapping out a space where identity politics and playing dress up could meet aside from the physicality of clothes on bodies. Such projects evoke the expression “language costumes,” a term introduced by fellow Australian artist Gerry Bibby’s poetic instructional texts made of appropriated language amalgams stemming from photocopy machine manuals, auction catalogues, and restaurant menus.³ CfS usurps fashion as something not necessarily physical, no longer ascribed to the body through the relationship of cloth on skin, but creating another bond, a form of circumscription in which language describes something, shapes, sheathes and clothes it just to then be relieved of that purpose, leaving us with language as tissue with potential for clothing alone yet the subject still unclothed.

As with any fashion house there are staples, both in style and approach. One such staple being for CfS the classic sack dress, possible the simplest form of clothing in existence. A garment for which two rectangles of material are attached to one another, creating a shape that is both a flat untailed dress and, if hung, a flat hung object in space. Based on these basic parameters a plethora of stylistic and functional modifications can be made. CfS took this basic

principle as the starting point for a collection and an exhibition entitled *Silly Canvas* that took place at UTOPIAN SLUMPS in Melbourne in 2014. A group of artists and designers – amongst them Amalia Ulman, Anna-Sophie Berger, Bless, Body by Body, Marlie Mul, and Susan Cianciolo – were invited to work within these guidelines to produce garments both for a runway show on the night of the opening and a display to hang in the space for the duration of the exhibition. The sack dress is here both image and shape and yet once worn it becomes a shapeless cover hiding the body underneath – both pure fashion potential and a Mumu. Hung in the space after the catwalk the dresses took on an architectural quality, like screens they structured the space and the visitor’s route therein, animated by the breeze of the movement of the passers-by. In the catalogue pictures then the dresses are static again, pieces, photographed in the same pose in front of the same wall, a look book – Teller’s go-sees – some fully fledged some an improvised whimsy.

For the three-day exhibition/performance extravaganza *Boulevard*, hosted at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne in March 2015, CfS called upon an extended roster of affiliates to consider how bodies move through space, such as down a street or boulevard. The project reflects on the street as a place in which fashion circulates, understanding the street as a complex social space that conflates the old dandy dilemma sketched out by Thomas Carlyle in his statement: “others ‘dress to live,’ the dandy ‘lives to dress.’”⁴ CfS culled toge-

ther a diverse take on the subject and the jam packed schedule featured works by Amy Yao, K8 Hardy, Michael Smith, and Nicolas Ceccaldi, a sumptuous “getting ready” performance in the window of Gertrude Contemporary by Rare Candy, poetry readings and musical performances by EN.V and Odwalla88 amongst others. Linde presents in projects like this his understanding of clothing not as an addendum to our natural state but as the epitome of humans as social beings and fashion as that very connecting tissue which binds us to our fellow humans – fashion as necessity, shelter, style, and communication.

1. M. Carter, *Dress, Body, Culture, Fashion classics from Carlyle to Barthes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), preface, p. xi.
2. “Total von Heute,” *DER SPIEGEL*, n. 12, March 1969, p. 194 (<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-45763505.html>).
3. G. Bibby, *The Drumhead*, ed. N. Soobramanien (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).
4. T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, eds. K. McSweeney and P. Sabor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 207.