MAINTENANCE, CRAFT AND PROTOTYPE: ANDREA ZITTEL'S TECHNOLOGIES FOR LIVING

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The contemporary artistic practice of Andrea Zittel incorporates a variety of working methods and mediums in making objects that slip easily from one context to another. Zittel's artworks, which range from textiles to found objects, domestic implements and architectural structures, are simultaneously featured in museum collections and used functionally in everyday life. Focusing on her artistic endeavors in New York in 1990s, this study investigates the slippery nature of Zittel's work through the lens of the equally slippery concept of technology. In order to interrogate such intersections, I will examine three of Zittel's projects: *Repair Work* (1991), *A-Z Personal Uniforms* (1991-present) and the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (1996). These cases exemplify how Zittel's engagement with technology creates a dialogue between her work and artistic and historical movements of the past, while also engaging and critiquing contemporary culture.

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INTRODUCTION

A photograph of Andrea Zittel's living room at her home A-Z West prominently features an environment crafted by the artist. The vernacular style snapshot, which appears on the artist's personal website, captures a familiar interior living space (Figure 1). A sofa sits in the foreground, covered in a throw and supports an Apple laptop computer. Behind is a large window that looks on onto the California desert landscape and below the window, custom shelves hold colorful folio size books. Familiar to the viewer as a western domestic tableau, upon a closer reading, the crafted nature of the interior becomes apparent. The artist has designed all aspects of the home, from the fore-fronted grey foam sofa, one of Zittel's original *Raugh* furniture pieces (1999), to the choice of books on the shelf. The variety of objects in the photograph hint at the totality of Zittel's practice, but most importantly the photography illuminates to how precisely Zittel crafts herself and her surroundings, from her art objects and homes, to her lifestyle and projected self image. All are acutely designed and presented to the viewer in an equally intentionally designed package.

In addition to the highly crafted nature of her work, a central issue in Zittel's practice is the functional nature of many of her objects. In this sense Zittel's artworks straddle the borders of art, technology and design. Her practice is broad and experimental and although she is a self-proclaimed artist, rather than designer or architect, her work incorporates variety of methods and mediums in making objects that slip easily from one context to another. Zittel's artworks, which range from textiles to found objects, domestic

implements and architectural structures, are simultaneously featured in museum collections and used functionally in everyday situations.

Until this point most scholarship solely recognizes Zittel's practice as artistic, focusing on the aesthetic elements of her work, rather than physical, performative and functional nature of the majority of her projects. This study shifts the discourse and examines Zittel's work through the lens of design, and more specifically, the relationship between design and technology. It investigates technology as an aspect of Zittel's design work that sheds a particularly useful light on tensions between art and function, and display and use.

The definition of both design and technology hinge on the relationship between object and use. Design inhabits an intersection between aesthetics and function, while in its most basic sense, I define technology as the use of objects, such as crafts, tools and artifice, as well as systems of information and knowledge in order to solve a problem. These entities, which can be both material objects, such as a wrench, and immaterial, such as the Internet, are applied in order to gain a desired result. Of particular interest in relation to the work of Zittel is her fundamental use of technology to mediate or change the relationship between the user and the greater environment.

Zittel's engagement with technology creates a dialogue between her work and artistic and historical movements of the past, while also engaging and critiquing contemporary culture. Through her work Zittel draws attention to the neutralized state of technology in current culture, by intentionally subverting normalized uses of technologies in daily life. Her practice calls attention to the uses of technology in the everyday, interrogating issues of mass production, consumption and identity, branding and

obsolescence. Moreover, Zittel produces designs that are themselves alternate technologies for living, in order to further draw out how they function within our daily lives, in addition to producing alternatives.

Zittel's primary mode of relating to the environment is through design and her objects become purposeful mediations between the user and the outside world, as exemplified in the entirety of crafted nature of her lifestyle displayed in the photograph of her home. As critic and curator Rainald Schumacher notes, "the dream of design lies in making the hammer and sickle so functional and beautiful that one forgets that these are the instruments of the laborer or the peasant." [1] In other words, design allows objects of function– tools, or technologies to take on an aesthetic dimension. Zittel plays with this relationship through out her practice, finely crafting both her objects and her projected lifestyle. This is exemplified by Zittel's architecturally based works such as *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (1996), which fuse the aesthetic qualities associated with art and the purposeful functionally associated with tools into a nostalgic stainless steel package.

Zittel believes that much of her work acts, as a "critique from within," which she achieves through embodiment and replication. Rather than an overt external critique, Zittel recreates situations, objects and experiences as a way of calling attention to issues that she feels must be reexamined. Zittel reflects in an interview conducted in 2011: "… When I was formulating my approach, when I was in my 20s, I often thought about trying to critique something from within, so rather than critiquing it by pointing at it and kind of saying this is wrong, to critique it actually by recreating that situation and experiencing it,

[1] Rainald Schumacher, "How Do I Get Inside a Trojan Horse?" in *Andrea Zittel: Sammlung Goetz*. (Munchen; Sammlung Goetz,), 74.

by embodying it in a way."[2] This philosophy is consistent with Zittel's work in the 1990s in New York, when she began a practice that reexamined and remade preexisting forms in order to expose not only the faults and tensions in the objects themselves, but also the society that necessitates them.

This critical approach is exemplified in the manner in which the artist used and displays her textile works. The artist explored the role of clothing in everyday life and the concept of uniformity by designing, creating and wearing a single garment for a designated amount of time. It is also evident in the formal aspects of her architectural structures, which offered a nostalgic take on the aesthetics of modernism and transportation culture. Although it is clear that Zittel actively seeks to critique through her work, due to her indirect manner, much of the critique can go unnoticed, and the discourse surrounding her work fails to recognize its critical nature.

One of the more successful aspects of Zittel's approach to critique is that it often draws attention to otherwise neutralized objects that inhabit our daily lives, and I propose this is the primary site in which Zittel's practice engages with technology. Her work wavers between interventionist and isolationist, often mediating between the world and the artist/user, while also intervening into daily life, calling attention to ingrained social patterns and personal necessities. Marshall McLuhan, writing in the 1970s, addresses neutrality and technology in a way that is helpful in conceptualizing Zittel's practice. McLuhan is specifically writing about mediated technologies, such as television and radio, however his observation on the stabilized nature of media as commodities is

[2] Andrea Zittel, as quoted in a recorded and transcribed interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

applicable to Zittel's work. He theorizes that media[3] have become societal staples, much like coal, cotton and oil and argues that as a society we have become dependant on such staple commodities, to the point of adapting our social patterns around them.[4] This is precisely where Zittel's work intervenes. Most of her objects are disruptive to the normalized uses of technologies in our current culture. For example, and one that will be expanded in subsequent chapters, the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* provides an alternate space free of mediated technologies. It is a tool used to escape, while also disrupting the way technologies normally function with an architectural structure.

The practical nature of each work and its relationship to the quotidian is the way that Zittel is in dialog with much 20th century art history, but it also fits into a larger investigation of the relationship between art and technology which consumed post World War II philosophers such as Louis Mumford, Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger. Lewis Mumford explores the relational development between art and technics in human evolution, arguing that they ultimately cannot be separated. Mumford defines art in its purist form as an act of spontaneous self-expression without reference to the physical media.[5] Alternately, technics in their most pure state are impersonal in nature and are directly connected to humans' control over nature. Yet throughout history, as Mumford argues, art and technics have existed simultaneously, influencing each other or having a

[3] McLuhan seems to use the words media, medium and technology interchangeably throughout the text.

[4] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 21.

[5] Lewis Mumford, "The Tool and the Object" in *Art and Technics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 33.

coinciding effect on the worker or user.[6] He cites the example of decoration on early stone tools to illuminate how symbolic expression coincides with the functional apparatus. Zittel's objects reflect the commingling of art and technology in a similar way. Her domestic apparatuses, textiles and structures have an aesthetic that is highly designed by the artist, but simultaneously function as integral objects in everyday life. Furthermore, Zittel's work is far from passive, and it intentionally inflicts changes on the user and greater environment, taking on the historical and anthropological role of technology, according to Mumford's definition.

Hannah Arendt offers alternate an alternate viewpoint of the relationship between humans, tools and environment. In the *Human Condition*, Arendt addresses the concept of *homo faber*[7] in relation to seemingly polarized categories of artifice and tools. She contends that humans' capacity to create is spilt between making useless things, such as works of art, which are essential ends in themselves, and useful objects, which serve as means to an end. Thus, as Kenneth Frampton points out in his summation of Arendt, *homo faber* exists in the duality of being both artificer and tool-maker, being "the builder of the world and the maker of the instruments with which it is built."[8] He argues that *homo faber* and architecture exit in a similar ambiguous state: *homo faber* is neither purely an artist nor purely technician and similarly, architecture neither solely building

[6] Lewis Mumford, "From Handicraft to Machine Art" in *Art and Technics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 59-60.

[7] "man as maker," refers to the idea of man controlling the environment through tools.

[8] Kenneth Frampton. "The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects" in *Labour, Work and Architecture-Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002), 30.

nor solely edification.[9] Zittel embodies this notion and her practice, which exists in a similarly equivocal space.

In order to address these concepts, this thesis is organized thematically and chronologically, adopting three central case studies of Zittel's work from the 1990s. The first chapter broadly explores the concept of maintenance using *Repair Work* (Figure 2) as the central example. Chapter II investigates the *A-Z Personal Uniform* (Figure 3) project in relation to craft in order to illuminate issues of technology and handicraft. Finally the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (Figure 4) is utilized to look at Zittel's relationship to the prototype, mediation and capsulation. Each theme and subsequent case study is used to investigate the different ways in which Zittel draws attention to, critiques, and reinterprets technology in her work. The thesis concludes by examining issues concerning the installation of Zittel's work in a museum or gallery context. Although each project will be examined individually as a case study, many similarities and themes cut across the breadth of the artist's body of work. For this reason, it is important to consider the individual work in relation to the whole, particularly since many of Zittel's projects function similarly, whether they are textiles, structures or sites.

In 1991 Zittel began living and working out of small storefront in Brooklyn where she started creating what would become a diverse and varied body of work. Her first project, *Repair Work* (1991), consisted of the artist traveling around New York City, collecting, repairing, and repurposing broken items off the street. The *A-Z Personal Uniforms* (established 1991) developed nearly simultaneously with *Repair Work* and consisted of the artist creating and wearing a uniform for a six-month period, a practice

[9] Ibid.

that she continues into the present day. Due to the compact urban space she was working in, Zittel began experimenting with designs that could serve basic daily human needs in a small space. These self-contained units, such as the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (1995), introduced Zittel's signature style of incorporating maximum efficiency with a mid-century design look. In 1999, Zittel moved her primary home and studio to Southern California, creating A-Z West, while keeping her New York based studio, A-Z East, intact.

The decision to focus on these seemly diverse projects is deliberate. They provide succinct examples of the assorted objects and disparate ways in which Zittel's practice engages with technology as a facet of her overall approach with design. Each case study relates to these larger themes to in direct and consequential ways. For example, the *Escape Vehicle* easily lends itself to an interrogation of design, whereas *Repair Work* can be read as a response to technology. The choice to limit the scope of this investigation to Zittel's practice in the 1990s is also intentional. While historically the 1990s was a particularly ripe technological moment, marking a cultural, ideological and economic shift from mass industrial technologies to widespread connected information technologies with the introduction of the Internet, it is also the period of the inception and proliferation of Zittel's artistic practice. Each case study was conceived and created by Zittel during the last decade of the 20th century in New York.[10] The projects are seeds of development, prototypes of prototypes if you will, to what would be further perfected at A-Z West. Her

[10] Many of the projects that Zittel created in the 1990s have continued into her present day work. Most specifically, the *A-Z Personal Uniforms*, which she began in 1991 and continue into the present day. Furthermore, during the period of the 1990s her works were more object-based, rather than site-specific actions that develop in her practice after moving to Joshua Tree.

work following her move to A-Z West in the 2000s tends to draw the most attention from critics, thus her earlier work is a rich territory for art historical examination.

Although much has been written about Zittel's objects and working methods over her twenty-year career, the discourse has been shaped through curatorial catalogues and exhibition reviews. There is a distinct lack of critical scholarly examinations of her work outside of that done in conjunction with exhibitions. The most complete documentation of Zittel's work is found in the exhibition catalog for *Critical Space*, a traveling retrospective of her work, which opened in 2006. It included several articles that address the historical context for Zittel's practice, as well as a chronology of her work. Other reviews and short articles published in art journals and the art sections of newspapers tend to focus on the authoritarian nature of her designs and the utopian aspects of her practice. The dominant discourse surrounding her work focuses on Zittel's tendency to combine life and work draws much attention and allows for multiple comparisons to modernist progenitors, both in their site-specific collapse of life and art, and in the way they blur the lines between art, design and craft.[11]

[11] Jane Chin Davidson, Jane Chin, "Review Andrea Zittel and WACK!- Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles March-May 2007," *Textile,* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2008): 146-171; Zdenek Felix, ed., *Personal Programs-Andrea Zittel* (New York: Alfried Krupp von Bohlen), 2000; Penelope Rowlands, Penelope. "At Home with Andrea Zittel," *Metropolis,* (May 1996): 104-107; Elizabeth A. T. Smith, Elizabeth A. T, "The Comprehensivist: Buckminster Fuller and Contemporary Artists," in *Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe*, edited by K. Michael Hays and Dana Miller (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 62–75; Paul Sztulman, "Andrea Zittel," in *Documenta X: Short Guide*, authors Davidson, Catherine, Paul Sztulman, Documenta GmbH and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltung GmbH, *et al*. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997), 254-255; James Trainor, James, "Don't' Fence Me In," in *Frieze,* No. 90 (April 2005): 89-92; Palola Moriani,"Emancipated Usage: The Work of Andrea Zittel," in *Andrea Zittel-Critical Space*, edited by Paola Moriani and Trevor Smith (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art 2005), 36-43; Mimi Zeiger, "Complete: Laboratories for Living" in *Andrea Zittel: Sammlung Goetz* (Munchen; Sammlung Goetz, 2003), 105-115; Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artist and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994).

Total Design: A-Z

Zittel's practice incorporates a form of total design: a complete melding of life and art, in which her art objects are functional objects or vice versa. Published in 2002, Hal Foster's *Design and Crime* surveys the state of total design at the end of the 20th century, noting "the old project to reconnect Art and Life, endorsed in different ways by Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus, and other movements, was eventually accomplished, but according to the spectacular dictates of the culture industry, not the liberatory ambitions of the avant-garde. And a primary form of this perverse reconciliation in our time is design."[12] Foster points to how the utopian vision of a total work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, championed first by Art Nouveau practitioners in the early 20th century, and carried on by the Bauhaus, exists in the last decades of the 20th century. The complete work of art has left the realm of the avant-garde and entered the space of commodity in the form of commercial design.

Zittel examines this relationship by establishing a practice that is in constant dialog with modernism. She adopts the goal of melding of life and work, but appropriates the rhetoric of commercialism. Furthermore, many of Zittel's artworks could easily fit into a commercial context or as prototypes pushed as a product design. Zittel's playful strategy of branding all of her art works under the A-Z logo feeds into this larger critique. Zittel claims she adopted the corporate-like identity as a form of legitimacy, since she had trouble being taken seriously when putting in fabrication orders for large-scale projects such as the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (Zittel blames her California accent). While the

[12] Hal Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes* (New York: Verso, 2002), 19.

explanation is anecdotal, it is more interesting to think of the A-Z logo as a crucial piece in Zittel's larger engagement with design.

The label "A-Z" and "A-Z Administrative Services," the title that Zittel gives to her endeavors as a whole, can simply be understood as the artist's initials, or shorthand for her signature. It also suggests an encyclopedic knowledge, a multitude of products, and also works as a generic suffix: everything from A-Z. Similarly the logo is reminiscent of small companies of the 1950s and 1960s, such Universal or Acme and thus partakes in a nostalgia similar to her designs. Zittel mimes older brands, which were small operations when compared to the franchise businesses and globalized markets emerging in the 1990s. They are also exactly the type of companies that closed-up shop in Williamsburg when was just starting her own operation.[13]

The corporate moniker also allows Zittel to act as a designer, rather than an artist. By using the label A-Z Administrative Services, the artist's name is removed form the work and instead her objects can be presented as a design, or more specifically as a product design. Zittel's fluctuation between the role of an artist and role of designer is both constant and another way that she blurs lines between shifting concepts of art, technology and form and function. Zittel notes that the goal of her overall practice is to work through a series of personal explorations rather than to create finished products that suit the needs of a uniform population. This is one of the areas in which Zittel draws a personal distinction between herself as an artist rather than a designer, noting, "I think what makes my work art is that it's a very personal form of exploration. I thought about becoming a designer but a designer has the responsibility to make products that best serve

[13] Trevor Smith, "The Rules of Her Game: A-Z at Work and Play" in *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, ed. Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith (New York: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 40.

the greatest number of people, and I don't think that's so liberating."[14] Zittel's practice advocates experimentation and evaluation, and ultimately she creates unique personal objects. The statement exposes a contradiction in Zittel's tendencies toward critique and her crafted image as a vanguard that works toward redefining of the relationship between objects and ourselves. Since most of her projects are personal in nature, or made for an individual collector, Zittel's designs tend exclude a general audience aside from spectatorship. By this account, is it easy to view her practice as symbolic at best, regardless of how the artist frames it.

Zittel's persistent crafting of her image is one of several difficulties in researching her work. Zittel is extremely proactive in shaping the discourse surrounding her work and much of information regarding her methods and objectives comes directly from the artist. Zittel interjects a highly stylized rhetoric into her work, using selective terminology such as freedom, limits, productivity and investigations as ways to frame her practice, in addition to the aforementioned the A-Z label she had applied to all pieces since early 1990s. Furthermore, Zittel often supplies illustrated brochures and pamphlets as a take home for viewers when exhibiting her work. Under her own name, Zittel has published *Diary No. 1*, an account of her daily observations while living at A-Z West, often reflecting on her work and its integration into daily life. Zittel opens her home to visitors, both at A-Z East and West, giving tours and lecturing onsite, further interjecting her voice into the reception of her work. Zittel is technologically savvy—she is currently an

[14] Andrea Zittel, interview by Stefano Basilica, *Bomb* (Spring 2001): 74.

active blogger with an extensive and up-to-date website listing her projects, publications and reviews.[15]

[15] www.zittel.org. Zittel's personal website includes her CV, a comprehensive and up-to-date list of her works with photos and statements about each piece. Her blog can be accesses from the site, as can the web pages for side projects such as the High Desert Test Sites and the SmockShop.

CHAPTER II

MAINTENANCE: *REPAIR WORK*

In the early 1990s, Andrea Zittel began traveling around New York City and picking up abandoned items off the street. Zittel was a new resident in New York, moving from Rhode Island after finishing a masters of fine arts at the Rhode Island School of Design. She considers this act to be her first project as an artist. Titled *Repair Work* (1991), the work consisted of the artist retrieving discarded items in the urban environment, bringing them back to her studio in Brooklyn, and repairing them. After returning each object to a functional state, Zittel then displayed each object in her home as art, repurposing each item from functional to aesthetic.

The project itself is straightforward: retrieval, repair, repurpose. But *Repair Work's* relationship to technology is subtle and thematic, especially in comparison the overt, authoritarian nature of later structure-based works such as the *A-Z Escape Vehicles* (1996). In opposition to later projects where the artist creates objects and environments that instruct the viewer/user, asking them to think/feel a certain way, *Repair Work* approaches the subject of technology obliquely. *Repair Work* occupies the space hollowed out by mass industrial technology, corresponding and reacting to its aftermath in the last decade of the 20th century. In addition, the work is an exploration into the role of an artist in the greater society, specifically examining the necessity of an artist as a maker of things in the post-industrial object filled landscape. The project questions authorship, the necessity of the creative gesture, destitution and obsolescence.

As demonstrated in subsequent projects in the 1990s, *Repair Work* begins Zittel's practice of investigating an environment through artistic means. *Repair Work* is firmly

rooted in a specific time and place. In 1991, Zittel her first established a personal studio, soon called A-Z,[16] in a rented retail space at 72 South 8th Street on the south side of the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn. The location was home to A-Z Administrative Services from 1991-1993 (while *Repair Work* was taking place), before the artist moved the operation briefly to Union Street in 1994, before settling in its present location at 150 Wythe Avenue (Figure 5) in 1995. Although presently the Williamsburg neighborhood is known as a lively center of youth culture, this was not the case in the early 1990s. When Zittel rented her studio in the neighborhood, the urban and cultural landscape varied in its demographics, a mixture of abandoned industrial buildings and closed commercial businesses.[17] The Brooklyn neighborhood was a reflection of the tumultuous state of New York city as a whole, still recovering from near bankruptcy in the 1970s. Evidence of the city's disillusioned state littered the streets, visible in boarded-up windows, failed commercial spaces, abandoned residences and discarded objects.

As a native Californian,[18] Zittel was caught off guard by the state of the urban landscape in New York in opposition to that of her west coast suburban childhood, she notes,

> When I moved to New York from California I was overwhelmed by the decay here. That was just when the recession hit and people had the sense that everything was falling apart. In California everything had been all about progress

[16] A-Z was later relabeled as A-Z East with the addition of A-Z West in California in 2003.

[17] Andrea Zittel in conversation with the author, March 21, 2011.

[18] Zittel's identity as a Californian is a constant and overarching theme in her work and comes up often in interviews and her personal writings.

and newness, but here in New York buildings were being abandoned and rents were going down and nothing was being repaired, everything was falling apart.[19]

It is within this setting that Zittel began her interventions into the landscape, developing an endeavor that was both conceptual and object driven. Zittel follows an established tradition of earlier 20th century artists who used the decaying urban environment as a catalyst for their work. Similar to Kurt Schwitters' collaged compositions and environments in the first half of the 20th century, the assemblage works of Robert Rauschenberg and Ed Kienholz in America and décollage and Nouveau Realist artists like Arman in France in the 1950s and 1960s, Zittel uses found preexisting and often discarded materials that littered city streets. However, unlike the preceding techniques of collage, assemblage and décollage, in which each artist combined found objects, images and text as a means to create art, Zittel returns found items a functional state through repair as an artistic act.

Zittel began specifically collecting domestic objects of the everyday— furniture, decorative figurines and dinnerware. When in her possession, the amount of 'repair' varied from object to object. In many cases, Zittel simply glued or pieced back together the object with little attempt to hide patchwork (Figure 6). Other cases, such as *Repair Work (Table)* (Figure 1) required additional materials and structural renovations to make the table functional again. In both situations, there was no attempt by the artist to veil the repair, nor is there any effort to match the style, period or materials of the original object. It is an act of repair, rather than restoration.

[19] Zittel, interview by Basilica, 74.

Zittel replaces the missing legs of the side table with two square legs of unfinished lightwood— a style and material that is distinctly different from the original slender turned dark wood leg still present on the opposite side. Other than this functional repair, Zittel leaves additional damage such as scrapes, splintered wood and paint chips intact. An even more striking example is *Repair Work (Wise Man)* (Figure 7) in which Zittel reconstructed the head of a found figurine out of papier-mâché and paint. She attached the head directly to the decapitated body, but chose not to match the colors of the original figure or apply facial features. This leaves a jarring contract between the original body and its newly attached head. Consistently there is no attempt to return the objects to their original state. They maintain their found object aesthetic. Each piece is returned to a functional state, yet are also repurposed as non-functional art objects. [20]

It is noteworthy that most of the objects collected and used in *Repair Work* were household items. And while these small, portable items were most likely easier for the artist to bring back to the studio, there is a correlation to her later practice that consists of reinterpreting and remaking domestic items and objects of the everyday. Similarly, with *Repair Work* Zittel begins experimenting with how objects can slip from one context to another. While her later work, which I argue should be considered a form of design as is defined by creating objects that blur the lines between form and function, the *Repair Works* travel from being essentially trash, to functional object to art. Zittel's choice to display the repaired object in her home verifies their newly achieved status as art. Rather than utilizing the mended items, Zittel displayed them together in compositions, placing some on the patched-up table and others on the floor adjacent to the table. Paola Morsiani

[20] This is complicated by *Repair Work (Wise Man)* and similar piece which were not necessarily functional, but decorative to begin with.

recognizes that the order of display signifies a transition in progress, from "thing" to "object," from "ugly" to "beautiful," and from "object" to "artwork."[21]

Acts of Engagement

The discourse surrounding *Repair Work* is often consistent with contemporary criticism and highlights the readymade nature of Zittel's Duchampian gesture as a critique or rejection of authorship. Yet, the artist has commented directly that authorship was of little concern when the project commenced, urging that the impetus for the project was a desire to act.[22] *Repair Work* becomes one of the first projects in which Zittel begins to use her practice a laboratory to experiment with a solution to personal and cultural problems and inconsistencies. Rather than a traditional critique of authorship, *Repair Work* is an experiment in art making in order to determine the role of both the artist and the creative gesture within post-industrial America. Zittel comments, "At the time I was thinking that I wanted to do something that was non-creative, to see if that was possible, arriving at the conclusion that everything is a creative at some level."[23]

Lynn Zelevansky concedes that Zittel is interested in redefining the role of the artist in society. Zelevansky's discussion, which appears in a exhibition catalog for a 1994 group show at MoMA in New York, notes that rather than acting as a moral authority apart from society, Zittel feels that artist should serve the community, in a

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[21] Paola Morsiani, "Emancipated Usage: The Work of Andrea Zittel" in *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, ed. Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith (New York: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 27-28.

[22] Zittel, interview by Basilica, 72. Zittel goes on to admit that she does think about authorship now (2001) in connection to human isolation and celebrity culture. Notably, this is a different definition of authorship than what is consistent with contemporary art discourse and the way that others and I have suggested authorship relates to this work.

[23] Andrea Zittel, as quoted in a taped and transcribed interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

manner similar to that of present day designers and architects. Zittel looks back to utopian-minded early 20th century collectives, most specifically the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivists, in order to see how they achieved this goal.[24] Thus after completing her MFA and arriving in New York, Zittel began a project that allowed her to define what she considered to be role of an artist in the present day. Zittel did not wish to contribute to what she calls the "artistic litter of the world,"[25] by creating more useless 'things' when the present moment was overflowing with the like. Instead she engaged in 'non-creative' gestures or restorative acts as a response to a city where things seemed to be falling apart.

Through her interventions into the urban landscape, Zittel draws attention to the question of the role of the artist in current society, while revealing tensions in the social structures that exist. Similar to Meirle Laderman Ukeles's *Maintenance Art Performances* (1973-1974) (Figure 8) in the early 1970s, in which Ukeles uses her role as artist reconfigure the value put upon otherwise unobserved maintenance practices that have become conspicuous in current society, in addition to exploring the ramifications of making maintenance labor visible to the public.[26] While Ukeles utilized the concept of maintenance and her role as an artist to reveal truths about labor, gender and the museum's agency in artistic practice, Zittel uses the similar notion of repair to explore the role of the artist in the early 1990s, while highlight and critiquing of the otherwise ignored states of commodities in the United States.

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[24] Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1994), 29. Zelevansky further notes that Zittel neither endorses nor puts blame on modernism or the artists/designer/architects involved, instead Zittel explores the issues they raised.

[25] Andrea Zittel as quoted in a taped interview with Lynn Zelevansky on January 13, 1994. As quoted in Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility*, 29.

[26] Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 79.

During this period, Zittel explained," I spent a lot of time thinking about the difference between maintenance and progress and where I wanted to position myself between the two."[27] Ultimately Zittel settled on an artistic practice that incorporates elements of both. Much of Zittel's post *Repair Work* projects attempt to reinvent the wheel *per se*, taking established forms and aesthetics, and progressively adapting them in order to expose their role in everyday life. Many of her objects are proposed as solutions to the traditional needs of everyday life, yet she does not invent new forms in order to do so. Instead, she redoes and reinterprets conventional objects such as domestic objects, items of clothing or architectural structures, as a critique. Forms are maintained, while ideas on how they should function progress.

Trevor Smith situates *Repair Work* in the context of a critique of leisure and freedom in contemporary consumer culture. He suggests that by devoting artistic attention to discarded or rejected objects, Zittel is addressing the ease in which society often causally abandons objects due to changing modes of style and fashion. Formalistically, the minimal and pragmatic nature of Zittel's repairs highlights a clear aesthetic separation between Zittel's adjustments and the original object. Smith suggests this creates a comic visibility between the object's use value and its display value. Using the side table as an example, he notes that while it has lost its original stylistic corpus, it is once again a supportive surface.[28]

Repair Work draws forth concerns of obsolesce. Zittel confronts objects that are no longer wanted, that have become obsolete in society, repairing them to their functional

[27] Zittel as quoted in a taped interview with Lynn Zelevansky on January 13, 1994. As quoted in Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility*, 29.

[28] Smith, "The Rules of Her Game," 38.

use and adding a cultural value by repurposing them as art or design objects. Obsolescence is a problem rooted in technological progress— conjuring images of manual tools abandoned for the newest electronic gadget or the discarded computer wiped clean of its contents and replaced by a newer, faster model. Yet the problem of obsolesce is rarely linked to art or artistic work that exists outside of pieces that utilize technology as a base medium. As Michael Rush contends in his examination of technology-based art (encompassing a range of practices from photography to film to video to virtual reality), that art that is born from the art-and-technology fusion is the most ephemeral of all, [29] suffering from obsolescent tools and points of access. *Repair Work* is no such thing, as it is based in traditional, non-electronic and unmediated materials and thus suggests that is it more a conceptual act of critique.

A more fitting comparison is with the craft based assemblages of Mike Kelley. Kelley's 1987 work *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (Figure 9) is a tapestry of tattered toys, handmade dolls, knit potholders and afghan blanks sewn together and mounted on canvas. Each of the collected objects that hang on the canvas is a record of commodities once loved and now fallen out of favor. And while Kelley's pieces call into question issues of gender and craft, and the distinction between high art and kitsch, themes that Zittel's work touches but never overtly comments on, their practices share an observance of the obsolete. Kelley reflects that most of his stuffed animal work grew out of a critique of commodity culture in the 1980s, although ideas of memory and ritual are also central to his work.[30] Similar to what Zittel has done in *Repair Work*, Kelley employs

[29] Michael Rush, introduction to *New Media in Art*, by Michael Rush (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 8.

[30] Mike Kelley, interviewed by *Art: 21*, "Memory," on *Art: 21*, PBS, 2005, accessed online July 10, 2011.

the strategy of transitioning discarded, obsolete items into art as a way of underscoring the ubiquity of such items, and the underlying social dynamics that sustain them.[31]

In 1994 Zittel commented that "people organize a system and rather than maintaining that system, they are on to the next one." [32] The statement reflects several concerns that Zittel continuously interrogates in her practice. Most specifically in *Repair Work*, the idea of maintaining, rather than discarding becomes important. She showcases items that have become obsolete, and returns them to their functional state. The project goes a step further by repurposing each item into an art context. *Repair Work* signals a growing interest in creating objects that easily transition from use as items or tools, into aesthetic items or art. Furthermore, the early project is not only directly rooted in and reacting to the cultural climate of the 1990s but also commenting on the systemic conditions which produced a culture that is always looking for the next best thing. In terms of her larger practice, which expands in the following years to include a variety of mediums and methods, *Repair Work* foreshadows Zittel's interest in adapting, reinventing and transitioning preexisting forms rather than inventing new ones. Maintenance becomes a form of progress: by maintaining a

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[31] Cary Levine, "Manly Crafts: Mike Kelley's (Oxy)Moronic Gender Bending," *Art Journal* 69 (Spring-Summer 2010): 75.

[32] Zittel as quoted in a taped interview with Lynn Zelevansky on January 13, 1994. As quoted in Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility*, 29.

CHAPTER III

CRAFT: *A-Z PERSONAL UNIFORMS*

Andrea Zittel's *A-Z Personal Uniforms* is an on-going and sustained project in which she creates and wears a uniform for roughly three to six months at a time. The handcrafted garments provide a medium for Zittel to explore the intersections between craft and technology in her work. This chapter considers several important tensions that arise based on this meeting including the relationship between the body and technology, handicraft and feminism in art, and uniformity. The uniforms are in dialog with the past, revising concerns central to Russian Constructivism (Figure 10). Finally the uniforms exemplify several key aspects of Zittel's larger practice. The first being the inability to exclusively categorize the uniforms as functional or aesthetic, as they act as both. The second is the issue of mediation. Each uniform provides the artist with a second skin of sorts, a mediation between her body and the exterior world, a concept that is transferable to Zittel's household implements, furniture, architectural structures and personal studio and home.

In keeping with her larger practice, *A-Z Personal Uniforms* are indicative of the period in which they were conceived, reacting to the artist's personal necessity, as well as larger societal shifts taking place in the late 1990s. Similar to the contemporaneous *Repair Work*, and many of her following projects, the *A-Z Personal Uniforms* are accompanied by a creation story, explaining how they evolved out of a practical need in everyday life. The story helps to isolate a need that Zittel had, grounding the project in a functional reality, and showcasing Zittel's designs as prototypical solutions. The story goes as follows: in 1991 Andrea Zittel began working at the Pat Hearn Gallery in

Chelsea. The gallery assistant job provided a way to make money while establishing her artistic career after her completing her MFA. Shortly after taking the job at the high-end gallery, Zittel developed anxiety about having appropriate clothing to wear to work and the extreme cost of such clothing. She needed attire that was suitable and fashionable, yet functional and cost-effective. Thus Zittel began creating personal costumes that could be worn at work in the gallery and at home in the studio. Synonymous to *Repair Work*, the uniforms are rooted in Zittel's early struggle to understand the role of the artist within greater society, and specifically in New York City in the 1990s. While *Repair Work* is a direct examination of the necessity of the creative gesture, early incarnations of the *Uniforms* allowed Zittel to negotiate working in a gallery while also expanding her artistic practice.

Over the past decades Zittel's uniforms have varied in technique and material, yet have maintained their conceptual and functional purpose. The first incarnations of the garments, the *A-Z Six Month Uniforms* (Figure 11) were created from cut and sewn fabric, crafted into a multitude of dress-like shapes. Variations in materials and forms include basic unadorned wool dresses, silk-adorned tulle, long skirts with accompanying suspenders and wool petticoats. The design was simple, functional and appropriate for gallery work. In 1993 Zittel began incorporating pants into some of the uniforms for an even grater amount of functionality while working in the studio. It is not surprising that during this period Zittel also began making many of her structure based works such as the *A-Z Management and Maintenance Unit* (Figure 12), which required more labor on the part of the artist.

Many of Zittel's mid-90's uniform designs revolve around preserving the flatness of fabric, resulting in rectangular garments that had to be pinned and tied to fit on the body. After seeing an exhibition featuring Russian Constructivist clothing, Zittel began designing rectangular garments influenced by the early 20th century European avant-garde.[33] Miming Constructivist design, she began reducing her garments to a series of rectangular cuts of fabric.[34] Each *A-Z Personal Panel* (1995-1998) uniform featured rectangular apron-like main piece, with undergarments consisting of fabric worn as a wraparound skirt tied with bands.

Constructivist designs stressed clothing that was hygienic, appropriate and in harmony with the proportions of the human body,[35] as well as useful in everyday life. Zittel's uniforms share these fundamental elements with the utopian-minded Constructivists– specifically textile artists Lyubov' Popova and Varvara Stepanova. Furthermore, the artists share an interest in the connection between technical process of making and garment's function and fashion. Stepanova rejected fashion's role as purely aesthetic, asserting that this classification did not take into account how the garment functioned or added to the experience of everyday life. Instead she proposed that the primary consideration for clothing was the function it was to perform.[36] Thus clothing

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[33] Andrea Zittel, lecture at the University of Oregon campus, January 20, 2011.

[34] Schumacher, "Trojan Horse," 72. Schumacher goes on to make the connection between Zittel's choice to name the uniform 'panel' to her interest the language of fashion and painting.

[35] Morsiani, "Emancipated Usage," 23.

[36] Stepanova believed that clothing should not be viewed as an independent or special 'work of art' but rather should reflect what is necessary for life. "Clothing which can prove itself only in the process of working in it, not presenting itself as having an independent value outside of real life, as a special type of 'art work.'" Stepanova as quoted by Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 148.

was not aesthetic in nature, but instead functional. Although the aesthetic elements of design were more or less dismissed by Stepanova, she did acknowledge the existence of the aesthetic element of fashion, stressing that it was a by-product of the garment's function and mode of production. As Stepanova puts it, "The aesthetic elements are replaced by the process of production, the very sewing of the costume… not the application of decoration to the costume, but the sewing itself."[37] In other words the mechanical process of making guides not only the form of the garment, but its aesthetics as well.

Zittel's uniforms have a similar relationship not only to function, but also to aesthetics. At the heart of the *Personal Uniforms* project is a drive toward clothing that is purely functional for use in everyday life. The uniforms are efficient and designed to be functional, giving the artist the ability to move between daily activities regardless of the aesthetic or functional needs of any imaginable scenario. Furthermore, the aesthetics of each garment is inherently bound to the materials and the technologies of its making. The aesthetics of each garment changes with the introduction or limitation of technologies as exemplified in the *Single-Strand Uniforms*.

Zittel's uniforms share aesthetic and ideological ties to other historical trends. As Paola Morsiani points out, Zittel's uniforms have strong aesthetic and conceptual ties to labor garments of the early 20th century. Her earliest designs remind us of clothing worn by women working on assembly lines before World War I.[38] By adopting the long skirts and apron-like design from these working class uniforms, Zittel mimics the aesthetic of

[37] Stepanova as quoted in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 149.

[38] Morsiani, "Emancipated Usage," 21.

productivity associated with the technology surrounding mass production. Zittel's uniforms and the working uniforms have the same intended purposes. In their uniformity, both sets of garments allow for increased productivity when performing tasks. Yet true uniforms are worn due to regulation, are mass-produced and worn to show totality. Zittel challenges the concept of uniforms by making hand-made, unique and customized garments for her own daily routine. In creating 'uniforms' Zittel engages the idea of uniformity materially, conceptually and historically. The notion of a *uniform* signifies sameness or collectivity, a distinctive dress worn by members of a group. This is consistent with the collective ethos of Zittel's practice, but also touches of the tension of mass production versus uniqueness, as well as freedom in limitations, all themes that come out in Zittel's work.

In subsequent incarnation of uniforms there is a progression toward limiting materials and tools in making. Utilizing the pared down geometric simplicity of the previous garments, *A-Z Raugh Uniforms* (1998) were created from fabric torn directly from bolt. Very few modifications were made to the fabric outside of minimal seams and safety-pin closures. With the *A-Z Single-Strand Uniforms* (Figure 13) in 1998, Zittel abandons all pre-woven fabrics, creating garments from a single-strand of yarn bound together using only a crochet hook. By 2001, Zittel eliminated all tools associated with making, focusing on creating garments using only her hands and fingers (Figure 14). Evolving from the *Single Strand Uniform*, these garments were loose, airy and web-like constructions. Experimenting with limiting technologies was part of the artist's intension for the work. Zittel comments, " I liked crochet because it required the least number of implements possible, a single crochet hook. [Eventually] I began to wonder if there was

a way to link yarn directly off my fingers without using any extraneous tools (other than my own body)."[39]

The systematic elimination of technology from Zittel's process is symptomatic of her overall investigation into how technologies work within the everyday. By limiting herself to first a crochet hook, a simple manual tool, and then to her own hands, she highlights the relationship between certain technologies and production. The body becomes the primary technology for making, further blurring the lines between technology and art. As Mumford argues, "Technics began when man first used his fingers for pincers or a stone for a projectile: like art itself, it is rooted in man's own body."[40]

Zittel's integration on her own body into the work is not limited to the making, as it is also involved in testing each work. Since most of Zittel's work is made for practical use, the artist uses her body to test each prototype, to experiment with what does and does not work in the design and to prove its usefulness in the greater world. This is not unlike performance artists from an earlier decade using their bodies as the primary mediation between their work and the world. As Lynn Zelevansky succinctly describes it in relation

[39] Andrea Zittel, " A Brief History of A-Z Garments," in A-Z Advanced Technologies: Fiber Forms, artist's brochure (Tokyo: Gallery Side 2, 2002), n.p. Although outside of the scope of this investigation, it is noteworthy that after moving to A-Z West, Zittel abandons yarn and begins developing felting techniques using unwoven and processed wool fibers. Each of the *Fiber Form Uniforms* is created from washed and carted wool that is sculpted directly into the shape of the shirt or dress. Each garment is made from one single piece of felt, and is without seems or additional applied decoration. The felting process is completed on site on. The cyclical nature of this process is reminiscent of a closed loop ecological system, in which the natural environment provides the technology for making. Furthermore, Zittel presents this complex and almost archaic manual process, which provides an alternative to the notion of serial production, under the title *A-Z Advanced Technologies: Fiber Forms*. Rainald Schumacher observes that in doing so, Zittel presents a complex and manual process as an alternative to serial production methods. By creating unique garments under the label of 'advanced technologies,' Zittel playfully suggests that a return to artisanal production may also be a return to a truly progressive technology. Schumacher, "Trojan Horse,"73.

[40] Mumford, "Art and the Symbol," 15.

to preceding performance artists, "Like these artists, Zittel uses her own body to establish the authenticity of her art in the world."[41]

The uniform project incorporates hallmarks of performance artists[42] from the post war period: embodiment, ephemerally and accompanied documentation. It is easy to question the authenticity of Zittel's work, to wonder is these supposed functional objects are actually needed or used in an everyday context. I argue that by thinking of Zittel's work as performance, exemplified by the uniforms, the necessity truthfulness in of her practice falls away. What emerges is performance is a facet of Zittel's tendencies toward a total design. She crafts the image lifestyle through performance much in the same way as she does with her photographs, words and objects.

Although a form of performance, the uniform are equally rooted in Zittel's exploration of the connections between technologies and the human body. Zittel makes an important point in a conversation with artist Allan McCollum. She notes, "Almost any other animal that you can think of is already biologically equipped for survival in the would. We are so fragile that without architecture and clothing, our bodies could not survive. Maybe we are like hermit crabs that are always looking for their shells. Maybe there is a human instinct to be always searching for an extension of one's body."[43] The quote is indicative of the way Zittel uses and eliminates tools in her work, but also the physical relationship between the uniforms and her body. Each *A-Z Personal Uniform* is

[41] Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility*, 33.

[42] This includes Performance artists working in the late 1960 and early 1970 such as Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, as well as artists working with the medium of performance into the present day.

[43] Andrea Zittel, "Andrea Zittel in Conversation with Allan McCollum," in *Andrea Zittel: Diary #01*. (Milan, Italy: Tema Celeste Editions, 2002),131-132.

a mediation between the artist's body and the outside world. Diverse projects such as the uniforms and the compact architectural units like *A-Z Escape Vehicle,* stage a similar relationship between the user and the environment. They act as a form of mediation, between the user, which in most cases is Zittel herself, and the outside world. Marshall McLuhan touches on how clothing becomes a form of mediation between the body and the world at large, calling it an extension of our skin. He stresses the dual nature of clothing, recognizing that it functions as a way to control heat, while also a means of social definition. In other words, clothing is functional, as well as expressive and aesthetic. Furthermore, and most applicable to Zittel's designs, McLuhan notes that architecture and clothing share these functions and meanings. As clothing is an extension of our private skin used to store and conduct our heat and energy, housing is a way of achieving the same result for a group. Architecture, which acts as a shelter, becomes an extension of our bodily heat control systems while also being a reflection of our cultural taste and values.[44]

Outside of theoretical musings on the relationship between technology and the body, Zittel's *Personal Uniforms* can also be contextualized within the period of their inception. The initial date of the project is concurrent with the introduction of large-scale connected technologies such as the Internet into the public consciousness and discourse. The 1990s become a period of rapidly evolving computational systems entering lives of the everyday.[45] Theorists, authors and artists alike begin questioning the ramification of large-scale connectedness, addressing issues of identity, obsolesce and the nature of

[44] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 119–122.

[45] David Trend, "The Machine in the Garden" in *Reading Digital Culture*, ed. David Trend (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2001), 8.

interactions between the corporeal body and virtual space. Artists of the period developed working methods that engaged, critiqued and rejected emerging technologies. Fittingly Zittel's work in the 1990s takes on issues of out-datedness and waste within the urban environment as seen in *Repair Work*.

A-Z Personal Uniform aligns with the 1990s trends concerning a return to feminist art practices and a resurgence of craft. Zittel's craft-based work during the 1990s was consistent with artists, as well as museum exhibitions such as *Division of Labor* in 1995, that highlighted material and techniques of handcraft in connection to gender and traditional hierarchies of making and revisited seminal issues of craft in relation to 'women's work' first investigated by artists in the 1970s. The role of feminism and feminist critique, however, is challenging to define in Zittel's oeuvre, though her materials and technique easily lend themselves to a superficial association. The artist herself expressed the difficulty in relating her process and goals to that traditionally associated with feminist art practices, noting that for a long time she intentionally made large-scale sculptures as way to avoid engaging in a feminist discourse.[46]

Instead of applying a feminist handicraft narrative to Zittel's uniforms, I argue that she uses the medium of craft as a means to critique technology. As mentioned, the medium of handicraft allows Zittel to play with the inclusion and exclusion of technologies in her work. Zittel continuously strives to eliminate use of technology throughout the process of making, both through the decision to create handcrafts during a period of rapidly evolving computer technologies, or by eliminating technology in her process. The overall chronology of the uniforms suggests a growing interest in materials

[46] Zittel, interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

and an increase in the self-inflicted limitations put on the artist through the rejection of technologies. In doing so, Zittel calls attention to how technologies work in our lives, both manual and mediated.

In this regard, Zittel's work aligns with the contemporaneous practices of Rosemarie Trockel and Mike Kelley, who adapted the medium of craft to engage and critique emerging digital technologies in the mid 1980s. Kelley's *More Love Hours Than Could Ever Be Repaid* (1986) and Trockel's *Balaclavas* (1986) (Figure 15) use the medium of craft to draw out aspects otherwise latent technology. Trockel's project utilizes computer-generated patterns and machine knitting to create traditionally handcrafted garments. Kelley explores theme of mass production and its aftermath, as previously explained in Chapter I, by collecting and displaying once loved and now forgotten crafts.

The final component of Zittel's engagement with craft and technology is what happens when her objects are released into the greater social sphere. Zittel considers the *A-Z Personal Uniforms* not only personal attire, but as a work of public sculpture, which she unbinds from its personal everyday context and releases into the public realms as work of art.[47] The uniforms can be considered a work of social sculpture, as defined by Joseph Beuys. Beuys, who's comprehensive practice incorporated performances, installation, and in addition to traditional visual art medias, much like Zittel's, conceived of social sculpture as a way to show how the plastic dimension could influence the social construction of lived reality.[48]

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[47] Morsiani, "Emancipated Usage," 22.

[48] Kristine Stiles, "Process," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Zelz. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 582.

By framing the *A-Z Personal Uniforms* as social sculpture, two important points emerge. The first is that each uniform acts as both a utilitarian item and as a piece of sculpture of that enters the public sphere. As with the objects in *Repair Work*, each uniform slips between the functional and the aesthetic, acting as both simultaneously. Secondly, much like Beuys, Zittel is creating works that move easily from private to public, and that are incorporated into a larger critique of how art can be greatly influential in deconstructing or reconstructing social realities. While Beuys focuses on acts of performance, Zittel investigates clothing, and as we will see in the following chapter, architecture's role in determining social experiences.

CHAPTER IV

PROTOTYPE: *A-Z ESCAPE VEHICLE*

This chapter interrogates the notion of the prototype in relation to Zittel's work, using the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* as the primary case study. In this comparison issues of mass-production, capsulation, commodity and design are also examined in relation to this larger theme. In its entirety, Zittel's artistic practice is based in experimentation and the artist conceptualizes each project as a prototype: a singular model built to test a concept or theory. Zittel isolates a real-world problem, and creates original designs as prototypical solutions. Zittel's choice to frame her artworks as prototypes, rather than sculpture, is intentional and fuels the argument that her work blurs the often polarized, and equally shifty categories of technology and art. Prototypes are associated with process as they act as primitive, singular or test models. Artworks on the other hand, signify permanence and the achievement of an end goal. This dichotomy consistently runs through Zittel's practice, the *Escape Vehicle* however is the most pointed example.

The *A-Z Escape Vehicle* (1996) is a prototype for a redefined domestic space, through which Zittel explores the boundaries between function and aesthetic, public and private, and limitations and freedoms. It is a 100 cubic foot stationary (although transportable), octagonal architectural unit. It was designed by Zittel and fabricated on commission by Callen Camper Company in El Cajon California in a limited numbers in 1996. The shape and exterior of each unit is uniform and retro in design, while the interior varies depending on clients' needs. The materials, shape and branding used for the vehicle incorporates elements of car culture, space-age design from the 1960s and

1970s and modern architecture. Zittel's adapts this historical vocabulary knowingly, giving each unit a distinctly nostalgic feel.

The roof and floor of the modular unit mirror each other in size, shape and volume. The shell is polished shiny steel accented with wood and glass. Depending on the model, an orange or bright blue band circumscribes the lower portion of the vehicle body. Exaggerated pinstripes, reminiscent of automobile detailing, adorn the upper and lower portion of the exterior shell. Each structure has a pop-up rectangular window, allowing the viewer to see the interior of the model, and also serves as the point of access to the interior space. Each unit can accommodate from one to two people at a single time.

The *A-Z Escape Vehicle* is designed to be an intimate, personal space, "used to escape to one's 'inner world' as instead of travelling to a destination in the external world,"[49] In order to best achieve this goal, each unit has a unique interior tailored to the taste and needs of the individual client. While the exterior recalls a machine-like manufactured uniformity, similar to automobiles and airstream trailers, the interior changes based on necessity and intended use of the individual who commissioned it. The *A-Z Escape Vehicle* customized for Andrea Rosen (Figure 16),[50] is outfitted with light-blue velvet upholstery on all interior sides of the capsule, and includes a mirrored oblong bar attached to wall opposite the door. An alternate unit, customized for Dean Valentine,[51] includes a built-in desk adorned with antique inspired trinkets, a small

[49] Andrea Zittel, as quoted in Mimi Zeiger, "Complete: Laboratories for Living," in *Andrea Zittel: Sammlung Goetz*. (Munchen; Sammlung Goetz,), 114.

[50] Rosen is owner and director of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Rosen has represented Zittel since the early 1990s and Andrea Rosen Gallery serves as Zittel main commercial gallery until the present date. Additionally Rosen owns a personal collection of Zittel's work, including the customized *Escape Vehicle*.

[51] Dean appears to be a Los Angeles based art collector. Dean does not know Zittel personally, via google search.

television set, desklamp and trompe l'oeil window of a snowcapped mountain view on the wall facing the door. The interior of Zittel's personally customized unit features a desert[52] inspired environment with sand, faux rocks and running stream (Figure 17).

The series of *A-Z Escape Vehicles* belong to a group of structures conceptually based on the theme of escape.[53] Although each structure relates to the theme of escape differently, they are unified in Zittel's belief that personal freedom is achieved through mobility. In opposition to a large scale, permanent home, the compact, adaptable and portable nature of Zittel's structures provides the user relief from extent bureaucratic systems. Appropriately, each structure resembles an automobile rather than following traditional architectural models such as a residential home. Some are actually mobile, such as the *A-Z Travel Trailer Unit* (1995), which is a functional trailer that attaches to a vehicle via trailer hitch, and the *A-Z Land Yacht* (1998), which are fully functional mobile homes. Stationary models include the later *A-Z Wagon Station* (2003-2004), intended for outdoor use and the *A-Z Escape Vehicle,* designed as stationary domestic dwelling that can be placed in the interior of a home.[54]

Similar to *Repair Work* and the *A-Z Personal Uniforms*, Zittel designed the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* while living Brooklyn. As a result of living in a compact urban

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[52] Constructed in 1996, before Zittel moved her life and practice to the California desert, it is intriguing that Zittel begins exploring the desert landscape as a way to achieve personal freedom, although in an interior, enclosed space.

[53] Escape or escapism is another over arching theme in Zittel's work. Additionally, escape becomes one of the ways in which this group of work is labeled under in exhibition catalogs. Rainald Schumacher lays out helpful definition escape in relation to design, "Designs for Living," 74.

[54] Two additional projects form the late 1990s and early 2000s can be included into this group of portable structures. The *A-Z Thundering Prairie Dog* (1997) and *A-Z Desert Island* (1997) have similar functions as the examples mentioned in text, but seem not to share an automobile inspired aesthetic.

environment, Zittel began exploring ways to expand and alter the experience of everyday life within the limited space of the city. Zittel created several designs devoted to achieving maximum efficiency in a small space, finally settling on the design for the *Escape Vehicle*. Zittel describes the project as one of her greatest successes, but one that stifled her creative process. Zittel, in an interview with Stefano Basilico, characterizes her creative process as building off the weaknesses or flaws in previous projects, but describes being "satisfied" by *AZ Escape Vehicle* to the point where her process was halted for almost a year, when she found she had no new avenues to explore. Reflecting on the process of completing *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, Zittel laments, "I hope I never make a successful piece that I like again."[55]

Zittel measures the success of her work on both its design and the process involved with making it. Each work is a solution to problems that arose in previous models. Similar to the creation stories behind *Repair Work* and the *A-Z Uniforms*, the narrative for the creation of *A-Z Escape Vehicle* allowed Zittel to root her practice and the vehicles in practicality. In addition, it is further evidence of how Zittel relentlessly the crafts discourse surrounding her work, carefully designing the vehicle itself, as well of its identity in the realm of public thought. Chronologically, Zittel created the uncharacteristically naturalistic and cute *Thundering Prairie Dog* units as a follow up to the *Escape Vehicles*. Based on their bizarre appearance and concept, in this case, Zittel's story may actually match the reality of the situation.

[55] Zittel, interview by Basilica, 74.

Transportation and Capsulation

Zittel's concept and design for the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* is deeply embedded in a culture of transportation. Formally, the vehicle's distinct automobile-like design recalls the streamlined efficiency of Henry Ford's Model-T factories, and Zittel uses the aesthetic of mechanized manufacturing and assembly line techniques that revolutionized American production. It is in this way that *A-Z Escape Vehicle* continues the mechanized process that European modernist architects and designers such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier found so beautiful. The *A-Z EV's* design is machine-like, compact, and for the most part free of ornamental excesses.

Furthermore, the *Escape Vehicle's* streamlined form reminds the viewer of the pure-line, stripped down aesthetic associated with modernist design after 1930. Zittel adapts the streamlined aesthetic that was once ubiquitously applied a variety of everyday objects and consumer goods, as well as Airstream Trailers and mobile homes that populated North American highways, as a way of aligning the *Escape Vehicle* with a history of mobile dwellings in the 20th century. Architectural critic J.B Jackson offers a comprehensive history of the mobile dwelling that is helpful in unpacking Zittel's work. Similar to Zittel's continual reassessment of modernism in her art practice, Jackson frames the transportable home tradition as a parallel, yet alternate history of architecture in the United States. Rooted in European Medieval nomadic farming structures, by the second half of the 20th century the portable dwelling has become equivalent to the automobile. According to Jackson, the trailer and the mobile home, and most recently the

camper on the back of a pickup truck, offer relatively inexpensive alternatives to the permanent home.[56]

Jackson comments that a portable, temporary dwelling offers, "a kind of freedom we often undervalue: the freedom from burdensome emotional ties with the environment, freedom from communal responsibilities, freedom from the tyranny of the traditional home and its possessions; freedom from belonging to a tight-knit social order; and above all, the freedom to move on to somewhere else."[57] In other words, a portable dwelling offers its inhabitant a type of freedom not available to those living in permanent dwelling. It is not surprising that Zittel uses the same rhetoric of freedom and escape to frame her *Escape Vehicle*. Each chamber allows the benefits of a moveable dwelling– a release from emotional ties, from possessions and permanence. What is notable about the *Escape Vehicle* in this context is that it is ultimately supposed to function within a fixed dwelling, providing a place of escape within the walls of a fixed home. It plays with the idea that freedom can be achieved anywhere where as long as the user can escape into a detached space.

Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa[58] provides a helpful counter example of the benefits of transportable, chamber-based design and how it can be incorporated into a

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[56] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, "The Moveable Dwelling and How it Came to America," in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 221-222.

[57] Ibid., 222.

[58] Kisho Kurokawa was a primary member of the Metabolist architecture movement in Japan in the 1960s. The Metabolist group conceived of plug-in buildings (capsules) and megastructures to fit into the urban landscape exemplified by the since demolished Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo. The term Metabolist implies a biological analogy meant to replace the mechanical analogy of orthodox modern architecture. The design philosophy compared building and cities to an energy process found in all of life: the cycles of change and the life and decay of organic matter, rather than the western tradition of the machine. The

larger permanent structure. Writing in 1969, Kurokawa observed a growing number of trailer parks and cities designed for motorists on the west coast of the United States. Much like Jackson, Kurokawa suggests that the capsule dwelling, his term for a type of moveable architecture, is inherently connected to car culture. In the 20th century the capsule dwelling is an expanded form of architecture necessitated by the growing mobility of the current population (Figure 18). Much like Zittel's design, Kurokawa's capsule dwellings are not independently mobile. Instead they are modular, fabricated off site and transported via semi truck to a location (Figure 19) and installed into the structure of a larger building. Kurokawa comments on the transformation from automobile to architecture, suggesting "we should think, rather, in terms of what was considered a tool in the past being converted into architecture."[59] In other words, a car, which was once used for getting from one place another, has now expanded into a form of architecture: the mobile capsule dwelling.

In a subsequent section of his article *Capsule Declaration*, Kurokawa elaborates on the necessity of capsule architecture in the 1977. He observes the change from industrial society, based on manufacturing industries, into a technetronic[60] age, based on information industries. He argues that the capsule is a mechanism for the current age, as it aids the dweller in rejecting and filtering unnecessary information. The capsule becomes a tool that permits the dweller to filter media and information, guaranteeing

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movement as a whole is an interesting comparison to Zittel's practice, particularly in thinking about the relationship between the body and natural systems in opposition to mechanical ones.

[59] Kisho Kurokawa, *Metabolism in Architecture* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1977), 77.

[60] Kurokawa uses the term 'technetronic,' taken from Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Between Two Ages: America's role in the Technetronic Era* from 1790. The term is a contraction of 'technological' and 'electronic.'

complete privacy and assuring the subjectivity and physical and spiritual independence of the individual. Much like astronauts protected by their spaceships from solar winds and cosmic rays, capsules used in everyday life provide individuals with a shelter from information they do not want, allowing the individual to recover his or her independence from abundant information.[61]

The closed off and unmediated nature of Zittel's own capsule-like design suggests a connection to Kurakawa's architectural theory. Reflecting historical context of the 1990s, the *Escape Vehicle* provides a space free of larger connected information technologies such as the Internet, radio and television. Furthermore, Zittel's choice to create not just a domestic space, but also a device to filter out unwanted 'noise,' fits into to a larger critique on neutralized state of technologies in our daily lives by offering an alternative.

Zittel acknowledges the idea of capsulation enters her work, but it is not limited to her architectural structures like the *Escape Vehicles*. Instead, Zittel uses capsulation as a format to experiment in restrictive design. She reflects that capsulation is symptomatic of contemporary American culture, a type of American individualism gone berserk, leading to de-socialization, as seen for example in California suburban tract home communities. Drawing on her experience growing up in southern California, Zittel notes, "The frontier isolationist mentality has gone so far that your entire world is contained in your piece of property, in your house and your automobile. Basically those three capsules are everything."[62] Although she reflects on this negatively, she admits that her designs often

[61] Ibid.

[62] Zittel, interview by Basilico, 74.

strive toward a similar isolation as a way to adapt restricted individualism into a type of desirable freedom.

The customization of each capsule is paramount to Zittel's concept for the project, and tied into the intended use of each unit. Each capsule provides an isolated space for the user who becomes enclosed on all sides by the structure. Due to restrictive dimensions of the units, most adults are not able to fully stand, walk, or move about while inside. In most cases there is only room for the user to recline and no additional seating is provided. The compact space suggests that the overall intended use of the unit is mental, rather than physical. Although it is an architectural structure and at its most basic level it provides the inhabitant protection from the outside elements, the capsule also acts as a barrier or seal between the user and the outside world. It is a space that provides refuge from public interactions and a place for personal refection and reveries.[63]

Zittel muses on the necessity of such a space in her ongoing list of 'truths,' *These Things I Know For Sure*,[64] which she has garnered through her artistic experimentations. Here she defines the difference between "voids"— the time one spends being completely idle and therefore thinking freely— and "avoids" the compulsion to fill the voids with a consumerist activity, such as watching television.[65] This revels a critique of the capitalization of free time in the 1990s and how Zittel's designs can act as a barrier between the user and the external world. Much like Kurakawa's view that capsule architecture was a growing necessity in the urban environment as a way to filter, Zittel's

[63] Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith, *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* (New York: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 201.

[64] The list appeared as part of the 2005 exhibition *Critical Space* and was published in the catalogue.

[65] Morsiani, "Emancipated Usage," 26.

structure that provides a way to avoid unnecessary information and consumption by securing a space to actually 'do nothing.' Moreover, such a space is achieved through a form of mediation. Similar to the way that the *A-Z Personal Uniforms* mediate between the body and the outside world, the enclosed capsule is designed to a structural mediation between the user and the external world, regardless of its location.

The customizable nature of each the *Escape Vehicle* should also be understood as a larger comment on the relationship between personal identity and consumer goods. Zittel is interested in how the idea of individualism is reflected in the home and through personal possessions. She has commented that domestic space, and how it is arranged and decorated is commonly viewed in contemporary culture as reflection of a person's inner self, or as she puts it is directly, an "externalized reflections of our soul."[66] She expresses a concern that people have become obsessed with the details of their homes and how they reflect their personalities and characters. Zittel plays with the notion that domestic spaces act as reflections of individuality, produced by commercial design retailers such as Ikea or popular architecture magazines like *Dwell*. The cool, uniform, streamlined exterior of the *Escape Vehicles* opens to an intimate personalized space, playfully suggesting how mass-produced commodities are customized to reflect personal nature.

Customization is also the root of an apparent contradiction in Zittel's projected design ethos and work she creates. She frames much of her work as being solutions to existing problems, such as abundance and ultimate obsolesce of commodities, decay within the urban environment and the necessity to limit and escape in order to achieve personal freedom. In opposition, Zittel's artworks are mainly intended and used by the

[66] Zittel, interview by Basilica, 74.

artist herself, outside of the few collectors who own her work. While Zittel's works are "intended" to be tailor-made and customized to the individual needs of hypothetical users, in practice she is generally the only consumer and the various customizations are made simply as academic or artistic exercises.

Architectural critic Mimi Zeiger offers a reconciliation of this discrepancy. She quotes from her interview with Zittel: "Everything that I've made has been unique to my own unique needs, but I put it out in the public like a mass-producible object. I do that knowingly. Part of why I do that is to talk about how personal truths get translated into universal truth. I think that's the case with lots of design and architecture, but that people don't really recognize it." [67] Zeiger goes on to recommend that Zittel combines elements of craft, design and architecture in her work as part of a process to meet individual needs and desires. While her pieces reflect her personal goals, ultimately they mirror individual needs of a society dealing with the impact of technology and information.[68] Still, this does not neatly solve the secondary problem brought forth in this thesis. Yes Zittel's designs are linked to societal reactions to technology, but they are also technologies themselves—items of use, as well as items of art. This poses a serious a substantial dilemma when conceptualizing how best to display Zittel's work in a museum or gallery setting and will be explored further as the topic of the concluding chapter.

[67] Andrea Zittel, interview with Mimi Zeiger, "Complete: Laboratories for Living," 114.

[68] Zeiger, "Complete: Laboratories for Living," 114.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES IN THE EXHIBITION OF ZITTEL'S WORK

While I argue that Zittel's work engages and critiques historic and contemporary issues surrounding changing human relationships to technology, at its core, Zittel's engagement with technology is evident in the a consistent ambiguity between form and function in her work. Her artworks are neither a totally an aesthetic endeavor, nor completely a functional one. Objects of design often inhabit a similar ambiguous state, however objects of art often do not. The works featured 1972 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* provides an interesting comparison to Zittel's work and one that highlights some of the difficulties that arise when objects that are made used and seen, enter a space where they become purely aesthetic.

A press release by the MoMA dated May 26, 1972 describes the show as one of the most ambitious design exhibitions ever undertaken by the museum. Advertised as a report on the current design developments in Italy, the exhibition featured one hundred and eighty domestic objects, ranging from furniture, lighting and everyday implements such as flatware, dishware, telephones and typewriters. The show's curator specifically selected each object. Additionally there were eleven architectural environments constructed on commission by the museum for the exhibition. The objects and environments were created and built in Italy and shipped to New York to be assembled and displayed in the museum galleries and gardens from May 26-September 11, 1972.

The links between Zittel's practice and the works displayed during the *New Domestic* exhibition are profuse. Most apparent is the formal similarities between Zittel's

objects and those exhibited in the show. Both adopt a clean, colorful machine-like look, and incorporate it into both objects and architectural environments. Beyond aesthetics, Zittel's adopts a similar philosophical approach to her work, revisiting some of the central issues explored twenty years earlier. In the introduction of the catalogue for the exhibition, the curator Emilio Ambasz provides an apt definition of design that is succinct with Zittel's work. He concedes a growing public awareness "…of design as an activity whereby man creates artifacts to mediate between his hopes and aspirations, and the pressures and restrictions imposed upon him by nature and the manmade environment that his culture has created." The quote reflects the highly personalized nature of design, but also how it serves to mediate, change and understand the surround world. This is succinctly exemplified by *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, in which the user literally enters the walled and sealed structure to escape the exterior world.

Much like the mobile environments and objects featured in the show, Zittel's work reflects a commitment to using design as a problem-solving activity, providing physical solutions to current socio-cultural based problems. Moreover, Zittel adopts a *counter-design* philosophy similar to the environmental designs by the featured architecture groups Superstudio and Archizoom. Such designers believed that no new objects should be added to the already cluttered consumer-dominated culture, and instead social and political changes must be made before altering the physical aspects of society.[69] This closely resembles Zittel's intensions when formulating *Repair Work*, as well as fitting into her overarching trend of redesigning preexisting forms rather than inventing new ones.

[69] "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape." The Museum of Modern Art press release (New York, NY, May 26, 1972).

Many of the show's participating designers utilized the exhibition as a forum to address the flaws of modernist design. Many produced designs that interrogated the long-standing modernist tradition of promoting design and technology as the solutions to an imperfect world, without taking into account how such designs would function in the everyday. Designers featured in the *New Domestic Landscape* worked toward creating designs that focused on the quality of life of inhabitants, while also taking on real-world problems such as pollution and the changing environment– largely ignored in the modernist design ethos. Their solution resulted in a redefinition of the ideal way to live, achieved though redesigning the domestic landscape though architecture and objects.[70] Zittel proposes a similar redefinition of the domestic landscape and many of her designs are experiments or prototypes in how best achieve this goal. Her objects, such as the *A-Z Personal Uniforms* and her environments, the *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, act as tools to help redefine the way we presently live.

There is an apparent contradiction that inhabits the display of the objects and environments featured in the *New Domestic Landscape*. There is a similar problem present in the display of Zittel's work in a museum or gallery setting. Both sets of objects have a very functional and ideological presence in everyday life. Zittel and the featured Italian designers in the exhibition use design as a way to interrogate artistic and historical movements of the past, by reinventing how objects work in an everyday context. Yet when featured in museum exhibition, functional objects become only aesthetic. This is true for the objects in the MoMA in 1972 and equally still true for one of Zittel's pieces,

[70] Emilio Ambasz, introduction to "Environments" in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, edited Emilio Ambasz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), 137.

such as the *A-Z Travel Trailer Unit* (1995)[71] and the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* entered the institution in the 1990s.[72]

Use Vs. Display

Cultural theorist Andrea Huyssen seminal story exploring divisions of postmodernsim with a story. He recalls visiting to seventh *Documenta* in Kassel Germany with his five-year-old son. Huyssen describes the child's delight while climbing over a Joseph Beuys sculpture included in the 1982 exhibition. The haphazard heaps of basalt rock-cum-sculpture offered an interesting and ideal playground for the child within the museum while still being an art object. He expressed his enthusiastic delight to his father finding it hard to believe that the sculpture was 'art.' In a subsequent section of the exhibition, Huyssen's son reached out to touch a Mario Merz spiral table and was immediately scolded by the museum guard, who seriously intoned, "Don't touch! This is art!"[73] Huyssen's story illustrates the continued problematic nature of art in the institution after the 1960s.

Fifteen years later, a fleet of Andrea Zittel's *Escape Vehicles* was included in the tenth *Documenta*. The group of highly polished units lined the walls of the gallery space.

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[71] In 1995 Zittel and friend Charlie White, traveled from southern California to the Biosphere in Arizona, before heading to north. The pair was one of three two-member teams that picked-up newly fabricated *A-Z Travel Trailers*[71] from Callen Camper Company and took different routes through California before ending their journey in at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Once reaching the destination, the trailers were placed in the upcoming show "New Work: Andrea Zittel," Again heightened by a whimsical story, the *Travel Trailers* inception into the SFMoMA marks an almost ceremonial transition of a functional object into one of art being placed in a museum setting.

[72] Zittel has exhibited at the MoMA and the SFMoMA throughout her career. Most notable is her solo exhibition in 1995, " New Work: Andrea Zittel," and several group exhibitions in the 1990s.

[73] Andreas Huyssen "Mapping the Postmodern," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernsim* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 5.

With tops open, each gallery visitor was able to see the uniformity of the capsules' exterior and examine the intricate details of the customized interiors. The walls of the gallery playfully mirrored the nostalgic pin-striping of the *Escape Vehicles*, creating more of an installation, rather than a showcasing of individual objects (Figure 20). The themed space and bright colors, however were as far as the viewer experience went. Museum patrons are rarely allowed to step-into, touch, or use Zittel's objects while on display—they must be content with witnessing her objects and observing her practice.[74]

The disconnect between Zittel's process and the experience of her work highlights the main tension that challenges the appreciation, criticism, and consumption of her work in a museum. Since the early 1990s Zittel has consistently created objects that blur the lines between art and technology. Her works slip easily between objects of use– tools, and objects of art– sculpture, and most of the time they act as both. What is overlooked in this process is the true conceptual nature of Zittel's acts. Until this point, most scholarship frames Zittel's work in relation to the past, seeing her objects as instruments in the greater goal of collapsing art and life. Although these historical connections are apt, they fail to conceive the critical nature of her engagement. By challenging the definitions of art and technology, and how they relate to each other, Zittel draws attention our relationship to objects. She intentionally subverts normalized uses of technology, and art for that matter, to accentuate the role that objects play in daily life. Zittel often does this by redoing, or remaking forms of the past but with an intended highly critical edge. When Zittel's work is placed in a museum, its functional nature is completely removed, strictly subjecting the work to the category of art.

[74] Please note that I was not able to see *Critical Space*, nor *Documentia X* in person. My analysis comes from photographs of written accounts of the exhibitions.

What is problematic about Zittel's practice as a whole is that she has had consistent gallery and museum representation since the start of her career. In the early 1990s, Zittel began showing her work in New York at independent artists' spaces before her first two-person show at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in 1992. Since, Zittel's work has been shown nationally and internationally. Her solo exhibitions include *Andrea Zittel* at the Sammlung Goetz Gallery in Munich in 2003 and *Critical Space* in 2005. Additionally, Zittel has participated in numerous group exhibitions including *Documenta X* in Kassel and the Whitney Biennial in New York. Several major museums have Zittel's work in permanent collections, including an *A-Z Travel Trailer* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.[75]

So what happens when her pieces, which have thus far been described as items to be used in the everyday and implicated a larger societal critique of technology, enter the museum? What happens when her functional items enter the space of, as Huyssen puts it, "no touching, no trespassing. The museum as temple, the artist as profit, the work as relic and cult object hallow restored."?[76] Some critics have picked on this inherent tension: Rainald Schumacher points out in the catalogue for Zittel's solo exhibition at the Sammlung Goetz in 2003, that when Zittel's artworks enter the museum, they produce a radically different notion: sculpture. On the one hand her designs invite the owner to use them, to customize them in order to best fit their individual needs and desires. On the other hand, as works of art, an aspect that is accentuated when the work is seen in the context of a museum, they are no longer functional tools of practical use, but become

[75] Zittel's official website, www.zittel.org and the Andrea Rosen Gallery, www.andrearosengallery.org, both offer the artist's complete CV, with extensive list of exhibitions, publications and bibliography.

[76] Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," 6.

objects to be looked at and luxuries to be owned.[77] Benjamin Weil echoes this point in his article *Home is where the Art is,* noting, "A-Z Administrative Services produces well-designed objects that are supposed to hold a specific function in its client's life. Being produced and presented in the sphere of arts, however, they tend to be considered by the viewing- and collecting- public as purely sculptural objects."[78] Although both writers relay the problem succinctly, they fail to provide a solution.

In a review of Zittel's largest retrospective, *Critical Space*, Stephanie Cash writes "It's almost as if Zittel's life were on view for us to examine, minus the personal stuff."[79] With Zittel's work, it is the 'personal' stuff that matters. It is the way she created the work, the way she used it, and the way it comments on our use of objects– it is that context which is absent from Zittel's work when displayed in a museum. The personal stuff matters to Zittel, who has made it clear that her work is very much entwined with her everyday life, as well a larger investigation into society. The museum patrons are able to read about, see and contemplate each object and their associated action, but the experiential and investigative aspects of each work is lost. The *Repair Works* displayed in *Critical Space* sit hollow, devoid of the system and context in which they were created. They follow a strange readymade tradition, as they are objects displayed as art, but are not longer valued for their reinstated functionality.

Similar problems arise in the display of the *A-Z Personal Uniforms*. Forty-five the uniforms were displayed in *Critical Space*. Each uniform was hung on a headless

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[77] Schumacher, "Trojan Horse," 75.

[78] Benjamin Weil, "Home is where the Art is- Andrea Zittel's design for living," Art Monthly 181 (1994), 20-22. As quoted in Rainald Schumacher, "Designs for Living," 75.

[79] Stephanie Cash, "A-Z and Everything in Between," *Art in America* (1996), 126.

mannequin and organized in consecutive rows. The mode of display allowed the viewer to carefully examine each uniform in detail, noting their intricate construction techniques, differing shapes and choices in materials and colors. What was absent is the self-limited way the uniforms were made, their use, and their intended function in Zittel's daily routine. In use, they provided a forum for Zittel to experiment with limiting the technologies of making, in display they become mere fiber sculptures.[80]

The institutionalization of the *Escape Vehicle* is the most peculiar. Since it is architecturally based, the observer automatically desires to go inside the unit to understand and experience the full extent of the structure. Instead they are forced to stand outside the capsule, peering voyeuristically into the cabin space. The *Escape Vehicle*, as conceived, is a tool to be used to achieve solitude, a place to enter in order to remove oneself from contemporary life – to escape. It is also a compelling critique of how commodities function in society, and yet in a museum, and even more so a commercial gallery, the *A-Z Escape Vehicle* is an actual commodity.

Zittel acknowledges that the exhibition of her work is hugely problematic. She reconciles that since each object is meant to function in a one to one relationship with the owner/user, her artworks do not often work well in public setting. This is a conscious decision on the part of the artist, and she prioritizes the object/individual relationship over that of the object/museum. Zittel notes, "At a certain point, I decided that a museum was more like a museum of natural history, like a place you go to learn about things but not a place to necessarily experience things. I think you experience things in the real world."[81]

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[80] Note that I was not able to see *Critical Space*, nor *Documentia X* in person. My analysis comes from photographs of written accounts of the exhibitions.

[81] Andrea Zittel, as quoted in a taped and transcribed interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

With A-Z West, Zittel has finally created a 'real world' context for her work. In 1999 Zittel moved her life and studio to a 25-acre homestead outside of Joshua Tree National Park in California's Mojave Desert. A homecoming of sorts, Zittel returned southern California with intention of expanding her practice through further integration of her life and work on the desert compound. Zittel conceived the homestead cum artist's studio cum utopian prototype as the ideal place to conceive, create and exhibit her work. A-Z West inconspicuously sits on the chaparral-covered hillside off of California Highway 62. Monolithic granite bounders loom behind the small white home and stop feet from the residency's door. The slightly sloping barren hillside to the west of the main house is outfitted with short metal posts inserted directly into the earth. Reminiscent of Minimalist sculpture and 1970s Earth Art, the *Regenerating Field* (Figure 21) is integral of Zittel's newest felting process for her garments. Below, the desert landscape opens up to a wash sprinkled with *A-Z Wagon Stations*. The capsules, a close relative to the *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, provide shelter for friends who come to stay or live on the property.

Upon entering the house, the artist greets you in uniform. Her objects are everywhere. The cat stretches on an *A-Z Raugh Sofa* while Zittel offers you tea from a personally conceived bowl.[82] In this localized reality, Zittel has shifted the display of her work from institution to the center of her own existence. Her work, much like Zittel herself, is composed and exhibited onsite. Her objects shift effortless from one context to another, fully realizing their duel nature as objects of use and objects of art. Each work is at home, and Zittel's practice is complete.

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[82] One of Zittel's many personal programs is the use to only bowls in her home. She feels they provide the most efficient shape for her current lifestyle. Bowls are designed by the artist and fabricated offsite.

APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Andrea Zittel, living room at A-Z West, Joshua Tree, California

Figure 2: Zittel, *Repair Work (Table),* 1991

Figure 3: Zittel, *A-Z Personal Uniform*s, installation view, 1991-present

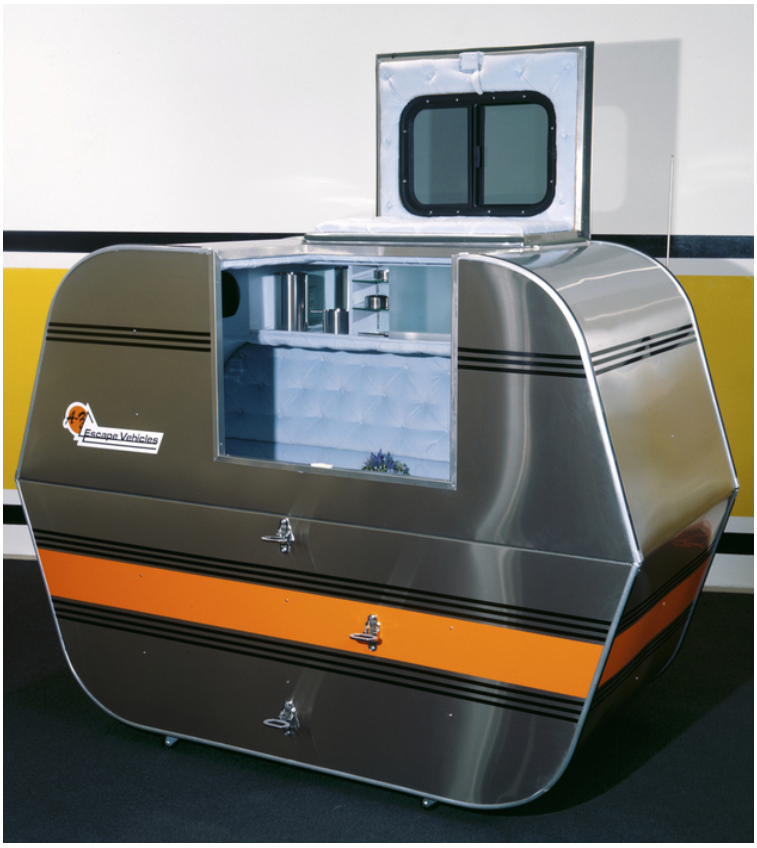

Figure 4: Zittel, *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, 1996

Figure 5: Zittel at A-Z East, Brooklyn, New York, circa 1991

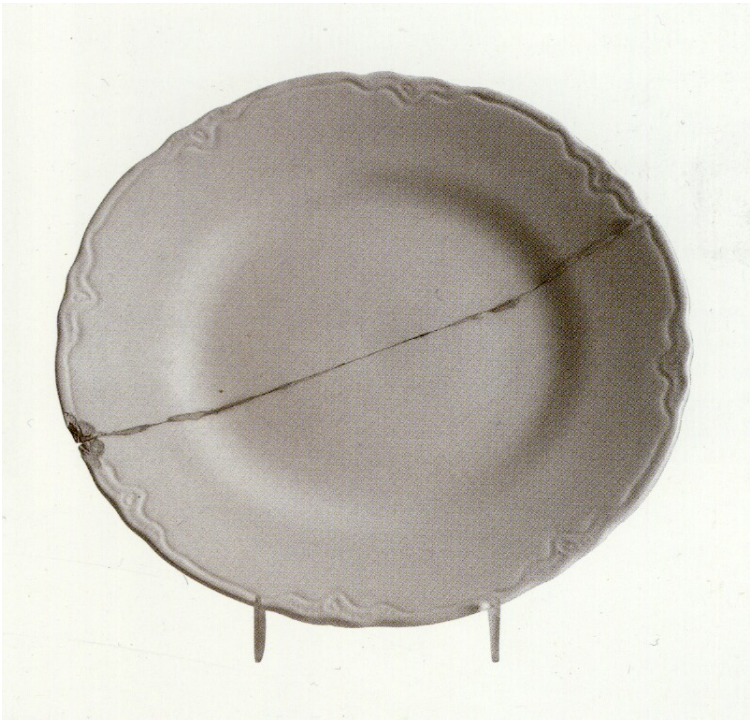

Figure 6: Zittel, *Repair Work (Dish),* 1991

Figure 7: Zittel, *Repair Work (Wiseman),* 1991

Figure 8: Meirle Laderman Ukeles *Maintenance Art Performances,* 1973-1974

Figure 9: Mike Kelley, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, 1987

Figure 10: Varvara Stepanova, *Costume design for Tarelkin*, 1922

Figure 11: Zittel, *A-Z Six-Month Personal Uniform*, 1991-1994

Figure 12: Zittel, *A-Z Management and Maintenance Unit*, 1992

Figure 13: Zittel, *A-Z Handmade Single-Strand Uniform* (Fall), 1998-2001

Figure 14: Zittel working on *A-Z Single-Strand Uniform*, 2001

Figure 15: Rosemarie Trockel, *Balaklava*, 1986

Figure 16: Zittel, *A-Z Escape Vehicle* Owned and Customized by Andrea Rosen, 1996

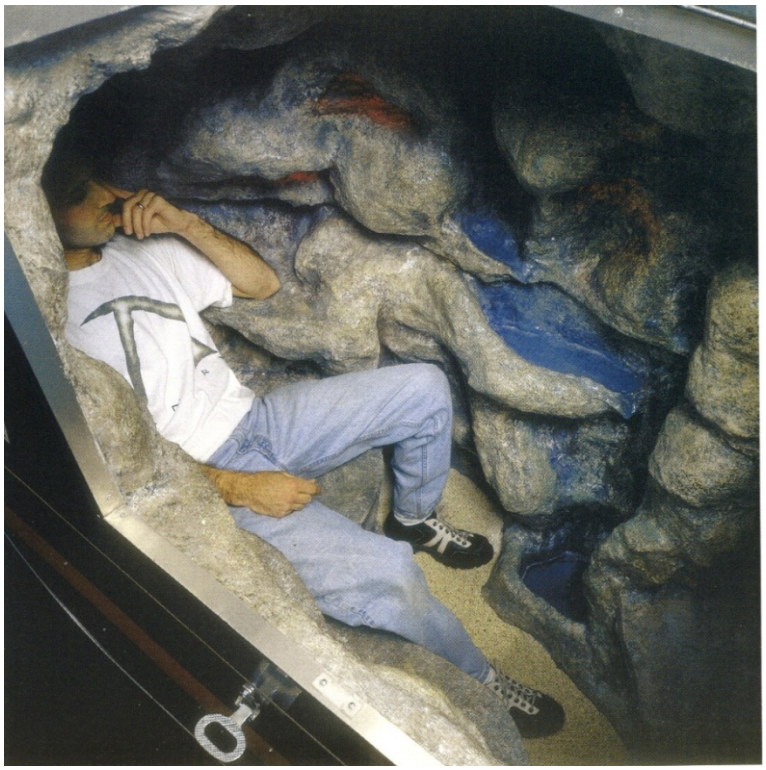

Figure 17: Zittel, *A-Z Escape Vehicle* Owned and Customized by Andrea Zittel, 1996

Figure 18: Kisho Kurokawa, General view of Nakagin Capsule Tower, 1972

Figure 19: Kurokawa, trucks transporting concrete capsules for Concrete Capsule House, 1975

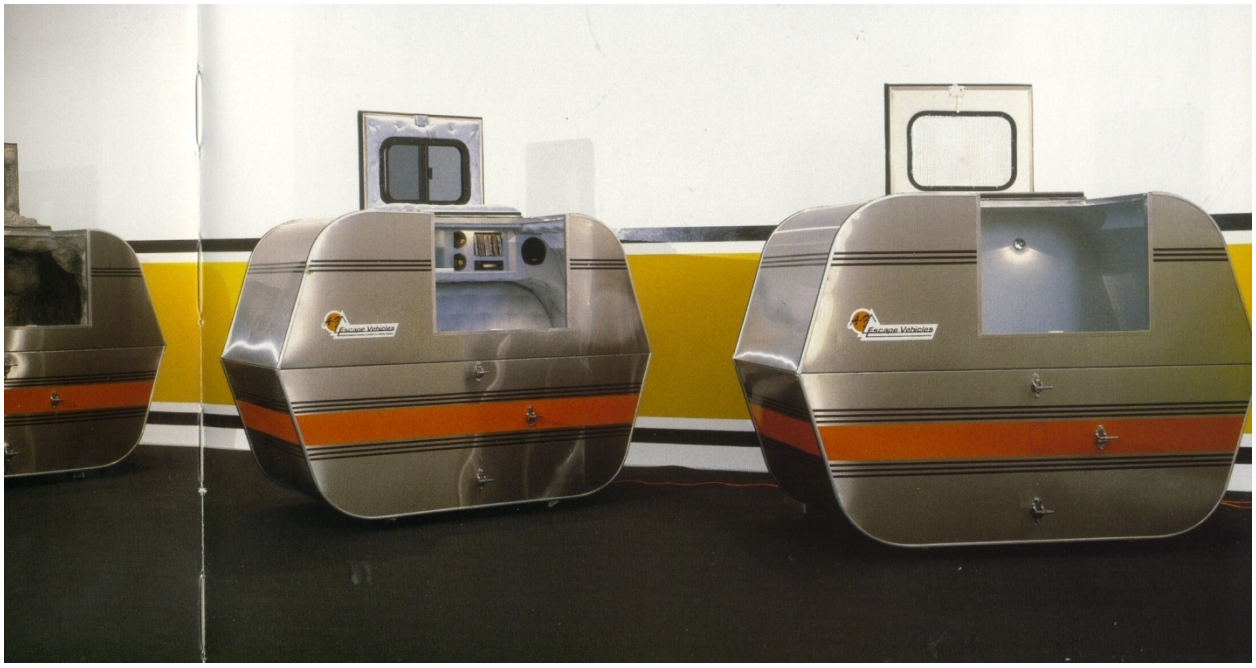

Figure 20: Zittel, *A-Z Escape Vehicle*, installation view, Andrea Rosen Gallery, 1996

Figure 21: A-Z West, outside of Joshua Tree National Park, California, 1999-present

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA ZITTEL

Conducted by Caitlin Gleason March 21, 2011, A-Z West, Joshua Tree, California.

This interview took place at Zittel's home, studio and conceptual project A-Z West. I traveled to Joshua Tree in March of 2011, to visit and interview Zittel for research this thesis. The interview took place at Zittel's kitchen table, after she had briefly showed me the house and discussed future plans and concepts for the space. A walk through the outside property at A-Z West followed the interview, which is home to many of her architectural units. Zittel has recently constructed a new studio onsite, which was also part of the tour. During the interview Zittel crocheted the entire time.

Caitlin Gleason: My masters thesis explores ideas of technology and how you use technology or how artists are using technology at this point in history. I am also interested in the idea of the desert and desert communities. I would like to start out with you why you moved to the desert from a cityscape?

Andrea Zittel: There are a bunch of different answers. I think I was doing my practice in New York and I knew I wanted it to be more integrated into a real community, not just an art community. I started looking around my house in Brooklyn and the closest thing was an automotive high school for boys, but I just realized that everything that was around me, how can I say this, came from a culture that was so different than what I was surround with, that I knew that I would never really be able to assimilate into that culture. My grandparents live south of here, so this is a place that is really familiar to me. I grew up in a rural community similar to Joshua tree, so in terms of coming here it made a lot of sense. It was easy to move here, it was extremely affordable, it was familiar, it was a culture that basically was a version that I grew up with. And the other thing about Joshua Tree that I realized after moving here is that very few people are actually from here, so it has a very diverse community demographic, so you have the new agers, the sort of eco-tourism, the military base, the construction guys, western ranchers. There are all these different groups of people here, but everyone, or most people moved here in search of something, so you really don't have this us and them thing, this insider outsider thing, there is only one point where I got a lot of stress from being an outsider, and that was really from the local arts community when I got a couple of write-ups form the New York Times, and they got pissed off that the times was writing about me and not them. But for all practical purposes this is a community where it is really easy to become part of it and an insider really quickly. So it had more to do with that. So people talk a lot about the desert, and I am hardwired for the desert, there are things I like about it.

CG: How do you think you fit into this history of artists or drop-out desert communities, do you feel that you fit into this?

AZ: Well there is a parallel history of non-desert communities, I taught a class last summer, in upstate New York, I don't think there are more artists coming to the desert than other places, I think there is probably a history of artists leaving urban settings, wanting to get out for various reasons, for some it is escapism, they just need a buffer from the art world.

CG: I would like to hear about this idea of escapism, it is nice being here because I can get a sense of how isolated you actually are. Do you think this isolationist aspect is one of the reasons you moved here?

AZ: It appeals to me. On a personality level I can deal with a lot, I never get lonely and I never get bored. So I am really, really happy being alone with nothing to do. I actually think I am a lot more creative when I have nothing to do. I am a lot more creative when I am in those moments where I would potentially be bored, so I kind of need that setting to do my work. So that drew me here, but having said that, I would say that it has all caught up with me, so its not that at all anymore. So I'm constantly fantasying about how I could go further out. When I first moved out here and people would come to visit it was very exciting, and I liked that. If I go further out ill get that feeling again.

CG: Do you mean your friends and family, or just anyone?

AZ: Anyone! You know when someone would actually make the whole trip out and show up, I would just feel so excited.

CG: Do you think the desert place has anything to do with that, or are you interested in moving farther out in a different climate?

AZ: Right. Well I like warmth, I feel claustrophobic with trees. I like being able to see long distances. I grew up in a place like this is, although it was not quite as extreme, but was like rolling chaparral like these hills and when my parents built their house, it was the second house for miles around and by the time I was a teenager it was all suburbs and there was a shopping mall like two miles away. So I think growing up in So Cal while it was being developed that quickly, I am always really interested in a place that that wont happen to. With the desert I guess my thinking was that it is so harsh in the desert that fewer people would move there, but when you start thinking about it you have Phoenix and you have Las Vegas, so you have the most rapid growth in the desert.

CG: Right you need a golf course.

AZ: Right it kind of contradicts that. Another thing that is worth mentioning is that I think that, and I may have touched on this in the slide talk, but I think that in general people are drawn to the desert out of notion of freedom. I think that aspect of it is very interesting. You get a lot of people here that are coming for different motivations but there is always this interest in personal freedoms. It is something I am interested in my own practice.

CG: Is that one of the reasons you moved here, to explore the idea of personal freedoms further?

AZ: Yes. I was seeking it for myself, but I am always interested in these other versions that other people are after.

CG: That actually touches on another point I wanted to bring up. I know in the talk at University of Oregon you mentioned this idea of car culture and how much you enjoyed car culture and I wondered how this fits into this larger idea of freedom and being in the desert.

AZ: It funny because I have been obsessing over cars today. So I am always thinking about the next place that I am going to move, and every week it is different. But today the idea was that I would buy a van and instead of choosing one place I would live in the van and choose to push out as far as possible. So yes I am kind of obsessed with cars, but that they are kind of this prosthetic, a membrane. I tent camp and I have my truck but there is something about having a hard enclosed shell of a van. I am trying to decide between a Dodge *Sprinter*, they are like delivery vans that FedEx is using now, they are high and they are square, Mercedes also makes them. But those would be good for really discreet living in urban environments. Like in Brooklyn I am sure there is someone living in one. It is black and always moving around with tented windows so you would never know. There is also the *Sportsmobile*. They are four-wheel drive. There is a Quigley four-wheel drive conversion kit you can get on Ford vans. They are really amazing. Those can go anywhere, but they get like twelve miles to the gallon, so I guess today I am not sure. Do I get the Sprinter, which would be like the urban van or do I get the Quigley 4 x 4 conversion to the Ford van which would be the I could go anywhere, end of the world van. There super expensive, so it only one or the other. I would the customize whole inside.

CG: Do you think you could live out of that indefinitely?

AZ: See I think that I would use this as my docking place, I wouldn't have to give this up completely in that instance. Conveniently, I did those three big roll up garage door in my new studio so I would just drive it in there and work on it. It would be really great.

CG: Where would you work then?

AZ: That is a good question. My practice would have to be something else. Maybe it would become video. One of the cool things about my practice is I feel I can do anything. If I keep dating the guy in Portland I would probably get the Sprinter because I would need to stay in Portland. Or if I could convince him to leave Portland, then I would get the Ford because we could go anywhere and it would be better to go anywhere with someone else incase you get stuck or get in some strange situation.

CG: Definitely. Just in this road trip it was been nice to have someone along, even if just to check in during the long drives. Moving on to another question, I have been thinking

about the idea of critique in your work from the beginning. It seems to me, looking at much of your earlier work, for example your furniture are use items, or items specially meant to be used. But they are also very extreme and push limits of how someone uses them or how you use them. So I wonder if they were a kind of critique or comment on how we use technologies or how we as a greater society use objects to mediate environment. But then in the UO talk you mentioned that these are person projects for your own use and life. Where do you see them falling into this is?

AZ: They are both. I am trying to think, because it really varies from object to object, and project to project, but I think when I was formulating my approach, when I was in my 20s, I often thought about trying to critique something from within, so rather than critiquing it by pointing at it and kind of saying this is wrong, to critique it actually by recreating that situation and experiencing it, by embodying it in a way, it almost like I would critique something by embodying it. This seemed like a better way to critique something. If I were writing would probably come out with a more articulate way of saying that. But yeah, really trying to experience something fully, even if it was fucked up in someway, and then trying to talk about it on that level. Usually critiquing something is a certain way, so by remaking that thing, even something that is controlled or compartmentalized, I mean our lives are so highly controlled and compartmentalized anyway, but by redoing it, but in a slightly different way that allows people to see it. Jeff Koons was a really huge influence, in part I felt like he changed everything for my generation of artists, because before Jeff Koon's criticism happened as an external factor, but with Jeff you could never tell if he was critiquing something or not and I think that was the moment when artists of my generation looked at that and this idea of embodying things came up. So it is not just myself, but I think that I am part of a whole generation of artists that were hugely influence by him.

CG: Thank you that is a great example I can really visualize what are saying there.

AZ: Yeah. I wasn't really interested in the same issues or the same objects, but was really interested in that approach.

CG: Do you feel like when you make these objects that there is an actual end goal for what is produced out of them? For example, the *Wagon Stations* or your *Escape Vehicles*, they seem to have a very specific thing they are made to do, a specific function. Do you agree with that? Is there a desired thing that is supposed to come out of how they are used? Specifically the *Escape Vehicles*, the user goes into them to almost produce a desired effect.

AZ: Kind of. Those were the most really highly critical pieces. Some pieces are really meant to be used, and they were to a point and other pieces may be more social commentary. Are you saying is there an outcome? Because I think the outcome was more that you would observe your own reaction to this thing. I have been making the living units and trying to get people to engage with them and it was hard. But when I made the *Escape Vehicles*, I think it was the aspect of interiority that really freed people up. And that was the first time I ever had collectors really going crazy customizing their *Escape*

Vehicles. And I thought, what is that, I was thinking about what that says about our human condition. I was thinking a lot about modernity. I just found a book about this and I have just started reading it, but its something about modernity and the internalization of space. I am not sure if I spoke about this in lecture at all. I think that we are being more and more internalized and Richard Sennett wrote about this in the *Fall of the Public Man* and how we have lost our power to emote outward, so everything turns inward. I was thinking about this too in the importance our domestic interiors and our domestic settings, you know 200 years ago your interior of your home wasn't something that expressed your personality or character, and with psychoanalysis being another way of turning inward. The *Escape Vehicles* were a lot about all of that to me, how you sort of liberate yourself by confining yourself even more. My hope with that was that people would get excited, get engaged, but in that process they would start to understand that condition. It almost about getting people to observe themselves feeling things, you feel the emotion freely, then you turn the critical part, I don't even know if critical is the right word because that implies value judgment. I mean maybe there is an analytical eye or mind that you switch on at some point where you allow yourself to feel something freely then you allow yourself to analyze it.

CG: I wonder with something that has this use value or a kind of desired outcome, how do you think it functions in a gallery or museum setting when that aspect is taken out?

AZ: That is a huge issue in my work in general. The objects are meant to function in this one to one relationship with an owner user. One thing is that I don't think they function as well in a public setting and that was a conscientious decision in part because at times I feel like you have to choose and I would rather have them function in the relationship with the individual rather then having the function in a museum. It's nice when it does both, but it doesn't always. At a certain point, I decided that a museum was more like a museum of natural history, like a place you go to learn about things but not a place to necessarily to experience things. I think you experience things in the real world, which is why I did this (A-Z West), why I want to do thing in the world because that is where, in my mind, where you go to experience.

CG: Are there certain museums or certain displays that are better for your work?

AZ: Again I think that doing it again in the real world is the best. I talk a lot about intimate audience, and maybe the best experience is just a few people experiencing something and not a mass audience. I think museums function for some artists really well, and even some of my works like these pointed pieces. They work fine in a museum setting, just not these experience based pieces.

CG: Where do you think the best setting would be for people to experience them?

AZ: Here, in the wash. I think the *Wagon Station* experience works really well for the seven people who own them. I would like to open that up a little bit, I just think there is always that fine line between, I hate the word authentic, but I can't think of anything better, but then at the same time I think you can create an installation that will stimulate

people's imaginations, you know I think you can install things in a way… I almost think I shouldn't stay this, but in those instances its almost like the shopping brain that goes on, you know. They see something and they think about it and they are like, I want to do that. Not necessary an art way of looking, its kind of creating a desire of an experience or something. I have not thought that ever before, so I could change my mind. But I was thinking that maybe it is the consuming brain that devours these experiences. I think that in itself is a pretty rich territory. Its something that I am pretty interested in, but I have by no means full command of, but it is just how that works, the public interact in the museum and where experience actually exists.

CG: So when you moved here, did you already have this idea that this would be a place to create and show?

AZ: Exactly. That was the plan. A-Z East was already like that, but I just wanted it to be bigger and more. I always thought it would be fully open to the public, but just in living here I have realized that it is not possible, I'll go crazy.

CG: Understandable, I can't imagine people coming up here all the time.

AZ: Yeah it's hard to reconcile those two things, but someday it could be.

CG: I hope so. I will come back! Ok, I wanted to talk about one of your earliest projects *Repair Work*. Could you just talk about the project a bit?

AZ: Yeah. I mean that was so early, I left grad school, and now most of my students in grad school kind of know what they are doing and they have it all figured out, but I left grad school not even knowing what art was yet. I was really confused. And so at the time I was doing the *Repair Work* I was kind of trying to figure out what a creative gesture was. I still have problems with the word creativity, I don't really understand what that means and so you know living in New York there was just so much broken crap everywhere, like why would I make more stuff when there already seemed like there was so much stuff in the world. So I was living in Brooklyn and it was a pretty bad neighborhood then, so I just started bringing everything into my studio to see if I could fix it. And at the time thinking that I wanted to do something that was non-creative to see if that was possible, arriving at the conclusion that everything is creative at some level.

CG: How to you see your work or your process fitting to a feminist context?

AZ: Yeah.

CG: Or do you even feel that is a valid way to address your work?

AZ: That is a hard one right? Because I think, the generation I was, I was really excited about making big sculptures and not even ever having to address that in a way. And early on in my career, I have actually gotten a lot of criticism for my work being big and expensive. And in part I felt like that was because I was a woman and people didn't

realize how much of the work I was actually doing myself. And somehow I have ended up… [Zittel holds up Uniform she is currently crocheting].

CG: Making crafts…

AZ: I know, I know. So I don't know where I am going with this, I think I have to be careful right now, I think I have gone too far. So ok you were talking about how you were interested in technology and I have always been interested in how craft is another kind of technology and when you learn about real craft, like the real way to do something, its really interesting. I think that craft is often dumped down, and I was interesting in fully understanding the way that different things are made. So you can get so excited and swept away in that, but in the end if you do something that is soft, its textile or its fiber you know. This is totally off the record, but at my last show at the New York Gallery, I don't tell her what I am doing, I usually just ship it. And she unpacked it and kind of freaked out. She was like I cant believe you are sending this, I wanted to make money, it was in a downturn, I really need to make money right now, this is just more craft. She goes this is just like Rosemarie Trockel. Well I thought I love Rosemarie Trockel, how is that an insult? I think she is so smart and so good. And you know within two days she had kind of covered up those emotions, but I thought that was really interesting that that came out in that moment of frustration from my gallerist. So I guess what I was saying is that you can make something that is really highly conceptual, and you know execute it, you know I used to weld and welding is a 100 times easier than doing some of these fiber pieces and yet people still read it as a kind of soft art.

CG: Do you think that you became interested in working with crafts as a way of exploring different way of using technology?

AZ: Yeah probably. I am always interested in anything I cannot do yet. Sewing is really hard for me, so I think I have kind of skirted sewing by learning other things. You learn the rules of crocheting and you do it, unlike sewing. I just kind of want to be able to do everything and this is easy because I can just do it like this you know. Although I have a feeling that the studio is really going to change my work because I have been working outside for the last several years, and its so hard and I think that having an indoor space and a real woodshop will make everything a lot easier to go back into those more ambitious pieces again.

CG: Tell me about the studio.

AZ: It is 4000 square feet! I can't believe it. We can go up there later if you like.

CG: I would, those are most of the questions I had.

AZ: I am kind of secretly relived that you are doing technology because a lot of people are doing crafts and stuff right now.

CG: Yes well it has taken me a while to figure out this lens since your work is so diverse and expansive.

AZ: Right well when you say technology it takes people to a certain immediate point and then it is interesting to unravel that. Because you also can think of computers.

CG: Right and that is kind of where I started. I had been thinking about this idea of mediation and boundaries and spaces that are outside of direct connectedness. So I though about that a lot and I looked at some of your *Escape Vehicles* as way to unpack some of these issues. But I have also been looking at the idea of tools and extensions of the body.

AZ: Right, I am listening to this Bill Bryson book *At Home* right now and it reminds me that all major breakthroughs, technological breakthroughs happen because of a change in materials, than a change in technology, especially when thinking about architecture and building. I used to think about that a lot too, how amazing it would be to create a new material, that had like different prosperities that no one knew about yet.

CG: Do you think a lot of your work is material driven?

AZ: Yes, especially when I was trying to figure out the paper pulp stuff, which I would like to go back to someday. I think that what you can do is always determine by the material, like the parameters and I think that is really interesting.

CG: Great, thank you.

APPENDEX C

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