

MAKING A USE OF THE WATER IN YOUR BOOTS

Revitalisation of Primary Cut Garments into the Contemporary Clothing Stream



MAKING A USE OF THE WATER IN YOUR BOOTS

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“In the winter,
on the hillside behind the house,
we used to go sledging.
Our skirts would freeze to the sledge.
On the way home they would slowly defrost,
and water would drip into our boots.
The boots after our grandmothers,
two-three sizes bigger.
The water wobbled in the rhythm of our footsteps.
Yet we were never cold.
We never thought of ever putting on some pants.”

(an excerpt from an interview, Volkova 89 y.o.)

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DICTIONARY

primary (adj.)

early 15c., "of the first order," from Latin *primarius* "of the first rank, chief, principal, excellent," from *primus* "first" (see *prime* (adj.)). Meaning "first in order" is from 1802. Primary colour is first recorded in the 1610s (at first the seven of the spectrum, later the three from which others can be made); primary school in 1802, from French *cole primaire*.

cut (adj.)

"formed or fashioned as if by cutting or carving," 1510s, past-participle adjective from *cut* (v.). Meaning "hewn, chiseled" (of stone, etc.) is from the 1670s. Meaning "gashed with a sharp instrument" is from the 1660s.

garment(n.)

c. 1400, "any article of clothing," reduced form of *garnement* (early 14c.), from Old French *garnement* "garment, attire, clothes" (12c.), from *garnir* "fit out, provide, adorn," from a Germanic source (compare *garnish* (v.)), from PIE root **wer-* (4) "to cover."



Women from Radosovce during Easter

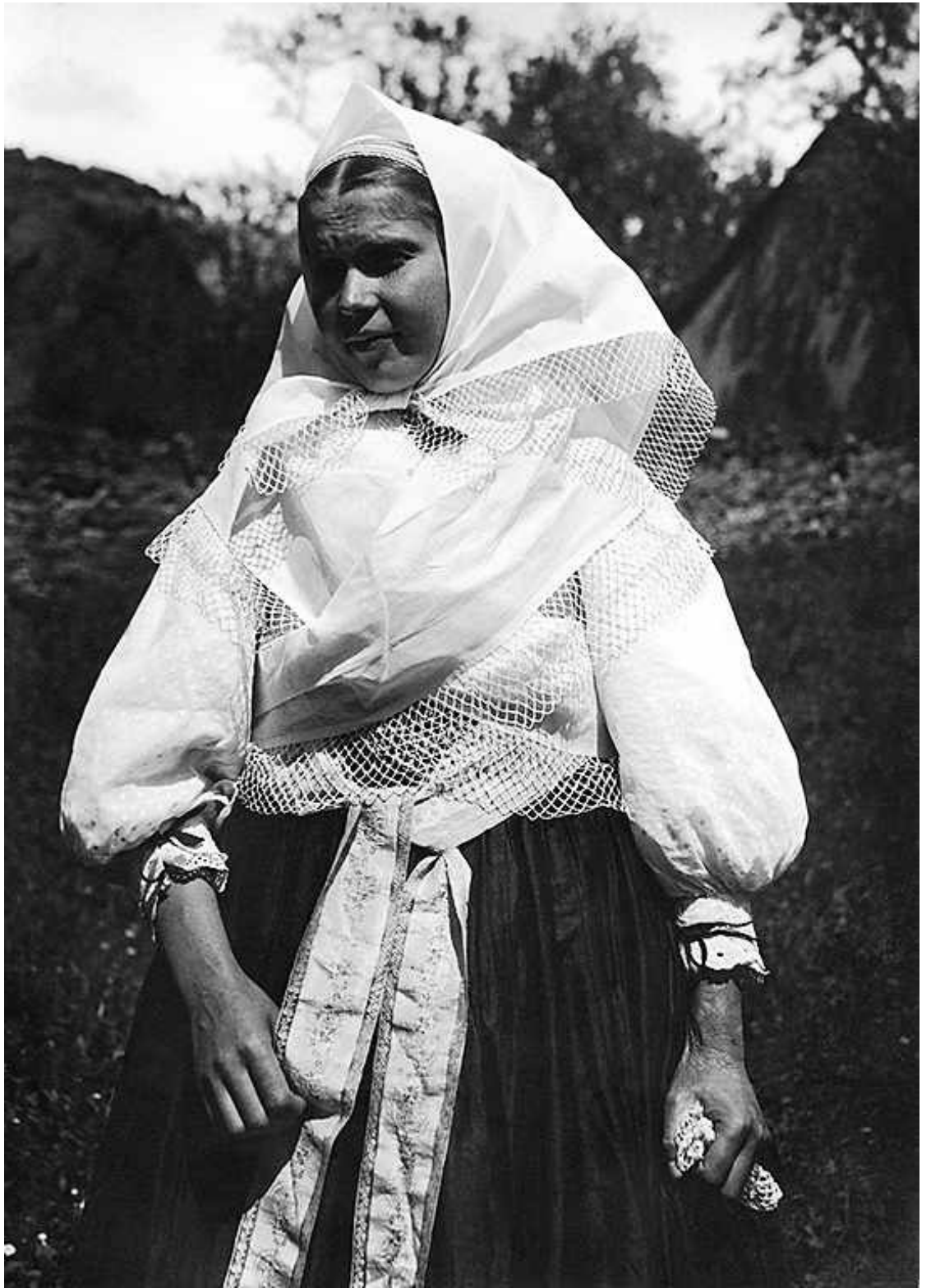
MODES OF DESIGN

Abstract

“Making a use of the water in your boots” is a cultural study into “primary cut” garments. The project investigates whether or not in today’s world a distinction can be made between the social impact of garments and the media that portrays it, and if or how it changes the ability to perceive and communicate with them. The research material was gathered during a field trip to Radosovce, a Slovak village, where the domestic garment making and the creation of textiles has a long-lived tradition. Through the quest of constructing a complete identity, this project follows a group of elderly women, unaffected by mass-consumption, as they dedicate a lifetime to making their garments at home. It explores their position in society, their values, their behaviours, the place where they live, the forces that shape them, and the power that distorted them. Through the process of everyday making and the diverse aspects of co-habitative design, this project places them in the centre. They provide an oral history, an original source material, and individual narratives that get infused in series of garments: a revitalised library of their practice.



Women from Radosovce on a trip to Macocha



Aims & Intentions

The aim of this project is to work on oneself. One of the tasks is to create a space, a “laboratory”, where the wearer will be able to learn how to perceive and experience the garments again. It intends to help maintain and develop critical thinking, to restore our sense of time and space that the expansion of technologies disrupted. Our perception today is extremely heightened due to rapidly changing moving images. Because of the speed and intensity of our visual stimuli, we often fall into a passive perception, a temporary “shutdown”. This series of primary cut garments: (svk. kroj: rectangle like fabric cuts sewed into shape by gathering) stand in contrast to trend and overstimulation as they aim to offer a balance between the contemplative state and the active functional state.



Local communal "laboratories"

Objectives

In Slovak household, a white cloth was an essential marker of achievement, a spiritual blessing. It embodied the strength of the community as an essential symbol of the acquired good. White embodied values absorbed in the garments. As one of the most important color, it had the ability to speak across generations, and go beyond the garments' prime time. For that reason if one combines shades and nuances of white color, it allows the wearer to connect to some of the most important aspects of the garments' presence. By incorporating white details (such as embroidery, quilting) into the white color, the ability to perceive the garment becomes blurry, and this juxtaposition of similar colors forces us to have a closer look. Here the objective is precisely to reduce the distance needed to observe the garments in order to have a more intimate look at it, as opposed to the way they are perceived on the runway. Only when one becomes physical, one feels more connected.

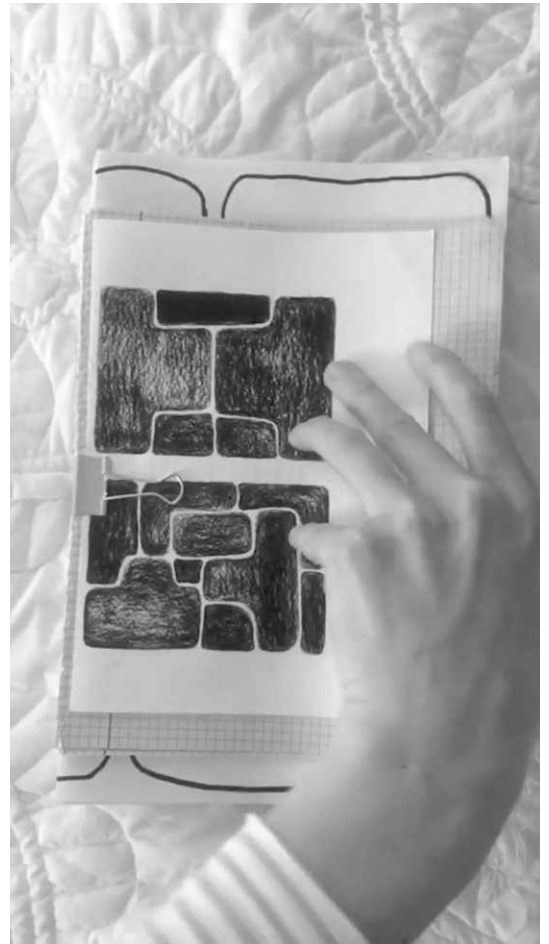
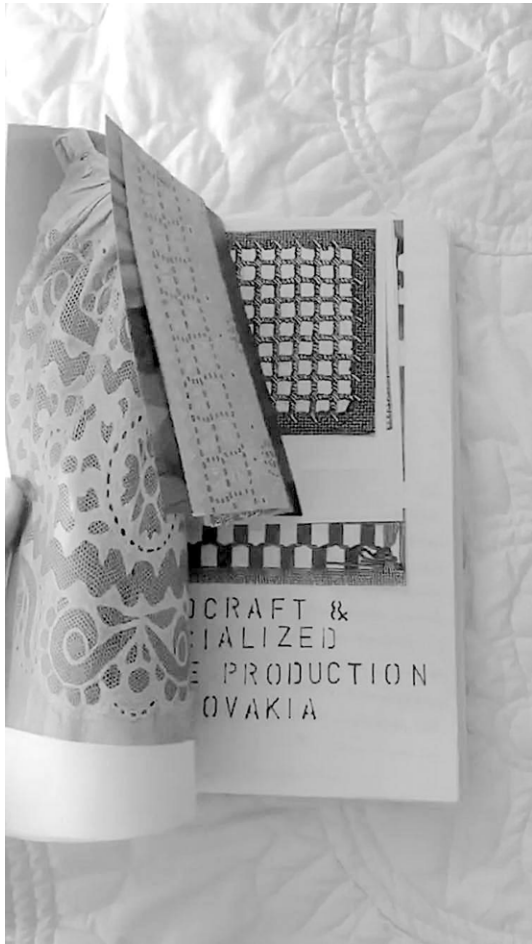


Women from Radosovce in their 20s

SYNOPSIS

Discovery Phase

The application of older ways of garment making was always present in my work. I became more aware of it after a positive response during an exhibition in the second semester. I was more interested in hand-printing and patterns at the time, but the people seemed to be more intrigued with the shape. That shifted my attention and my further actions were the result of this prior experience. Because of the newfound qualities, I started to inspect my garment making more closely. I established a garment library and began a deeper personal investigation into the history of shape, needlework and materials. The concrete discovery of the theme started in early October of 2019 during a trip to Radosovce. I was made aware that the era of women wearing primary garments (14 in total) is slowly coming to an end. I understood that it might be my last chance to talk to them.



Material library

Need of the Project

As the name indicates, “Making a use of the water in your boots” revolves around finding use and space for the outdated practices, but also finding their meanings and values in the present time and in the future. The need for this project arose from the fact that even though research into Slovak sabbatical primary garments exists in greater extent, there is a lack of research evidence into the everyday primary garments. Bringing these garments into a “laboratory” allows one to question the relevance and the impact of two different ecologies, the hand-made and the mass-produced. Why keeping up with current production practices despite their effect on the decline of the garments’ worth?



Sabbatical primary cut garments



Everyday primary cut garments



Individual primary cut garments

Principle of Operation

I used semi-structured interview technique as a main tool for the field discovery operation. I gathered voice and video recordings, photographs and textiles. To measure out the volume of found evidence, I organised private and public conversations. The private conversations happened at home, they were more intimate and allowed me to inspect their wardrobe, their domestic space, their personal understanding. The public conversations happened in a form of a discussion panel where three of the women spoke about their common experiences, how they related to one another and shared stories about the community at large. Here I found an array of sensing elements, making elements, and lifestyle choices that resonated with my practice as I was ready take them into the practical stage of this project.



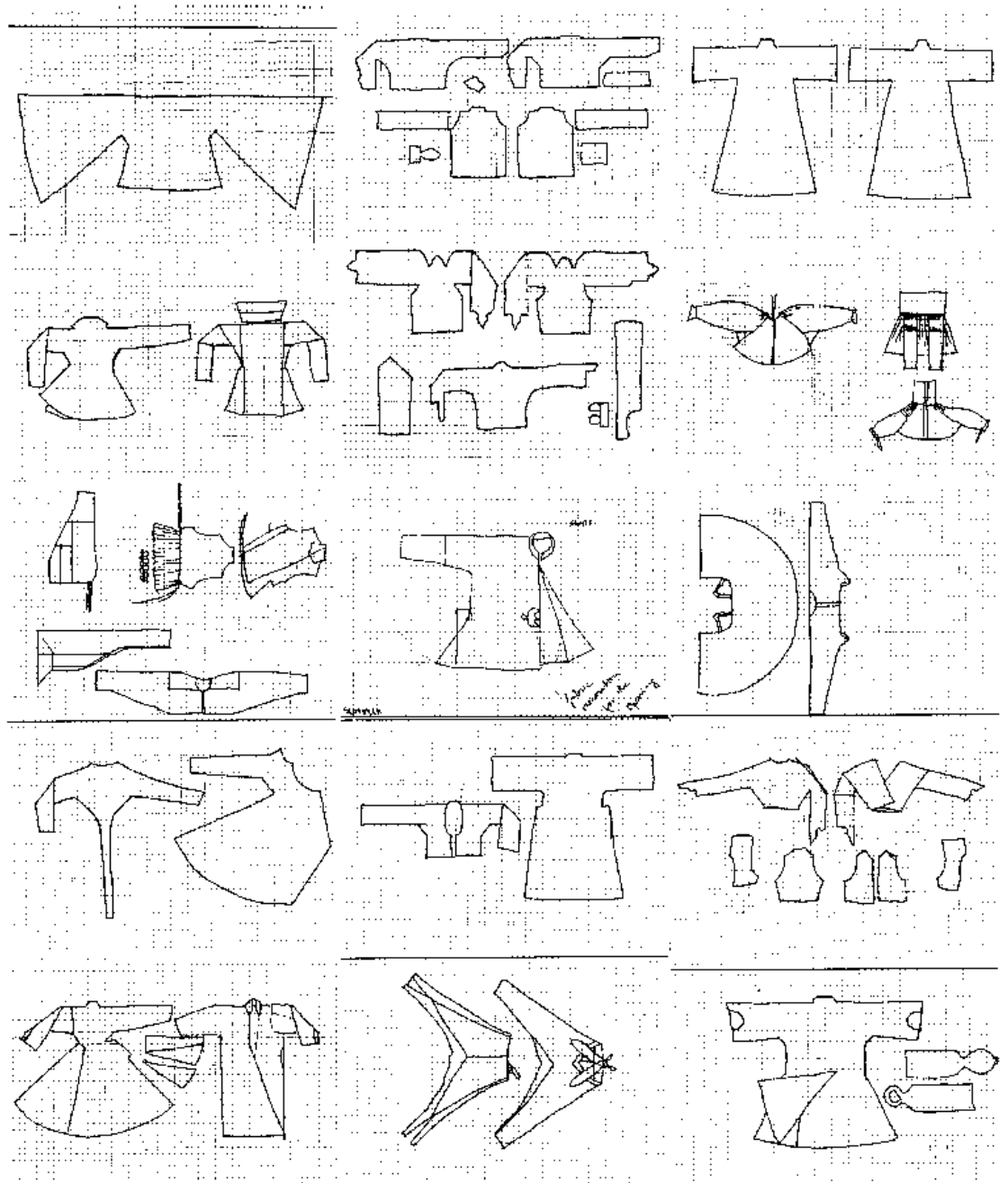
Personal conversations in Radosovce



Public discussion in Radosovce

Design Phase & Application

The construction phase consisted of series of experiments with geometrical shapes (such as rectangles, triangles, squares). Working with absence of curved lines brought challenges as well as new discoveries. Here I recognised the “base shape” on which the rest of the garments were build upon. Still being able to access workshops, I was contemplating with the idea to combine an offline practice with digital technologies. I began to learn the digital knitting and digital embroidery programs. Still in the phase of experiments, I produced samples based on mixing the two. At this point, I recognised that I was steering away from the source. I changed the direction by adopting the women’s domestic garment making techniques to my own. Around this time, Oslo went into a lockdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19. Workshops were closed and my decision seemed like a blessing in despair. I built a workshop at home. It consisted of embroidery station made from a big metal picture frame, a sewing station with a Bernina Bernette domestic machine from the 60’s, and me taking up the roles of an author, maker, model and user.



Primary patterns flat drawings



Domestic embroidery station



Domestic sewing station

Components Used

All the components (textiles) used in this project were given to me during the field trip. The colour palette was based on that original source, consisting of mainly white and beige cotton, linen, mixture of hemp and one polyester curtain. A collection of embroidery patterns present in the women's homes inspired the graphic embroidery and quilts. A hand-lettering embroidery illustrates text that deals with the period of the discovery phase. These varied domestic applications individually took about 2-3 weeks. I stayed away from overlocking and instead secured the edges with folding and reinforced stitches. The limited amount of pattern making on paper and working straight on the textile aided me with results that were unexpected.



Local decorative cloth and quilted piece generated from



Hand-lettering embroidery based on the field notes

Results

By stimulating my own practice with these domestic design circuits, I arrived at a place with series of garments that fully interpret the lifestyle that surrounds the group of women I felt inspired by. Because there was nothing else that needed to be done, nothing other than this: an ode to these women so replete, witted, vibrant yet modest, composed and full of hope.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Precepts of the Project

“Wearing garments is a universal constant, and consequently it is as natural a feature as for example using language for communication. (Weiner, Schneider)”

Communication in garments takes place between the author and the wearer, but also between the artistic context and the social context. Garments are one of the forms of social consciousness that stimulate the ability to express and reflect knowledge or experiences in a certain way. We can also understand wearing garments as an activity that works with our perception, imagination, knowledge, but also with intuition. They give us the ability to speak creatively and captivately to others. The increasing speed of our production, of our consumption habits and of our passive visual stimuli all contribute to the dilatation of our perception and our communication with garments into nothing more than a momentary satisfaction.

Conceptualisation & Research

By traveling back in time and inspecting the elements of domestic production, I was able to gain a deeper insight into a practice that fell out of favour in the recent decades. It was an essential choice to get a composure and to question the different needs of garments' communication across our social spectrum. The study of a local culture (as opposed to an international one) changed how I relate to my own practice. I defined primary cut garments on the basis of past geometry patterns and local material knowledge and how they both carry a value to me, and to the future of the industry.



Reflections & Learning Realisations

The primary pattern making relies heavily on one's sensibilities. In my case, the absence of a model, or a dummy, reshaped my vision of the body, its role and its relations to the garments. Working alone lead me to discover a study from my perspective as the user. I developed a simplified structure of non-restrictive shapes and sizing systems that can carry the garments from adolescence to adulthood, through pregnancy, body changes and ageing.

I learned to view resources in the same way these women did: in commonality, regardless of where on the class spectrum they lived. Constructing garments from their household material (bedsheets, linens, cloths and crochets) used or visibly decayed challenged my practice to think of the future where raw material will be scarce. It broadened my knowledge of material that ages well, mixing qualities of unevenness, roughness and decay with light colours that psychologically suggest purity and newness.

A key context (not only the context of the garments and the author, but especially the context of the wearer) shifted to resilient garments. The ones that can communicate something new but also something already adopted, and at the same time lead to further definitions and redefinitions. The domestic techniques of embroidery, quilting and assembly insinuate tactile novelty. The build in extra seam-allowances, reinforced stitches and adaptable sizing directly targets our need for prolonged period of use. It is a physical reminder that time is an objective, even if looked over, but certainly responsible for how and why we value garments today.

Summary of Insights

With the expansion of modern technologies, the domestic sewing practice in this project serves as a metaphor. A metaphor that allows to a wider range of interpretation. It could relate to the use of time in our production, to the understanding of the future, where facts are disseminated, but also how we assess the different ecologies for the garments and the industry itself. These series of garments act as figures of speech applied to my own practice. They address questions to maintain or develop critical thinking, to restore the time and space we lack. They correspond to the transformation of conditions, however they don't have to change us. Their effort can suggest to work on oneself, whether it is overcoming today's social pressures or working with one's own role or position in relation to others, to the society. They are not about negating the existence of industrial production, yet they are still valuable as a study of development of discourses around domestic garment making, so that we can learn how knowledge is produced and by whom, and within which structures. These garments can take us somewhere we haven't been before. They can be both reason and hope.

“Hope is not a belief that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something will make sense no matter how it turns out.” (Vaclav Havel)”

MANIFESTO

1. Communication between the author and the wearer.
2. Communication between the artistic context and the social context.
3. Color and shape as a mutual influence.
4. White is not a mere absence of color.
5. Prolong the moment of contemplation.
6. Cultivate the co-habitative domestic design.
7. Insinuate critical thinking and active presence.
8. Trans-cultural garments that reach beyond our time.