

Andrew 01
Union Station

Toronto
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If you had been walking along the East Corridor in Union Station you would have seen, amidst the showcases containing CN Police displays and VIA Rail souvenirs, another enclosing *The Venus Suit*. Spotlit and mounted on a waist-high column was a headless, man-size torso wearing a khaki coloured jacket with lurid pink, fur trimmed lapels, a vest and shirt in other hues of pink and a deep purple tie. A small notice stuck to the glass wall in front expained this as a manifestation of 'sexual symbology in the business environment'. The business person, by nature of work, is forced to repress personal expression and conform in dress to the status quo. Certain symbols have evolved allowing an individual to express self, natural identity – here defined as an identity with nature in its most primary form, Sexual Power. Constantly visible but not 'obvious', this representation takes the form of The Business Suit.

The little notice on the glass wall would not have been terribly helpful to the passerby who might want to connect *The Venus Suit* on view to the definition of his (or her) business suit.

If you had received a press release in the mail, The Business Suit would have been related to *The Venus Suit* as follows: three piece suit and tie = enlarged, 3D representation of an

open vagina; jacket lapels = vulva lips; vest = inner labia; tie = vaginal opening; tie knot = clitoris; handkerchief or carnation in pocket = sexual juices/or blood. The tie could also be taken as a phallic symbol (with a twist – in early fetal development the primary genitalia of pre-males and pre-females are identical and can become penal shaft with head or opening with clitoris.

If you had looked at the installation closely you would have found this press release affixed to the rear concrete wall at a discrete, barely readable distance.

The Venus Suit was an Eye Revue project. Eye Revue is an artist-run organization (disposed to an examination of street culture/the pedestrian situation) which operated for several years out of a downtown storefront location. Financial constraint caused it to 'relocate', renting two showcases (each 3m x 8m x 2m) in the East and West Corridors of Union Station for exhibitions. Hence *The Venus Suit* was Public Art. Because it simply looked like a piece of side-show sleaze and since its intentions were didactic, as Public Art *The Venus Suit* required some mediation with its audience. Its readability aside, the information given was, in itself, not very useful in analysing contemporary male codes of dress.

One might consider pre-Freudian ways of thinking which argue from an economic base and would cite the origins of the business suit in the 19th century.

"The great dividing line in 1860 is not rich and poor but the respectable and others." (G.M. Young. *Victor-*

ian Essays – The Happy Family.) The concept of respectability bridged the gap when industrial revolution threatened to split English society into two nations, The Rich and The Poor; it encouraged the intelligent and enterprising worker to rise out of the squalid slums of industrial towns; doing so gave him self-respect and the respect of others. For these clerks, teachers and shop assistants, the neat black suit-coat, trousers and waistcoat, stiff white collar and unobtrusive tie – became uniform. For women the equivalent was coat, skirt, blouse, and gloves. Similar significance invested the white collar for men (cleanliness distinguished the respectable from the great unwashed of the Victorian slums) as gloves for women (denoting someone who never soiled their hands with work.

The neat black suit, of course, brought the respectable one step closer to the gentleman, his uniform and the possibilities inherent therein. As Veblen notes in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* the patent-leather shoe, the stainless linen, the lustrous cylindrical hat and the walking stick do more than enhance the native dignity of a gentleman or indicate that he is able to consume a relatively large value. In fact, they suggest "that the wearer cannot when so attired bear a hand in any employment that is directly of any human use" – but they do not suggest his physical inability to do so.

Jennifer Oille



Andrew 01, *Venus Suit* (1985), mixed media, courtesy: Garnet Press