



Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze,
Hito Steyerl & Miloš Trakilović



Mission Accomplished:
Belanciege, 2019
(Excerpts)

In their three-channel video installation, Gagoshidze, Steyerl and Trakilović speculate the rampant commodification and neoliberal privatization of the former Eastern bloc through a single case study: the luxury brand Balenciaga. Taking current creative director Demna Gvasalia's overhaul of the French luxury house as a point of departure, the piece proposes a dizzying dynamic between branding, technology, and political populism in contemporary consumer culture, 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall. Here, Balenciaga figures both as the progenitor and consequence of changing conditions of capitalist production; mimicking and perpetuating an aestheticized image of post-Soviet political life, only to be marketed as a luxury commodity.

Miloš Trakilović: The story of present-day Balenciaga starts in Georgia. Hidden behind all these people – is a little boy called Demna Gvasalia. He must be around 10 years old. He's fleeing war, one of the countless post-revolutionaries wars of the former East. He will later on reach success as a fashion designer with his label Vetements, after which he will become head designer of Balenciaga in 2015, revolutionising fashion and propelling the brand to the very top. A lot of things other happened in between, of course, among the invention of the internet, and the next thing we know – we've come to this.

Hito Steyerl: Let's jump back to Lotta [Volkova], and start zooming out of the situation. Lotta was trapped in a conflict of enormous complexity, one premised on crumbling former nationhoods and unwinnable new statehoods in which attitude became an important alt-currency. In the 90's, free market ideologies and

the collapse of state socialism re-configured the map. But today many nations have moved beyond this point. De-globalisation; authoritarianism; isolationism, ethnic segregation; moved beyond the templates, tried and tested, throughout the 90's in Eastern Europe.

Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze: All the clothes we dreamt of wearing, end up on our bodies as humanitarian second-hand items. The clothes were lousy, and mostly oversized, they got even larger, as they had been worn by multiple bodies – passed on from older brother to younger sister. And later kept and inherited by the newborn cousin. In this way poverty was constantly being passed on from the past, adding your brand to another brand. Branding the unbrandable. We call this the Balenciaga method, not because it has anything to do with Balenciaga, but because it slapped the brand on top of pretty much everything.

MT: My generation, born in '89, got to know the world not through walls, but through transparent screens. It's a generation that understands usership, but has problems with meaning. A vast so-called free generation of the free-market economy that grew up with some freedom of movement, freedom of expression and no future. Balenciaga and Vetement appeal not only to the global elite, but to the post-89 generation in specific, because they craft their brand meme-bait strategies. They test on principles of framing and re-framing – thereby co-opting their consumers in creating hype. Whereas most luxury brands would rely on some aura of exclusivity to sell their products, Balenciaga twists this principle with a dose of irony, breaking from the image of snooty wealth and lending it an air of broader reliability instead. Their greatest hit, the Ikea frakta bag.

GG: Balenciaga is the ultimate method of privatisation to separate bodies from clothes, most specifically it separates clothes from the body by making them look hot. You just heat poverty up to a certain degree until it evaporates an aesthetic of the survival of the fittest, and then you just have to wait until it comes back to you. As we have already seen, Mikheil wears Balenciaga and he does it for a reason. As intended, when he wears it, he feels confident and powerful whatever job he does. He's the one that perfected and finished the process that started from '89 – he brought privatisation to the next level, and whoever stood in his way was found dead on top of the newspaper kiosk, or abused and filmed in a prison.

HS: the Balenciaga method: learn from the best – privatise poverty.

MT: If there is nothing left to privatise, privatise the unprivatisable. Privatise Bernie.

Mission Accomplished: Balenciage, 2019. Courtesy the artists, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, & Esther Schipper, Berlin, Germany.





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