

Valentina Triet, *Of manners, of trips*

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In the late 1950s, the British fashion designer Mary Quant caused a stir at a couture show in St. Moritz with a collection that flew in the face of prevailing runway etiquette: instead of the smooth elegance of ball gowns and soft music, she introduced short hemlines and leather boots, accompanied by jazz, sound with tempo and nerve. “I want girls who exaggerate the realness of themselves,” Quant said, “not the haughty unrealness like the couture models do.” Quant was one of the key figures in transforming mainstream fashion shows in 50s and 60s Europe. Her labeling and marketing, the “realness” of her models and garments, owed much to her use of street style, Black culture and the nascent sexual liberation movements of the time.

Of manners, of trips pinpoints such moments of distortion, in which spectacle flirts with the attraction of the unfamiliar. Valentina Triet is showing close to thirty videos in which she transforms found footage of fashion shows from the 1980s to today, covering a range of houses from Dior and Thierry Mugler to Off-White, into pixelated images. Bars of color hint at the clothing line of the shows, the movement and pace of the grids suggest the models walking on the runway. Flashing lights indicate the press’s constant snapping. The soundtrack remains unaltered, blasting and sharp, in contrast to all other – visual – elements of shows that are literally unfocused. Rather than the model being the obvious vehicle of desire for the object – actually wearing the clothes as well as embodying their essential vibe – the soundtrack is outed as a most conspicuous vehicle of attachment. Whether the sound of clanging machinery, classical music, pop songs: edge of industry, class of high culture, rebel of subculture, fun of the mainstream come into play as genres conjuring value of this or that prestige.

Valentina Triet is interested in the world of haute couture as the site of collision between the avant-garde and consumerism. She alienates the images of the runway, undermining the performance that contributes to their commercialization, and with it conventions that determine what is tasteful and what is not. In the 60s, the runway shows and marketing in general burst the limits of what and how something could be *the* hot thing. The sensory jolt of Quant’s fashion

show, the means that have since been enlisted in all imaginable ways in order to ignite the desire of and effectively affect viewers, critics and consumers, have here been reduced to their raw components: light, color, rhythm, volume. Without a product to latch on to, the body is left to its heightened senses.

But it is more complicated than the often-grand artistic gesture of “anti-capitalist critique”. What of commerce with its “devilish” skill of turning everything new and strange into product? Bittersweet for many who have long desired the limelight. For what is the disdain of getting glammed up if not one of a position where it is not needed – discretion as the quintessence of modesty effectively shuts down the artifice of the beauty industry. The body is not nature; it produces affects and is affected. The fashion industry and its key players encourage imitation. With the immediacy of visual references blurred, *Of manners, of trips* suspends this tendency.

Altogether, the videos run to around 3.5 hours. Triet shapes the footage into an abstract colour grid, into an aesthetic image of blurred information that foregrounds the make-up of the medium video, reminiscent of such gestures as the use of the flicker in structural film for its stroboscopic effect. The four projections in the installation are choreographed to alternate or multiply throughout the two galleries of Kunsthalle. The effect is trance-like, and disorienting. If ‘manners’ are a set of rules that define appropriate behavior (compliance) then ‘trips’ might be perceived as a kind of counter-behavior – an escape from the ordinary, a means of transcending the limitations of the body (ecstasy). However, this take on ‘trips’ implies a present abandoned for the sake of an ideal state and fails to realize that enlightened travelers only *believe* that they understand the world. It is the subject of a culture in which Experience with a capital E is king.

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Valentina Triet (*1991 in Winterthur, lives and works in Vienna and Zurich) has had solo exhibitions at Marble, Brussels; OxfordBerlin, Berlin; Neuer Essener Kunstverein, Essen; Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna; and group exhibitions

at Galerie Neu, Berlin; Sweetwater, Berlin; Alienze, Vienna; The Wig, Berlin; and mumok, Vienna, among others.

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