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The Per(ver)formative Aspects of Pandemic Fashion Performances: Moschino's Deconstructive Marionettes[1]

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Abstract: It is said that due to the social and economic effects of the recent pandemic, fashion has been caught in a destructive position. One aspect is the material change of the fashion objects and the strong pre-eminence of the so-called "stay-at-home collections" against the earlier dominance of the ready-to-wear and haute couture garments intended for social events. An important feature of recent fashion changes is their reliance on current pandemic rules and the related political decisions. In my presentation, I will focus on an interesting example of these pandemic changes: Moschino's 2021 Spring/Summer Collection. Moschino's "Marionette Performance" is a perfect example for infelicitous performativity where the show is created in a *per(ver)formative* (in the Derridean sense) act in the catwalk space. I intend to show that performativity is broken at every step of the show. In this spring collection, not only are the mannequins substituted by dolls but the viewers – some are well known (e.g. Anna Wintour) – are also transformed into marionettes by Jeremy Scott. With a self-ironic gesture, anyone of us from the possible audience can be changed into a puppet. To analyse the performative character of the show, I use deconstructive approaches and ideas. I wish to emphasize the interweaving performative dimensions that, in a sense, preclude each other with the help of Paul de Man's interpretation of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*. I want to point out the mechanical, meaningless materiality appearing in the marionettes' movements on Moschino's special catwalk. My lecture argues that in the movements of the marionettes the possibility of the clear manifestation of performativity becomes uncertain.

Keywords: deconstruction, fashion performance, marionettes, Moschino

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> Let us look at the matter thus: May we not conceive each of us living beings to be a puppet of the Gods, either their plaything only or created with a purpose – which of the two we cannot certainly know? But we do know that these affections in us are like cords and strings, which pull us different and opposite ways, and to opposite actions; and herein lies the difference between virtue and vice. (Plato 2016: 36)

Fashion and Pandemic: The Transformation of Fashion Performance

The fashion show is a social phenomenon; it has the performativity[2] that regulates and validates it as a given, convention-based activity. Recent initiatives aiming at the "transformation of the fashion show into a fashion performance"[3] (Evans 2001: 301) have significantly changed the performative nature, the rules, and the conventions of fashion events. The pandemic in the previous two and half years has been an essential factor in this change, resulting in the self-deconstruction of fashion performances. However, it is easily possible that the changes can also be interpreted as the effects of a broader transformation in the fundamental character of contemporary artistic processes, amplified by the pandemic.

One aspect of the pandemic transformation is a material change in fashion objects, the strong dominance of "stay-at-home collections" or "work-from-home collections" (e.g.: WFH Jammies or Christian Dior's Spring/Summer 2021 or Hungarian-based fashion brand Tomcsányi) over the earlier power of the *ready-to-wear* and *haute couture* garments intended for social events. These changes have transformed the design practice, creating a unique "pandemic fashion". Besides these facts, numerous other changes can be seen in the fashion industry.[4] A new emphasis, i.e. sustainability, has become crucial, but in general the whole fashion industry is undergoing a vast change (Nistor 2020). My focus is directed on a specific aspect: the recent fashion show changes directly connected to the current COVID-19 rules and restrictions and the related local and international political decisions. It is a fact that "while many brands chose to stage and record runway shows without a live audience, others created short films in which models showcased garments in a narrative format" (Domoszlai-Lantner 2020). In this general trend, memorable presentations include two short films by the House of Dior (Autumn-Winter 2020/2021)[5] and Moschino (Spring-Summer 2020–2021).[6]

2 On performativity, see Austin (1975) and Fischer-Lichte (2008).

3 On this, see also Duggan (2001), Evans (2003: 67–85), and Egri (2020).

4 As the fashion industry has changed, so has its media. E.g. the emergence of "Instagrammable fashion". See Keszeg (2020).

5 The House of Dior Autumn-Winter "fashion show", 2020–2021 https://tinyurl.com/3d66yfcv (last access: 05.07.2022).

6 The House of Moschino Spring-Summer "fashion show", 2020–2021 https://tinyurl.com/ae96hvv8 (last access: 05.07.2022).



Source: Style Magazine

Picture 1. *A short film by Dior in 2021*

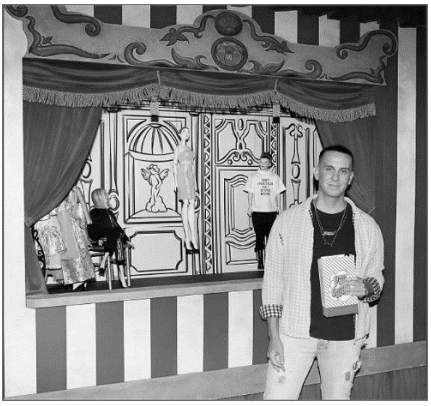
In the context of the pandemic, more and more fashion events are stepping out of the traditional framework, introducing elements of a theatrical nature and presenting a complex performance. The fashion show is thus not only a representative display of dressing possibilities in a specific space but becomes a kind of spectacular show of a particular type that seeks to convey subjective meaning, a message beyond the clothesline. In Alexander McQueen's famous turn-of-the-century fashion performances, for example, the personal sense of national identity or the traumatic experience of violence became the founding background of the fashion show. In my study, I analyse a fashion show – Moschino's 2021 Spring/Summer Collection – where the disruptive, destructive subjective backdrop of the pandemic transforms the simple fashion show into a complex, multi-meaning, allegorical-referential fashion performance that radically transforms space. The fashion show becomes an artistic event in itself.

Reading the Fashion Show through the Deconstruction of the Performative

I attempt to use the deconstructive "close reading" method of the Moschino presentation. Fashion shows and performances have their own (constructive) performative structure based on specific, accepted conventions. Moschino's "Marionette Performance" is a perfect example of the disintegration, of the perversion of such existing performative rules. We may even ask with Jacques Derrida how this *per(ver)formative* act (Derrida 1987: 136) is created in the catwalk space. The primary "perversion" is that the whole fashion show is turned into a completely alien genre, into a puppet show. The theoretical parallel

here in my interpretation will be Paul de Man's study (1984) on Heinrich von Kleist's essay on the marionette theatre (Kleist 1972). I want to show how regular performativity (Austin 1962), the accepted, fundamental system of rules of the fashion show is broken at every step of the show. The resulted show product rewrites the standard and validates conventional rules of the fashion show. The Moschino show disrupts and deconstructs at once the formal order of the fashion show and reveals a hidden process that takes place in subjective depth and can be read in deconstructive and psychoanalytic ways.

The catwalk show of Moschino starts with a preparatory deconstructive narrative (whether it can or cannot be called a fashion performance will become apparent in my analysis). We are not watching a documentary fashion presentation at a real-life location but a fictional story shot on film and adapted to the medium of the short feature film. It has nothing to do with the previous fashion shows in real space, where bodies met. The starting scene, a kind of preface, is entirely different from the usual fashion show narrative. We are witnessing an event at an amusement park or village fair in which Jeremy Scott (the creative director of the Moschino fashion house) is walking with a bag of popcorn in his hand. This popularizing context is extraordinary: the guests of great fashion brands are mostly VIPs who do not come to the show with popcorn bags but with invitation cards, and they are all well-dressed and adequately prepared, leaving their expensive villas and arriving at an exceptional, dedicated space of the fashion show.



Source: Good Morning Vogue

Picture 2. *Moschino's puppet theatre and Jeremy Scott in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

In this alternative story, Jeremy Scott, with popcorn in his hand, is faced with a strange marionette theatre at the fair. At this moment, the theatre is only a tiny box (it will expand to a human size shortly); it has a puppet mannequin, a marionette figure of Scott, and a woman wearing black and gold leisure dress.

The little marionette-Scott addresses the life-size Scott by saying, "Hey, You!" Upon this gesture, the little puppet becomes anthropomorphic; it is transformed magically into a real, living human being, similar to the uncanny, "unheimlich" (Freud 1955: 217–252) image of the Olympia doll. Scott's puppets create uncertainty through initiating a dialogue with the real person, as "the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or a fantastic one of his creation" (Freud 1955: 230). Jeremy Scott's answer to the deconstructive uncertainty is a real surprise: "Who? Me?" "You!" – responds the marionette – "Come here to help me, zip this dress." At this point, a strange, controversial game of personification starts to unfold. The puppet becomes a living being after being addressed. Moreover, with the changes of the social relations, Scott (the creator of the puppet-show-styled fashion show) is turned into a serviceman, a dresser in the puppet world of the fashion performance. The tiny puppet takes over his directorial power, the aesthetical-ideological power of the designer, as it orders Scott to zip the dress on the puppet-mannequin. The real Jeremy Scott is treated as a simple passer-by and is not addressed as Moschino's designer but as a "flâneur" who has accidentally bumped into the fashion show.

The label of the Moschino T-shirt on the puppet is also strange and quite narcissistic: "I don't speak Italian, but I do speak Moschino." The text on the dress of the fashion show puppet refers to the American-born director of an Italian fashion house.



Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 3. *Scott marionette wearing "I don't speak Italian, but I speak Moschino" label T-shirt in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

Scott addresses Scott. Using de Man's irony concept, this is an expressive start. The "real" Scott asks: "Are you guys here to put on a show?" The marionette Scott answers: "Of course, dear boy! What does it look like?" Indeed, this question is familiar to us from Paul de Man's *Semiology and Rhetoric* – this is a real "Archie Bunker situation" (de Man 1979a: 8). The fictional marionette puppet refers to the

reality of the events, while the real Scott understands it like fiction – "the same grammatical pattern engenders two meanings that are mutually exclusive: the literal meaning asks for the concept (difference) whose existence is denied by the figurative meaning" (de Man 1979a: 8). And, according to the presentation, "the confusion can only be cleared up by the intervention of an extra-textual intention" (de Man 1979a: 10), so as outsiders we have to decide what really cannot be decided, i.e. who is real, who is fictional. Of course, the "real" Jeremy of the filmic presentation does not perceive the rhetorical structure of the question and continues: "Wow! I just love (a) puppet show!" The marionette is hurt and growls: "This isn't a puppet show. This is a fashion show!" The unpleasant situation and the disapproving sight of the puppet make the "real" Scott apologize: "I am sorry. I didn't mean to offend you." This is like the situation in Kleist's *Boy of Thorn*,[7] in which Mr K. recounts how the grace and the vanity of the boy were injured by his comment "You were probably seeing ghosts" (Kleist 1972: 65). In this dialogue, the double meaning of the word "show" (puppet show and fashion show) is taken into a game, and the puppet becomes ghostly. Are we watching a fashion or a puppet show? The question is rhetorical and depends on the persuasion effect on readers, but its importance really affects the history of fashion performances and significantly influences the performativity of fashion shows. The pandemic situation transforms the possibility of contact of bodies and inserts a mediatory change into the former framework of the catwalk show: using the short film as a medium, the two different types of performative acts are opposed to each other. The puppet show is also performative; it has its own rules that differ from the laws of the fashion show. Here, in this ironic situation, the two kinds of performativity are confronted with each other, and their opposite features are manifested.

But what is performativity, and how does it become per(ver)formative due to a deconstructive transformation by the pandemic situation in fashion performance? Fashion shows are always performative in the acceptance of modern and postmodern theories (Austin 1962). A precise set of authenticating rules always operates around relevant performative events. The fashion show is always performative; it does not simply show some clothes (as a shop window does) but draws the clothes into a specific, defined runway narrative.

In contrast to such grammatically regular "happy performatives", we constantly face unruly formats. Austin pointed out that in some cases "something *goes wrong*, and the act – marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or whatnot – is therefore at least to some extent a failure (…) the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy (…)" (Austin 1962: 14). According to the author, the things that can be and that go wrong are "infelicities" (*idem*). Austin groups among

7 The *Boy of Thorn* is a Greco-Roman Hellenistic sculpture representing a sitting boy as he pulls a thorn out of his leg. In Kleist's essay, the view of this harmonious image is damaged by the teacher of the young man who tried to identify with the statue.

these "infelicities" cases where "a performative utterance will, for example, be in a *peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage" (Austin 1962: 22).

Derrida used a specific postcard to illustrate the performative deadlock. The picture shows Plato and Socrates as the latter writes and the former dictates. This situation radically suspends the original principle, the ancient, original performative of the history of philosophy. Derrida's comment says that:

> Here is the master of the *perverformative*, he writes to you: it is indeed me, here is my signature, you will be able to recognize it, it is authentic, and to be more certain, it comes in the first place, above left, I the undersigned, and below right: let the beginning of this letter be for you simultaneously the symbol that it is indeed from me. This breakdown in the subjective moment of the performative always disrupts the constative, assertive, grammatical clarity. It builds into the phenomenon a fracture that thus becomes an event of destructive uncertainty. (Derrida 1987:136)

The infelicity, the "perverformative" is understood by Derrida as the fundamental, essential nature (a kind of unavoidable perversion) of the performative, a character of human communication. What happens in the Moschino show is that the rules of the fashion show are radically broken, and the conventions of the fashion performance are deconstructed. Performativity is transformed into the activity of per(ver)formativity. In Moschino's performance, the marionette puppet creates a "perverse" situation since the presented garments are worn mainly by real human beings. The perverformative character is a critical structure in the deconstructive understanding of performativity.

In the Moschino 2021 Spring/Summer Collection, the designer, Jeremy Scott, transformed the mannequins and the viewers into marionettes. Fashion critics Anna Wintour and Anna Dello Russo also appear as marionettes in this incredible, distorted situation. With a self-ironic gesture, all of us, the viewers, can look at ourselves as puppets of the pandemic situation. Because of the restrictions due to the pandemic, it was not possible to organize the fashion week in many countries in the presence of an audience, but, seemingly, this encouraged Scott to be creative.

In the fashion show, marionette puppets substituted living bodies, and the designer created a complex system of objective references through them, mixed with fictional images. In his essay (which was written about Kleist's theatre), Paul de Man shows that in Kleist's study theatrical situations (e.g. the exchange of looks and dance) are mechanical. According to de Man, this kind of rhetorical operation works by mutually excluding cognitive and performative dimensions, putting all this in contrast with an ideological understanding of aesthetics that was created in romanticism (in the romantic theory of the aesthetics by Schiller). In Moschino's marionette fashion show, the aesthetics of the traditional, formalized

fashion performance (e.g. the presence of bodies, which was the privilege of some people previously), staged aestheticism, symbolism (namely, presentation as a kind of internal sense and beauty) are damaged, broken down at every step. If a real model were to walk in a Moschino's dress, we would take her/him as an aesthetic message. Everyone could see the beautiful garments on beautiful people, creating a complex message of beautiful bodies and objects. The garments worn by the puppets generate an essentially different impression.

Fashion researcher Ginger Gregg Duggan (2001: 243–270) wrote about the development of fashion performance and described its categories.[8] However, her examples are unreliable because only the staged human bodies are seen as beautiful, and only their presence is referred to by her in this kind of fashion performance. The total disappearance of bodies (that of the models and the viewers) and the uncanny movement of the marionette puppet stage a perverse and distorted situation. This is the disappearance/removal of human nature attempted before the COVID-19 period (e.g. Dolce & Gabbana's drone show in 2018). How can the tautology of the idea be solved, i.e. the one that was cited from Schiller by de Man: "art is, in fact, what defines humanity in the broadest sense. Mankind, in the last analysis, is human only by ways of art" (de Man 1984: 132). The question is what kind of human nature is presented in a piece of art like Moschino's puppet fashion show. What comes to light is not a romantic essence of life but a deconstructive, puppet-like machinery, something that is hidden deep inside us.

A kind of undecidedness also characterizes the course of events. The continuously present specular but disruptive relationship between the living human body and the mechanical puppet defines the whole fashion show, a ghostly uncertainty in the show. Scott took photos of the garments on lifelike, living mannequins too, possibly before the fashion show by the puppets, which showed the opposite end of this specularity. But in de Man's words: "The specular structure has been displaced but not overcome" (de Man 1973: 69).

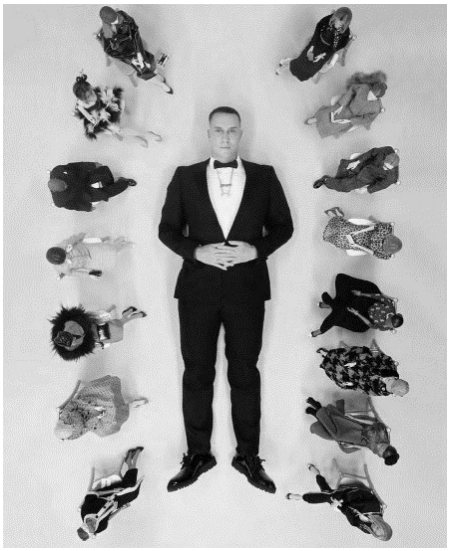
A kind of death sign, an anamorphic message is also present in the press photos that were taken of the collection: the living Scott is lying as a dead person, as a puppet himself among the inanimate puppets. Puppet quality is essentially a loss: the permanent danger of lifelessness. The photo taken of this situation (puppets sitting around and mourning the dead Scott) creates the personification and transformation of the puppet into a living being. This clearly "evokes the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia, namely that by making the dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living is struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (de Man 1973: 71). While the puppet is personified, the real model is shifted into a puppet existence at the power of the mirroring image pair.

8 These categories are the following: spectacle, substance, science, structure, statement.



Source: Kendam.com

Picture 4. *Living, "real" mannequins in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*



Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 5. *Puppets sitting around Jeremy Scott in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

Performative Becomes Per(ver)formative: Doll Bodies, Marionette Motion, and the Absence of the Human Body

In Schiller's description of dance as absolute art (cited in de Man's essay), the essential is the set of formal constructive movements (Schiller 1967) in the background of a piece of art. Similar to dance, this formal constructiveness of the fashion show is created by the bodies and movements of mannequins in a fixed space (catwalk) that has been the primary and required convention since Charles Frederick Worth, who argued that fashion is connected with a social event: its first scene was Worth's saloon (Vinken 2005). De Man's essay on Kleist deconstructs Schiller's position, pointing to the constant collapse of formal constructiveness that creates "beauty", aesthetics. Here, in the case of Moschino, the conventions of the show are decomposed, and the basic principles of the performativity of the fashion show are denied.



Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 6. *Fashion critics as marionettes, Moschino Spring/Summer 2021*

Besides the fact that no living bodies participate in the show, several other features are brought in, in a kind of deconstructive movement. The marionette puppets do not have mobile faces (except the Jeremy puppet, which speaks at the beginning of the show). As a result, affects cannot be expressed; we only see stern, sculpture-like faces. Of course, a "poker face" was traditionally required from living models on the catwalk, but a deconstructive gesture counterpoints these expressionless faces. All of them are familiar to us in the puppet audience: the designer Jeremy Scott, the editor of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour, fashion critic Anna Dello Russo, Nina Garcia from *Elle Magazine*, also including Edward Enninful from *British Vogue*, Angelica Cheung from *Chinese Vogue*, and Vanessa Friedman from *New York Times*. The faces of the mannequins are familiar too: they are the favourite mannequins of Jeremy Scott. As an addition to the list of painted faces, the designer's painted portrait is placed on the wall in the catwalk space of the marionette performance. This face is a simultaneous *de-facement* (de Man 1979b)

act. The face that is also well known from the photos, as a rigid puppet face refers to and removes the living face simultaneously.

The puppets were made by the Jim Henson's Creature Shop (known for its special effects work in Hollywood, e.g. *The Muppets*). The motion of the marionettes is also an exciting aspect of the fashion show. Paul de Man's remarks about the Kleist marionette theatre seem to be valid here too:

> The puppets have no motion by themselves but only in relation to the motions of the puppeteer, to whom a system of lines and threads connects them. All their aesthetic charm stems from the transformations undergone by the linear motion of the puppeteer as it becomes a dazzling display of curves and arabesques. By itself, the motion is devoid of any aesthetic interest or effect. (de Man 1984: 274)

The original context and rules of traditional fashion shows do not provide enough space for the free movement of the model bodies, and the same happens in the case of marionettes. The "affect" is missing from the puppets here and the marionettes of Kleist. The designer notes in an interview given to *Vogue*: "It's not the same energy that a human gives. So I wanted to make sure that it just always had a vibration […] and I do long to work with models again because they are much less futsie when you are trying to get a very beautiful walk out of them."[9] The most prominent difference in the motion between the puppets and the models in flesh and blood is that the legs of the puppets are not connected to the ground. They are suspended by a cord, and their motion is not excessively harmonic. In his essay, Kleist notes the opposite: there is not a more perfect and harmonic motion than the groundless and floating movement of the marionettes. But, certainly, Paul de Man disagrees with this: "Balanced motion … Is the metaphor of a centre of gravity" (de Man 1984: 274), and de Man also points out the contradiction of the words "weighing" and "antigravity" in Kleist's text.

Jeremy Scott's marionette performance is moving somewhere on the border of the serious and the playful in which the performativity of the traditional fashion show is changed into a Derridean perverformativity (Derrida 1987), into a *pervert performative event*. The female body becomes a fetish object: a puppet. Jeremy Scott refers to the duality of the playfulness and the reality, or the serious and the unserious in *Vogue*: "I transport everyone to another place, where we don't think about these problems [he means the pandemic situation], where we don't think about these heavy things…"[10] Thus, the marionette show and/or the fashion show escapes from the sombreness of the pandemic situation: perhaps the fairy context at the beginning of the fashion show also refers to this fact. On the other

9 https://tinyurl.com/3d35ta9e (last access: 05.10.2022).
10 https://tinyurl.com/3d35ta9e (last access: 05.10.2022).

hand, the garment presented on the marionette puppets cannot be taken seriously, as they would not elicit a "must have" feeling in potential consumers. Just think of the favourite Barbie garments from our childhood: we would not wear them; a garment presented on a living body is much more suitable to stimulate anyone for consumption.[11] An ironic gesture must be noted here: Moschino began to sell not only the collection presented on puppets but even the pictures of the marionettes shown on ordinary T-shirts (the price is over 500 dollars). The photos of the pandemic show are transcribed in this deconstructive way into the materiality of the dress. Another exciting aspect is that Jeremy Scott took photos of the marionette puppets as if they were talking to one another backstage or just trying on the garments.



Source: Printamps.com

Picture 7. *Moschino T-shirt from Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

The space of the show is called a catwalk, where mannequins walk. Another deconstructive gesture is that the puppets are not connected to the ground; their motion is ethereal, which differs considerably from human movement. As Kleist remarks: Puppets, like elves, need the floor only to skim it (Kleist 1972: 64).

It is essential to think about the defining mode of expression of the Moschino fashion show and how referentiality and figurativity work. The usual fashion show is dominantly referential: it wants to show clothes. The most referential is the shop window of the fashion house; the fashion show is the next step: it is

11 In 2022, Balmain will be, of course, challenging this when it launches its own miniature Barbie collection (Balmain x Barbie). The 50-piece, capsule collection (both in NFT version) is genderless – it is available from 14 January. Is it perhaps thanks to the influence of the Moschino fashion house?

a performative set with the rules of the usual fashion shows. But the Moschino show goes further than that; the reference (for example, Scott's look or the photos of the mannequins) is interspersed with a fictional, figurative presentation. The mannequins present themselves, and thus the clothes they wear, as figurative content. However, despite their anthropomorphic nature, the mannequins are not symbolic but allegorical; they come into existence as a kind of "prosthesis", and through them the tiny clothes they present are also linked to an allegorical frame of temporal nature. The symbolic holds the promise of expressing and referencing intimacy; the allegorical instead seeks things, objects, and metonymies for the broad experience of its message. Such metonymic elements are, for example, the recognizable characters in the audience, who are the significant twists in the world machine that can be marked with fashion. It is true that "the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance" (de Man 1983: 191–192). The audience is not symbolic but serves to add another, allegorical system of meaning to the given fashion show.

An even more critical basic rhetorical strategy is the ironic schema of the fashion show. It is not only that everywhere we see a strange, uncanny play on self-irony (like Scott munching popcorn or the ironic dialogue between the two kinds of Scott – real and puppet), but the fashion show itself is built on an ironic, destructive structure. The essence of irony is the doubleness, that is, "the moment that separates reflective activity from the activity of the man who is the prisoner of everyday life" (de Man 1983: 37). "Irony is unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness", writes Paul de Man (de Man 1983: 215). The irony is a duplication or, more precisely, a chaos of the simultaneous possibility of two worlds, where "the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous, involving an extraneous principle that determines the point and the manner at and in which the relationship is articulated" (de Man 1983: 209). At the heart of irony is this doubling (de Man quotes Baudelaire's concept of *dédoublement* (1983: 212)), which "sets apart a reflective activity, such as that of the philosopher, from the activity of the ordinary self caught in everyday concerns" (de Man 1983: 212). This is what Scott indicates in his interview about the background of the fashion show, that his aim was to create a whimsical environment and transport it out on whatever is going on that day. The fashion show is built on parallel, superimposed layers of space and time. The first is the appearance of the real Scott, with his ironic popcorn and a very small marionette, but one that can speak. The second layer is the series of larger marionettes, the fashion show itself. At the end of this, as usual for standard fashion shows, the Scott marionette appears on the runway as the designer. Here, another ironic layer is signalled: on the T-shirt of the Scott puppet, there is the following inscription: "I don't speak Italian but I do speak Moschino."

Fashion References and Intertextual Games

Some interesting, deconstructive, intertextual games are built into the performance that can be seen easily. The cutting, the black label, and the type of the letters on the T-shirt (*I don't speak Italian but I do speak Moschino.*) recall the meeting of Katherine Hamnett and Margaret Thatcher in 1984. As it is well known, Hamnett wore an activist T-shirt (with an anti-nuclear message) at a reception with Thatcher, and the dress stirred up much controversy at the event (Hamnett is a crucial figure in the activist movement.). Indeed, this is not the only parallel in the history of fashion integrated into a game by the white T-shirt: the meme collection of Viktor & Rolf from 2019 also carries provocative messages at the MET Gala.

There is no lack of allusions that break the performativity of the performance: the marionettes could be regarded as allusions to Nina and Robert Ricci's fashion exhibition from 1945, Theatre de la Mode, which was first held in the Louvre after World War II. The exhibition consisted of 237 dolls wearing unique pieces of haute couture. The collection, in the spirit of the "New Look" mentality, wanted to show that fashion can be reborn despite the "shortage of materials". Despite the material and cultural waste caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the fashion industry is in a similar process of deconstructive rebirth today.

The Moschino fashion show is not only an exciting and vital moment of the human, individual-personal and social changes of the COVID pandemic but also an example of a new way of representation called in theatre aesthetics a performative turn. The fashion show breaks traditional fashion-performative rules and creates a kind of "perverse" performativity, both in form and content, in a destructive, deconstructive way. A vital element of this is that puppets appear instead of living mannequins and that the puppets are even incorporated into the living world. In contrast, the living (for example, Scott's real person) are sucked into the medium of the puppet's existence. An endless ironic play permeates the presentation, making us uncertain not only of the perceptibility of fashion but also of the reality of our existence.

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