

# Metamodernists

by Silvia Bombardini



Martine Rose, *Don Pedro*

***Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. This is how the Oxford English Dictionary defined post-truth a whole year ago. Twelve months went by, with all sorts of sinister consequences: not least, a consumer culture all the more designed around products' emotional sway instead of any genuine merit they may once have had. To this day, truth lies in the eyes of the beholder – but a new type of consciousness also begins to take hold. If emotion remains at the forefront of our judgement, it no longer has to come with delusions of universality. That is to say, we understand that we live in post-truth times: that even that which we perceive as true, is truly being marketed to us as such. "When something is 'authentic' it is not 'outside of mere consumer culture'" writes Rob Horning for The New Inquiry, "it is instead the apotheosis of that culture". It becomes increasingly difficult to shed this cloak of knowingness and delight as we used to in the unequivocal world advertising still paints around us. Calvin Klein's FW 17 campaign acknowledges this somehow – our inability or unwillingness to be fully absorbed again in a two-dimensional fantasy. Shot in the Mojave Desert in California, against a series of billboards***

featuring images from the previous season's campaign, it was presented, among other things, as *a study in art and artifice*.

*"When we examine our own 'authenticity,' we think of ourselves in the same terms"* Horning's text continues, *"a clearly defined personal brand capable of being convincingly sold"*. It is no longer plausible to fancy ourselves outside, above, or against the responsible economic system. If the subcultures of yore were seized and commodified by capitalism, contemporary youth culture is born and bred within it. And so are our conceptions of adulthood, maturity and independence inextricably linked to personal income, or the moment when we join the workforce. Our desires, our taste, our ambitions, even our outrage, are never fully our own, never perhaps entirely true. And yet, that's what's new: in the understanding that financial mechanisms subsume our perceptions and our feelings, we've come to accept that they're none the less real for it.



Billboard artwork: Andy Warhol, Six 9 Three (Studio Type), 1963 © The Andy Warhol Foundation / ART, photographed at The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh.  
CALVIN KLEIN 2016/2017 Fall 2017, photographed May 2017, Mojave Desert, California

**CALVIN KLEIN**  
205 W39 NYC

Calvin Klein, FW17

To make sense of this ambivalence, and try to domesticate our inner conflicts, it could be worth it to revisit the principles of metamodernism – a structure of feeling, according to a 2014 symposium at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, that emerged around the turn of the millennium. *"The metamodern generation oscillates between a postmodern doubt and a modern desire for sense: for meaning, for direction"* cultural theorist Timotheus Vermeulen noted in an interview with Tank Magazine, *"hope is not simply something to distrust, love not necessarily something to be ridiculed"*. In other words, a *Metamodernist Manifesto* penned by artist Luke Turner declares: *"metamodernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons. We must go forth and oscillate!"*.

Now if there is such a thing as metamodern art – works by the likes of Olafur Eliasson, Ragnar Kjartansson, the LaBeouf, Rönkkö & Turner artist trio – it stands to reason and historical precedents that a metamodern fashion should soon follow. But how do these sensibilities translate to cloth? Fashion isn't new to bouts of postmodern irony, especially on days when society seems keen to fold back into the perceived safety of conservative conventions. But metamodernism is a step forth from mockery: though there certainly are to it aspects of parody, they're tempered by understanding, or even sympathy. Fashion has always been good at that, shaping something desirable from an as yet undesirable source. If there is one character who best personifies all this, he's been menswear's muse for a couple of seasons to date – the corporate man, 2.0. Swathed in suits so out of proportion they never could pass for respectable white-collar attire, he nods to last year's 1980s revival from the point of view of an inflatable dream too easily popped. And yet there's something about him, a keenness perhaps, with hindsight almost irrefutably charming. Luke Leitch aptly describes the style, in his praising review for Vogue of E. Tautz's fall 2017 collection, as *"a Conservative Central Office researcher working weekends aesthetic"*. But the one who's most of all to be held responsible for the popularisation of the look would be of course Demna Gvasalia, whose rise to fame in recent years, and propensity to toe the line between original and replica, make of him the quintessential designer of the post-truth age. *"Irony is both about making you smile or laugh, but it can also be quite painful because it asks questions"* he recently told Vestoj, in a textbook example of metamodern oscillation as creative process *"with irony you can ask questions that are delicate, but there's a thin line between irony and sarcasm so I have to be careful not to overstep it"*. He then went on to discuss how funny it is, since he finds himself at the helm of both Vetements and Balenciaga, and being his client base as Demna Gvasalia bigger than that of either brand, that he's become *"a brand too, sort of"*.



Balenciaga, FW17

It's with his menswear shows for Balenciaga in particular, that Gvasalia fleshed out in recent collections his corporate muse. For FW17 he was wearing hoodies bearing the logo of Kering, Balenciaga's parent luxury group since 2001 – a zealous display of company devotion, not quite so overtly ironic as to appear that Gvasalia was biting the hand that feeds him. In spring 2018, his spacious off-duty tailoring reportedly comes with extra weight in the pockets and linings, to recreate a saggy, well-worn effect: the lasting echo of hours spent bent over this paper or that report. To be fair, part of the credit – or blame, depending on whether or not you're partial to the style – should go to Martine Rose, who aside from working as a consultant for Balenciaga, has further explored the theme at her namesake label over the last past seasons. To begin with fall 2017, inspired by the likes of bankers, office workers, and *American Psycho*, to add a note of disturbance to what would otherwise have been just a perfectly desirable sartorial exercise. Christian Bale's Patrick Bateman was also a reference at Fendi's SS18 show, an ode to the high-waisted start-up executive of our times, which finds its ironic apex in the so-called *Skype Look*: properly dressed, if only from the waist up. Less subtle, but still worthy of mention are the spring 2018 collections of Xander Zhou, which was shown on a set of ready-made office cubicles, and Vaquera, where overblown button-downs and ties trailing down to the toes follow Amazon Prime paper bags, a slip dress made out of credit cards, and a t-shirt with a pencilled portrait of Abraham Lincoln.