

Chloé Op de Beeck

The subject of attention seems to me a crucial element to Chloé Op de Beeck's practice. Her carefully constructed video-sculptures, installations and photographs operate as magnifying glasses: they highlight micro-situations and objects that may otherwise remain unnoticed in the everyday visual flow. By redirecting the gaze at these poetic moments of pause and "backgrounds" – as well as by creating specific conditions for their reception –, her work renders the attention, often treated as a commodity or a capitalist resource, into an independent object of reflection. In *The Ecology of Attention* (2014), Yves Citton deconstructed the way attention was influenced by the capitalist system, turning it away from what might be essential to human life. One of the main questions that arises from his work is: what really happens when we look at the background itself, rather than on the figure? Once the attention is given to the background, that have for so long been omitted, hegemonic narratives can be brought into question, and attention may be rehumanized.

Chloé Op de Beeck's practice consists of video and photographic works, of collecting and creating minimalistic objects, as well as of the conceiving of installations that translate these elements into a choreographic experience within the space. The images she produces bring backgrounds as well as those that we could call in cinematographic terms "extras", to the forefront. They *live through* the situations in environments that could make one think of realistic, carefully thought out settings for a film; almost as if the operator left the camera on, once the actual filming was finished. Isolated trajectories, repetitive gestures, casual postures suggest potential narratives that never come to a culmination. The moments of "true" action can last a couple of seconds, thus immersing us into a state of extreme sensitivity: we interiorize the profound attentivity of the artist towards the environment, balancing from childish and at times naïve and voyeuristic curiosity – as if one was discovering the world for the first time – to deep empathy and care.

By isolating and rearranging "real-life" situations into successions of still or moving images that appear to come from film, the work of Chloé Op de Beeck deconstructs the conventions of cinematographic fiction. Minimal in its form, it reduces the formal filmic language to its basic elements: scene, fixed plan, suspense, breathing of the operator, subtitles. Despite this decontextualization, they continue to operate as cinematographic triggers for the viewer's eye: capturing attention and interrogating expectations in this specific situation of viewing of a moving image. As early as 1935, Walter Benjamin pointed out at the new mode of "reception by distraction" linked to the invention of cinema ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"). As he noticed, instead of like painting which incites contemplation, film seizes the thoughts of and guides the collective spectator, who must constantly evaluate the visual flow. By making the images inhabit the space, Chloé Op de Beeck's work dissects the habitual relation between the screen and the viewer, giving the way to the conscience of one's own body in its relation to image, time and space.

In Chloé Op de Beeck's installations, the setting seems to spread out of the screen. It unfolds into space, through a play on visual associations: via installations of objects and architectural shapes, a sort of extrapolation on the videos, use of various projection surfaces and a thought-out scenography. The filmic experience thus develops into two dimensions: firstly, that of the image projected, which becomes part of the existing architecture and attains a physical status, and secondly, that of the spectator moving inside the installation and experiencing its various stages. The dispositif created by the artist suggests a certain choreography for the body inside the scene. Nonetheless, it leaves the scenario and the narrative open for the visitor's imagination whose attention is constantly solicited – and confused: Are these objects put here randomly, or is there a narrative behind? What is important for the course of the plot and what is the background?

The hierarchical relations seem to fade away, as trivial objects appear significant, while personal ones attain a universal status. Through shapeless narratives and slowed temporalities, the practice of Chloé Op de Beeck generates a specific type of attentivity. Every time one experiences her work, the attention gets subjectified, and the narratives multiply. Her work stands for me as a place of poetic resistance to the authority of fiction, whether this fiction is cinematographic, literary, political or ideological. Slowly peeling out the additional layers of sense, it tends to make us unlearn and reexamine the habitual approach to objects and situations, opening routes to directly access things in their essential qualities.

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