

Paul Spengemann

About Falling in Love and Even Little Rubber Ducks

ART COLOGNE NEW POSITIONS 2017

Rebekka Seubert

Subverting the subverted

At the point in Paul Spengemann's film *About Falling in Love and Even Little Rubber Ducks* when an old-fashioned sounding voice asks in solemnly theatrical tones: *"What is dynamic?"* and immediately gives itself the nebulous answer, from which the video derives its title: *"It's about speed, power, acceleration ... and about trees. It's about joy and not so much joy. About light carbon and heavy metal, about darkness and the energy of light, about you, about powerful horses and even little rubber ducks. It's about maintaining control and losing it. About falling in love, about forever and for everyone. Dynamic is about yesterday, about today and tomorrow,"* – at that point, if not before, all initial doubt that the film uses the rhetoric as well as the visual language of advertising is dispelled. It jumps from one cinematic style to the next and constantly changes the (iconographic) language selection, like a misdirected translation app. This Babylonian multilingualism generates different, consecutive dynamics. The camera simulates the gaze of the cameraman; acts all-knowing. It conjures different states of consciousness, ranging from arousal to quietness, concentration and devotion, by using devices such as light, rain, and slow or fast motion. But the tension and drama in the filmed space, created by the camera movements and the sound, deliberately comes to nothing. There is no concrete object to be served by this visual language. Instead, the focus is on the setting, namely the studio space and all the props in it, or the barely recognizable traces of work, suggesting the site of post-studio practice. A half-emptied bottle of Coca Cola light, once presumably acquired to energize someone, is now lying in a crack in the upholstery of a pink 50s couch. The film shows a picture syntax with no content, reflected on a linguistic level in the complete lack of message that the words uttered by the above-mentioned voice convey, ostensibly defining the 'dynamic'.

The concepts charged with vital energy – speed, power, acceleration, energy of light – recall advertising's preoccupation with vitality. Liveliness is appealing and the human eye is drawn to movement. Vitality attracts attention. The dead thing, the product, the commodity, having been alienated from its manufacturers and their work process, must be vitalized. The commodity must be re-enchanted by movement, light and narration, and ultimately become a subject itself: something to catch the eye, seduce, affirm.

As human observation of the world became increasingly objectified by modernism, and categories invented and boundaries drawn between nature and culture, subject and object, manufacturer and product, a desire evolved that curator Anselm Franke describes as a *"desire for animation"* – a wish for objects to be attributed with subjectivity, to be inspired. This desire for animation became a *"key driving force behind the development of modern mass media such as film"*¹. It became a *"central resource of modern mass culture and its visual economies"*².

The compulsion to separate subject from object, life from non-life, as mutually distinct categories, then, runs dialectically and temporally parallel to a tendency to mystify and vitalize things, and attribute independent subjectivity to objects. This is true of all film genres, because almost all films simulate

¹ Franke, anselm (ed.): *Animismus*, diaphanes, 2012/2016, p. 11

² *ibid.*

(vital) movement using (frozen) stills: “*All moving things are inspired; that is, driven by an inner, autonomous impulse of will,*”³ wrote the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein in the early 1940s in a manuscript on the animated cartoon, which Walt Disney was popularizing at the time. This vital will attributed to the moving picture means cogency to the powerful magician who possesses the means of communication⁴, The “desire for animation” was soon put to the service of advertising. The animation of objects launches an economy of desire: A commercial promoting an Audi A3 uses the moving pictures created by the camera panning around the stationary car to awaken the viewer’s desire to drive it. The toothpaste doing a loop-the-loop around itself is supposed to make the viewer want to feel the icy mint toothpaste on his or her own teeth. And in the film *About Falling in Love and Even Little Rubber Ducks*, the same animistic aesthetic appears in the globular drops that drift and fall in slow motion on to the agave, like little models of the world. The globes sculpturally reflect the space and provide agreeable affirmation of the frame’s boundaries.

The critical force inherent in this affirmative bubble aims to shift the focus on to the role of the artist as a magician in possession of the means of communication by apparently taking up a commercial aesthetic. The artist speaks the meta-language of contemporary mythologists, and to decipher their myths, the artist must be familiar with their concepts.

Translated by Charlotte Kreutzmüller

3 Cit. from Sergej Eisenstein in Anselm Franke (ed.): *Animismus, diaphanes*, 2012/2016, p. 219

4 Michel Serres, *Atlas*, Merve Verlag, Berlin, 2005, p. 156–157