

Barking Dogs United – SIZE MATTERZ

An exhibition of the ACC Gallery Weimar in cooperation with Kerstin Stakemeier (Hamburg).

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Barking Dogs United – Terms of Use

For Barking Dogs United, size is what counts, since there is no room for fadishness here. Where the bourgeoisie, as Theodor W. Adorno wrote, wants “a paltry life and opulent art,” it doesn’t allow for separation. The world is reconstructed out of whatever is a utilitarian object but which serves no productive function in the reproduction of society. Lifestyle accessories such as skateboards, fashion, and drag meet up with objects of order like handheld weapons, GPS systems, and their societal intermediaries, religion and violence. Modified technical drawings, computer collages demonstrate afunctional constructions. Life in the present is reconstructed from the perspective of what is (still) artistic. This results in no productive utilitarian objects and no contemplative aesthetics, but rather the world, ordered according to new values. Aesthetic functions are not reinforced through decoding, but rather through overcoding, and the same aesthetic functions that subsist in everyday life are exaggerated.

BDU bark – they don’t bite, since in order to bite, they first need to realize the path that is explored in the exhibition: becoming a non-artist. Since the emergence of their autonomy along with that of the middle-class, which has protected it ever since, artistic production has only been independent at the price of being totally insignificant. And those artists of the past who sought to escape from this misery logically sought to attack this middle-class art system. The Russian Constructivists hoped to assimilate mechanical production, the Bauhaus gave itself to design, the Situationist International of bait politics. BDU reverse this attack: they do not target art, this abstraction and intangible conventional chimera, but rather the artists. They target nameable identities, producers, and first of all – themselves. With BDU, the destruction of one’s own position is also done through overcoding. Naomi Tereza Salmon and Nikos Arvanitis are constantly present in their exhibition – however, not in the ancestral position of artists within bourgeois society, as eccentric clowns, but rather as enforcers.

So what in themselves can artists attack in order to finally become non-artists? How can artistic production be simultaneously hedonistic and arrogant when its societal role in the present day, even in criticism, makes use of the very market politics it attacks? How can it inaugurate an economy of expenditure instead of contenting itself with one of general reproduction?

Everyday

BDU start and finish in the middle of everyday life. This is not an attack, but an inversion. True to scale, the objects are present here in their mass psychological significance, not in their utilitarian value. The larger-than-life multiple plug apparatus belongs to the video “Neon Tetra”, a room illuminated by a damaged neon tube. And while, in the “Dual-not-duel” video, the artists’ mutual attack against each other still has real resonance, it disappears the moment a gigantic pistol appears which, precisely through its over-stylization, loses rather than gains in power. Where it is no longer conceivable as a prolongation of the body, it loses its potency. “SIZE MATTERZ”, since alone a conception of size that can still be mentally connected with the object’s everyday function confirms our perception of its reality. New size relationships give rise to tensions, the extent of which depends on their combination.

During the transition from Jackson Pollock’s Abstract Expressionism at the beginning of the 1950s to Claes Oldenburg’s superdimensional Realism in the early 1960s, the subject’s relationship to his everyday environment in American culture underwent a violent shift.

What had still been, in Abstract Expressionism, the formlessness of a historically-destroyed subject in a world that had become practically unidentifiable, abstract and hardly tangible, with Oldenburg became concrete, tangible, and overbearing, since rather than hiding the monstrosity of the world behind abstraction, it worked with and through it. In “The Street” (1960), he offered for sale the garbage he and Jim Dine had collected, and in the now-famous “Ray Gun Museum” (1956), he expanded this search for concreteness in mass culture and its trash into a performance of the objects themselves, in which masquerade and true existence exchanged places. Oldenburg swept out the drag of the earth and collected an inestimable quantity of objects, packaging, trash, puddles, leftovers, and industrially-produced items whose form resembled the ray guns out of science fiction stories.

BDU search for the objects’ similarity to themselves – and this also means bringing them into the drag. Likewise, the manifesto occupying the space of an entire room does not, as its avant-garde predecessors of the previous century, construct a new, utopian, and thus initially transcendental world, but rather combines what can be obtained from the late-capitalist present day in new ways. The gesture remains radical politically, but the meaning of radicality has been transformed: for BDU it consists not so much in designing a new, completely different world and rejecting the present on every account, as in – disassembled in fragments and materials – affirming, asserting that what is missing has in fact always been present in it, in its expenditure.

The revolutionary Russian Constructivists of the 1920s had demanded that the artistic be assimilated into the general production, in this way eliminating the alienation of work, its industrial division. At the conclusion of the BDU manifesto we read, “We are working on a future in which there are no longer artists, but only non-artists.” The Productivists centered

around Osip Brik, Vladimir Tatlin and others had called for artists to disseminate Productivism, for all producers to be made into artists. However in our day, this ever-present creativity has become a threat, a paradigm of societal reproduction which coerces each individual into expanding himself constantly. Thus with BDU, the artist-subject becomes a negative transparency: in order to become, through art, a non-artist. As a blow to their own profession as artists, BDU demand the dissolution of the work order that has historically held its own, however no longer by storming its machines, but by allowing every aspect of everyday life to become the point of departure for a new production. Since why should we give up the objects in art as lost when art's step forward into immateriality with the conceptual art of the 1960s led, historically, above all to its discursive self-pollination, to the expansion of the market with its forms of production into a conventional mental sport, and to an ever-greater distance from the hedonism that is in any case already lacking in our late-capitalist everyday life. In the end, the capitalist order appears to us as an outdated rite of permanent self-flagellation which has survived and is waiting to be concretely surpassed. The demand remains universalistic, but it is directed toward the world rather than against it: it is materialistic.

Material stock

BDU (re)produces a materialism that is derived from its materials, its social and individual function, and not from the idealism that historically preceded it and its production. Subjects and objects of its pre-history now turn up only as objects. Helmut Newton's famous photograph *Big Nude III (Henrietta)* (1980) had already been the exhibition of an object anyway. Here with BDU it is taken seriously as an object and, from an icon of a (middle-) class, it becomes a utilitarian object of another (employed) class. Its life-size becomes life-threatening, but hardly in a bodily way – it is a decal of pop culture, allowing no contemplation. It is a kind of empirical materialism which BDU is pursuing in the objects' potency.

With Georges Bataille, "The time has come for us to use the word Materialism to signify the interpretation of raw appearances excluding any idealism, and not a system that is based on fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis that had been drawn up within a religious context." BDU's materialism is of this a-religious kind. It produces objects, but no icons. The religious, which since Bataille's words has, alongside materialism, served as the structure of the everyday life of capitalism, constantly strives toward the immaterial, toward laying out, agonizing, ensoulment, and conservation. These elements are no longer to be found in the material stock reconstructed by BDU. The visitor cannot orient himself through an archive of loaned references, in order, upon arriving in the security of his own educational repository, to be included himself as a participant. It remains for itself, along with the material whose nature first becomes perceptible through its alienation from its customary context. The archivistic certainty about the past is dissolved here just as much in the objects' pre-history as in that of the two-person collective. Materialistic practice requires no CV and no self-references, but is newly constructed from every point.

Formless

In 1914, the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovski wrote that there is, in the world, nothing to be discovered or unveiled, but only to be produced. Formalism was intended to enable people to perceive their world, and also to integrate it into themselves and bring about a revolution in it. Shklovski's rejection of the unveiling of conspiracies and apparently hidden meaning is still valid today, and still today, the only way of integrating something into oneself is the observation of the world as a material for construction. But the material from which things are constructed has radically changed since Shklovski. The emphatically new has disappeared from it. More and more, it appears formless, identical, undifferentiated. More and more, global industrial production is interested in the uniformity of material in the style of difference. The affective, somatic desire becomes increasingly threatening here. Polished through an endless succession of educational series – in German television, daily urging citizens to maintain order – the work ethic necessary in society is not only reproduced, but the hedonistic desire of individual subjects is at the same time increasingly demonized. In the work ethic of our time, hedonism only seems to be conceivable as aggression. People are told that only through the repression of his bodily needs can he be made into a person capable of socialization. With "Super Nanny", there is wailing and supplication, but the patients are only released as "cured" when their difference from their environment has been eradicated from their will. Every element of "SIZE MATTERZ" is directed against this formlessness of desire. In it, the attempt is born to regain the world and its objects by being taken by a desire, understanding it in relation to its function in society and in this way breaking through the assertion of destructivity, positively transforming the desire. The force for the abolition of society is drawn from society itself, just as with Karl Marx, the productive forces of industrial production always form the preconditions for its own future abolition. The performance here is no longer by the artists, but rather by the objects and subjects in their placement.

Visitors thus have every reason to feel themselves observed. As it was written for many years on the door of Berlin's Club SO36, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you are not being followed." The security that comes from the constant combination of functions of order that determine our everyday life also implies the loss of self-confidence. This self-confidence is today granted almost exclusively to the artist-subject who, as representative is expected to reflect an imagination that is by definition excluded from the pseudo-religious structure of everyday revision. BDU hope to take this self-confidence from the artists in order to give it back to the everyday subjects. Peter Saville described in an interview that during the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, the cover of the band Roxy Music became a reality for him – for Barking Dogs United, the crash of the art market at the end of the 1980s seems to become real in the art of the present.

Kerstin Stakemeier