

The Shimmer of Dark Beetle's Eyes

The exhibition *Body Light* positions itself within a series of exhibitions, seeking a curatorial solution for the legitimate display of video art. Through an inventive staging of what would often, feebly be described as *Aura*, the exhibition emancipates the viewer from the traditional confines of the filmic medium and offers an essential contribution to this ongoing project. Videos are still often shown in booths where the viewer is completely subjected to the temporality and perspective of the film. Instead of negotiating an interaction between two independent subjects - the viewer and the work, the video booth simply forces a viewer to relinquish his autonomy. He is all but imprisoned. He cannot relate to the film in any way other than the duration of his stay. This understandably evokes mixed feelings for the viewer: an obligation to the artist to appreciate the work in its entirety, impatience, a sense of repression, an uncanny or disoriented feeling. And as such, emancipation remains of fundamental interest to contemporary exhibition practice. I applied to her face, which was blurred in the twilight, the mask of my most impassioned dreams, but read in her eyes as they turned towards me the horror of my own nonentity - Proust. The duration of the film is diametrically opposed to the duration of the viewer's stay. Since the architecture of the video booth only allows the viewer to leave or stay, this opposition cannot be resolved. The cultural solution of this affect laden relationship, easily reduced to fight or flight, must allow the viewer to relate to film from multiple perspectives.

In large scale video exhibitions like *The Big Picture*, this issue is often ignored. Rather the viewer simply finds in the architecture, yet another oversized, encapsulated video booth and the problem becomes all the more evident. In the extravagantly designed basement vaults of Düsseldorf's K21, the films are projected into individually designed rooms and the viewer always has the option to leave the room early and enter the next, where another video runs. But here as well, the viewer can only relate to the video through the duration of his stay. In these cavernous, ahistorical and implausibly shaped rooms, the absence of light deprives us any sense of perspective and thus any sense of subjecthood. Worse yet, should the viewer decide to leave, he has no other option than crossing abruptly into the adjacent booth where he is apprehended again by another film and the process of desubjectification proceeds exponentially. One can only break the cycle by leaving the exhibition altogether.

While, the exhibition *Body Light* also expands the projection screen to encompass the entire surface of the exhibition, it also takes place in a large, former hair salon whose rooms are still outfitted or at least carry traces of their original use. Here, the viewer experiences the complete and necessary inversion of Proust's trenchantly detailed scenario: our age is infected with a mania for showing things only in the environment that properly belongs to them, thereby suppressing the essential thing, the act of the mind which isolated them from that environment. A picture is nowadays 'presented' in the midst of furniture, ornaments, hangings of the same period, a second-hand scheme of decoration in the composition of which in the houses of to-day excels that same hostess who but yesterday was so crassly ignorant, but now spends her time poring over records and in libraries; and among these the masterpiece at which we glance up from the table while we dine does not give us that exhilarating delight which we can expect from it only in a public gallery, which symbolises far better by its bareness, by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create it. In contrast to the video booth, the individual rooms at *Body Light* offer their own temporality, namely their history. Whereas film in the video booth, monopolizes time (it's no mere coincidence that it's the only light source) and reduces the room to a passive receptacle in which the dissipated temporality of the viewer - pure duration - is forced into a dualistic relationship with the temporality of the film, we find in *Body Light* a twofold dialectic between the visitor, the room and the filmic medium.

This dialectic is firstly the relationship between film and room. Here, the inherent time of the film confronts the historical time of the room. This becomes especially apparent given that a multipli-

city of rooms encounter a multiplicity of videos. It is this multipolar encounter which provides a sense of perspective and its significance. This opposition between film and space resolve into a clear synthesis. The structural similarity between film and installation is often discussed and it's hardly surprising that films shown as installations can grasp the temporality of a given space. The historically delineated architecture of the hair salon confronts the hermetic temporality of the film and simultaneously transforms it. Here the viewer experiences two modes of temporality: one generated through action in space and the other inherent in the abstract temporality of film. Here, the second dialectic between viewer and film emerges. Though the respective projections remain the only source of light, in contrast to the video booth, the rooms in *Body Light* allow individual perspective. The visitor, by way of his viewing position in such historically laden space, can become aware of his perspective as fundamentally subjectivising. Here, he need not merely relate to the film through the duration of his stay but must actually relate in a real space altogether. He can not merely act between the surrounding objects but must also relate to them. For the last time, Proust sublating his previous observations: Our attention fills a room with objects but our habit lets them dissolve and creates room for ourselves. Observing the room is as much a component of our aesthetic experience as observing the film since it is hardly possible to observe the film without observing the room. The film essentially determines the atmosphere of the room and the room determines through it's atmosphere - that is the consummate relationship of all present objects with each other - the perception of the film. The lack of distance between film and room that Benjamin sees as lacking in aura, is inverted here through the atmosphere of the objects in the room and a new distance created. The viewer can no longer be taken in by the film without the possibility of associative reflection (which is ultimately dialectical) since, in a room of real tangible objects, the attention of the viewer always jumps back and forth between object and film. In a video booth, the viewers attention can at best oscillate between the film and the viewers own consciousness. However, individual consciousness is not simply an instantaneous component of the aesthetic experience but rather the synthesis of aesthetic experience. When the initially contradicting film and space resolve into a synthesis the viewing experience becomes instantaneously unique and plural.

Firstly, each film in the exhibition can only be experienced specifically as such since it has an inimitably specific relationship to the specific space. This hardly the case with the video booth given that the booth is interchangeable and the experience of the same film in different video booths tends to be identical. As the viewing experience becomes inimitable, the synthesis of film and space - not the film itself - could be described in Benjamin's words as auratic. This specific experience can only be had in this specific situation. In an exhibition like *Body Light*, the dialectic between film and space, which is altogether negated in the cinema and video booth, allows associative thought while watching the film rather than after. Secondly, the viewing experience is pluralized through the viewers awareness of the perspectives of others and every viewer can relate to the film - spatially and temporally - as freely as anyone else. The space in *body light* becomes as much a space for observing other visitors and their relationship to the projections. Here, the individual subjects become self aware by observing other subjects. The way in which space is created by bodies moving in time is silhouetted with exceptional clarity against the backdrop of film's temporality.

A recent article on the blog, *Perisphere* attributes the exhibition a romantic tendency. The author concerns himself little with the exhibition architecture and much more with the individual works which are somewhat neglected here. He draws a parallel between the pronounced individualism of the present and that of the romantic epoch. But considering the exhibition as a whole, this hypothesis hardly holds. The perceptual realization of others and how they move through the distinct spaces of the exhibition, gives the individual a sense of how different the perceptions of each observer must be. Here, the ideas of German Idealism are more relevant than those of Romanticism. What prevents excessive individuation, especially in the aesthetic field, is ultimately spoken and written language which mediates universal concepts and facilitates intersubjective understanding. *Body Light* anticipates the medium of language as a path from the individual to the general. By observing other visitors and their autonomous relationships to the individual

rooms and films, the visitor experiences by way of body language and the behaviours of other visitors, something about their perspective and must conclude that theirs is different from his own. This however is a far cry from romantic escapism. Rather the exhibition instigates a far reaching discussion on corporeality. Again, the heterogenous works experience synthesis in which they are all seen under the gaze of corporeality. And finally, each represents a partial articulation of the broad and often banalized theme of corporeality. In Body Light, this discussion undergoes a pertinent reappraisal. Unfortunately however, the significance of the body, particularly in aesthetics, is too great to be suitably addressed here.

Body Light occurs within a festive framework that brings Nietzsches words to mind: What good is all the art of our works of art if we lose that higher art, the art of festivals? Formerly, all works of art adorned the great festival road of humanity, to commemorate high and spirited moments. The mood of subdued anticipation on the opening night, the often erotic films in relation to multilayered architecture and the festive illumination of projected light make one think of the labyrinthine rooms of certain clubs, in which the german techno that gave an entire generation the prospect of unity is played. Though a festival in antiquity could still break class boundaries, the dialectical motor of the collective so to speak, Adorno brings the disillusionment of the late 20th century to the festival when he questions the agency of the festival in its time and sees it as an affect ridden repetition within a fixed structure or even as a caricature of said structure. The Techno movement however let the true character of a raucous festivity shimmer once more and, regardless of what has become of techno today, one can recognize the universalizing character latent within the festival. Especially when, among other things, one considers that it was this music that unified East and West Germany's youth after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The exhibition Body Light is a festival of the body, hardly in a hedonistic sense but rather a festival of the bodily presence of emancipated individuals. And this can be asserted specifically of an exhibition devoted to film, a medium often thought to deprive individuals of their autonomy and question the subjecthood of the viewer entirely. We'd like to invite the biggest of all idealists to comment when we quote his only serious poem devoted to his friend Hölderlin:

Um mich, in mir wohnt Ruhe, - der geschäft'gen Menschen
Nie müde Sorge schläft, sie geben Freiheit
Und Musse mir - Dank dir, du meine
Befreierin, o Nacht! ...

Also, in the artworks and the form of presentation the theme of night reoccurs but should not be misunderstood as mystically romantic. Night here, is rather the ultimate negative, the dark or the absolute unromantic. It is unbeing death. But it is only in the face of this absolute other that unification becomes possible. The artworks that actually embody alienation and individuation find their absolute other in the darkness of the exhibition. Here this other is the festive room of autonomous, animate bodies that enter into an exchange with each other and aspire towards a universally valid truth. What dancing bodies recognised by night can now be discussed by day.

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