

Bac Jaune

poetic of cardboard packaging

Working with cardboard boxes opens up a path, a thread along which to progress above the void, a singular path, fragile and strong, made up of pirouettes and snubs, an iconoclastic gesture of a pioneer, terra incognita in a land too well known. Everything is there before our eyes, blinded by social mechanics, a world of forms hidden in the reverse side of things. The reversal illuminates, reveals, elevates. Lurking beneath the image of merchandise, living forms are brought to light, they speak to us, touch us, resonate within us and activate structures of recognition that the human species has carried since ancestral times, a “faciality” referred to by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1).

What we see in the unfolded cardboard boxes held under the glass frames are archaic forms that speak of our precarious and laborious humanity, forms of our hopes and fears, strange forms, but not so strange after all. This strangeness is familiar to us, it is that of masks, fetishes, animals, sacred or not, monsters that we like to be frightened by. The strangeness stems from the co-presence of the rational thinking behind the packaging, calibrated by engineers, designers, advertisers... and a syncretic archaism that tears the object away from and saves it from its ephemeral destiny, transubstantiation, the alchemy of the yellow bin, the anthropological paradox of a temporal loop associating the very short term of packaging-marketing with the long term of ancestral thought structures and beliefs.

What if hidden shapes were conceived by packaging designers as forces acting at the heart of the product? Like so many deities endowed with powers over consumers, the action would then be “diabolical” because, contrary to what we believe and see, the attractive force of packaging would not lie in its external form (visual, design, text, etc.) but in a hidden power on the reverse side, a force acting subliminally.

Another paradox, apart from the ecological one, is that an eminently polluting activity (producing packaging destined to be immediately thrown away) reveals within it many images of animals, the first victims of this activity, a blind vanity of a humanity captivated by merchandise and deaf to the catastrophe it causes. The cardboard boxes are a disturbing formal synthesis of crime and victim, as if the weapon took the shape of the body it killed; imagine what our lethal weapons would be like, a human-shaped dagger, a city-shaped cannon, a country-shaped bomb...

This conjunction between the very long time of the archaic and our foolish and short time is also a sign of our era, where the outsized threat of our loss arises at the heart of blind consumerism.

François Duconseille January 2020

(1) Year Zero – Facetedness in ‘Mille plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia’ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Les Éditions de Minuit - 2001)