

Doris von Drathen - *No Standstill Anywhere* (excerpts)

Sur le pas, La Fabrique Sensible ed., 2005 - Translation George Frederik Takis

That which makes a wheel a wheel is the emptiness between the spokes, according to Lao-Tse¹. With this recognition that, by essence, a solid object consists of emptiness and movement, he touched upon a phenomenon in the fundamental structure of matter which today the natural sciences have still not investigated in all its subtleties. For even an atom itself is emptiness and movement between elementary particles. The primary building blocks of matter, the subatomic units or quarks, are described by scientists, however, with characteristics such as aboveness, belowness, strangeness, truth, beauty and color². Nonetheless, even in these so utterly minute units, no solidity can be found. Neither their position nor their velocity can be defined. All that can be determined is their relationship and vibrational patterns. Matter is a tiny part of emptiness and movement; each body is ultimately a flowing system of changes.

Whoever approaches the sculptural works of Caroline Duchatelet is able to experience this insight. With her interventions in a pre-established space, she subverts the conventional concept that there could exist a fixed objective world. Her - let us say sculptural presences do not obtrude as obstacles, are not suitable for embarking upon journeys, do not take possession of space like a built-up object. Instead - and this was evident in an especially impressive manner during the early summer of 2005 in a solo exhibition³ - the artist creates an experience of space, an experience of time, an experience of light, and she takes as her theme the ongoing changes in these qualities which are almost imperceptible in their permanent, slow advance. (...)

«My propositions in space, says Caroline Duchatelet, are not objects - that is to say objects that are in themselves full, forms which fill a void - but instead are endeavors to serve as support for emptiness; they indicate a void, establish delineations around it rather than filling a space. It is in this sense that these forms impart a body to the emptiness. What is important for me is that my propositions not be an object but that they give presence to what is surrounding us - they are receptacles.»⁴

Verbal descriptions of this artwork recall the minute progression of minimal music. The spatial impression, however, abandons the limitations of composition or construction. What the viewer experiences is a sculptural presence, the proximity of a silence which creates something like the occurrence of a spatial breathing. The characteristics of this altered space are close to that which Hermann Broch once named an «imageless stillness, yet image-filled» and with intensified expressivity «a breath-awakened stillness.»⁵. (...)

Already in her early works, Caroline Duchatelet had taken on the theme of making one's approach to experiences of time and space and of their diverse alterations in haptic metamorphoses. In various places, historical and political contexts, she has gathered dust, deposits upon pathways, rubbings from bricks, slate from the cliffs, stonepowder from mountain quarries, dust which came from a specific landscape and embodied it in a substantial manner, which carried within itself a

multiplicity of images, was itself a temporal landscape⁶. Duchatelet characterizes these works as « tactile photography » for in fact the image of an experienced narration here became comprehensible in an extremely reduced form, in their material essence. (...) In their lack of pictorial reference, these layers of dust condense a plenitude of images whose conjoined substance disrupts the customary rhythm again and again, when the artist, as she did in an urban space, for instance, inserts these surfaces right beneath the archways of everyday life. To the passers-by it seems as if, at once, the framework of the street has been disrupted in all its concentrated and brief impressions. The empty place, however, the pause which opens here, does not remain immobile but gives an intimation, upon its scintillating, mysteriously charged surface, of a permanent movement effected by indefinable images of time and space.

For this is what is so extraordinary about the visual world of Caroline Duchatelet: whether as sculpture or pictorial panels, the images never stand still but always represent the passage of a visual flow which is bound up with the fluctuations of space and time. (...)

Duchatelet goes a step further when she raises the fundamental question of how to represent the movement and instability of a world that finds itself in perpetual change and transformation. And what is more, she takes up this movement itself as her theme, so that her oeuvre comes to proclaim the challenging thesis that there is no solid surfaces. (...) Nothing that we perceive is detached from the experience of being rooted in the world and subjected to its laws of gravity and change, its processes of becoming and perishing. (...)

Representing a never fully exhausted epitome of this phenomenon is certainly the horizon which, just like our own shadow moves about with us. In her film *l'étendue (the expanse)*, Duchatelet causes this horizontal line to delimit a pale blue sky to slip way up towards the upper edge of the picture. A large, coarsely sandy, somewhat stony field takes up the remaining three-fourths of the picture. What may be observed during an unlimited duration of time is an alternation between light and shadow playing upon this field. The gradations of the paths of light and shadow remain extremely slow and can only be perceived with the greatest attentiveness. This observationnal mode gives rise to a peculiar exchange : while one sees how in a hollow of this field the light is caught and intensified, how extremely subtle shadowings become perceptible there, the time which is connected with this movement spontaneously begins to inscribe itself into this landscape of light and shadow, as if it were to attain its materialization here. (...)

So ultimately in these works the viewer experience nothing other than his own perceptual structure, albeit pursued down to their most subtle levels: that which is visible for us is the surface of things, is scarcely anything other than the trembling border of the dark and the visible. The fact that the world is in fact horizon accordingly implies that everything which we experience is in the process of transition. « Ultimately everything is in a state of passage, there exists nothing other than the fragile and the transitory, »⁶ says Caroline Duchatelet.

To be situated in the intermediate space between the visible and the invisible, between the solid and the flowing, between matter and emptiness, between movement and standstill, between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible induces a deep uncertainty in most individuals. Evidence of

this fear is apparent in all endeavors to remain occupied in each moment, to form and fill time ceaselessly, to attach oneself to a territory and stake it out with habits, to take possession of spaces. For in order to comprehend this intermediate existence, what is required is a consciousness of the fact of oneself being inscribed into this transitional situation as a « type of being, a being of porosity, of pregnancy or of generality »⁷ who is immersed in precisely that state of consciousness which may be experienced when the horizon opens in front of oneself. For it is then that the individual sees how fully he is united, in the very depths of his being, with this precarious phenomenon of dancing upon the tight rope stretched between boundedness and endlessness.

¹ Lao-Tseu, quoted by Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *Die Welt als Klang* (The World as sound), Hambourg 2002, p. 133.

² George Leonhard, *Der Rhythmus des Kosmos*, Munich, 1980, p.242

³ Galerie OÙ, Marseille, may 27 - june 25, 2005.

⁴ Caroline Duchatelet in a studio conversation with the author, Marseilles, june 26, 2005.

⁵ Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Virgil* (The Death of Virgil), Frankfurt 1976, p. 211.

⁶ Caroline Duchatelet in a studio conversation with the author, Marseilles, june 26, 2005

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (The Visible and The Invisible), Paris 1964, p. 28.