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On the roll of the vessel in the work of H el ene van Duijne

November 2010

Ernst Strouhal describes H el ene van Duijne as a scavenger of history in the tradition of Walter Benjamin based on her piece *Stubenrein* from the year 2001. Collectors and conservers of the recent past always pop up when change and upheaval is imminent; when conditions change so quickly so that all important and useful things seem to lose their value and their right to exist gets renegotiated. To suggest that van Duijne merely collects and conserves would be too truncated of a statement. She transforms and cares. Her artistic strategy involves giving dying things new functions. It is futile but not without intent.

One of the most essential elements of early human development is the vessel. From the agrarian revolution all the way to today's indissoluble social structure could have only occurred through specialized and sophisticated kinds of receptacles. Infrastructure, the concept of the city, the arrangement of fields and plotting future plans is somehow always connected to some type of vessel: the primordial "medium".

Every distinct form of vessel - from the clay pot to freight containers all the way to zip disks - are all bound to archetypal forms, even to this day. Everything that exceeds "form equals function", is applied arts or design. Early on, clay pots already have been decorated, the storehouses and office buildings of the Hanseatic patricians are feats of architecture. As a result of standardization, specific vessel forms started reoccurring around the world. What had begun with Napoleon's metric system, peaked with the emergence of the 5,25 inch floppy disk. A new age vessel for data and information, the most valuable contemporary resource. These physical storage media are now disappearing. What once was hand held is now concentrated in underground basements as mass media storage similar to the granaries from when settledness began, with the exception that today almost everyone has access to content. Today the priestly caste does not regulate the distribution of it, and it can be reproduced indefinitely. This is where H el ene van Duijne's work comes in to play. To argue that she deals with dying media, as I had intended to with this text, is unsatisfactory and isn't quite true; since it is not the media which is dying, but its standardized physical manifestations and accessibilities around the world.

If you look at van Duijne's year of birth (1974), it comes as no surprise that three elements stand out in her work - elements that have been engrained deep in the collective consciousness. These are the audio cassette as a standard form element, magnetic tape as a medium of technology and the polaroid as an image vessel.

H el ene van Duijne sees, just like everyone else, that an era is coming to an end - or has already come to an end, just her vision is more focused. The end of an era of technological habits. Just this year the last Technics 1210 shipped out - it was more than just another turntable, a symbol for hip hop, techno, club culture and lifestyle for over three generations. With the end of the polaroid and cassette tape, even more is lost than with the Technics 1210, which was only truly appreciated and loved by a distinct circle of DJs and producers. Van Duijne is unknowingly or deliberately aware of this, and she works naturally and concentratedly with what is still left of it. I refer to this as futile, but not without intent, or even with an air of nostalgia. Futile, because the development towards cloud computing, in which ever growing amounts of data are no longer bound to a single transportable medium, pushes everything else into the realm of the obsolete. But full of intent: the piece *Porzellan Tape* (2008) doesn't just evoke merry memories, but a whole era of postmodern human relationships with technology and vice versa. Let us compare a young teenage couple from the years 1987 and 2010. Both express their affection by compiling music for each other. Today, the teenager drags and drops files or thumbnails and sends these by various means to his/her love. In 1987 he/she had to contemplatively listen to every minute of the compilation as it was recording to tape, and the linear structure of the magnetic tape demanded a precisely premeditated arrangement of songs. I don't want to suggest any qualitative differences, that the real time method, as prescribed by the vessel audio cassette, served the romantic relationship better as today's methods. Rather, I allude to the shift that is taking place within a - our - generation. It is increasingly difficult to encounter someone eight or ten years younger than van Duijne who can share the same experiences with the same level of intensity. With the focus being the vessel's proper character traits and the habits we develop according to it, not its mere physical form for nor content. These experiences are inextinguishable, like a kind of socialization, stored within us.

The porcelain cassette, a three dimensional piece, is not rendered to detail. Quite the opposite - on one hand, the rectangular shape and a few functional design elements suffice to inform the audience of what it is, which demonstrates how deep the phenotype of the MC is engraved into our collective consciousness. On the other hand, the object looks like a found object, a half-molten, precious archeological item from a post-apocalypse era, in which mundane objects of civilization have become historical memorabilia.

When H el ene van Duijne uses wide VHS tape elements in her installations, it can occur that some younger viewers feel transfixed with technological mythology. The fact that the tapes glisten so promisingly and reveal a texture reminiscent of velvet upon closer inspection, is merely a side effect of technical principle and not added adornment. It is just as fasci-

nating for an audience that has grown up with VHS tapes, but for another reason: Tape was never to be touched. It was precious and to be guarded.

Now it hangs en masse in its reflexive beauty; a re-designated material in an art exhibit - self-confident in life after death, partly back as a vessel - in the case of *Night at the Range*, *Originator*, and *BI DER TU DISKAVR HEVNLI SIKRETS* (2009) vessel for a living thing: a performance. These works are active and transformative reminders. Not just of the last 50 years of pop history and its media, but -on a larger scale - a universal theme. Until today - especially today - material settings, media technology in particular, affect inter-human relationships.

On the border of transformation - on which van Duijne treads, one can already sense the 180 degree turn that the world wide web promises. The opportunity for reversing this comparativeness exists within it. Through massive networking of individuals that have many options but only a weak bond, and are equipped with amorphous universal vessels, the following scenario could occur: in the future, human relationships determine material technical standards. A utopia and uncertain promise. All of this is not discernible from H el ene van Duijnes works, but they function as an indicator. For when collectors and archivists arise that focus on the recent past in one way or another, one can be assured that the degree and pace of change is fast. This must be what we call progress, and what Walter Benjamin refers to as progress when he speaks of the angel who no longer can fold his wings.

On a less hypothetical, but more formal esthetical and economic note, the two works, *Porzellan Tape* and *Porzellan Polaroid* show further aspects. In contrast to the series of polaroids *Untitled* (2009) in which vessels are depicted that, interestingly, do not encompass material matter but purely ideological/religious ones, the porcelain polaroid transcends its technical-functional entitlement as a medium and becomes an absolved (white and content free) icon of a singular esthetic. An icon that defines itself by the proportion of two rectangles. Polaroids are by default somewhat yellow in tone. Its fast developing technique is compromised by photographs of a shorter lifespan. These technical faults are so deeply engrained in the viewing habits of its users that they become esthetic virtue.

The polaroid picture, with its transience and its technical imperfection, has almost a human element to it; something highly subjective and authentic (because it is difficult to manipulate) that reminds us of the way our perceptual apparatus works and of our ephemerality. Today certain Photoshop filters attempt to emulate this polaroid flair but cannot fulfill its unmistakably vessel character. Today when you upload a picture on the internet you are confronted with the less charming problem of never being able to remove it again. Digital pictures do not fade and therefore do not subjectify, but our perception of the reproduction does constantly. These specific attributes of vessels dictate the mechanisms of recollection of those who grew up and live with them. This goes as far as informing a fundamental attitude towards life and a way of seeing the world.

Regarding the properties of vessels, economic structures have indicated time and again when we are dealing with a change of an era. The price for audio cassettes was stable for a very long time. When CD burners and thumb drives displaced this form of storage, the prices of the still large stock dropped. Today you have to pay a high price for an audio cassette. The mechanisms of the market are not considerate of individuals to whom the properties of specific vessels are still important. Polaroid and MCs are not being sold anymore as vessels with a real and practical value, although they would certainly still fulfill their function, but rather as a re-animator for a lifestyle. In the pieces, *Cut Up* (2004/5) and *Magnetica* (2006) van Duijne develops multiple levels. What appears from the outside to be the bright idea of a graphic designer for a hip magazine, is far more multifaceted when analyzed. In these pieces transformations occur on multiple levels. The vessel cassette is dissolved.

The tape - initially carriers of magnetically stored data - becomes a visual/graphic carrier of data, namely text. The original form of the content, namely music, is reduced to lyric passages, which - as mentioned numerously before in this text - attaches itself deep into collective consciousness. (i.e. Who wants to live forever). Next to an audio visual transformation, we witness a self-referential carousel ride of vessel forms. Transformational work most distinctly stands out in van Duijnes oeuvre.

For what reasons H el ene van Duijne works with the specific materials of these specific vessels, I cannot say at this point. I can only speculate - it might be her technological socialization. What matters is that someone deals with it as sensitively as her, and that there is someone out there that can share this sensitivity.

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