

How can an object exist and cease to exist at one and the same time? Tim Ingold believes that this happens when the object stops being the object of my attention, when it no longer exists as itself, but becomes its own function: I no longer see my glasses, but I have, in this case, the experience of vision. An object, according to Ingold, needs therefore to disappear in order to exist in a different way, as a tool. Interestingly, Stéphane Barbier Bouvet's works are based on a comparable observation – confronting the questions of functionality, reduction, visibility – but the solutions they propose are the opposite of the theory of the British anthropologist. Indeed, if Barbier Bouvet's method is based on a logic of 'pulling away', in the sense of a process of progressive suppression of non-necessary constituents of a manufactured object, searching for the limit, the moment when the fabricated thing is almost no longer an object but continues, despite everything, to function, the forms that this negative system generates, are anything but invisible, quite the opposite.

Nourished by an internal contradiction, which confers on the object its elusiveness, their presence oscillates between a form of impersonality – produced by a conceptual grid that is almost algorithmic, taking into account the context, its parameters, and proposing answers – and, at the same time a high degree of specificity, bearing the traces of gestures learned and unlearned, of techniques, found or displaced, of bodies, of uses. The double distance they maintain with the contemporary criteria of seduction suggests an origin lying outside even the immediate preoccupations of the industry of objects, mixing in with this other sources, other genealogies, other knowledge sets. His works move away from any stylistic functionalization such as a system of aesthetics or an aestheticization of dematerialization: they emerge, in one sense, from a literal correspondence with specific situations, and from a process that strips them, layer after layer, of meaning, ornament and surface. BarbierBouvet exhibits what remains potentially of objects once the film which could still identify them as the subject of design is removed.

The exhibition *People* organizes and combines various typologies of newly created objects that, while all seemingly referring to an idea of designing and controlling the public space, suggest destinations that remains ambiguous, by reason of their changing functionality and their undecidable materiality and finish. A series of light fittings, produced by hanging opaline tubes around I-beams, is the only source of illumination for the exhibition. Here, the white light of control, of commerce, of 24/7 visibility conquers the interior: the lamps re-enact, inside the gallery space, their ability to regulate the public space with their luminosity. Elsewhere, certain lamps present differences, like an update, but with evolution replaced by devolution, an ossification of the form, its disintegration: with a piece of pylon replacing their LED lighting.

Three urban distribution boxes arranged across the exhibition space recontextualize this invisible

object of regulation of the urban system. These caissons, placed under high surveillance by various structures (cities, companies), present a characteristic protective surface, usually enclosing the connectivity that governs the movement of vehicles and machines (traffic lights, trains), communications between individuals and businesses (telephone, Internet), or energy (electricity). Barbier Bouvet has chosen three boxes of basic shape and colour, which he has made to undergo a series of transformations. First of all they are presented open. This gesture de-occults a form of secrecy, of power associated with the habitual experience of these symbolic objects. Signs of another form of regulation, this time concerned not with security or economics (as in the case of lamps) but with logistic and transport flows (humans and goods), they become, in a second gesture, cabinets, diverted from their function as if for domestic use: their interior space harbours a light, activated by an automatic switch.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, in places specifically chosen by Barbier Bouvet, a set of furniture, made from cardboard transport boxes collected in the streets, proposes a collective use, situations of conviviality. Tables, seats, carpets present, on their surface, a constellation of indicators and information – date, type of object, country of production, company marketing it – markers of standardized production, of a delocalized economy, of globalized trade. From cardboard boxes, non-objects that serve to protect other objects and enable them to transit into various non-places, from storage spaces to recycling places, are born forms with new functions. Rough, apparently simple, wild, they take shape in the residues, the remains of invisible skins of the objects which surround us and the value of which, linked to their being packaged in cardboard that protects their surface and image, makes them into consumption goods. Image of uses and re-uses, of possible diversions by an invisible community, these furniture items reveal the critical dimension, relying on the observation of the everyday gestures of transformation that in fact feed the technical principles that govern the production of other objects in the exhibition: here a lamp is replaced by a beam, there an electricity distribution cabinet becomes a wardrobe.

Barbier Bouvet's furniture is made of matter itself, neutral and without quality, things that accompany and make possible the value of objects. It is produced from gestures, from accessible, shared, and shareable techniques and knowledge, and made of objects that exist and do not exist for themselves, but for, and between, other objects. Their specificity lies in the near-absence of any desire to use them to create added value and in the fact that suddenly, through the traces they leave, the precise gestures that preside over their manufacture, and their marks of use, they become the object, with no price tag attached, of our attention. This is perhaps the very meaning of the presence of a double mirror that Barbier Bouvet has placed in the exhibition, as a way of resolving, reflecting the environment, or of conceptual closure of the project, of setting in motion of the whole: or how,

from object to non-object, the work here becomes an art of attention to the non-visible, a way of transforming – by displacement and reduction, and not by elevation or idealization – the very idea of objects as goods of another kind, expressed in acts, as common goods.

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