

on *Silent Revolution* (2018)
by Stefanie Schwarzwimmer

A soft sound, gently grinding. A shaky camera peeks through the crack of a door. It is dark, probably nighttime. Only a TV set sends a cold blue flicker of light through space, a show is on, offering a delight of crackling noises and voices joking and arguing on TV in Japanese. On the floor a simple dinner plate comes into focus, its shiny porcelain surface stands apart from the darkness. The plate turns slowly and incessantly around its own axis. Whispering voices comment the scene in utter astonishment from behind the camera. All of a sudden, the frame tilts and trips into the next take. Here, a light beam feels its way through a neat kitchenette, where something that appears like the same plate flashes in the dark. A further plate sways in a bedroom, another spins in a stairway, a further one in a low-key restaurant. One hears the incredulity of a Turkish voice, a slight dissonance in a couple's discussion in Denglish, and the frightful curiosity of a Swedish commentary: »Have you seen this? Has it been like this before?« These voices are all puzzled and equally intrigued by what seems to be a worldwide phenomenon.

Silent Revolution interweaves a series of amateur recordings. These portray an ordinary china plate that starts to spin in domestic and semi-public spaces without seemingly ceasing to do so. The kinetic energy required to do so must originate from the object itself. It is at least not clear where it should emanate otherwise. The montage of the images has its own rhythm, the different sequences are cut off abruptly sometimes, as they switch into a different setting. This suggests the perpetual generation and distribution of further images, but also of further plates. Witness this event. Share this image. Fake this video. Then again, there is a gentle intimacy in the way the witnesses, merged with their cell phone or hand-held cameras, interact with the plate that clearly works against the rough montage of the recordings.

The spaces and languages in *Silent Revolution* are characterized both by a variety of global and somewhat local cultural markers. The Chinese dog figurines on the wall of a restaurant, for example, are specific, but also always already part of a marketised and globalised network of cultures. There are other motives of that kind, like a poster of the Eiffel Tower, which graces a living room, a stylised black-and-white photograph of Audrey Hepburn, a beige faux leather sofa, and chandeliers made of shiny PVC that could also be included in this category. Like the plate itself, which is part of 365+, a pragmatic and affordable series of kitchenware, launched by the world's biggest furniture retailer, the Swedish multinational IKEA. These items are easy to produce and circulate, but in their quick-fix-functionality also leave a lot of room for different ways of interpretation and appropriation. Throw all of these into a blender — et voilà! — there goes your planetary apartment.

Thus, the interiors in *Silent Revolution* seem to share elements and motives that connect them with each other as part of a glocal network, whose language is not only one of (life-)style, but also Japanese, Spanish, Syrian Arabic, or English. At the same time, the narrow frames and windowless rooms appear isolated. They do not offer an opening towards an exterior. Viewers of *Silent Revolution* cannot help but ask whether something has been left out of these environments. The late-night recording of a security camera in an IKEA store heightens this uncanny feeling. It inconspicuously blends into the amateur recordings, thereby disguising the fact that it differs greatly from them. In this shot, the camera's scope is wide and elevated. Its frame remains static. The only sound you get to hear is technology's disinterested buzz. Whereas the amateurs engage in an intimate but respectful dance with the plate, a vast and knowing distance nonetheless makes itself felt there.

It is in these environments, environments of a strangely familiar and cosy standardisation, that a weird spectre appears. It emerges from the material of the everyday and develops an agency from within that remains to be explained. Schwarzwimmer thinks *Silent Revolution* as a low-key fiction. Perhaps you can think of it as a fictitious, speculative element that gets smuggled into reality, where it ends up roaming about. A glitch in the matrix of reality. A tiny, nagging bug that consistently eats away at the system. A *Silent Revolution* happens where a small slip gives way to an everyday object, that is, like all (human) animals and things on earth bound to the ground by gravity, but is defying the laws of time and space. These types of fiction have a low threshold and can easily be incorporated into collective frames of perception, thereby rendering the small cracks they open even more enticing to the viewer.

The images of *Silent Revolution* are entirely computer-generated. The birthplace of CGI (computer-generated imagery) is a software program and thus has — unlike photography — no indexical, or material connection to a shared reality. 75% of all images in the famous IKEA-catalogue are computer-generated renderings — a fact perhaps unknown to the reader. If not, she probably learned about it in an article somewhere, but not through the act of looking at the images themselves. It is probably safe to say that synthetic images, which are rendered on the basis of reality to some degree, are still read like photographs and have a certain verisimilitude. Like other visual media, digital simulations co-construct the world. Still, they occupy an ambivalent ontological position. They make present what is absent, nonetheless being incapable to materialise this absence fully. They can give shape, body and flesh, to that which is not anymore and that which has not yet been. By using these image-making technologies actual worlds can be modelled, remodelled, or replaced in their entirety. These capacities characterise images and image-making in general to some extent. Nevertheless, CGI offers a quite specific play with reality — a reality bent by imagination. It represents a technology that can be employed to experiment with spectres of the Then and There in the Here and How. Visual drafts can be brought to life with sound and haptic sensations, and experienced in the full range of the senses.

Until the fifteenth century, the word 'revolution' was used to describe the movement of the planets. It was not until later that it came to denominate a radical turnaround, a project of emancipation that deviates from the given social order to install a new one. There sure is a connection between a centrifugal movement that strives towards an outside and the political event that we call revolution today. The poet Fred Moten prefers to think about revolution as a tendency. Instead of a revolutionary event, Moten imagines a constantly grinding, ever escaping, prevailing revolutionary practice. He is interested in the ways this tendency as a practice is already given in the Here and Now, in social life, poetry, and music. It is in these genres and ways of assembly that an unactualised society to come haunts the present in the guise of a spectre from past and future alike. *Silent Revolution* might speak to these desires. The rotating china plate seems like an enigmatic ghost. Is it a revenant from the past and a messenger from the future? Does it seismographically detect a general revolutionary tendency?

Silent Revolution does not give any answers to these questions, but offers an ambivalent portrayal of a problem. In a fixated capitalist Now a Then and There announces itself. A simple everyday object gathers a certain force and defies that very fixation. An affective dynamics arises between the enclosure and familiarity of an interior and the china plate's slow and steady revolution towards an outside. *Silent Revolution* asks the viewer to join in its intimate, hypnotising dance. When you witness what they — whoever 'they' are — have witnessed, you sleepwalk into a moving form of inquiry. What is happening here? Am I involved? »Have you seen this? Has it been like this before?« Where does this spark lead onto? Is it even one? Is it the harbinger of a first spark that begins to perpetuate? Or will this slow start eventually ebb away? Will it remain distinct in different global sites or will it spread out? Will the plates and their witnesses be caught up in an endless feedback loop until the end of time, or does something else start here? Will it forever go around in circuit or will it depart from here?

Sources and further suggestions for music and readings:

1 James Blake, *Limit to Your Love* (2011)

2 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (1993)

3 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (2017); *Capitalist Realism* (2009)

4 Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche* (1919)

5 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters. Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997)

6 Online Etymology Dictionary

7 Sebastian Köthe, *Versuch über Ununterscheidbarkeit* (2016)

8 Fred Moten talks about revolution as tendency on different occasions. One of them is this talk called »The Gift of Corruption« (2018) <https://bit.ly/36lGdYe>

9 The Otolith Group, Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, about the Loop and the GIF file format, 2005 <https://bit.ly/3iyO1YV>

10 Joseph Vogl, *Über das Zaudern* (2007)

11 Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976)