

A cardboard box slides into frame, and with it an immediate conflict. The box's physical presence is indicated by the sound of cardboard scraping along a surface, seemingly at odds with the dimensionless void it appears to be suspended in. Next to the box, a scalpel fades into existence, materialising from the ether. Disembodied arms clad in long black latex gloves pick up the scalpel. We assume we're about to watch as this box is opened — voyeurs in this strange, impalpable space.

However, as we will learn as the piece unfolds, Aoibheann Greenan's *Dingbox* is a work of constant misdirection, compulsive deviation and perpetual motion. It is both fluid and spiky, a momentum like a marble falling through a gravitram. So, before we can settle into our voyeurism, *Dingbox* re-routes. In a crucial pause before the initial incision, the gloved hands present the scalpel to us, for our examination, for our pleasure. A sudden direct address: *Dingbox* knows we're watching.

This demonstrative mode, as well as the work's sustained focus on its titular box, signals a clear contextual influence: the internet phenomenon of "unboxing." Unboxing is a video trend produced for and disseminated primarily on video-sharing sites like Youtube. In these videos, a host (sometimes disembodied, a pair of arms like *Dingbox*'s) removes a product from its packaging, narrating the experience as the layers are discarded. Although fulfilling the perfunctory goal of exhibiting a consumer good, unboxing videos are visually and narratively preoccupied with the process of the unveiling, and the physical handling of both product and packaging. When *Dingbox*'s hands remove another box from the original cardboard, it becomes clear that the work shares the same fixations. It's not about the product, it's about the box.

*Dingbox* is the unboxing video stripped down to the essences of its allure: its affective intensities and tactile pleasures. The absence of a climactic product allows *Dingbox* to stretch the narrative structure of the unboxing video to its logical extreme. The journey towards the reveal is elongated, the pleasure of release intensified through deferral. The work meticulously curates our attention, we see certain symbols visually repeated, like clues to be pursued. Modulation of attention is also a key asset within the unboxing video industrial complex. Unboxing performers convert viewer attention into revenue, increased engagement is an uptick in advertising space and direct sponsorship. Video representations of corporate products become themselves corporate products, boxes within boxes.

Strict management of attention has further insidious implications in the world of unboxing. Every reveal works also to conceal. The structural violence that upholds the manufacture and distribution of the product (and indeed, the packaging) remains obscured within the sustained process of the unboxing. It is the same work of cognitive dissonance that allows us to consume products without having to take on the ethical burden of how they came into being. *Dingbox* performs this dynamic as burlesque. As its nominal box is disassembled further and

further, the cover-up work that the traditional unboxing does for capitalism is interrupted. It instead suggests that capitalism relies less on the actual reveal than the continued promise of it. *Dingbox* loops indefinitely, a formalistic mimic of the cycle of production-consumption built on hidden labour and discarded waste. A cycle which, as the work makes clear in its refusal of climax, is ultimately driven by a false promise. Like a magic trick: it's what you're *not* looking at that allows the trick to function.

There is in fact a pre-digital visual lineage intimately related to magic that *Dingbox* taps into: early cinema, specifically “the cinema of attractions.”<sup>1</sup> Referring to productions from cinema's infant years, the cinema of attractions was predicated on a visual stimulation that involved novelty, surprise or shock. Less concerned with contributing to the development of narrative cinema, these films recognised that the technical possibilities of the medium itself were the “attraction,” the spectacle being precisely the visual transformations achieved by the cinematic apparatus. *Dingbox's* mechanisms of construction and performance are always at the surface. The work's box is both the site of the performance and the performance itself. And, true to any good attraction, it is one of spectacle. *Dingbox's* disassembly is full of revelation. The gloved fingers slide along surfaces — at one point leaving behind what appears to be digital marks, only for these marks to appear physically hollow once another layer is lifted. A visual deception of the same impulse as the earliest cinema practitioners.

However, this sense of spectacle doesn't account for the full range of visual pleasure on offer. Unboxing as a tradition affords us close proximity to the object, and *Dingbox* harnesses that proximity in its haptic, tactile visuality. The concept of haptic visuality, as conceived by Laura U. Marks, is a visuality that “functions like a sense of touch.” The sensation of touch is transposed to the eyes, the act of looking becomes more akin to “a graze than a gaze.”<sup>2</sup> With only a pair of hands as our guide, we are invariably intimate with *Dingbox's* sense of touch. Yet, this sense is problematised by the black latex gloves, which not only connote a physical barrier, but also a potential fetish object, gesturing towards sensations of both pleasure and displeasure. As a haptic experience, *Dingbox* is both surgery and strip-tease. It punctures, penetrates and perforates, as well as caresses, fondles and strokes — an exhibition of the full range of (dis)pleasures to be wrung from this era of screen-based consumption.

*Dingbox* ultimately obfuscates the lines between object and container, product and packaging, mechanism and spectacle, material and immaterial. The seductive power of unboxing is pushed to its limits, arousing visual pleasure through its heightened performance of the logic of capital. The work unpacks more than simply a product, it reckons with how we relate to both images and objects in a culture that gave rise to unboxing videos. *Dingbox* prompts us not to ask what is in the box, but if we'll ever be able to stop ourselves from looking inside.

---

<sup>1</sup> Term coined by Tom Gunning (and André Gaudreault) in the 1986 essay “The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde”.

<sup>2</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.