

## PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, September 10, 2019.

### **Attention**

Artwork by Paolo Cirio.

This series intervenes in the attention economy of advertising by social media influencers. Particularly looking at the language of the photographic medium on Instagram, *Attention* appropriated photos by influencers who promoted controversial products without disclosing them as paid advertisements. Cirio's compositions, which comprise prints on glass, make use of the original photographs and enlarged body parts, expressions, poses, and products. The work deconstructs how Instagram influencers deploy their own particular language of advertising, and therefore interrogates the arbitrary visuals that determine the value and utility of our attention in becoming commodified. The photos are analyzed by zooming into the visual details to reveal highly constructed photography. The imagery of the narcissistic, sexualized, and idealized self is a performative language of the attention economy that became canonized, both to convey perfection and spontaneity. The image is meant to be familiar, effortless, natural in its fabrication; advertisements seamlessly appear to be authentic life. This artwork aims to break the construction and formality of this photographic language; by decoding the images, their mechanism is highlighted. As a form of public action, printed compositions are posted on walls to return the subtle online advertising to its traditional form. In addition, a website for the project allows the public to collect and report deceptive adverts by online influencers.

- Project website: [Influencers-Watch.org](http://influencers-watch.org)

- Artwork page: <http://paolocirio.net/work/attention/>

### **Further theory and research:**

This series of photographs, appropriated from celebrities as well as micro-influencers, function as evidence of deceptive advertising and illustrate visual devices utilized to allure attention. The analysis of photographic language is used to point at the legal, ethical, and economical nature of the online influencers to discuss the pervasiveness of the attention economy.

Advertising has become a sophisticated social performance. The language for seeking attention gets under our skin through normalizing proto-advertising behaviors to stage the image of the self and make it an economy. Private gestures became public spectacles, manipulated to appeal, value, and validate the image of the self, which is then defined through the visual attributes of the body and objects, rather than the intellect, spirit, and its experiences.

Diffused advertising replaced the role of the copywriter, the strategies of traditional advertising became a profusion of influencers influencing followers on endless media feeds. Meanwhile, consumers become influencers themselves, replicating the linguistic and semiotic performance of this mode of advertising and labor. The visual exposure of the language and behaviour of this attention economy adopts a critical stance toward the semiotics of advertising and its relationship to advances in media studies and the medium of photography.

Despite initial attempts at regulations through new consumer protection laws, some of which have been enacted in only a few countries, influencers still create deceptive advertising, manipulating the medium in many forms to dissimulate legal compliance. To this day, regulators fail to reign in this diffuse and subtle form of advertising.

(See the most recent complaint letter by TINA.org to the FTC on March 4, 2019)

Ultimately, the project highlights the responsibility of social media platforms, which take full advantage of the media attention without adhering to standards and codes of ethics in advertising for traditional broadcasting companies.

More theory and research here:

[http://paolocirio.net/press/texts/text\\_attention.php](http://paolocirio.net/press/texts/text_attention.php)