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LPG Modernity

Just outside P////AKT's exhibition space, at the adjacent plot, banners installed by an excavated pit indicate twenty "gas-free *atelier* dwellings, business spaces, and a parking garage" are planned for construction. Both art show frequenters and real estate developers can readily observe how the lingering strip of small industry on Zeeburgerpad represents a favourable site for capital investment. While the expulsive mechanisms of gentrification have become a hotbed for artistic reflexivity and site-specific production, their analyses often lack the more obscure material interactions between state policy, industry and finance capital that have come to define gentrification's current umpteenth wave. In the case of this text, the notion of site functions as a *multiplicity*: a manifold, fluctuating structure of continuous transition. Inside the exhibition space itself, by-products of processed natural gas and petroleum in the form of propane and butane mixtures are contained in four refillable LPG cylinders bearing Antargaz and Shell brands. Sometime before, while buried under layers of inorganic sediment, large quantities of organic material were subjected to heat and pressure over millions of years, decomposing and transforming the matter's constituent fats, carbohydrates and proteins into what we now call fossil fuels. Within an isolated system, energy can be neither created nor destroyed, but only changes form.

At first sight, the works of Stian Ådlandsvik seem to reframe the exhibition space – obliquely, but willingly – as a strange volumetric kind of Anthropocene. Presented as his central series of sculptures, oil rig drill bits that look like teathed steampunk fossils heat up under the hissing sound of torch flames—slowly burning liquefied petroleum gas; releasing carbon dioxide. The mass of cast-in-place concrete slabs, filled with oyster shells and lemon peels, has brought fragmented pitch pine pulpits down to earth where they hybridised into pedestal supports for the drill bits, that in their industrial origin point only deeper down into the surface. Scattered on the floor still, vacuum-packed literature (amongst which Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid* and Gustav Metzger's writings in '*damaged nature, auto-destructive art*') seems to resist a hypothetical decompression of what Zygmunt Bauman called *liquid modernity*, into what would probably be an apocalyptic gaseous state. How do such objects and sculptural elements connect? If we consider the classic telos of sculpture as using a form-mass-volume episteme to indicate the passage of time through its manifestation in space, and, conformably, alluding to movement while remaining in static repose, how does installation practice come into play? The network of references that clutters up when different objects come together and combine cannot but produce associative effects on the spectator that go far beyond the conservative reading of art as the execution of a formalist exercise. And any attempt to maintain such an effect within an isolated system only leads to disregarding the heterogeneity of the concept of system itself.

Where do we look for clues? Fixed on the back wall of the exhibition space, four dowsing rods on display ('fabricated' by, among others, a financial specialist) suggest through their immobilised positions that in the context of this exhibition, the act of looking does not so much imply a distancing, but rather an association or proximity with a subject. Here, 'looking' means both the act of spectatorship and the 'looking for' a discovery of water sources, precious metals or petroleum. In this poetic amalgam of aesthetics and extractivist pseudoscience, the status of artwork and fossil fuels start to converge. It is through our

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mental representation of that movement, of coming up close, that our consciousness attends to the unseen. Within such fluid geographies of site and system, where are these symbolic exchanges deposited into solid form? In the space's programme guide listing this year's exhibitions, Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK), Mondriaan Fund, and the Ammodo Foundation crystallise as the local trinity of financial support—not unlike many other art institutions in the Netherlands. While sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has pointed to the 'clandestine circulation' of cultural capital, inversely, the Dutch arts infrastructure rather explicitly recognises and embraces its role within (and dependence on) the *material* circulation in industrial capitalism. This commissioned text forms no exception, and is consequently part and parcel of the very system. In 2014, independent journalist platform Follow the Money reported on how Ammodo was established using a dubiously obtained capital of over one billion euros through the sale of a profitable Rotterdam port worker pension fund. When insurance firm Aegon acquired the pension fund in 2007, the independent foundation managing the fund's capital discreetly changed its articles of association to freely distribute the 1.55 billion euros of profit as it pleased. After protest and lawsuits by the port workers, parties settled for over 500 million euros in 2010, with a remaining fortune of one billion euros of port worker surplus to spend on the visual arts, performing arts and sciences. Just as goods and processed materials (such as fuels) pass through the hands of port workers on a daily basis, they lose their grip on the entitled surplus yield of their own labor.

It's a popular claim that under the current globalised conditions of capitalism, art is no longer able to truly transform anything in our social reality. If, however, interaction in the regime of industrial production and sculptural practice can be located historically as navigating between the readymade's clash with conventions in social *structures* and constructivism's pursuit of utility and social *purpose*, installation practice may at least help contemporary artistic production in emancipating the perception of its own systemic entanglement with the cultural-materialist preconditions that enable it. The question is whether its sculptural constituents are able to retain their porous and unstable quality of being not just one thing, but many things at once, transforming from one state into another through being exposed evenly to light, heat, and pressure as well as to context, time and place. Strategically charging a site with poetics serves as one of many options to accomplish this. Paraphrasing John Kelsey from a catalogue text for the Astrup Fearnley Museet in Oslo (itself built on a shipping magnate fortune): the secret to making a show is that anything can go with anything, and something will always somehow connect—aesthetically, conceptually, or by mere proximity. An exhibition, then, does not function merely to connect and reflect, but importantly also to enact.

Timo Demollin, 2020