

SLOW BURN

Kjersti Vetterstad

11.04. – 08.06.2024

Suprainfinit Gallery

An exhibition curated by Cristina Vasilescu

Kjersti Vetterstad's installation effects a poetic estrangement on 'the Home' as a site of withdrawal from geopolitical problems, luring the visitor in an affective encounter with the complicated feelings generated by the climate emergency. As the exhibition displaces the categories of private/public, inside/outside, natural/mass-produced, the defamiliarizing atmosphere settles in the body the more time is spent within its realms. Supernatural forces seem to break off the homely surface that promises stability and order. Sun beds, a stuffed canary bird on a wooden-metal stick, dried moths, and three chunks of coal infiltrate the TV-set equipped, minimalist living room.

Central to the exhibition is the new video work *Slow Burn* (2024), addressing the painful sense of isolation that results from the commodification of desire and fear. The entertainment industry tends to normalise and naturalise the promise of material well-being as universal by further entrenching the stratifications of consumer culture. In this context, the fantasy house acts both as the need to safeguard oneself from unknown dangers, and as the ultimate effect of people's desire to "compensate for their dislocations and impoverished experiences in the economy" [1]. The video borrows elements of drama and suspense from the soap opera genre, reflected in the protagonist's emotional states that bafflingly shift between longing, contempt, fear, and self-fulfillment.

Sensorially emplacing the video's content, the installation functions as an immersive environment in which things are no longer commodities, but matters of (urgent) concern in a carefully choreographed gathering [2]. *Slow Burn* sparked as a meditation on the complexities of coal as a combustible sedimentary rock. Coal's materiality stores the histories of other-than-human presences, past ecological and geological processes, forming through the gradual decay of dead plant matter. Storing the history of sun, water, wind, and living organisms. Since the Industrial Revolution, coal has functioned as an energy catalyst, being materially co-opted in the speeding up of technological progress to a planetarily threatening pace. The main source for electricity production globally still, coal is intimately entangled with political power and processes of capital accumulation. Equally, the stuffed canary bird in the exhibition space attests to the animal labour and multispecies exploitation involved in coal extraction—well into the 20th century, caged canary birds were brought down into the coal mines to alert workers of high levels of air toxicity.

Slow Burn makes visible the multiple agentive capacities of organic and inorganic bodies by exacerbating the human responses in these affective circuits [3]. In the video, the presence of the sea, wind turbines, coal, soil, pigeon, and cat provoke enchanted aggravations that take hold of the protagonist's body, culminating with an identity split in which one Self passively remains in the unreality of her safe home, watching the broadcast of a space rocket launch; the other Self goes into the world, greeting and dissolving into the sea, performing dissociative acts as "inventive alterations of receptivity" to the biopolitical realities of climate breakdown [4]. Materially-bound mental responses also inhere in the exhibition space: the sonic vibrations of Vera Dvale's accompanying sound pieces move through the space and touch the surfaces of the visitors' skins, leaving no-body unaffected.

Text by Maria Persu

References

- [1] Elizabeth Seaton, 'The Commodification of Fear', *Topia*, 5(1), 2001, p. 8.
- [2] Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry*, 30(2), 2004.
- [3] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2009.
- [4] Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, Duke University Press, 2022, p. 120.

Video Credits

Performer: Georgiana Dobre

Concept, camera work and edit: Kjersti Vetterstad

Music composition: "To want you" and "Dybden" by Vera Dvale

iPad text fragment adapted from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Medea* (1969)

UNBURIED

Performance by Georgiana Dobre

20 & 21.04.2024

Suprainfinit Gallery

A performance commissioned by Suprainfinit Gallery / Cristina Vasilescu

Entrenched in speculative somatic practices, Georgiana Dobre's newly commissioned performance UNBURIED probes the materiality of coal as a generator for movement, sensing, and imagining. How can we activate our invisible bodily ties to this black, porous material? What are the consequences of touching coal? Can we think of carbon, present in both coal and the human body, as a shared materiality?

Extractivist methods may be imagined as a violent awakening of coal from its deep slumber through drilling and harrowing vibrations, an unseen violence that shapes our world. Thinking-with coal and its commodification, one can reflect on touching as itself an extractivist practice—a possessive grab onto something—, specifically in the context of disciplinary practices that alter perceptions on embodiment and the human's place in (or away from) what has come to be constructed as 'nature'.

Twisting touch as alienating accumulation, the performance instead accesses it as an agent that may in-form and maintain an open path of relating and communication. UNBURIED unfolds slowly, journeying through the twilight and into the night, as the three performers are being moved by and move with the pieces of coal. Falling in and out of deep trembling sounds, faint whispers, and loud sighs, they come together, breathe together, and drift apart.

Text by Maria Persu

CREDITS:

Concept and choreography: Georgiana Dobre

Co-creating performers/ dancers: Lisa Teige, Kristin Nango and Georgiana Dobre

Costumes: Adriana Preda

External eye: Bára Sigfúsdóttir

Conversation partner: Kjersti Vetterstad

Commissioned by Suprainfinit Gallery

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