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DANIEL DE PAULA

the control of things over subjects is the control of subjects over themselves

Opening Thursday 14th November – 7pm

Until 18th January 2020

For the purpose of my first exhibition at Francesca Minini, entitled *the control of things over subjects is the control of subjects over themselves*, as a recurring strategy within my practice, in place of commissioning an external curatorial essay, I've decided to write and provide a short statement as an accompaniment to the presented works, followed by an excerpt derived from an interview I conducted specifically for this occasion with sociologist and professor Saskia Sassen.

Through a posture that attempts to overcome the traditional dichotomy of physicality and action¹, the exhibition articulates and composes, by means of juxtaposing a series of objects and strategies, a critique towards the production of space as the reproduction of abstract social forms and relations of dominance.

The investigative result being, on its most fundamental level, that, as humans endlessly transform and construct space in order to satisfy their necessities, specifically to exchange commodities within a capitalist society, a system of constraint establishes itself, not simply as class-domination, or the control of people by other people, but by the domination of all subjects by abstract social structures constituted by ourselves².

Under such system of constraint, in which, through the ubiquitousness of labor, and the production of value, we are condemned to transform thoughts into things, materiality is not neutral, on the contrary, it is the embodiment of control and the circulation of power.

Power flows through things, and, in many instances reveals the exchange of roles that takes place between individuals and commodities in modern capitalism, where life becomes objectified and expendable, while materiality is fetishized and invested with substance and the active agency of spiritual entities.

In addition to the space of the gallery, the exhibition is composed by materials such as:

video-inspection footages of oil, water, geothermal energy, and gas extraction wells

lunar rock fragment

granulated copper recovered from high-speed communication data cables

rock core samples derived from geotechnical surveys performed for works of urban mobility

dead worker's wristwatch with counterclockwise-functioning

fulgurite (tube-like rock formation caused by lightning discharge into the ground)

Despite the notion of artworks and the artistic field as being autonomous and positively charged, supposedly detached from, and solely representational of the collapsing world, art is a commodity³, and plays an equal role in the reproduction of the catastrophic social relations that control us⁴.

Daniel de Paula

Santos, Milton. (2006). *A Natureza do Espaço: Técnica e Tempo, Razão e Emoção*.
Postone, Moishe. (1993). *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*.
Posenenske, Charlotte. (1968). *Statements in Art International* 12, no. 5
Jappe, Anselm. (2003). *Les Aventures de la Marchandise – Pour une nouvelle critique de la valeur*.

As a final note, please find below brief fragments derived from an interview with sociologist Saskia Sassen, produced specifically for this circumstance, in which, amongst other issues, she addressed how materiality is a vehicle for power and invisible forces, and how, currently, the global financial system is capable of incessantly transforming the physical space that surrounds us into commodities.

One point of entry into a complex multifaceted system that has kept gaining power over the last 30 years is high finance – a mode that has nothing to do with traditional banking. Traditional banking, still the most common type of banking across the world, is basically a form of commerce. These, mostly modest banks, sell money, for a price. They could be selling potatoes for a price. Yet with high finance it all changes: it becomes complex, develops endless chains of instruments, all contributing to concentration of wealth at the top. This is radically different from the traditional commercial bank.

A way of opening up that window into a complex world is to focus on the capacity of this type of finance to extract value from even modest operations ... It does so via an admirably complex and effective innovation ... at the heart is the capacity to transform a whole range of basically modest, simple entities, into financial assets. That transformation actually involves some rather complex innovations – basically advanced algorithmic math ...

... it is not easy to understand, but once you do, it is both impressive and horrifying.

High finance is now after actual materialities that it can transform into instruments that are in high demand, such as, for example, asset-backed securities. The difference between high finance and regular commerce when it comes to the material, is that, for regular commerce, the concrete object is the desired object, while for high finance, the material gets transformed into a field of assets, and this serves to produce asset-backed securities, which is specifically what high level investors want now... they do not want derivatives... as I like to say, those are for the simple people, including me and you.

What we see with our good old eyes: a house, a truck, a bridge, all and more, can today function in two distinct domains: the material domain of the house, the truck, the bridge, and so on, and, in a second domain, that is invisible to our eyes, where via algorithmic mathematics you transform the house, the truck, the bridge etc., into a range of financial instruments that are then far removed from the asset that is based on that house, truck, and bridge... and, being so removed from the original material item, it can now be bought and sold as a financial instrument, many times a day. You are not burdened by, for example, the materiality of the truck, its condition, its size, or what makes it desirable ... it has been neutralized into a financial instrument that you can buy and sell several times.

Land, seen through such perspective is simultaneously two different things. There is land involved in a range of conditions, such as to grow materialities we need, such as food, or to extract oil, metals, etc., but also, in today's financial system, land, as simply land, can feed the making of asset-backed security (detached from the material), which becomes an instrument investors appreciate since derivatives have lost their attraction ...

... land is seen as a desirable asset to construct financial instruments.

Daniel de Paula (Brazilian, born in Boston, USA, 1987) - Lives and works between São Paulo & Rotterdam. A selection of recent solos exhibitions include: *estrutura insuperável*, Kunsthall Gent, Ghent (2019); *the conductive form of dominant flows*, Galeria Jaqueline Martins, São Paulo (2017); *objects of mobility, actions of permanence*, White Cube Gallery, São Paulo (2014). His works have also been featured in recent institutional shows including *Knife in the Flesh*, PAC, Milano (2018); *Avenida Paulista*, MASP, São Paulo (2017); *Metrópole: Experiência Paulistana*, Pinacoteca, São Paulo (2017). More recently he has been a resident artist and researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and at FLACC Workplace for Visual Arts in Genk. His work has been reviewed in magazines such as Artforum, Metropolis M, seLecT, among others.

Saskia Sassen (Dutch-American, born in The Hague, NL, 1947) is a Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and a member of its Committee of Global Thought. She is the author of several books including: *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014); *Globalization and its discontents. Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: New Press, 1998); *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). She has received many awards and honors, among them multiple doctor honoris causa, the Príncipe de Asturias Prize in Social Studies (2013) and the selection to the Royal Academy of Sciences of the Netherlands.