

Susanne Kriemann: Duskdust

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A Landscape Camera

Technology is most often talked about in terms of hotspots. The photographic culture in the age of wireless digital communications, social media and sharing is prescribed according to the possibilities of shareability. This is afforded by where you are. Location becomes primary; the hotspots of wi-fi, signal reach and broadband speed determine a geography of the shared image. The digital image circulates according to this imaginary temperature scale of digitality. It's an image of internet infrastructures in which anything that we see is almost always contextualized as something that might potentially be shared, sent, posted, uploaded and made visible in the networked sense.

There is however also the digital ecology of cold spots, of which engineers and researchers in disciplines such as industrial ecology are already aware. The cold spots of cities are those sites where technology has fallen out of use but still remains as material infrastructure – both as an aesthetic embodiment of modernity and the industrial era and as a possible site of excavation of materials of construction, whether that is copper, cement, glass or something else. These sites are often less in the visual frame, even if they resonate with the theme of 'bunker archaeology' (a term coined by Paul Virilio concerning his interest in old military infrastructures): they are remnants of a past era that still haunt our visual horizon both literally and metaphorically. These infrastructures once offered very definite thresholds as active parts of the (technological) world. Now, their functions have changed and they take on the forms of both monuments to a bygone industrial era and documents of what that era left behind. They seem to have grown cold, existing at best as abandoned sites of interest to the off-

beat tourist, but these sites also endure as markers of a specific geography of material arrangements: cement intended to bind building materials also binds their duration in time.

In some ways, *Duskdust* is a visual montage of cold spots that have paradoxically been exposed to the extreme power of the sun. Light enables vision to emerge and discover the photographic, but light is also emitted from the heat that blazes within cement furnaces and enables industrial production. Already in Susanne Kriemann's earlier work she has had an acute awareness of the material determinations of technological culture, including what we know as media – the photographic, the visual, the technical – and with such connotations that refuse the narrow focus on technology as restricted to the contemporary. Kriemann's work with natural history collections and minerals teased out natural processes of mediation inherent in radioactive material, where a radiographic trace functioned as an illustration of geology of media (or in short: media registers and measures natural phenomena, whether light or radioactive wavelengths). An interest in the vibrant activity of matter together with technical media materials such as film produced her artistic assays into the joint natural/media history.

The multitemporal contemporary in *Duskdust* puts forward an interesting set of promises as to where the site of the visual and its experience are born. *Duskdust* poses the questions: how do we see and participate in a landscape with a camera that doubles as part of the emergence of the photographic outside itself? How do minerals but also landscapes participate in the emergence of the visual, as co-producers, or agents? The photographic apparatus has a relation to the physical landscapes that themselves are made to turn into natural forms of visualization, an extended camera obscura.

Duskdust is situated in the specific landscape of the Furilden peninsula, where industrial legacies of limestone mining have fossilized into yet another cold spot. This post-industrial affect coexists with the stark beauty of the sparse Scandinavian landscape, part of which is now home to a

boutique hotel. What was once a site of hard industrial labour has its second life in the soft labour it now engenders.

Glass and cement persist; these materials are now produced in other places with cheaper production costs in Europe, Russia, or China, but remain present as visual markers. Modern(ism) recalls its original materials. Instead of only showing what is currently visible, the camera turns towards the area's historical conditions. The question posed by way of Kriemann's artistic methods is one of industrial, even media, archaeology: what lies in the landscape and the geography that has been turned into a contained branding line of industrial legacies with natural beauty? The distancing gaze of the touristic is turned upside down with the camera and the body of the artist becoming entangled in the existing landscape. It's the other story that one can tell about Furilden, one outside the realm of the passive observer. A land art of a landscape abandoned.

The mountain of lime stone rubble in Duskdust is rather a different sort of a mountain than in the history of the aesthetics that we recognize from romantic discourses of the sublime: this mountain, the industrial sites, and the residual materials don't sit comfortably in the distance, triggering awe. Instead, the camera is involved. An underground tunnel becomes part of the assemblage of the camera and its lens; the cement factory and old military observation sites participate in the bunker archaeology turned into a geological media assay executed by way of the image; not merely what is visible, but how that which is visible enables it to be seen. It's remarkable how the process of site-specific investigations in Gotland also becomes a meditation on the wider predications of what the image is, or can be: The existence of light as the fundamental variable in which images are practiced, the manipulation of vision, the sun, the artificial suns that fire up technical media, the denaturalization of what seems to be the most natural of all things—light, sun, energy. It is an ecology of the photographic. Kriemann's question "What material is erased when we consider our own sight?" is one that should not however be dealt with as a psychoanalytic question of trauma nor imaginary absence, but as the real conditions of what makes an image an image. The image is not a containment of the landscape as another visual spectacle designed to be a

product for the luxury market, but is itself contained in the material realities in which the sites themselves take up the work of photography: an extended camera obscura that invites the image to emerge against the geological sediments, the abandoned mining tunnels, in the dusk and in the dust. If the photograph is a sort of a spatialisation of time, consider also the mountain of rubble in *Duskdust* as a spatialisation, a condensed structuring of time. It is not merely an image in focus but one that is cemented in an awareness of the various materials sedimented into this little artificial mountain that tells stories of the residual times of the industrial production.

However, it is not a fantasy devoid of humans, even if such figures are pointedly absent from the images. *Duskdust* implies the political archaeology of labour. Its interest in such afterlives brings to mind further questions: What sort of work was implied in the old industrial factories that dealt with the metabolic rift; how does that transfer of energies sustains the luxury visual culture of aestheticized modernity still lingering in the post-industrial landscapes; how bunker archaeologies are not merely images of abandoned sites, but teeming with questions as to the ecologies of vision and labour that haunt the peninsula. These many questions are posed as essays by the extended camera-body that relate to the natural and artificial materials, to light and the metabolism of natural and artificial energies.

Duskdust sits at the threshold as an artistic investigation into what constitutes the outer, and what the inner. This idea could be seen as an echo of the British author J.G. Ballard, although his focus was always much more on the urban. However, the relation of the inner and outer is expressed in both as a constant back and forth zigzag. In Ballard's words: "I define Inner Space as an imaginary realm in which on the one hand the outer world of reality, and on the other the inner world of the mind meet and merge." Such questions of the interface and of thresholds are less about the mind and the imaginary, than about the material embodiments of the apparatus, the body of the artist, the sites of light and shadow. The camera imagines landscapes, while the landscape is the situation of the photographic already before its emergence as one specific consumer

technology. The interface and its thresholds are also about the geographies in which an afterlife of industrial labour exists. What if you would start to narrate this imagery with a specifically speculative, science fictional undertone? To start to ask questions such as: where did the people disappear? Were they evacuated? Did they abandon the site suddenly? What sort of a force drew them away from the site, replacing them with another sort of an affective scenario and economy? In so many ways, physical landscapes invite us to narrativise against the backdrop of industries of affect and answer by way of infrastructures and speculative questions. These sorts of speculations turn inner and outer into their opposites, but also the natural landscapes and the artificial media techniques of art and photography; the landscape itself starts to tell stories of what it registered, documented and passed on. The landscape itself is the apparatus of light, the mountain a sort of register of an alternative form of image transmission than one of digital hot spots. Instead it receives and reflects what the sun gives, or as Kriemann herself suggests, could be thought of as a gigantic receptor, a receiving surface made of lime stone rubble. Transmission, imprint, image.