



S#38 (Lamp Black Monochrome), 2018 (óleo sobre tela | 148x114 cm)



S#29 (Cobalt Blue Monochrome), 2018 (óleo sobre tela | 148x114 cm)

Hacking into Strata

What does the line of interstice in Sérgio Costa's painting series "Strata" think it is? Is the interstice just a geological necessary byproduct of the tension of movement and fixation and thus a plane of consistency? Can we construct strata (stratification de- and re-stratification) as a valid model not just for a geopictorial view but also a geo- attentional view derived from Costa's work? I don't think so. Strata articulate an >interstice modality< of a) territorializing as non-discursive (visible) and b) discursive (sayable), coding. Are the interstice lines of Sérgio Costa's Strata this empty infinite horror vacui of a search for a central chamber, the central onion peel? That means do we by contemplating strata fall into a void, a clueless "eternal pause" (Heiner Müller) or an earthless infinite ocean where the land has broken up behind us as in Nietzsche's infinity: Beware! Strata #1 is missing! No original painting, no original layer of the world can be presented in the strata doubles. In Sérgio Costa's >Strata< series we are not dealing with a collection of representative depictions or illustrations of scientific sedimentary rock samples, in which the principle of original horizontality holds. Instead, Costa's work shows how the de- stratifying assembling machine of stratification questions horizontality as a principle of composition and systematic tectonics (e.g. stratification of knowledge construction) not only of the image in itself but also of thinking in general as strata of orientation and its orientation of the non-stratified. Sérgio Costa in his painting series "Strata" from Strata#2(2008)-Strata#14 (2011) applies the following principles:

- [1] Costa stratifies by taking photos of stratified Calcium rock formations and sedimented stone layers at the Algarve region around Tavira
- [2] He de-stratifies the quality of the image by forcing the contrast to extremes of pure black areas and then marks the dark areas (I call this attentional contrast stratification that is also a diagrammatization process). This is achieved by photocopying processes of photos taken to push contrast levels
- [3] Creation of the First Map/grid de- stratifying and geometrization of the painting plane
- [4] Plane of painting (second map composed of two image strata. First working on the shadows and within a limited parameter of colour modulation of four colour qualities: only a) sepia, b) cobalt blue, c) raw umber brownish, d) titan white (that gains a higher opacity than zinc white).

4.1] The recent works Strata, however, shift these principles and aim specifically at a variation of the fourth principle of Strata by adding different monochromatic colour variations into the Strata series as in the examples S#29 (Cobalt Blue Monochrome); S#34 (Cold Grey Monochrome); S#36 (Cassel Earth Monochrome); S#38 (Lamp Black Monochrome). In a first phase of monochromatic strata spectrum differentiation (#28 to #32) (except #28 which is in under pictorial experimentation and observation) he started to work on the photographic recording of long stratification processes. In

these painting experiments, he composes through digital editing, resulting in a series of cracks, gaps and interstitial lines, which suggest a structure and its vertical implementation — starting with the monochromatic Strata (#16 and #17) and the dimensionality of perception experimentations in his anaglyphic strata paintings (#19-#21). Still, this time the opposite spatial principle lies at the core, not a strengthening of a 3-dimensional painting space perception, but a focus on a flat 2D surface ontology of a plane of immanence in which the importance given to registering the contrast and colour differences in terms of a more realistic approximation to an object of the physical world is highly reduced. The premise of the work would be a higher concentration on drawing and immanent planarity, allowing repeating exercises in describing a surface, the painting gestures suggest constellations of forms that stand out from backgrounds less than in the Strata before and the shift away from contrast rich photorealism aesthetics towards reflection of the image editing process but with means of canvas, paint and the gesture of tainting into one color and mood. This selection processes now proceed without the distraction of the use of a colour logic, as one colour is simply predominant and its fine differences are based on monochromatic adumbrations. There is, however, colour in this first set, not for characterizing perceptive structures but as a transforming element to blur outlines of less saturated contrasts to create a painted map with tenuous greys and even intense overflows of chromatic saturation.

On Remnant Drawings

Costa started with a roll of paper 10 meters by 1.6 meters, which he unrolls about 2 meters at a time in the conditions of the studio. Objects, cloths and papers are placed on the surface, covering it entirely and being removed after applying the black spray. The "cloud" of spray, very thin and diffuse, always ends up finding a path between the objects, to the surface of the paper, creating very subtle stains and indicative of this process of presence and removal. The Remnant Drawing series continues the works in the exhibition "Ground" (2015) - spray on paper. In the exhibition >Ground< (2015), Sérgio Costa revisits the still and remaining topic of the lived experience/the fall-out of the rest of lived bodies, corpses of what we were, a trace of cloud, of snow-like body-lines, the being a sexual body and its adumbrations of sexuality, though only atmospheric spray cloud of lines of scattered embodiment of grounding, a oxytocin-induced remedy attraction of a deserted ground in which we become leaving lines that properly desire a grounding onto an atmospheric body, always already a vapor and temporary decay and despite being remnant rests of lines, contours and shadows, never fully at rest. Any form for the un-formable that only spreads, cloud, sprayed haze, temporally rapidly decaying, aggregating image noise, to enable to be touched by the unknown, irresistible frequency of recurring motifs. Any futile attempt to force the cloud and stain into another intended form by diffusion would result in the immediate collapse of the entire oscillation, the interruption of our lifeline. These remnant lines that show open projective vectors, of enhanced conditions of meeting of self and other, in which no finite grounding is possible, no extracting of a concentrated notion of anything, nor the possibility of pushing the atmosphere of grounding into a single lived space is given, no show and



S#36 (Cassel Earth Monochrome), 2018 (óleo sobre tela | 200x162,5 cm)



S#34 (Cold Grey Monochrome), 2018 (óleo sobre tela | 200x162,5 cm)



Remnant drawings, 2019 | spray sobre papel | dimensões de cada desenho 70 x 50 cm

last call for a singular physiology take-off and landing, no possibility of forcing us onto a single central stratum or identity, nor horizon line of thought in sight of an individual body, but bodily nebulae, unable to recognize itself as a ground: in hacking the movement of the cloud outfall to the paper sheets, Costa reaches out for the atmospheric skin of the other, the other margin of a projective vector, that is suspended by the matter behavior of mixed air and paint an homeless-radiant fall-out on paper, a memory-dissolution machine of our continuous desire to arrive at a ground, a fundamental uncertainty, even a clarity of longing for a ground, though the observation and next lineage of truthful auto-operation, is infinitely suspended in the air: >Ground< under-, over-, and ungrounded Space outer space, corpse outer corpse, sex outer sex, groundlessness outer groundlessness... The premise of the Remnant Drawings are rests, relics of this desire for grounding, reactivated to act on a large format surface involving a body in the process. More incisive stains populated some sheets, others more tenuous, others almost imperceptible, fragile, incomplete, alive. We, remnants, unsold and unsellable small pieces of cloth, left to contemplate or to discard, after the rest of the cloth of the world has been sold.

On Hacking: the fragmentation of the image in 5x5cm squares

If you hack something, you might not only invade the privacy of a data system but as well enact unusual or improvised alterations to equipment or processes. Hacking can be a method to cut something with rough strokes or take it apart, hack it into pieces, barehanded or by the help of tools. Hacking restructures the technical and artistic use that has not been thought about while inventing a technical or artistic object, such as the spray clouds that the remnant drawings bare witness.

Often hacking implies some violence and ab-use as well as re-use of the part of something that is left when the other parts are gone independent if we work on an original idea, form or technology by using a sharp tool such as an axe or knife. In this sense, even the iconoclastic slob attacks with a knife on "Who's afraid of red, yellow and blue" can be seen as the diagrammatic introduction of a line of orientation after the total loss or destruction of what was there in the first place.

In Costa, the fragmentation of image that emerge from the leftover elements as rudimentary deviations on a path from myth to logos and back to uncanny zones of perception, attended in 5x5cm squares, remind us not only on the format of Portuguese tiles- just that here we are confronted with black, white and greyness, no tourist attraction but sedimented spray clouds dust that stays after the hordes of tourists went away in Lisbon at the dock. Costas 200x5cm that are re-composed possession-less things to 1-meter square scraps in Sérgio Costas 2020 works are based on discarded sheets, the rests of a paper session in a playground of colour contrast lines and cuts. They transmit a lingering dark disturbance: Pulverized, hacked, cut thought flour, rests, and light crumbs easy to blow off your hand. Dust that lies on the gleaming edge of great works. A small reflecting cloud rises, particles glistening darkly in the falling evening sun.

These remnant pieces of paper were repeatedly cut and at a certain moment stopped to be discarded. They were stripped of their halo, their obvious sublime and surprise effect. The transcendent aura has gone for good. Something of a map of ghost towns is installed in these works, such as the area of Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster or Chernobyl, where no one is anywhere near who could be fascinated with the novelty occupied by technical new artefacts and art techniques or the sudden electronic eruption of public attention: the artwork has disappeared, only leftover recursive fragmentation of

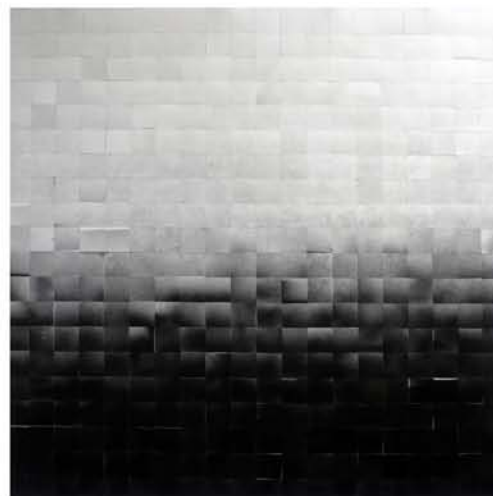
the paper sheets that gain a new sublime in what rests us, an uncanny notion of undefined but highly ordered sprayed greyness between black and white grey mathematized zones of outside of time, hoarded in time-banks and rematerialized as if being digital dust in which no sun shines nor a day breaks or a new world goes under, or even originates. Hacking into what rests after the image is hacked, until we are defined as hackable beings, until this hacking process halts and stops to be an image or at least ceases to be of the original and habitual interest when the paper is already so small that a pre-programmed suggestion of the intentionality of a specific indication, mark or gesture, fades.

Sérgio Costa created a 5x5cm square module paper hacking machine. Grouped according to a shade of grey, sometimes as dark way beyond the Suprematist "Zero of Form" in Malevich's black square, and its dark history of what it was that it overpainted with black taint. A joke? A reference to something higher or much lower, the sublime of trash? Sometimes as light enters an image, as sedimentation and erosion of material residuals crack open fissures and unintended craters and lines of flight appear in Earth Works in the tradition of Smithson appear, we question ourselves and how do we observe how do we approach an image, how we have to transport the image out of its artistic frame, how to escape the Academy or the Society of Fine Arts, and its stratification of how to produce art works?

As the grounding in the white of the paper becomes a hacking machine it starts to only contain information of particular value about aesthetic qualities, a play of greyscale, bluescales in a hinge of an almost not even noticeable game of colour bifurcations, rather sedimentations. The politics of reassembling these smaller fragments, not to replace any original, but through the creation of an informational collection grouped from the different shades of grey reminds on the resolution of tiny pixels that re-compose a new image, entering statistical orders and ordered networks of darker to lighter and from left to right. What however these squares lack is the dimension of big-data structures of the many and they would in this sense only gain an image *sujeit* in the moment of sufficient distance and highest resolution. But Costas works is a low-resolution work on the human perceptual scale. The inherent lack of distance and completeness of these pre-images or informational inceptions of an image are by no means a defect but their advantage, as they make us aware that we are part of these squares, grey and shadowy, ordained by orientations such as greyscales or left to right. Strange squares, zones of gaps perception, we observers lie -the more we watch, the more at the centre of the 200x5cm2 work. We, humans, are these hackable squares re-composable, reusable, the remnants after an image fall-out, we are the given in the square the image after the image data companies and statistical Markov chains clear up their overcrowded clouds after the shortcuts are installed and the politics fixed, we the spray, the noise, we the fall-out of digital dust without dawn, all grey projected light, no darkness of a slow cinema, no time image: Just a click and finger movement away and a spray of electronic breeze, and the algorithmic Deus ex Maquina, the generated image, the episodic line appears as a body shadow, a deviation by the material that resists the direct information of colour, then we are hacked in our perception, then re-composed in our reflection and might be partitioned in our life into 5cmx5cm squares of Strata and their remnant detection that rests upon us.

Alexander Gerner

Lisboa, janeiro de 2019



200x5cm2, 2019 | spray sobre papel, colagem | 100x100cm



200x5cm2, 2019 | spray sobre papel, colagem | 100x100cm