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Art History

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WITH ALL KINDS OF DELAYS

DANIEL MALONE

What had seemed to me to be light, even unstable, was not gelatine after all. It was heavy, much denser than I thought. Visually though, light got caught in the colour of the thing – that aqua-green tinge that glass has. The trace of colour only noticeable on a pane's edge, or when the glass is compressed and made dense – as here, in brick rather than sheet form. What was a window – transparent, negligible – acquires a presence and takes on a weight of its own.

This work, *With All Kinds of Delays*, drew me in by this surface effect alone. The light enters before struggling to find its way out, the aqua-green produced as a sort of residue, a by-product of energy spent in the struggle. In the depths of this light trap, the density becomes such that I can no longer see through the work as an invisible pane, or someone else's lens. It becomes opaque with its own history – a chain of lingering references, copies, and imprints. And now, at this point of intersection between the glass brick and myself, these traces reflect and refract backwards, playing on the depths of my own memory.

The brick, as I encounter it now, is part of one of the Adam Art Gallery's 2012 shows, Peripheral Relations. And this is how the work seems to manoeuvre itself, setting up complex peripheral relations (perhaps even ghost relations) centered around this modest mass of glass. Moving backwards, moving forwards, this brick has momentum in both directions. Its history wants to continue to unravel both ways, shifting from person to person, from continent to small island nation. It has a temporal weight of its own, which intersects physically with my own trajectory for only brief moments – the two hours I spend in the gallery each Thursday, for the duration of the show. For this exhibition the brick has been retrieved from the university's art store, where it probably has been since its fabrication, following the dismantling of the Adam Art Gallery's 2009, The Future is Unwritten. The brick's inclusion here, in 2012, is therefore a reconstruction of sorts – and this is the way the glass brick operates – deconstructing, reconstructing, dismantling, re-mantling.

I don't know where to start pulling on this thread of peripheral relations – perhaps we should grab hold at 2002. This is the year that the artist (then, and now again(?) called) Daniel Malone spent six months in Beijing. An unconscious, photographic preoccupation with bricks resulted in a pile-up of art history, references re-enacted through the subject matter of the Chinese brick. This realisation struck Malone as he traversed back through his photographs, and back through Atget, Duchamp, Matisse, Judd, LeWitt. The delayed awareness of his own referential act only accentuated the momentum of his realisation. His trip was also marked by recurring encounters with a particular Chinese character, enclosed in a circle. What he initially took as the work of a lone (and prolific) tagger turned out instead to be a sign of intention – of future plans. Malone copied down the character, and found its translation – 'tear down', 'demolish', 'dismantle'. Here, in its circle, it indicated buildings which were to be knocked down so that another could be reconstructed in its place.

Shifting ourselves back – to New Zealand, to Victoria University, to the Adam Art Gallery. Shifting ourselves forward – to 2004. The brick did not yet exist in material form, but was beginning its gestation in *Welcome to the bricks*. At this time, Malone presented a series of ceramic bricks, each impressed with that Chinese character he had seen emblazoned in so many locations around Beijing. Malone also proposed a performative work, a narrated slideshow of his Beijing photographs, beginning with the throwing of one of these ceramic bricks through the gallery window. As the slideshow progressed, the window would be replaced behind him. While the slideshow took place, the act of destruction (and reconstruction) was deferred.

It was not until 2009, in *The Future is Unwritten*, that the brick throwing act took place (*Bricks break dialectics* 2009). At the exhibition opening the deed was done, the culmination of five years of delay. Peripheral to this act was the gallery's preceding exhibition, *Billy Apple New York 1969-1973*. This exhibition had featured the re-enactment of a 1971 'window cleaning' act by Apple, accompanied by the words 'the inside dirt is separated from the outside dirt by 6mm'. Here in 2012, I learn that Malone's desire was for *With All Kinds of Delays* to be attributed to Billy Apple (Malone having changed his name to Billy Apple in 1996 – in turn referencing Apple's own 1962 shift in identity from Barrie Bates to Billy Apple). The denial of this desire joined the accumulating detritus of deferrals and delays that continue to ghost the glass brick.

It was not until 2009 that I visited China. I recall similar cycles of destruction and reconstruction, and the strange tension between momentum and resistance, produced by these patterns of 'progress'. My grandfather's village – once rural, once peripheral – occupies its place in the world like a memory that is not my own. It is a small space glacially yielding to the pace of the urban change of the city, in which it is now embedded. These spaces and moments of delay and deferral become a sort of lineage which I lay claim to in absentia. They are unstable memories – references, copies, and imprints of a ghost identity.

In the act of throwing the brick through the window, 6mm became zero. It was not until after another period of delay that the broken glass was cleaned up, zero reformed into the dimensions of the glass brick. It is easy to forget that this brick, my brick of 2012, is not really a brick. It is an indexical copy, an imprint of the ceramic brick that was thrown through the window. Fabricated from the swept up fragments of window glass, it is a reconstruction. The material by-product of the act of destruction is used to construct a document of the act. The act, and the trace of the ceramic brick are fused together in one object which now substitutes the act itself. The glass brick can only hint at these points plotted in its chain of substitutions and referrals. Placed in the location where the ceramic brick landed in 2004, this glass brick of 2012 is a placeholder, memory's marker.

As a substitute, the glass brick is also a reminder of absent fragments. The video documentation of the brick throwing has not been shown here. Where is it? And what was the fate of the ceramic brick, whose place is now occupied? The glass brick represents a long chain of shifts, only some of them material. These shifts are this brick's lineage, a chain of references which extends far beyond Peripheral Relations. The brick balances between solidity and fluidity, material and memory. *With All Kinds of Delays* is both present and absent, neither here nor there, neither that nor this. Its memory may or may not be my memory, but in terms of its materiality there is nothing unstable about it.

The glass brick has an opacity now, it hides its histories and denies linearity in its connections. It is a compression of fragments, traces which are material and immaterial, condensed into one mass. This account of this work, similarly lacks linear logic. Fragments and traces are compressed, fused together by missed encounters, chance encounters and peripheral relations. It is a reconstruction of its own, a mingling of my memory of the work with the history of the brick before it drifted into my periphery. I am writing after the close of Peripheral Relations, and therefore months after my first encounter with the work. My intersection with the glass brick is no longer physical, so this writing becomes perhaps another act of deferral. My recall of it here is a re-enactment of its impenetrable luminosity, as it unravels in my own memory. From this point I am written in one direction, while the future of the brick writes itself in another.

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