

Stalling

Notes on the Work of Bianca Hester

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Published in the catalogue to Bianca Hester's project *Please leave these windows open overnight to enable the fans to draw in cool air during the early hours of the morning*. Helen MacPerson Smith Commission, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), 2010.

Stall.

Stalling.

And, to stall?

Not merely to install, but stalling as an event, a stall, that combines both place and activity. Delaying while acting, acting while delaying, delimiting areas of activity, housing the elements that are constitutive of the event itself. Stalling, therefore as a form of continuity. Stalling as the creating of spaces, stalls – further stalling, furthering stalling – and therefore creation as the continuity of activity. Stalling as the forestalling of ends. Stalling exists therefore as continuity, as the opening, as the disclosing that takes place within. Stalling as an interruption that does not abandon the need and possibility for direction. (1)

Stalling 1

On entering the exhibition, to the right, a sign is attached to the wall. A sign forming part of the exhibition without, of course, forming or determining in advance, the exhibition as a whole. The sign makes a simple declaration: **ACTIONS WILL OCCUR INTERMITTENTLY**. The words are

capitalized. There can be no sense of doubt. Within the space created by the exhibition, and here, at ACCA, the space, the stall, is created rather than filled, there will be other events, 'actions' that while forming part of the exhibition only ever occur 'intermittently'. The content of the sign is twofold. In the first instance it announces that there will be further occurrences which while having a strictly delimited existence – occurring only on one day or only at one time during the day, for example, – nonetheless form an integral part of the exhibition. They have been scripted and thus participate in the exhibition's own rigorous logic. Once it is possible to attribute a logic to the exhibition, then the exhibition as a whole poses questions of relationality (questions that include the constitution of the exhibition as the work of art and thus the presence of work as an activity rather than the term 'work' designating already completed objects.) The presence of a script and thus of an ordered logic underwrites the exhibition as a whole. The challenge is the recovery, thus the continual covering, of that script. To recover a script is to insist that there is an organizational logic that informs the exhibition. However, and this is to note the second element of the sign's content, the script does not yield a description. To invoke a script, as has been suggested, is to evoke complex modes of relationality.

The relation between the constitutive elements would be one question that is posed by this exhibition. Equally as demanding would be the set of questions raised by the relation between the components constructing those elements. In other words, the traditional post-Duchampian question of the object, while retained, is mediated further by the question of relationality. These questions endure as a prerequisite to any understanding of what is taking place. Indeed, while it is impossible to forego the use of the word *object*, it should not be thought that objects are simply given. What needs to be argued is that what is actually present are sets of relations within and between what might more prosaically be understood as objects. Each element therefore is a set of relations that are formed and informed by other sets of relations (objects). Objects exist. They are internally and externally relational. The sign containing the words, **ACTIONS WILL OCCUR INTERMITTENTLY**, is attached to the wall. The blue tape that positions it cannot be disassociated from the

presence of the 'same' blue within other sets of relations. Complex modes of relationality pertain. (A return will be made to the presence of blue; a presence that cannot be assumed to exist, thus forming and informing the work, other than in the complex of relations in which it is located.)

Having read the sign a sense of expectation is introduced. Within the measured time that delimits the viewing of any exhibition what attends is the possibility of actions that can only 'occur intermittently'. In other words, within the time of viewing, within the process of tracing, noting, sensing, observing, etc., the complex interplay of elements and objects, unannounced though nonetheless still scripted is the attendant possibility of a form of interruption that is equally that which is already incorporated. What is there becomes, as a consequence, an awaiting stall. These actions are forms of immaterial presence - actions to be realized are defined by a yet to be realized potentiality - becoming material. Another form of relation is established.

Stalling 2

The sign is read. A body will be standing before a wall in order to read the sign. Walls are a fundamental part of the exhibition. In the first instance the wall announces the presence of a space created by the architecture of the building. The intersection of the building's internal walls and the floor creates a line, a line that would have disclosed the place of activity. It is essential to note that these lines 'would have disclosed it', since inherent to the exhibition is a strategy that while noting that line defers it. The process of noting and deferring occurs by the presence of an ordered line of grey concrete blocks - three blocks in height - that initially runs along side the internal wall and then in beginning to differentiate itself then serves to create another line. There is a moment of separation and thus the introduction of a line of difference. In that moment of separation, the introduction of spacing, the blocks establish a distance from the wall. That distance is integral to the creation of the space *as* the exhibition. As the line of blocks begins to separate what had been possible, namely to sit on the blocks and lean against the wall, is no longer possible. A body that could have lent now has to perch. A different sense of sitting is introduced. The

shift is minor and yet fundamentally important. Leaning against the wall, the wall is transformed and takes on a double quality. In this first instance it is no more than a literal prop. Holding the body and other elements of the exhibition that also lean against it. Here art's work works to subordinate the wall, thus the building's architecture, to its own project. As the other line emerges, as the blocks begin to part from the line created by the relationship between wall and floor, not only is the body necessarily repositioned the wall is reintroduced. This is the second aspect, for now there is a further sense in which the wall is part of the work rather than there housing it.

Towards the end of the exhibition, an end that is, of course, equally a beginning there is another wall. Constructed of cement blocks it cuts the space creating spaces thus further stalls. Walls recall each other. This wall has, at the very least, a doubled presence. It spaces. As such it cannot be disassociated from a more generalized understanding of what can be called the wall-effect; i.e. space creation. That wall-effect takes place in relation to the body. Equally, however, the wall cannot be differentiated from its material qualities. These qualities become the site of relationality. The wall is concrete, equally the wall is grey, it is the site of production; both in terms of the concrete blocks having been produced and the wall itself as having been built and thus produced. It should be added that a concern with production and thus an eschewing of the elemental is a fundamental motif within the exhibition. Even the large pile of earth that is so central to the work has to be understood as a recontextualization of that which has been produced. Earth is the result of specific and identifiable activities. Earth has its own rigorous logic of production. There is however another quality of the wall, namely abstraction. From the chains that are piled on the floor, to the cords that hang from the ceiling, what continues to insist is the presence of objects whose force lies in their material presence (a presence that allows for both external as well as internal relations). However, force is a quality of objects. When the objects are defined by sets of relations rather than a concern with content, then the work of force is by definition abstract.

Stalling 3

With any art work, even with the complex modes of presence that define and delimit installed space, it would be possible to identify its constitutive elements. And yet, here the question of constitution and thus what would count as a discrete object comes to be reposed as the work's own activity. Work is activity. Rather than being simply abandoned – as though material presence eschewed questions of the object – such questions have to be rethought in a significantly different way. The blue of the tape that secures the sign to the wall is repeated. Literally. It is there forming a line. Fixed to the wall, approximately 2.5 metres above the ground, it runs almost the entire length on one side of the space. Various objects contain elements that have the same blue colour. A metal rod – blue – is attached, at one point, to the blocks. A blue plastic tub contains soil and weeds. A series of blue metal rods are joined together to construct a unit that, amongst other things supports a projector that casts images on to the wall. This act of projection has the dual function of allowing for a further incorporation of the wall into the project while at the same time incorporating the project's documentation as part the project itself. The wall is, in part reworked as a stall; the wall stalling images. There is a blue metal hoop placed on the blocks and which leans on the wall. A large rock is placed on a blue mat. The blue works both to individuate and establish relations. It is always both. Indeed, once art works beyond the retained necessity of the named object, a necessity that will always allow the object to have been retained, thus installed without stalling, through the reiteration of its being named, then identification and relationality become more complex. Art work cannot be just described. Work is an activity.

While it remains possible to establish relations by noting the reiterated presence of blue, it would also be possible to construct a set of connections thus affirming the role of relationality within the overall work by starting with concrete, or wood, or surfaces. (Other possibilities remain.) At each moment not only are relations between elements constructed elements (objects) are themselves individuated as any one object (element) will always have been more than the reiterated presence of one quality.

Stalling 4

There is a generalized cartographical desire which is in part explicable in terms of the confluence of information and mastery. The general cartographical impulse informs as much the desire to map as it does the desire to list. However, it is a desire that is too easily satisfied. Satisfaction might occur with the production of a plan. Such a response to that desire is inherently unsatisfactory. The desire would be maintained. The plan does not provide an end. Within one specific understanding the contents of a map or a list are determined in advance by the already present status of delimited and named discrete objects. However, there are another modes of mapping. Mapping as a form of discovery and thus as the charting of movement in relation to the unnamed. While such a sense of mapping allows for naming and the identification of discrete objects they are only ever after effects. They are produced by movement. What is of interest however, within this conception of mapping is the presence of a sense of movement that is potentially endless. While the list and a certain conception of the cartographical desire – a desire that will be always thwarted – takes as its end states of completion and modes of finality, what cannot be precluded from such a set up are other movements and therefore different, potentially continually different, attempts to trace relations and thus identify objects.

Mapping this exhibition would be just such an undertaking. Internal relations, external relations, the movement of the body through and within the stalls the exhibition creates, allowing the body to stall at a certain moment is to open it up to other possibilities and modes of relationality, which resist mapping while allowing for it. Mapping must remain endlessly incomplete; its possibility being the necessity of its stalling. There is after all a relentless logic at work here. However, it is not a logic of complete determination. On the contrary it is a logic in which ‘actions will occur intermittently’. All such actions will continue to allow for other stalls.

1. I want to thank Dr Terri Bird for taking the time to discuss Bianca Hester's exhibition with me. My own ideas remain profoundly indebted to that conversation.