

Eight notes towards Aesthetic error.

1.

Kel Glaister asserts, in the publicity material for the exhibition *Aesthetic error*, that the work entails: 'The ruins of a set of constellations of objects in a room and just outside the room.' I, on the other hand, am well and truly outside the room. I am privy instead to Glaister's designs and diagrams, the general configurations of these objects, but not to any immediate encounter with the objects themselves. A vast distance separates me from *Aesthetic error*. I will have to negotiate it at this distance, or as a distant possibility. I can only speak in square brackets, you could say. Imagine these pages, then, as enveloped in a large square bracket: me speaking in a muted tone, starting abruptly and then trailing off, as your mind wanders between the components of Glaister's exhibition. I cannot say what exactly you should find in *Aesthetic error*, but only speculate about what may or may not have been realised there.

2.

Enough with the caveat. In fact I have seen some of the components of this show, and what's more have some firsthand knowledge of Glaister's methods. *Aesthetic error* (Candlestick and buttonhole) greets me from across the seas via the medium that is YouTube. The figure is already moving when I come to it, a dark silhouette swimming in murky shadows against a white dawn sky. Her transport across the railing is arduous, enigmatic. The protagonist appears to have a candle in her mouth. Billows of breath waft around her in the cold air as she pauses to change her grip. This is no doubt some sort of awkward choreography. More than simply a routine, it suggests a graph of some kind; a writing in coded gestural form. The lit end of the candle flashes out at us as with each heavy inhalation, becoming obscured now and then as she twists around the apparatus. It is a cipher (could such a technique have been employed between cold-war spies?). In shreds of darkness Glaister's protagonist embarks in a strange speculative confrontation between body and railing, muscles and gravity, darkness and light.

3.

This sense of choreography could be extended to the other assemblages that make up *Aesthetic error*. Indeed all of these sculptural works involve some sort of orchestrated encounter between various objects, and furthermore between objects, processes and words. Glaister's constructions seem like aesthetic or semantic systems. But on the other hand, they do not entail a simple exchange, or the transfer of a piece of information. In each of these works a certain preordained action is 'performed,' but these performances don't simply make some content manifest; they are not simply at ease with the suggestions offered by their titles. Instead these performances twist, turn, and ruminate upon the possibility of a message. They are posed between the generation of meaning through some material exchange, and meaning's own frustration, obscuration or contamination within this process.

4.

Aesthetic error (Is to as is to) invokes most clearly the condition of uncertainty that finds a variety of different expressions in *Aesthetic error*. As one who has not viewed said exhibition I have only a general conception of what will happen when photo-sensitive paper is left exposed behind a piece of security glass. *Aesthetic error* (The earth is flat and hollow), in which a basketball will find itself wedged between a brick and a stanley knife, involves a similar contingency. Presumably Glaister has tested these experiments before the fact, and certainly the installation constitutes a 'controlled situation.' But the haphazard attributes of these sculptures point to the more general examination of contingency in Glaister's process. There is always the diagram, the idea, and then its precarious realisation. This is evident everywhere, from the dilettantish acrobatics of *Candlestick*, to the seemingly formalist intervention *Aesthetic error* (The rope doesn't hang). Contingence (touching, connection, affinity) and Contingency (circumstance, uncertainty), might be a subtitle one could append to the cryptic *Is to as is to*, or, more drastically, to *Aesthetic error* itself.

5.

'Touching' is consistently invoked across this group of works. The objects and materials brought together in these sculptural moments do not simply abut each other; they touch and are touched. Even in the dry descriptions of these works I can sense the pressure exerted between materials, the shaping through which they are made to intersect. *Aesthetic error* (Push press) announces this in tautological style. *Aesthetic error* (In advance of a broken arm) reproduces a part of the apparatus of touching, reconstructing an affinity of components and their possible dislocation. The work is constructed in advance of its own degradation, but its possible degradation (the melting of the radius) is essential to the 'making' of the work. (Thus we can begin to see that the execution of each of these works is, on one level, the un-making of the diagram.) It touches on Marcel Duchamp's readymade snow-shovel of the same title (*In advance of a broken arm*, 1915) in several ways. The cast arm leans against the wall of the gallery, returning to the place from which Duchamp had to remove his shovel for it to become an artwork (Duchamp originally hung the work from the ceiling in his studio). There is also a more perplexing material association between the snow that Duchamp's artwork was never supposed to bear, and the melting radius that will render the arm similarly ineffective to perform such a task.

6.

Duchamp: 'ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE "READYMADE" IS ITS LACK OF UNIQUENESS... THE REPLICA OF A "READYMADE" DELIVERING THE SAME MESSAGE; IN FACT NEARLY EVERY ONE OF THE "READYMADES" EXISTING TODAY IS NOT AN ORIGINAL IN THE CONVENTIONAL SENSE.'¹ For some reason I imagined for a long time that the replicas of the readymades were casts of the original objects. Instead, they are re-enactments in which either Duchamp or another authorised person acquires a very similar object, and then applies the same procedures to it to create a near exact copy of the 'original' work. Glaister's Push press on the other hand is more closely connected to the theme of my misapprehension: it enacts a standoff between the readymade and its representation. Despite the indexical relationship between the weight plate and its gelatinous cast, the significance of their differing materialities becomes evident when they are made to work against each other in this context. In one sense it seems like a clash between the artwork (as a phantasy or fabrication pertaining to a subject) and the real world. But in correspondance with Duchamp's demonstration that an everyday object can be redeployed in the art context with an invigorated symbolic value, Glaister's representation has the potential to redeem itself in spite of its seemingly 'secondary' status. It is a type of translation, but this process is not simply one of derivation, it reinvents the object and its significance in this movement.

7.

Along these lines Glaister's The rope doesn't hang appears to make a wink back towards Bruce Nauman's film Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube (1969). Like Nauman's various provocations of what is sometimes called 'post-minimalism,' the seeming neutrality of this work's form is thrown out of kilter by the paradoxical interference of its title. In all of Glaister's simple juxtapositions a strange logic is made apparent: somehow their stripped back simplicity magnifies allegorical potential, as though the movement toward the simplest material exercise yields a corresponding desire to overcode within the realm of the symbolic. Nauman's performance with the large phallic tube invokes symbolic associations, but then slowly wears them away. He exhausts connotation as he exhausts himself (Nauman's routine going on for over sixty minutes). Glaister's aesthetic systems, or choreographies, similarly extend the possibility of allegorical redemption precisely to ensnare us in its moment of incongruity. In the step towards transcendence we are pulled back by a disjunction between words and things. The rope doesn't hang: the ruin of representation meets the afterlife of minimalism. The devious potential of form is that it can so easily empty itself out, open itself onto another set of investments.

8.

It is true that the individual works that make up Aesthetic Error belong to a set that is the show, and in turn to a larger set that is the artist's oeuvre. However, there is no reason to presume that these things are simply reducible to some unified explanation – in fact the foiling of any such cohesion appears to be a central stake. We as viewers, both internal and external, are instead destined to circulate between the components of this exhibition, knowing that any movement towards resolution is provisional, and no doubt somewhere or other already coming undone. Aesthetic error opens the possibility of an infinite and irresolvable discourse between the protagonists of artist, artwork and viewer.² Here, there, and now we are implicated within the making and remaking of Aesthetic error.

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1 Marcel Duchamp, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 142.

2 See Glaister's *In Camera: a closet drama for the gallery* (2011).