Espace Sculpture

Becoming Imperceptible: Robin Peck's "Zones of Indiscernibility"

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Number 77, Fall 2006

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/8858ac

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Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (print)
1923-2551 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Lebredt, G. (2006). Becoming Imperceptible: Robin Peck's "Zones of Indiscernibility". *Espace Sculpture*, (77), 43–43.

Becoming Imperceptible: **Robin Peck's** "Zones of Indiscernibility"

Gordon LEBREDT

In keeping with the redeployment of what the gallery press-release referred to as his "minimalist vocabulary," I felt it necessary to stage my commentary as if it occurred in situ and between at least two interlocutors: an on-site engagement, then, in the manner perhaps, of Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. I also wanted to displace the arguments that such work usually elicits, purposefully moving it away from, on the one hand, the purely conceptual (the "dematerialised" or ideal object) and, on the other, phenomenology's so-called "thing itself." Thus, I've attempted to locate the work in some sort of middle ground, a milieu that supports objects whose appearing bears comparison with Husserl's notion of a vague or anexact–yet rigorous–morphology.

Robin PECK , *Shallow*. Detail. Each stack 121.92 X 243.84 X 1.43 cm (48 X 96 X 9/16 inches). Commercially available clear acrylic sheets. Exhibition venue: Diaz Contemporary, Toronto, May 4–June 10, 2006. Photo: courtesy of Diaz Contemporary.

—Where do we start?
—Strategically speaking, maybe in the middle of things.
—But don't we have to start off from what we have, the forms, the arrangements that are now before us: two shallow, more or less dimensionally equivalent stacks of clear, four-by-eight plexi sheet stock.
—Yes, it's quite clear: two stratified planes occupying much of the floor of Diaz Contemporary's small supplementary display space. Aligned along the major axis of the space the two planes or plans (I keep wanting to think of them as schema, a couple of diagrams), they are separated by an interval, a spacing that appears to be equal to the length of a standard sheet. About eight feet by my estimate.
—A missing, phantom sheet or stack perhaps?
—Indeed, the central void is emblematic of what, in compelling vision to work overtime in a reduced but "total" field, works, strangely enough, to dematerialise the entire setup. It's as if these mirrors, these wafer-thin reflecting pools–if you will allow me these few analogies–are becoming, along with the room itself, spectral. And, I should add, that, over the course of the day, the play of light streaming in from the overhead clerestory can contribute immeasurably to the affect, so much so that one must include the weather conditions outside in any proper accounting.
—True, even the three light fixtures, employed more for fill than anything else, seem rather redundant insofar as the issue of clarity is concerned. They do nothing to offset this almost imperceptible drain on one's ability to discriminate.
—Here, redundancy is an issue because it is, for the most part, complicit with clarity, and it's precisely clarity that is in retreat. At any one moment, things appear to be losing their determinacy, to be devolving in light of what we might want to call "intensive affects."
—So, in effect, you're saying that these forms, this setup is in the process of being further reduced, to the point where we should be talking of something approaching the formless, something without form or measure?
—No, not at all. It's not simply a question of form or lack of form, just as it's not a question of the presence or nonprescence of this or that subject, a being like you or I who thinks the look resides in such a subject. Rather, irrespective of the material constraints, of the specificity of the emplacement and its temporality, the *eyes* must also acknowledge another plane, another stratum.
—A concealed or secret plane?
—No, nothing of the kind. As I see it, there's nothing to be revealed, nothing to be sublimated or elevated to some higher, more profound or transcendent level. We're stuck with what we have been given, a certain material *mise en scène*. And that's just how any reduction would have us understand it, whether it be, on the one hand, simply a pragmatic list of materials, a set of numerical coordinates or, on the other hand, something comprehended, something experienced by intuitions alone. Now Peck seems to have gone out of his way in order that his programme, his organizing principle, such as it is, is transparent: the sheets are clear and accessible, and, if that's not enough, we can always confirm our findings by consulting the brochure available at the front desk. So it's not a question of working one's way back to some sort of principle, to a set of fundamental parameters that govern the arrangement.
—In other words, by revealing everything, Peck precludes the necessity for interpretation, for the development of a narrative line, at least one based on analogy–for example: in a fashion whereby each arrangement will have already been read off as representing or resembling a lagoon, a pool, a mirror and so forth.
—Yes, that's no doubt part of his strategy. But such an approach doesn't account for what in the work incessantly labours to undo its resolute fixedness, its specificity, its adherence to one place, one time. Part of the problem, I think, lies with a description, a schema that has recourse only to a certain dimensionality. Peck's planes appear, at first glance, to be homogenous. Only on closer inspection do we see that they are composed of different layers or stratum. As forms, as objects, the stacks aren't in fact internally consistent or self-identical even at the level of their individual components. Each sheet is not *in itself* identical to itself. Which amounts to saying that the borders that define each sheet are themselves divisible, that is, permeable, open to deformation, to transmogrification. I may be stretching things a bit, but once immersed in Peck's scene, in the milieu that it gathers and, to some extent, incorporates, I tend to lose sight of its spatio-temporal coordinates, the ones that can only confirm the manufacture's metric specifications: so many feet, so many inches. I lose all sense of scale, imagining that the coordinates of each sheet have expanded to such an extent that one is now dealing with a collection of immense tectonic plates where one inch might just as well be one mile. And each is now better thought of as composing a differential, a body having a mass, a size, but also a speed and, it follows, a direction. A question, then, of speed–of *différance*–rather than space and time, of force rather than form.
—An intensive and seismic molecular creep.
—Exactly. It's as if things are moving in place, are already in excess of their place or placement.
—Warp speed for an extremely slow s-p-a-t-i-a-l-i-t-y.
—Perhaps. And, contrary to what common sense would have us believe, Peck may be about to outstrip his own time. Which begs the question: Is it possible to go faster than one's own time? What would happen if one were to exceed, as Blanchot would have it, the time barrier?
—Absolute catastrophe, a catastrophe to end all catastrophes. ←

Robin Peck, *Shallow*
Diaz Contemporary, Toronto
May 4 – June 10, 2006

Gordon LEBREDT is an artist and writer living in Toronto. Past exhibitions have included a recent survey of works from the 1970s at Gallery One One One, School of Art, The University of Manitoba (view online at <umanitoba.ca/schools/art/galleryoneoneone/lebredt>) and *Ten points for YYZ–now | 1989–2004* at YYZ Artist's Outlet, Toronto. Recent writings include "Stan Douglas: Living the Drive" (2001) and "Janice Gurney: A Presentation to Come" (2003), both for *Parachute*, 103 and 109 respectively.