





An abstract sculpture composed of four polished, cylindrical metal tubes and a rectangular metal plate. The tubes are arranged in a dynamic, overlapping fashion, with one tube lying horizontally in the foreground, another angled upwards to the left, a third angled upwards to the right, and a fourth positioned behind the others. The rectangular plate is placed horizontally, partially supporting the tubes. The entire piece is set against a neutral, light-colored background, with soft lighting creating highlights and shadows that emphasize the metallic texture and geometric forms.

TEMPERATURE

27 February - 26 March 2010

SASA
GALLERY

Temperature

Artists: Anton Hart & George Popperwell

There is a calorific register to tactfulness – the warmth of touch, the cool of respectful distance. There is a touch that touches without touching, that skims or grazes flesh; that touches on an idea by declension, without articulation, with a light firmness of touch. There is then the warmth of a touch; its dimension of care that also carries an affective temporality. It calms and stills or slows time down, gives room and space enough to breathe. It affords and makes possible. Touch can close time down, rush and compact it so that there is no time left for care. Or else it can dilate time, making of it an open framework in which duration is not driven but stretched and amplified. Here touch and tact conjoin aesthetic and ethical registers. Tactility opens touch to tact, and tact is nothing other than a disposition to the limit, to the other whose presence mobilises the limit into fluxion, fluctuation and unbearable excess: that is, into heat. Vacillation and becalming. As such, tact is the proper relation to and condition of the in-between – the midst and milieu that constitute every site and every context of thought, encounter and production. Tact does not adhere to codes but unsettles them through deviant migratory practices that unclench and activate difference: between painting and architecture; between sculpture and music; between littoral rainforest and arid desert ecosystems; between Heidegger and Irigaray; between brutal concrete materiality and evanescent, inarticulate (and unarticulatable) witness.

Modernity marks a loss of tact; the loss of an entire mythology and ritual of touch. Or else it marks the interminable project of a recovery of tact, in all of its awkward, tentative stumbling and groping tactlessness. Agamben says as much in his work on gesture, and on cinema as the preeminent site where Modernity confronts and works through the realisation that the sphere of gesture is both irremediably lost to it and the only site proper to its own becoming. Strangely, tact is entirely premised on the deferral and effective withdrawal of touch; an absence that Modernity keenly sets about to reverse through all kinds of compensatory and disingenuous tactilities. At the limit, the proper of tact remains Christ's exhortation: *noli me tangere* – "do not touch me (for I have not yet ascended to the Father)." That is, "I am not yet ready." He is untouchable because his state is fragile, virtual and in-between. He is emergent, on the way elsewhere; or else he has not yet arrived. In this case tact demands not contact but distraction; holding-off and keeping back, attending-to and witnessing the advancing-withdrawal of advent. In fact, the subject and object of tact are always mutually

and constitutively untouchable. Consider a remarkable gesture that forms a central moment in some forms of indigenous dancing of the Central Desert. Under heavy beat, the feet are pulled sharply away from the ground up into the dancer's undercarriage, held there for a moment, then forced down with great speed towards the ground, only to be withdrawn upwards again a fraction of an instant before touching the sand. They leave an imprint in the powdery ground, but without touching it. Touch is achieved by the concatenation and compression of air, by a kind of virtual telescoping trajectory whose presence is not concrete, but a projected trace; a kind of residual future predicated on an absent-ing past, or the mark made by an impending withdrawal. The feet alternate so that as one is planted in the ground, the other is held in suspense, or seems to draw the ground itself upwards towards the body. Otherwise, contact is entirely dissimulated in the pervasive dust that veils the ground. In any case, it is entirely a matter of touch without touching, mark without inscription, with-drawn draft that cannot-not draw. This space of separation – this charged interval that is suspension of desire for touch, respect for the untouchable condition of the other, of the other person, or of the ground that enables us to constitute our relative (and communitarian) otherness – is a hot slow space made of the compressive forces that maintain deferral and distention (or distanciation); but also longing and lengthening-towards. The long-while of tact constructs a space in which desire interminably reconstitutes and produces itself.

If temperature is the 'relative degree of hotness of a body, substance or medium,' then two things follow. Temperature is fundamentally a relational condition; and that relational condition refers to a substance, a body, something weighty (or light), something extended that resists (or yields). The relational aspect engages all registers that have to do with proportionality (Latin: *temperatura* = proportion): the partitioning and measuring-out of portions, the relative mixing-together of characteristics and qualities (the 4 humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile; the 4 climes: dry, wet, humid, hot; the 4 elements and their associates senses and organs: fire/sight/eyes, water/taste/mouth; wind/touch/skin and earth/smell/nose). In classical proportionality, existing things are characterised by the specific relationships between such qualities, elements or conditions: one's constitutive temperament or momentary temper, the viscosity of a liquid, the grain of a material, the vivacity of a gesture, the scintillation of a voice, the radiance of a face. Qualities are brought into a state of temperance, of temperate admixture (Latin: *temperare* = to mix); or they are tempered to achieve a characteristic disposition, poise or balance. This requires adjustment, adaptation and modulation of individual autonomy in favor of an overarching relational constitution. In Platonic theory, temperance is directed to unity so that a whole is always greater than the sum of its parts; and that in

any tempered whole no individual predominates or eclipses the collectivity. Tempering totalises in the manner of a hegemon, as in the musical octave (Greek: *diapason*) where the keynote permeates through (*dis-*) the whole (*pason*) gamut. Temperance therefore implies radical transferability, hence absolute erasure of individuality. In the 'well tempered scale,' every tone in the octave has the same concrete value and every interval exactly the same dimension, so as to enable modulation across musical scales. In every way, temperance is antithetic to the foundational principles of ecology and sustainability – that is, to the absolute necessity of maintaining radical difference; of preserving and taking care of the boundaries and limits that make otherness and difference possible.

The word temperature is from the etymological roots *TEM, Greek: *temnein* = to cut + *PER = limit, boundary; through, thoroughly, away. Cognates through the etymon *SEC = to cut, include section, segment – but also secular and sacred (what is cut off), secret and secrete (what lies concealed, away; what oozes monstrously from a hidden place). In the Greek, *peri* means round about, enclosing, encircling, near, adjacent – that is, at or about the limit, periphery or perimeter. These various resonances give the word a distinctive ambience around the idea of a surrounding environment; or a place cut out of a given spatial ambit – in other words a temple, a *temenos*: the paradigmatic template of architecture. But it is always place constituted of both spatiality and temporality (Latin: *tempus* = time). Such places are always existential, marked by experiences of adjacency and neighborhood, of a certain being-with-others. The encounter might be with oneself or another, with the sacred or profane. The neighborhood might be a limbo – a nowhere that suspends space and time, form and tempo. It might be a zone of ambiguity in which here and there, now and then begin to waver and become undecidable. It might be the empty space of boredom or the interminably available space of enablement. It might operate as a neutral frame across which all manner of surfaces might be stretched and all kinds of phantasms projected. Or it might account for the irremediable ruination of witness and narrative, shadowing an interminable evacuation of existential space in Modernity. But every temple is also a tomb, every cell a bunker, and every tomb a tumulus or tumor in the flesh of the earth. Making room and spacing-out are always means of swelling and enlarging matter, of stretching substances to find the interstices pocketed or folded within, of carving, encrypting, incavating, hollowing-out, interfolding or otherwise setting-apart space: a bulge in the ground, a puffy protuberance or excrescence, an efflorescence, a scar and scarification of territory. Tumidity and tumefaction in other words – in a trope as alchemical as it is pompous: felting materiality, causing a disturbance or tumult

within it so that something wells-up and weighs on its boundary, its berm or bank; so that something interminably threatens the limit's withholding power. A tumescence that signifies something occluded, dissimulated and secret, but always on the verge of secretion and precipitation.

Another sense is the motif of tempering, by which something undergoes a trial, test and temptation through which it is tamed or made temperate. Several themes are foregrounded here. Alternately heated at high temperatures and quickly cooled, the constitutive materiality of steel is compacted, enmeshed and densified to a high level of strength and flexibility. The heat alone does not do this, nor the quenching. Rather, it is exposure to a constant fluxion between two limits. Becoming temperate also means eclipsing extremes, residing in the intermediate, the median and milieu; taking a middle course in all things. It is wisdom rather than knowledge (of good or evil, this or that, one extreme or another). The consequent practice is one of deferral rather than decision; of interminable weighing up, balancing, discerning a middle ground or taking up a disposition of poise. The temperate is mild and moderate, moderating and modulating. It is tuning; adjusting pitch, stretch, tension; toning, enlivening, invigorating, bringing something to a heightened state: a tone, timbre, muscle, voice, organism, instrument. Or else it is toning-down – relative adjustment to avoid the preeminence of any one part. Yet this need not mean agreement that erases difference. Rather, it might be something like preserving a productive distance; or pointing to something beyond an immediate condition and situation, indicating a whole network of semantic, political, aesthetic and other resonances that present themselves without explicit articulation.

Such indicative allegories might be rooms or ruins, fittings or furniture of unspecified (and unspecifiable) function; evacuated spaces marked by traces of absent presences, wraiths and spectres; felted masses of corpses, clothing, shoes, belts, wallets and limbs; the indeterminate apparatuses of bureaucratic or biopolitical manipulation; equipmental assemblages for physiological tempering. They might be the abandoned bunk of a barracks, banked up like the nap of catastrophe: something like an archeology of the disaster; or stockpiled joinery, gnarled and shoehorned into store-rooms, gathering the interminable illicit potential to which it might be put: benches like racks or pews for pain or prayer, torture or hospitality. Or else they might just be so many tambour – embroidery frames or small timbers, endlessly open to the rhythmic decoction or weaving of territorial maps, airs, narratives and conversations.

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