



PROJECT MUSE®

The Brick Dialogues (extract)

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The Brick Dialogues *(extract)*

Rolf Hughes

1. *To shape me*

I do not think

I am worth something

not because

I am not worth anything

but I do not think

you have to help me

think

I am worth something

one of the things

not worth anything is that

there must be something wrong

with you

trying to make me matter

trying to make me think

I matter

whereas the only thing

matterng

you being worth something

is that you shape me.





If you please
not
to shape me
I understand
I am not worth anything
I do not think
there must be something wrong
with you not
trying to make me
matter.

2. Proximity

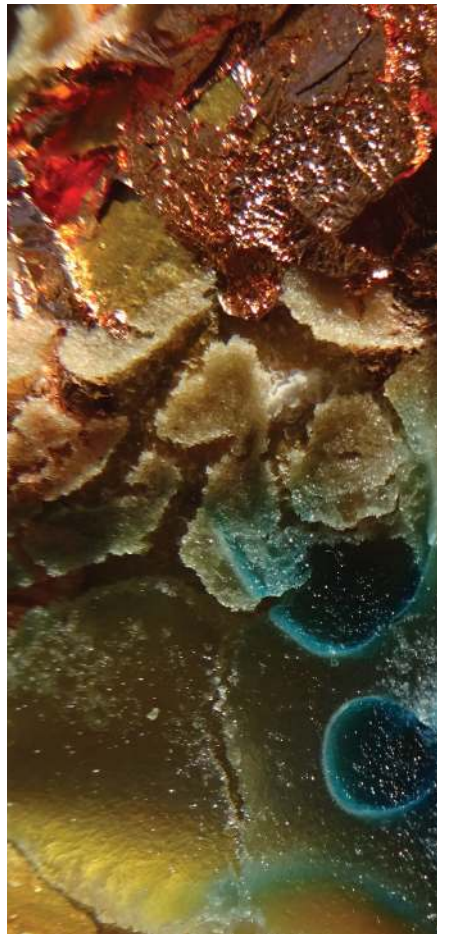
There are many who say you are useful, but who is shaping who?
By shaping you, we shape your capacity to shape our world.
You stand taller and live hundreds of years longer than us.
You seem to multiply through proximity.

We cannot compare you to birds. Yours was a long downriver
journey from glaciers.

From wet and soft, to dry and strong, under the gaze of the sun,
you are like a flame that has got to know itself through clasp
rock, particles, ice and sludge until fire and water make you their
bold daughter.

Then we build structures to build structures.

Kilns create bricks.
Bricks construct factories.
Factories manufacture cities.
Cities become kilns.







3. Trying to make matter

There must be something worth building
because they are building something.

Building blocks. Environment.

Building blocks of environment.

They would not be building something
if there was nothing worth building

because building is not nothing.

Building our environment.

4. *We are mainly strangers*

Listen to them.
Restless for recognition,
cracked actors. Survivors.

Headers and stretchers.
They deserve to be acknowledged.

Stirred into water,
trampled by oxen,
scraped by a bow;
paste framed,
stamped and roasted;
by such rituals,
clay becomes gold.

Make fire fly from water.
Spells from bodies of light.
Bone from fleshly effusions.
Magic from crackling night.

Iron, quartz, lime, salt.
Every trick unpacked, disassembled.
There's a groan, a sigh, a stilling of the air.
Somebody crouching to make it flicker and flare.
A choking of the vent, dust, soot;
A line of wooden suits dissolving into ash.

I saw a shadow, a warm body
drawing down sparks like stars,
light ravishing light, candle wick
sputtering –
hot out there
dirty, stinking streets,
walls of weathered pumpkins
rat gut screeching,
rolling and tumbling;
frog passes, hod in 'hood.

We are mainly strangers.
No rules. No expectations.
We neglect the tides and its silts for the roar of a furnace,
a memory of mortar, a fear of the future,
straw against skin, the sound of war.



5. *Someone*

Someone says first there is black.
Then white.
Brick red.

Solar.
Buttercup yellow.

Silver.
Lunar.

The idea of total darkness is not the same as
total darkness.

One single sentence cannot contain
total darkness.

But another might.





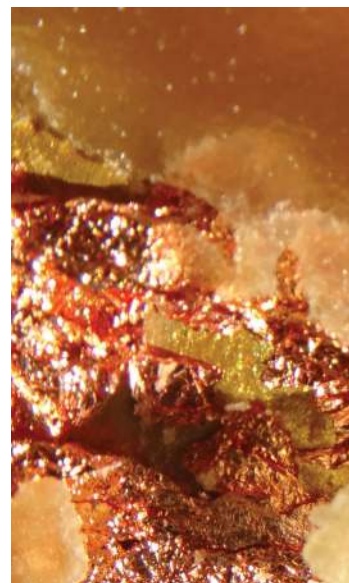
6. *Caustic Ophelia*

– Let us acknowledge it.

[*Long pause*]

– A spore of pollen inside a balloon.
– Glass of fashion, mould of form.
– A drum inside a bloody room.
– The whole world becoming stone.
– Did you think it might rise?
– I wanted to sink.
– Here's rue for you; there's none for me.
– The eyes of poor Ophelia. Blasted ecstatic.
– Whatever worm eats or impregnates–
– I sucked that honey–
– under that bed–
– his breezy vows
– sweet bells jangling
– caressing my river's silvery skin
– disordering the petals you plucked
– these petals I plucked from the wind
– mulching – always something turning to rot, or–?
– [*Pause*]
– The blue bacteria.
– [*Pause*]

All photographs of "Caustic Ophelia," Living Brick prototype (with Rachel Armstrong), Experimental Architecture Group, Newcastle University, May 2018.



- Blasted mulch.
- She's drying out.
- Dying to dry out.
- Caustic wit?
[Pause]
- Eat me. It's heat-seeking.
- An open coffin within which many rivers.
[Pause]
- Heartbreak hotel. Caustic soda. Copper. [Pause] *Ophelia!*
- What?
[Pause]
- Nothing.
- Nothing will come of nothing!
[Pause]
- Good night, ladies. Good night, sweet ladies.
- Good night.
[Pause]
- This artificial heart.
- What of it?
- It's not nothing.
[Pause]
- Good night, good night.

Exit.





When life is considered through a liquid lens, it is no longer a deterministic, object-oriented machine but soft, protean, and integrated within a paradoxical, planetary-scale material condition that is unevenly distributed spatially but temporally continuous.