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Notes on Lightness / Notizen über das Leichte

Exhibition with: Cecilia Bengolea, Nuotama Bodomo, Nina Davies, Leo Flügler, Suchan Kinoshita, Ma Liuming/Xing Danwen, Ariane Müller, Charlotte Posenenske, Clemens von Wedemeyer

HGB Gallery
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What is lightness? Is it something weightless, floating, an untenable state based on a “hint of possibilities”? Or does it figure as a fetish of happiness, which seems to promise a break from omnipresent burdens? Perhaps, however, lightness is more of a synonym for the “decidedly crucial problem” that we “lack resistance to the present” (Isabelle Stengers). This is because the present, in its repetition of the always-the-same, does not reveal itself as a space of the possible. It is therefore not surprising that “becoming light” comes into focus during transitional periods, when orders are in upheaval, structures are eroding, and binding orientations fail. Or when power regimes channel or break the desire for otherness and change. This suggests that “becoming light” can be understood as a movement that establishes a specific power or politics of action: an action that draws from the informal milieu of the unregulated. It corresponds with a derailment from or a break with the paths of traditional cultural techniques, but it cannot be easily fixed with either a theory or a practice of “being light”.

The exhibition and research project *Notes on Lightness* starts at this point: it opens a vague space in which strategies of lightness are viewed as diverse “Bewegungs(er)findung” (movement invention)*. This is comparable to an improvising dancing body “that escapes itself” (Gabriele Brandstätter). Accordingly, dance plays a special role as a field of thought and action. With dance, it is possible to think of lightness as a constantly new impulse for movement that can be transferred to other areas or practices. These include the reciprocal relationship between the material and the immaterial, the queering of body politics and history, the fabulating refusal to simply confirm world conditions, or the “modes of relation” of micro-revolutionary moments of solidarity.

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This is where the political comes into play, in that “becoming-light” can be understood as a transformative movement in its detachment from repressive orders or “dependencies of existence”. But what if oppressive power relations themselves appropriate strategies of lightness? What if, in addition to physical control over a territory, they assert a fleeting authority, position themselves in a state of suspension, and operate along self-contained structures and laws? (We are thinking, among other things, of the fluidity of financial capitalism, the economization of nature, or the digitality paradigm). A power designed in this way loses its lightness, as it is conceived from its imagined goals or ends and transfers the “untenably possible” into a status quo. In this sense, post-revolutionary depression is nothing other than a sadness about

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G Notes on Lightness is about such “Bewegungs(er)findungen” (movement inventions). The project is particularly interested in artistic works that use strategies of lightness in a transformative way, with regard to the “specific weight” of socio-political, historically and/or economically solidified structures of order, from which they detach themselves (perhaps only momentarily). For example, in dance, lightness can be made visible not only as the contrasting “other” of heaviness, but also as the (in)visible performative of codified steps and movement figures that must be broken through with new impulses. This can happen, for example, through the small perceptions in the “unnoticeable dance of tranquility” (André Lepecki), or through the relational principle of a “Météorologie du corps” (Min Tanaka). The latter understands the body as a changing system in relation to its environment and, from the analogy between body and weather, generates sensory intensities for an arsenal of constantly new movements. With Spinoza, we could add that through such practices, especially those performed collectively, a power to act arises when oppressive affects are replaced or transformed by affects of relief and “shared joy”. The moments of synchronization that arise are essential. For example, the synchronization between the affects of rain, thunderstorms, and passing cars, dancehall music and the dancing bodies (Cecilia Bengolea). Another example is the synchronization between any group of people and light infrastructures (ventilation pipes made of corrugated cardboard) that can be freely combined, assembled, or changed again. In doing so, they test the principle of participation as a (material) movement that re-constitutes social coexistence (Charlotte Posenenske).

The practice of fabulating (a.o. Saidiya Hartman) can also be understood as a “Bewegungs(er)findung” (movement invention). Its world-designs develop from a collective polyphony that brings itself forth with its narratives. Its transformative processes can unmask the coloniality of power and its narratives of progress. At the same time, as a counter-narrative, it creates a different beginning that gives the practice (in weightlessness) for a flight (to the moon) utopian power (Nuotama Bodomo). The practice of fabulating can also be connected with a political concept of materiality that incorporates a lightness or imponderable “vitality” (Jane Bennett). Not all matter must be considered dull, dead, or sluggish: it can also be understood as a turbulence of colliding particles of matter that are distributed everywhere and invisibly like dust. Waste that is no longer needed in economic functional cycles still circulates in complex ecosystems and, like meteorites or aerolites thrown off course (Suchan Kinoshita), acquires an interrupting (heavy) presence.

B Here, “becoming light” manifests itself as an indefinite duration or an interruption of linear temporality. It creates a moment of pause in which (social) connections can be reconfigured. Such a pause also arises when performers simulate AI-generated glitches as a dance in standstill, thereby creating moments of disturbance in the everyday (Nina Davies). Similarly, the naked human body can mark a temporal incision when the historically ingrained shame and normative social codes associated with bare physicality disappear from view (Ma Liuming). The naked body is linked to an oscillation between self-empowerment and self-vulnerability. This tipping point is also at play when a movement impulse (for example, through forgery) leads out of the

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realm of the legal (Ariane Müller) or, conversely, into it from the not-yet-legal (such as women's boxing) (Leo Flügler).

These examples illustrate that 'becoming light' is not an escape from, or avoidance of, contact with (political) reality. Rather, it opens up a space full of ambivalence precisely because established boundaries are transgressed, and sometimes the ground slips away from the 'walk as controlled falling'.

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