

Pinching the Earth, This Measuring Touch is an exhibition and book featuring new works by writer Giulia Damiani and artist Theodore Ereira-Guyer. The title talks of the reflection on the notion of weight carried out in one-month residency by the two collaborators in Bucharest. The residency was organised in partnership with the centre ODD and the gallery ALERT studio both based in Bucharest.

Pinching the Earth, This Measuring Touch

Extract from an essay by Giulia Damiani

Weight was chosen as subject because of its inconsistency. Because of its open nature, always debatable, always in flux. Because it is being discussed mostly through comparison, compressed by words and numbers which translate this property into something other than itself. Weight can be the language of our innermost feelings. It is the consequence of dictatorships surfacing on the body. It is the tournament of an association where nothing prevails and the centre doesn't hold; borrowing from George Yeats' whirl-pooling poem *The Second Coming* 'the centre cannot hold/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (...)'.¹

The writer sinks in a whirlpool of desire without objects for desire. When thought upon, weight is digested through sensations becoming perceptions and thinking within infinite scenarios. When I say 'stone' I say something bigger than a pebble which would be possibly strenuous to pick up; I say a unit of measure equal to 6.35 kg; I say Mick Jagger's heart of stone which his little girl will 'never break, never break, never break'; I say the Medusa's gaze, turning her nosy watchers into stone.

Any repositories for definitions of weight are displaced. This word can only be told as the subtle joint that seals corporality and cerebral activity. It is the connective cartilage. When considering weight, one can't help envisioning it through images. If there is a conceptual understanding of this subject it is necessarily derived from a sensual experience.

Surely by using the word 'cartilage' I am referring to the maverick Antonine Artaud's theatre and its cartilaginous transformations of ideas. The theorist prophesied a theatre practice as a halfway language between gesture and thought. 'It is not, moreover, a question of bringing metaphysical ideas directly onto the stage, but of creating what you might call temptations, in-draughts of air around these ideas' he explained in *Theatre and Its Double* (1938).ⁱⁱ

The stage that we have created in Bucharest made use of language and the arts to seduce intellect and actions into new critical horizons. We have re-developed our practices to adapt them to this theme-voyage. The work of the residency made us lose ourselves in order to become a manifestation of the corporeal reasoning cocooned in weight. Between objects lifted up and mental tensions; between things dropping down and light-headed writing.

It was in this suspended meeting of possibilities that we stumbled across this weighty matter. Contingency considered as a philosophical concept has decided the direction of the project. As for other contingent subjects, weight is the chance of something that is so, without having to be so. There is no fixed or permanent vision entailed by weight, but thousands of lines of escape from which it departs. There is no hierarchy, no focal point, only multifarious meanings that are voiced at the corners of our existences; weight is the fine dust over our perceptions.

Rosi Braidotti's nomadic theory has been one of our motivations. Her proposal for a critical theory as quest for new ways of thinking prompted our research towards a territory devoid of oppressive theoretical approaches.ⁱⁱⁱ In venturing into weight, we have navigated through a variety of styles and disciplines, with no sense of supremacy between different categories. Spurred by the process of *bricolage* supported by the structuralists, this publication reflects our extensive borrowing of ideas and images from previously unrelated sources; the individual's ability to create new meanings by deterritorialising her heritage is the method collating all the information of this project.

Weight is the multilayered subjectivity lent to the proceedings of art and language. It is a newly discovered window into the understanding of our souls.

On float

Weight is said to be, foremost, a physical property, whose definition in physics is:

$$W=mg$$

Weight is a quantity with direction and magnitude. In other words, it moves towards and can be described by a real number. Weight is a breadwinner, being it the force exerted on the *mass* (*m*) of an object due to *gravity* (*g*).

However, things get more complicated on the surface of liquids or when things hover in the air. In these two circumstances, density is the triumphant element. In order to float, an object has to be less dense and therefore have a greater ratio of empty space than the fluid in which it is floating.

At the age of seven when I was learning the basics of swimming in the Adriatic Sea, I asked my father why he could execute the float star so well; I can recall him urging me to follow his moves by saying: 'just hold your breath and don't think heavily, just imagine you can'. His body lowered down and then spread out. I kept freezing and wishing I could melt like ice instead.

The tendency to float goes also by the name of buoyancy. This power of water to defy gravity grows with the presence of salt. Salt makes things heavier. Once I read that an egg is a buoyant body in saltwater, while it sinks in freshwater. Despite having only a slight salty tang, when I dove into the Black Sea in the month of September 2015, its waters lifted me up and I could stare into the whistling sky – head going up first and then feet following, rather resentfully.

To be artists in residence abroad is to be drifting via untold currents; to be chasing the settling balance between swirling endeavours to

understand. Leafing through a pink-covered book – whose title is *Rokit* – at a local Humanitas bookshop near the Cișmigiu Gardens in Bucharest, I read that sea, delta and mountain represent the three beautiful Romanian landforms. This prompted a visit to the bodies of water by the coastal region bordering Bulgaria.

On this occasion, a swan-shaped pedalo stretches vertically above the placid surface. When the wind rises and waves begin to form, the childlike boat seems to be a perilous journey on the Black Sea. Witnessing this from ashore, I can conceive water uniquely as volume extending below and on every side of the meandering pedalo; my eyes fail to consider the movement of the sea, the weight of the abyss shuffling its mass to create room for a new creature on the margin above. I cannot grasp weight if I don't participate in it. I take a dip. I want to embrace water, holding it between the arch of my arms as they stretch.

When I think of bodies floating and weight disappearing, I think of the Three Kings bathing in Albert Serra's black and white film *Birdsong (El Cant dels ocells)*(2008).^{iv}

The camera records this scene from underwater. Hit by sunrays that become gleaming waves, three men are idling and swimming around a wooden boat. These two silent minutes of film show the expanse of fluid supporting the protagonists' movements; the beauty of their bodies as they slowly paddle and kick back the seawater to keep afloat. While camera moves below, following them from different angles, a certain immediacy of meaning is transmitted. Their hands flapping, their legs bending and spreading out visualise, literally, the simplicity but also the delight of buoyancy. I wonder when humans discovered they were able to float? This scene somehow refers to this primal realisation.

My anxiety when floating must be a genetic memory as part of our collective unconscious belonging to an eternal time. This last sentence uncovers a new connection with Serra's *Birdsong*.

In the film, the Three Kings are the Wise Men of the biblical legend. Serra retells their story blending tradition and humour, filming the

characters' steady movement as well as the landscapes of Iceland and the Canary Islands. The first three believers in Christianity are also three ordinary people searching for something to follow. Their conversations – in Catalan and Hebrew – echo the precious naivety of a historical time when official definitions and proven explanations did not yet determine the nature of civilisation.

After scraping a rock off a wall in a cave, one king is holding it in his hands:

Yes, look at that....It's so beautiful..
If you look carefully, you'll discover certain things...
At times we're awestruck with the beauty of things.
I wasn't expecting to see such a thing.
Now we can see it with our own eyes.

As he pronounces the above words, the film shows the hesitating eyes of his companion; his silent expression begins to exude a sense of wonder – the tantalising moment when incredulity may turn into new understanding. The Wise Men's journey is one of attempts, pauses, external configurations and the discovery of natural splendour. Their words speak of their own intimate pursuit of the function of the world. Despite the lack of theory and fact, the kings' thinking opens to a poignant grasp of things.

I hold weight in this potential of reminiscence. Some of our everyday exchanges on the qualities of being heavy or light, the way our words try to approximate this material component of our experience, can defy established formulas and achieve imaginative articulations. Footsteps can be light, like granules from a rock as they fall on the muddy track alongside. However, this capacity for association can lead to far-fetched reasoning, the absurd observing entailed by weight. Two protagonists of *Birdsong* are now evaluating clouds:

If we go on top of them, and water falls, we will fall too.
But if there is water inside high up as they are...
We will still fall.
There might be ice underneath. It might be frozen.
Inside of a cloud?

Yes. We need to know, because otherwise...If there was ice perhaps it could support us.

Perhaps.

We have been to many places where ice has supported us.

But at times we sank.

Yes but not too much.

A spontaneous, somewhat experiential landscape is combined with a sense of enduring relations in a 1964 untitled photograph by Ugo Mulas.^v Two elements, the sea and a tree, are portrayed as overlapping lengths: this float eludes the gravity of my words.

ⁱ William Butler Yeats, 'The Second Coming' in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 2000, p. 151

ⁱⁱ Antonine Artaud, *Theatre and Its Double*, 1985, p. 107

ⁱⁱⁱ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 2011, p. 64

^{iv} Albert Serra, *Birdsong (El Cant dels ocells)*, 2008, 98 min

^v Ugo Mulas, *Untitled*, 1964