





ARDI GUNAWAN

the super light

Reconfiguring still / Terri Bird

Propped, stacked, and wedged-the bicycle impaled with copious lengths, lodged in a pallet, and secured with an ockie strap inside *Reconfiguring still: proposals for the super light*¹ is nonetheless predisposed to fall. As Douglas Adams apparently remarked, 'A bicycle is always falling over.'²

Most of the billons of bicycles ridden all over the world are constructed around the diamond shaped metal tube frame that was invented in about 1900. The basic idea is that this kind of structure is an excellent light support for the human body. ...However, the load a frame has to take is not just determined by the weight of a person.³

But this implicit fall is not a simple collapse of the assemblage; it aims to provoke a giving way of expectations in order to expand the terrain of what's possible. In this region Ardi Gunawan investigates the nature of things with material propositions as thought experiments that engage the disordering effects of matter.

The most important thing to do when choosing a material for a certain function is to keep an open mind.⁴

Here matter is not understood as something mute receiving information, form or content from elsewhere. It is more akin to **Brian Massumi's appreciation of matter as a self-organizing and self-disclosing activity** passing through contexts, rather than being disclosed by them.⁵ Affirming matter as a complex site of activity gives precedence to the **instability inherent in material relations, blurring the distinction between intelligent activity and passive receptivity.** At the same time, any rethinking of the concept of matter needs to **persistently** safeguard against reinvesting it with the value of a fundamental principle.

All constructions are related to transport in one way or another. They are load for at least a part of their lives.⁶

If matter is not simply a **vehicle for conveying intentions,** expressions or meanings, then attention always needs to be paid to the **procedures differentiating the multi-layered relations of inside and outside** operating in any particular work of art. **In the interval between a material's becoming and processes of formation,** in the space between receiving and responding, inscription and signification, there is the possibility for something other to interrupt the circuits of existing economies.

The most obvious implication of composing efficiently is, that constructions shouldn't suffer under the burden of their own weight.⁷

What Gunawan's various propositions seek to generate is a consideration of materiality that bypasses restrictive understandings associated with formalist debates aligned with a privileging of formal qualities. Moreover, the dynamic expansiveness of this particular assemblage shouldn't be understood as a heroic artistic gesture or expressive of frenetic emotions. Manifestly inventive and mobile, it is also **methodically constructed** built up through repeated moves and ceaseless restructuring with an interest in a production of lightness.

When people had to carry their own stuff around lightness was a prerequisite.⁸

Making things lighter isn't just a question of choosing lighter materials; lightness comes from matching a particular combination of materials together with an appropriate function. What's important is performance per energy unit with the aim of minimizing energy consumption. With this in mind the materials utilized in *Reconfiguring still: proposals for the super light* are those found on site or gathered from other location frequented by the artist. The selection and combination of materials takes recycling as a technique for production to displace objects and functions so as to reiterate nomadic material relations. This opens the potential for the *work of the work of art* to be explored in terms of its materiality, produced as an effect of material operations.⁹ The slippage resulting from these procedures connects processes of making with processes of thinking.

There are no kites made out of concrete, because up until now nobody has come up with a process that can provide concrete with a shape that can be flown on a piece of string.¹⁰

In this instance the thinking is directed to lightness not only as a question of engineering and manufacture, but as a delicate balance between materials, structures and processes more broadly. Although lightness necessitates a displacement of the anchoring effect of ground or grounding principles, Gunawan's achieves this without seeking to conquer. Instead lightness is accomplished here, as John Rajchman indicates, not above the heaviness of gravity but because of it.¹¹

Heavy materials may be shaped into light objects.¹²

NOTES

- ¹ The artist's preferred title.
- ² Douglas Adams is best known as the author of *Hitchbiker's Guide to the Galaxy: a trilogy in four parts* (London: Picador, 2002).
- ³ Adriaan Beukers and Ed van Hinte, *Lightness: The Inevitable Renaissance of Minimum Energy Structures* (Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 1999) 92.
- ⁴ Beukers and van Hinte 165.
- ⁵ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual: movement, affect, sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 228.
- ⁶ Beukers and van Hinte 12.
- ⁷ Beukers and van Hinte 25.
- ⁸ Beukers and van Hinte 9.
- ⁹ Andrew Benjamin elaborates the concept of 'the work of the work of art' across a number of texts including: Andrew Benjamin, *Disclosing Spaces: on painting* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2004) 36 n 3.
- ¹⁰ Beukers and van Hinte 23.
- ¹¹ John Rajchman, *Constructions* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997) 47.
- ¹² Beukers and van Hinte 24.

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IMAGE CAPTIONS:
Front: Ardi Gunawan, *the super light*, works in progress, 2008

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