

Austin Buckett, Omar Chowdhury, Avni Dauti, Dara Gill, Liam O'Brien, Mira Oosterweghel, Clare Rae. Curated by Callum Ross.

*To not believe in the divine,
yet always aspire to reach
it*

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*To not believe in the
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22.07.15–08.08.15

To not believe in the divine, yet always aspire to reach it broadly deals with the intricacies and intersections of rituals and repetition. Through the presentation of new and pre-existing works, the project brings together seven young Australian artists to explore how ritualistic acts (religious and secular) may carry new meanings through laborious repetition and also to consider endless repetitive gestures as a set of rituals.

The project has invited artists to work from a title to reveal multiple perspectives and create a conversation without being contained by a fixed statement. The exhibition title takes its premise from Giorgio Agamben's precept that to believe in the divine and not aspire to reach it is the only way to achieve happiness.

To not believe in the divine, yet always aspire to reach it will comprise of a series of events including live performance and a film screening, utilizing various spaces across the BUS Projects site. The project will also include a written essay, commissioned as a central component of the exhibition rather than a reaction to it.

Henry Andersen

Sisyphus is a Ballet Dancer

O! poor Sisyphus; condemned by the gods to your boulder and your hill and so much time and nothing to fill it but pushing the rock or watching it fall. “In this moment,” (the falling) Camus will tell us, “we must imagine Sisyphus happy”. But who is ‘we’ in this equation, and what would it mean if we couldn’t muster imagination enough to believe it? It is worth remembering that, at base, Albert Camus’ *Le Mythe de Sisyphus* is essentially an argument against suicide. We must imagine Sisyphus happy, despite the sure failure of his project, because anything else would be to admit to our own sadnesses. Imagination here is a matter of literal life and death.

Accepting that Sisyphus is happy, the reader of Camus’ text is then confronted by two options:

1. We imagine Sisyphus begins each day with a fresh hope that to day his goals will be realised. Each failure is a renewed permission to sustain that hope. Any success would mean the profaning of this hope and the end of Sisyphus’ one connection with the realm of the Gods who punish him.

OR

2. We imagine Sisyphus knows full well that his project will never succeed but carries on with it anyway.

The first is to believe in the divine and not aspire to reach it.
The second is to not believe in the divine and yet aspire to reach it.

Although he lives only for his work, if Sisyphus can never achieve his task then the time he spends with the boulder and the hill cannot be called ‘productive time’. Similarly, it would seem ridiculous to term such a punishment as ‘leisure time’ (consumptive time). His movements lead nowhere except back to their own beginning. Sisyphus neither produces nor consumes - he simply moves.

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To imagine Sisyphus happy then, is to imagine his joy in the movement itself. Sisyphus' movements belong to the sacred sphere of gestures without ends, motions which do not follow the pragmatic considerations of moving one's body from point A to point B. Sisyphus' eternity, therefore, is a kind of aesthetic time - musical time, cinema time, the time of ballet dancers and bored teenagers.

Sisyphus in the Sweatshop

“In this moment, we must imagine Sisyphus happy”. How different and grotesque Camus's last statement becomes should we substitute the figure of Sisyphus for that of the sweatshop worker. Here, ‘we’* is a question of class allegiance. Do we imagine Sisyphus as one of us - is contained by the boundaries of the ‘we’; or is he but a vanishing point against which ‘we’ are constituted as such?

Is imagining Sisyphus happy a function of solidarity or a function of guilt?

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In his unending, untiring repetition of the same mute action, Sisyphus parrots the motions of the Fordist economy but denies such actions their intent. Sisyphus' labour is not really labour for it produces neither product nor service. It is the external face of labour stripped of its very ‘labour-ness’ and existing as a parody of the workers in the factory. ‘Bare repetition’ (in the words of Deleuze). The contracting muscles of the worker take power over the will. Factory work is imagined as an involuntary, nervous tic.

Scene: We see six Chinese workers in a rice field somewhere. They move in swift, practiced motions, in near-perfect unison. The image is blurry and indistinct; its edges seem poorly defined. Only as the camera begins to pan upward and the focal-point is adjusted do we realise that what we had been viewing was not the workers at all, but their reflection in an adjacent lake. The image was shown to us upside down. What we had seen as practiced labour was in fact only the play of light across the surface of the water.

Realistically though, hasn't bare repetition long been the true intent of the assembly line? (No sooner had the modern factory been invented than the Futurists declared it erotic). Hasn't capitalism always been less interested in the product than in the act of production - more intent on consumption than the specifics of what is being consumed? Such a system only functions as long as it is in motion - demand must always outweigh supply for that feeling of gravity to persist. To be satisfied with one's wealth and feel no need to work again (ha!); this is the divine in which none of us really believe.

In this moment, we must imagine Sisyphus as the still-spinning wheel of an upturned car.

*All those of us contained in the plural address of Camus' essay. You wearing Nike, I wearing Nike, both of us worried about next month's rent.

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