

Julia Keren Turbahn

On How to Let 'It' Be

Yeah, let it be, let it be
Let it be, yeah, let it be
Oh, there will be an answer
Let it be-e

(The Beatles: Let It Be)ⁱ

Having been accompanying the process of *Thinging*, the sound of this song by the Beatles got stuck in my mind.

Let 'it' be

Paul McCartney claims to have had a dream about his deceased mother, which inspired him to write this song. Hence, it is quite clear that he was not relating to the complexity of discourses around how we relate to objects, most certainly not about speculative realism or object-oriented ontology. More likely, he intended to express a rather existential recognition of the complexity of life in general. Nevertheless, I got busy with this 'it' in the song and would like to take the lyrics as a beginning for a train of thought.

It as some'thing'

Anthropocentrism, a long-standing fundamental assumption of modern Western rationality, comprehends the human being as the centre of everything: With its intelligence and capabilities, it has an indisputable superiority over the non-human matter. In other words: We as human beings do not 'let things be', we control and direct them. Recent philosophical discourses around Speculative Realism and the school of thought named object-oriented ontology (OOO) vehemently reject the privileging of human beings and break up the binary of objects as passive and stable phenomena and the human beings as the vibrant and active subjects in the world. Objects actively exist independently of human perception.

Letting 'it' be on stage

In the essay 'Moving as some *thing* (or, some things 'want to run)' the writer and curator André Lepecki draws a line from the 1960s, a period in which visual artists, dancers, and choreographers started to fruitfully question the relations between movement, objects, and things up to the 21st century in which the topic became more and more present in artworks echoing the philosophical discourses.ⁱⁱ In many experimental dance works everyday-objects are not used to decorate or accompany the performers on stage but appear as significant performative elements without being turned into an artwork in a what Lepecki calls 'Duchampian interest' but to let them be – more in McCartney's sense.

The thing with thinging

I would like to follow Lepecki's differentiation between an object and a thing, defining the term 'object' referring as matter that is tied to instrumentality, utility, and usage, whereas the term 'thing' refers to a non-instrumental entity which is not subordinated to a subject.ⁱⁱⁱ The philosopher Martin Heidegger uses the term 'thinging' in his essay about '*The Thing*'.^{iv} This construction of 'verbing' a thing, turning a noun into a verb, implements a 'state of being' an activeness intrinsic to a thing. Generally, one could claim that things are pretty good at being themselves. Rather we as humans might even interrupt their way of being by giving them attention, by relating to them. Ultimately, the act of placing an object in a black box theatre and 'letting it be' already implements an act of power of the manipulative subject. So how to not only let a thing be, how to let a thing do its thing on stage but to be with a thing thinging, finding a shared mode of being on stage?

Some'thing' is happening

Entering a stage full of objects in the process of creating *Thinging*, the first impulse to approach an object, to approach some'thing', was to work with an anthropomorphic method. Recalling childhood experiences, where the world seemed to be populated by animate rather than passive things, the

use of fantasy became the main catalyst to animate objects and things. Playing with attributing human properties to non-living entities turned out not only to be an attempt of coping with loneliness in a solo research process but also an exercise in empathy. While watching the performer animate a thing over a longer period of time, a sudden and subtle shift happened. The initiation of a movement could not be clearly assigned to the human being anymore and I began to question who was animating whom at this moment. In that sense, the animation of things became a tool to reflect about interconnectivity, enabling to acknowledge the potential of things to influence and move us. The philosopher Jane Bennett uses the term thing-power describing 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'^v. The uncovering of the performativity in objects, giving space for the Thing-Power lead to a development of an own choreographic force, detached from the object's functional purpose as well as an awareness that human beings themselves are composed of various material parts.

The thing with the gap

Seemingly completely crashed plastic bucket that suddenly straightens itself up or marbles that start to roll, without being touched, hiding in the most unexpected and seemingly unreachable corners of the rehearsal space. These are just two examples of how we found ourselves surprised, sometimes almost scared of the agency things can develop without human impulses. In his book, *Realist Magic-Objects, Ontology, Causality* Timothy Morton, a philosopher of the object-oriented philosophy movement, describes the secretiveness of an object.^{vi} Aside from the level of appearance, materiality also has unbreakably encrypted and withdrawn, unreachable essence. He claims there is an element of mystery in the way things interact with each other, a subtle space of the mysterious that does not necessarily require a visible action as described above. Sometimes it requires just some time and awareness. Again, the letting it be, or should I say the letting it thing comes in action: The poetic space, the magic was hardly ever experienced through specific actions but revealed itself unexpectedly almost as a precious by-product of another action that never intended to open this space.

Any-thing can change

Leaving the black box theatre after rehearsals, I could sometimes not switch off this mode of reflecting on how to relate to any object or thing around me, to relate in a different way than I usually would. I felt like I saw things thinging everywhere: The non-living matter is so strangely, paradoxically, and rather mysteriously alive! When I start thinking out of the (black-) box, reconsidering relationships of human and nonhuman matter holds an important and urging ecological value in a time of precarious oversaturation with objects in contemporary western life and increasing global ecological catastrophes. The artistic process hence becomes a space of potentialities, where alternative visions or modes of being can be revealed, developed, tested, rejected, and practiced. And here I am again with the Beatles song: 'Let it be' should not be understood as a call for indifference and passivity but as a demand for the constant actualisation of the relationship between human beings and other materialities in order to overcome long out-dated hierarchies. In the refrain of the song, Paul McCartney repeats the phrase several times. For me, this iteration underlines that to 'let it be' is a never-ending practice even if there will never be a definite answer.

*Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be
There will be an answer, let it be
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be*

ⁱ The Beatles, *Let It Be*, EMI Studios, 1970.

ⁱⁱ Lepecki, André, *Singularities - Dance in the Age of Performance*, Routledge, London/New York, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Heidegger, Martin, *The Thing in Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, HarperCollins, New York, 1971.

^v Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter- A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, London, 2010.

^{vi} Morton, Timothy, *Realist Magic-Objects, Ontology, Causality*, Open Humanities Press, London, 2012.