

In the shadow of the night the step jarred the foot in my Le Coq Sportif

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I dismount my black horse from Worpswede, the former artists' colony located on the edge of the Teufelsmoor – this bastion of Modernism. If some there once wanted to prevent the new epoch, today they no longer want to let go. Do they think you can just sit out the passing of time? I can't understand the absence of a wish for change, was irritated and had thought that the ride would do me good: "In the shadow of the night the step jarred the foot in my Le Coq Sportif". The title of the invitation sent out by Marcel Hiller sounds to me like a warning and a promise at once. It is a cool and very humid evening in March 2014. Despite the weather I'm one guest amongst many who have made their way out to this vernissage event in the Bremerhavener Kunstverein. Standing in front of the building are hundreds of these red-and-white plastic fences. I assume that nobody really has any idea what to do with all the polyethylene granulate, this purportedly recyclable product out of recyclable packaging. Perhaps a pretext is being sought to bury the things precisely here. The road is carved open and the pits dug. Everything close by has been meticulously separated – to maintain a sense of order only decipherable for those familiar with it: a stack of cobblestones, piles of sand, yellow and black cable drums, concrete blocks, wooden pallets. Exquisitely dressed people move over springy, wet casing boards. They probably feel that they are rather annoying, perhaps they even see them as a necessary evil. One shares a common goal, a close-by destination.

Finally through the door, past blocks of stone by Ulrich Rückriem, at some point confirmed by him and his reference system, and declared to be works of art. Suddenly I can scarcely wait any longer, scurry up the stairs to the first floor. Something on the landing has been dismantled. Above, vis-à-vis what's on the floor, a flat, long cement form, aluminium splays out of its round profile like reinforcement iron rods, behind it a smashed beer bottle. I want to get rid of my cape and top hat first and head straight for the cloakroom. But I find a coatless cloakroom pole, the coat hangers are gone, so too the curtain that usually encloses it. Instead, again on the floor, there's cement, cable, steel, a crushed plastic bottle, shards of a neon light. It's time to take a closer look: it seems that a conglomerate out of diverse materials solidified in a cement foundation has been intentionally knocked over. And right in the middle is an invitation to the present event. A physicist from CERN once explained to me that it's highly likely that an already broken cup cannot be pieced together when it hits the floor, but it is possible in principle. That still assures me. The damp cape remains draped over my shoulders today, the top hat on my head.

At least since I sojourn in this reference system labelled art, since the end of the 1990s, almost everything in my environment tangibly material as a thing has been taken apart or immediately cut to pieces. The goal of these deconstructions was to reveal the essence of such things – their concept, their idea. Everything else, the trappings, was regarded as annoying and unimportant. The noughties were thus the decade of the roof batten in art, which had to serve as the representative – mostly left unpolished – of all possible forms and in combination with other hardware store stuff until its producers themselves somehow became dematerialised and themselves precarious. One only got closer to essences in as far as we now know that there aren't any. The essence of things appears to lie instead in connections. Ever since, things are being put back together again, allied to the hope that maybe one can again become part of a whole. There is a longing for physicality and shaping. And already, 20-year-old art students are occupied with surface finishing. Crazy.

In the former print cabinet of the Kunstverein two designer chairs belonging to the interior decoration lie dismantled on the floor and are covered by a detached parapet panel from

the room's upper second level. And so they lie buried there now, as the carcass of their idea. On the parapet itself, next to the hole that now gapes, star-shaped square tubing and wooden strips are now resplendent and point to their surrounds like needles. In the corridor a kind of fence structure out of square tubing is attached to the wall, beneath slag sprayers rather fleetingly welded. It takes up the serial pattern of the intermediate ceiling, which is partly opened and thus gives a glimpse into the ventilation system above. Drilling dust on the black granite floor, wire. Debris delicately set out in a wall display cabinet: a piece of tubing, varnished orange, sawn off at a 45° angle, undefinable filings and splinters of green glass.

I draw nearer to the actual exhibition hall, along the doorman's glassed office with its hole for selling tickets and fax machine. It is as if this Kunstverein architecture – stemming from another time, charming and bearing a somewhat over-administering air for its purpose – is the target of an attack by diverse materials, a foray supporting an explorative *uber-*arrangement of Marcel Hiller. I move forward with a forensic eye and constantly secure evidence. The arranged things testify to actions which I reconstruct in my imagination. What were the aims of these actions? Where did they begin and where do they cease? And myself, how I'm moving through the whole thing and my personal context become part of my own search.

Then the highlight of the arrangement in the large exhibition hall. There is an intermediate level in the hall accessible via stairs that markedly characterises the space. But Hiller has removed the steps and has them vanish from view. The railing bounding the level and the stairs is partly dismantled and now forms a composition of diagonal visual axes in space. A pair of sport shoes of unknown brand glows as a dab of pink, positioned sideways on a steel girder supporting the plateau. In its origin, material and colour it is like a fashion accessory signalling the greatest possible difference to its surrounds.

Four further material arrangements are to be found in the same room: on the floor, surrounded by wood dust, is a *Kalanchoe beharensis*, a plant from the Crassulaceae family. A sign attached to the plant gives just not the name but also the origin: Madagascar. At this point, a flower bouquet like those in hotel lobbies could be envisaged, I think. To the left, on the edge to the final third of the room, stands – as an added element – a white, fence-like structure, obviously originally part of a serially manufactured industrial product. To the right, at the front wall, a car headlight lies flat on the floor, leaning against the wall. As if its shadow, a black sprayed mark runs across the whitewashed bricks of the wall. Hanging on the wall opposite is a polished metal sleeve that mirrors the whole exhibition room in miniature at head height. Meanwhile my senses are so primed into heightened awareness by the careful consideration of these interventions and encroachments that traces of past exhibitions on the floor of the Kunstverein or even the muted, rhythmical clicking of the start buttons in the neon lamps appear to be part of the staged scene.

The insecurity in the room triggered by Hiller's arrangements clearly rubs off on many of my fellow visitors. The existing parameters for a ritual exhibition visit in the Kunstverein are becoming increasingly blurred. *An exhibition*, as an institutional modus representing a body of work, is an inadequate description for what we see. For above and through everything a simultaneity and open performativity shines out of things and their ascriptions: institution, architecture, material, object, sculpture, artist and visitor. Marcel Hiller himself speaks of a *decision space*. Here we encounter more of a condition and individual situations than objects, sculptures, pictures and what one is otherwise familiar with from exhibitions, all separable from their surrounds. The parameters of the room's space and the movement within it, the parameters of the things and their viewing, appear to be negotiable each time, and this occurs within an activating relationship amongst themselves. Abstractly, everything in space, the animate and inanimate, becomes potentialities, capacities and tendencies.

The author of these lines still learnt at school that atoms, in the sense of the root word, are the smallest quantity of chemical elements, are constituted by a nucleus as well as circling protons and electrons. Growing up I wondered how much this evoked image corresponded to other known images, e.g. the depictions of our solar system. In my youthful daydreams I asked myself: could it be that the world consists of an infinite number of solar systems? At the same time, in the 1980s, the Mandelbrot fractal geometry shot to prominence: according

to this theory, everything is made out of smaller copies of itself – both macroscopically and microscopically. A fascinating, almost frightening idea of infinity arose in my youthful need for an ordered world. And I myself seemed to be a phony giant in this phantasy. Just like in Jimmy Button – everything is only a question of the viewer's standpoint.

Thanks to quantum physics, today we know that the atomic model taught to me back then was no closer to reality than my schoolboy phantasies. At best, atom models are useful as a kind of fossilised snapshot of a considerably more differentiated, dynamic reality. The part previously believed to be the smallest, the indivisible a-tom, is divisible after all and strictly speaking not even material. Putting it simply, today we know: particles act more like waves, and waves in turn like particles. And it is precisely this vagueness that refers to the origin of all that is animate. Scrutinised under this insight, the boundaries between the inanimate and animate dissolve, as do those between subject and object. Everything is an act happening of itself. Understanding the exact background to this insight is something I'll gladly leave to the quantum physicists. But just contemplating this I'm seized, like long ago, by a similarly galvanising idea of nonlinear infinity and thus once more the wish to be able to connect the isolated with the whole. So as to ultimately be able to generate out of this wholeness sense and meaning for the individual.

Marcel Hiller, who we would prefer to call an author or producer, once called himself in connection with a presentation by the *Magicgruppe Kulturobjekt*, a cooperative working alliance with other artists over the last few years, simply *decision material*, analogue to the aforementioned *decision space*. An apparent contradiction, for our Anthropocene worldview tell us that there is us *and* the material. Since the Enlightenment the material gains meaning only after first being activated by us. And so: how could material make decisions on its own? Only when the material is thought of in terms of its immanent, self-organising potential, and not as passive matter.

In Hiller's work, *decision space* and *decision material* are however to be understood as a call for a common practice or shared process, where our act of consideration and reflection is part of the production of the artist. There is no passivity when witnessing a condition or state. For Hiller, there can be no exhibition space detached from the world in the sense of a White Cube. The architecture is never simply there, is never a passive participant, but is permanently constituting a status, is involved in every movement in and through space. And for Marcel Hiller, his utopian call to consider himself and others as decision materials is about defining himself and the space as a possibility for experiencing – as uncompromisingly as possible – material relationships. He wishes to dissolve the ascriptions of things via manifesto, so as to release these things for their own sake. The trickling brick dust created by a drill plunged into a wall is turned into the witness of an act and, as part of the arrangement, encroaches into our interpretation. The cut-off piece of tubing does not end up in the skip, but forms the beginning of a story in a display cabinet of the Kunstverein.

Clothes and hat are meanwhile dry. Upon leaving I feel a sensation of giddiness. It is by no means disagreeable. I feel a bit like Scottie in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: with Marcel Hiller's arrangement I've tried to create a new reality. And like Scottie, who moulds Judy to fit his image of his lost love Madeleine until he recognises that both are one and the same, I also lose my new construction via the description in the old. In the end, Scottie pushes the beloved a second time from the steeple/In the end, another beloved of Scottie's plunges from the steeple for the second time. Dream or nightmare: reality is not material reality, reality is pure connectedness or potentiality. Okay, but how can I describe connectedness without describing *what* is being connected here? But even if I'm condemned to failure in this undertaking, it is experiencing that ways of seeing and acting can be changed which leaves me deeply contented.

On my way outside I glance again at the Rückriem stones. Even they are merely the intermediate product of a world in transition, I think and step out the door. It's stiller outside, I now find the air to be pleasantly cool. My horse no longer exists or it has already made its way back alone. I don't mind. I walk back. There's no hurry. Things were – and will always remain – the same, in a state of permanent change.