

Displacement and Temporalization: from Product to Process

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There are absolute definitions of time (past, present and future) and those that are relative (earlier than, simultaneous to, later than). Events take place between temporal gaps, and changes appear as the results of these events. When we talk about shifts in space, the temporal moment between being and becoming is implicit, i.e. in the sense of before/after or then/now. The past converges in new constellations: the accretion of earlier situations. Today's present is nevertheless modulated by the paradigm of simultaneity, of presence and sweeping availability. An altogether different economy of time—one based on overlapping, convoluted as a root system, thinking in allusions and latencies rather than manifestations—is primarily reserved for art, which scrutinises our utilitarian concept of time.

Ilona Ruegg has realised a series of process-based projects in which she has intervened in planned and fixed sequences, organising new temporal structures. For instance, a delivery van with construction materials for an as-of-yet unbuilt pavilion is “halted” in Frankfurt a. M. and displaced in a temporal gap. Made transparent through the documentation of the process, this punctuating intervention shows not only a brief suspension of the moment, interrupting the transport in the midst of transit, but also steers our focus towards the function of the objects out of context. They have yet to be conveyed their actual purpose, while they have already left their “inventory form”. Piled on a low-bed trailer and lit by neon tubes, they betoken an existence beyond the standardised pre-sets of fabrication and function. In this in-between space resulting from arresting an ordinary transportation process, temporal and spatial configurations converge. In the same way, the standstill is not just a pause, but a spatial fixation, potentiating other applications to emerge from the objects' immobilisation without actually aiming to do so: as it were, a state of potentiated latency.

In her more recent work, Ruegg also decontextualises industrially manufactured components from their original “timelines” and places them within new correlations, without these contexts obeying the primacy of function. On the contrary, wherever this dis-functionality comes to light, the new arrangements direct our attention toward a specific objecthood that is not exhausted by the utility value of the object. Rather, it is much more a kind of visual effect of this denaturalisation that elucidates the precision with which standardised building components or modular furniture are manufactured, allowing us to look beyond their intended purpose. The exhibition context is configured as a spatial and temporal interstice outside of the predetermined channels of production and distribution. This interstice produces idiosyncratic value systems through its negation of others. It preserves situations that would otherwise only be an interlude within a complex manufacturing process, denaturalising and redefining functions. Time becomes a visualised potentiality that points less to the state of affairs than to the currency of status. Sooner or later, it will change, something new might emerge or something different take its place. For now, the situation presents itself as is.

This dispensation of the commodity from its use value results in a revocation of the existing commercial value of the object. Beyond their practical use value, things lose their perceived material worth in favour of a symbolic capital that arises from an underlying conceptualisation—the potential to unclothe new thinking spaces and uncover the unseen. Our economy traditionally counts on tenability. Things possess use value, a utility dependent on social convention. They become commodities through their exchange value, which expresses their relational status towards other goods. Until the sales transaction has been closed, it relies on the commodity's promise of use value—the suggestion of a specific value abstracted as use value. After its first use, the respective value of a commodity rapidly depreciates, when the criteria of the new is no longer persuasive. The fact that material objects also contain other iterations of use function than those that are self-evident is simply ignored. In the same way that perception is increasingly focused on the present, economy relies on short-term efficacy, on pragmatism and instantaneously recognisable results. And because the present is so overburdened by stuff, production is dispatched to the future, where what is new awaits its expendability.

Because of this, Ilona Ruegg sometimes employs new, sometimes used objects as the point of departure for her work, decontextualising and redeploying their perceived value. In the broadest sense as sculptural works, they are not fixed in an as-is-condition, but rather point to zones of transitivity and

latency. These zones in turn contain potential, which can expand along the lines of other configurations or other material conditions of aggregation far beyond the currently palpable. These works maintain their especial temporal quality through their references to states of being in the sense of “before” and “after”, but also in their revocation of the self-evident.

Eleven 22, for example, is an office desk series by USM Haller. In the eponymous work by Ruegg, two elements from the system are stacked horizontally on top of one another. The original integrated grey panel of the modular system has been replaced by raw felt facing outwards and with black Plexiglas facing inwards. Two coloured pieces of glass serve as braces, fixing the frame components in parallel positions. The original cylindrical Nivellier feet have been replaced by copies of polished aluminium. Each component is loosely connected to the others and could potentially change positions to assemble in a new configuration or neutralise the synthesis of the two desk elements. It is not necessarily recognisable that these are two modular parts of an office set. This being said, despite the exchange between these elements with those with a stronger aesthetic presence (the coloured glass, the aluminium), what remains is the impression of rechanneled utility.

With *Wall Scan* (2012) on the other hand, two large wall panels have been screwed onto a supporting beam, so that they touch neither floor, ceiling nor the adjacent wall. In the gap between the two panels, a substantial number of neon tubes have been fixed to face vertically down, filling “the gap in space”. Their luminosity is directed downwards and towards the adjacent wall space, which in this sense becomes part of the work. The work envelopes the surrounding space, eclipsing it like a scanner, and yet, remaining part of an autonomous work.

With *Option* (2013), energy flow is presented entirely differently as transformative potential. Several of the artist’s heirloom family tin steins have been melted down into tin ingots. Only the characteristic handles are left intact and emerge from the molten tin as gripping devices. Despite its solidity, the ingot form reveals a state of latency; something new might easily emerge from the current state of the melted material. The form is lost; the material condensed. At the same time, the ingot points to the transformation of objects under economic conditions: the ingot is the reduction of form itself to the material value of tin. In the same way that no aesthetic value is ascribed to bars of gold or silver—their value being purely material—the tin ingot abstracts the original worth value of the steins as family heirlooms.

With *Made in China* (2013), it is the label that triggers immediate associations with value systems: cheap, low-quality, mass-produced. Ilona Ruegg’s eponymous work places two used side tables (from a series of three—one is missing) centrefold. The stackable rectangular tables are lodged inside one another. This functional aspect proves to be the result of economic calculation: transportation costs for the tables are reduced by the tables’ proportionally diminishing basic design. Ruegg has renewed the outer table with a high-gloss finish. The removed label accompanies the work in a frame. In its meticulous description of the object—“Item No. 31673, Description: 3 Rectangular wooden display cube white S / 3 rect. Cube Large, 38 x 58 x 20 cm M 30 x 51 x 20 S 24 x 44 x 20 cm”—it acts more like a sign than a label. At the same time, it makes the only reference to the original third cube, instead of the two we see. “Made in China” points to the source of the product. Through the varnish, it looks precious. The functions of sideboard and display case are also gone. Meanwhile, the “missing” third cube is made evident, pointing to the blank gap within the exhibition space as well as the shift from product to object. Thus, production does not take precedence over consumption, but rather is redirected to a new domain, which takes the denotation of the wood component as a “display” cube literally, exhibiting the moment of exhibition itself.

Similarly, *Quinten Doppel* (2012) investigates the question of commodification, as is made evident through a small label attached to the object. Two doorframes, which evidently have been designed for multiple locations, have been joined together in freestanding positions; they possess different heights and widths while their deviating depths of frame do not match up. The angle at which the doorframes converge in their current configuration is fixed through a polished aluminium connecting-plate placed on the ground. Five shards of glass are installed in the space between the door braces, while another five aluminium connecting plates nearby could enable the integration of other sets of separate frames into the same door margin. They all bear the inscription “and Marks © QuintenDoppel”. Intended for the renovation of a building, these door casings originally come from Quinten (CH). Because the

construction project never happened, they went to a stocks warehouse in Zurich, where they were purchased by the artist. In the same way the door frames have been installed at an alternate location, the aluminium bracketing plates point to “surplus production”, awaiting a new context for their use.

It would be a piece of cake to talk about these works in relation to how they display familiar objects and construction materials in deconstructed form, and yet it is worthwhile to cast a glance on what potential is actually tucked away in this conceptual approach. An established idea in the deconstructive thinking of Jacques Derrida is the term *différance*, which plays with the indeterminable alternation between the perception of structure and the generative moment. Derived from the French verb *différer*, which means both to “differ” and to “defer”, it is here transformed into a substantive verb that is homophonous with the word *différence*. However, its breadth of meaning also implies a temporal facet: not just difference, but also self-distinction and deferral. It denotes factual deviation as well as the act of self-differentiation to generate such distinctions. In this sense, both temporal and spatial aspects are meant: a formation or a motion that cannot be derived from the opposites presence / absence. While this may all have to do with a philosophical conundrum, in this context what is interesting is the juncture of spatial and temporal displacement in relation to how the generation of difference questions self-evident meaning. Structure and decontextualisation, transformation and differentiation form constants in the corpus of Ilona Ruegg. What is actually visible—the current state of things—is always the configuration of elements at a fixed point of time in-between, in a transit space. Something is present, yet refers beyond itself to the absence of something else. Every state demarcates the fact that other forms or domains of action have not been activated. Withdrawal from this process means to withdraw from the logic of economy that relies on speed and flexibility, and calls instead for pause, to stop without reason or cause: There can be more than just financial loss.

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