

Meyer Riegger

Jonathan Monk

More Than Four Hundred Million Ways
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A Vespa PK – an iconic 80s scooter – is parked in the room, at random, it seems. Its headlights, turn signals and speedometer lights light up, die away, light up and die away again. First the tail-light shines, immediately after that the right turn signal. Later, the front light illuminates the room, then the brake light. Some further combinations ensue. During this, the scooter stands still in the room, autonomous and static, only the flashing lights suggest a certain motion. The order seems to be coincidental. However, the seemingly random sequence of the lights is based on a system: permutation.

Permutation is a linear arrangement of objects in finite or denumerably infinite structures, with no sequence repeated. The number of possible permutations without repetition can be calculated with the help of the formula for the number of orders. If we take a tournament with three sports teams, for example, the following number of game options results:

$$3! = 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 6$$

With ten teams, this would be the result:

$$10! = 10 \times 9 \times 8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 3,628,800$$

So a tournament with ten teams would lead to 3,628,800 possible outcomes. If ten games were played per day, this would mean that the tournament would last for a duration of 362,880 days. Which would mean that the tournament, provided its games are played every day of the year, would last somewhat more than 994 years.

If we go back to the previously mentioned Vespa, we find that with 12 different lights on the scooter, there is this amount of possible combinations of flashing lights:

$$12! = 12 \times 11 \times 10 \times 9 \times 8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 479,001,600$$

More than four hundred million combinations are possible. If we assume that each flash lasts for one second, more than 15 years will pass before all of the possible combinations have come to pass precisely one time. With an uninterrupted running time, that is 5,544 days or 133,056 hours or 7,983,360 minutes.

The (assisted) readymade – the Vespa – is accompanied by the piece *Anna Holding Products: A lamp stand with a crossbar attached to its telescopic pole, with two metal clips from which a double-sided poster hangs*. The poster shows a person holding another poster. The depicted poster shows Richard Hamilton holding his work *Epiphany* in front of himself, in an almost protective manner. Originating in a souvenir from a trip to the USA, *Epiphany* becomes an allegory for enlightenment in everyday situations.¹ The back of the hung poster offers a view of nude female body, seen from behind. The back side of the Hamilton poster also becomes visible: Modified objects like *The critic laughs* or *Table with ashtray* are shown on it. Only the back of the poster makes the overall context perceptible: The photographed poster shows the unfolded artist book *Products* by Hamilton, held by an apparently female person, Anna.

Not far from *Anna Holding Products*, the plastic seat shell of a Porsche is set against the wall, with a Porsche user manual on it. The author of the manual is one Richard Hamilton. It almost seems like another artist's book by Hamilton. The Porsche, a design classic, seems predestined to have been modified by Hamilton as an "assisted readymade". Thus this deception is facilitated.

Several framed photographic prints of a The Smiths record hang in a row on two walls. Each print is marked at a certain position on the record with a pin. Each pin describes exactly one point on the record which amounts to an important moment for Jonathan Monk. Each moment seems amplified, like by a turntable needle: "What difference does it make, what difference does it make, it makes none, but now you have gone."

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translation by Zoe Claire Miller

¹ cf. Richard Hamilton, exhib. cat., Winterthur 2002, p. 276.