

Dagrun Hintze

Fear of Flying

Was that multifunctional or universal?

You have forgotten how to distinguish between things, definition by definition, but that shouldn't surprise you, you always had this difficulty with science right from the start, this abnormal behaviour, do you remember the bearded, sandal-wearing lecturer, just one sentence at the bottom of your first essay, but in red, your first, precisely formulated, scarlet Waterloo: *This is not a scientific approach*. You, however, had thought that the text shone, was a beacon, for a first semester student so damned full of brilliance, instead that scarlet sentence, you lay at home for two weeks, you wailed, then didn't ever say hello to the lecturer again, embarrassingly you skived the seminar, as if that helped. Still passed the intermediate exams, with a 1, irrefutable proof to others that you can do what they want, if you make the effort, that you can always do better than everyone else, just that you didn't want to any more and would rather be a – journalist. A career without job protection or a protected job description, typical of you to become something like that and to still today not be able to remember definitions, multifunctional, universal and whichever other ones are needed in this survey.

In any case the room here is like a broom cupboard, ten square metres, perhaps, the ceiling not more than two metres high. Six wooden stools on the dirty carpet, on one of the walls this sun-yellow oil painting that you can't look at without laughing, on another a row of pedestals with retorts and bowls. Various seeds in the bowls that can, as necessary, be chucked into the retorts, and just the thickness of one wall away the whole train station. Insulating materials must have been used, but what good are they against trains that come clattering in every minute, and against road tunnels above and below?

A lady with a blissful gaze guards the entrance and invites you in with an earnest friendliness, pulling the sliding door to behind you, not without suggesting that here you can not only research, but also really find rest, and she means it – here among the clattering trains, above the car tunnel's false ceiling and with all the noise that people make in a central station. Now you're sitting here, stifling a fit of laughter. That only works if you turn your back to the oil painting, and you still don't know: so, was that multifunctional or universal?

The lady said that prayer mats and beads are to hand, you would be just as welcome to say the Lord's Prayer or a prayer to the sun, you can do both, suggesting multifunctional, instead of offering a flower you would throw seeds into the retorts, each seed a wish, a thought, and next spring sown on a nearby green space to grow roots. Do you remember, there was that company event with 'live writers' who would write anything you wanted, even love letters, you were asked and didn't even know why, but you had one write a love letter, to the editor-in-chief, Kunst, for fun really, and two days later it arrived in the office, the letter, and the editor-in-chief knitted his brow and said that automobile journalists sometimes are given blank cheques at test events, as a give away, from the manufacturers. *Give Away*, he said in English. Now, here, for you, no blank cheques, just seeds, pumpkin, sunflower or something like that, that will never take root deeply enough in the soil, let alone in the air, and universal actually meant completely neutral, you remember that now, first established by Dag Hammarskjöld in the UN headquarters, adopted for the Brandenburg Gate, its north wing – you researched all of that long ago.

When you push the door open again, the lady and her gaze are awaiting you, there isn't a tally of visitor numbers, but is that necessary? She is on duty here two hours a week, and the hours always pass so differently, sometimes one guest after another, sometimes nobody, sometimes people with cheeseburgers who want to eat them in peace, but they aren't allowed to. You don't dare to ask if teens come in for a grope, nor if it's a practical place for junkies and dealers – then she mentions the button, all by herself, the red one under the table, press it and an alarm bell rings at the cobbler's, two shops down, *we are protected by a Muslim*, and he sorts everything out. The shopping centre, the next stop for your research, is just a short walk away. You follow an old map that leads you right to a Bayern Munich fan shop. Something has messed up, you think, and wonder whether you would like a Luca Toni shirt, for night-time, in bed.

Before multifunctional and universal, for a long time only one kind existed: *the chapel*. In Schalke's stadium it was built into the VIP catacombs with an altar, you would get in with your press ID, didn't know, though, how much you needed to see it for yourself, a good photo is the be-all and end-all. In the Olympic Stadium the same thing, gold-leaf covered walls, a glimmering background for christenings, weddings and deaths. You do buy the shirt and ask for a bag, a neutral one, but they don't have one, and you don't want to be the cause of any aggression, you're in northern

Germany, where people wear other club colours and know little of Catholicism. Beate Uhse's mail-order sex shop introduced neutral packaging for all home deliveries, it's different with your press ID, you felt exultant at first when the postman saw National Union of Journalists on an envelope, sometimes you dropped your purse at the checkout on purpose, only to pick up the ID that had slipped out and lay it briefly on the conveyor belt in the hope that the checkout girl would be impressed. It's always about belonging to something or other.

You wonder if you should do a feature on sport and culture, an interview with Luca Toni, *Italian Stallion*, it wouldn't be impossible, and perhaps he could also do something so that in northern Bayern Munich shops neutral bags were available, after all: in northern devotional spaces Muslim prayer mats were to hand. Beate Uhse was from Flensburg, you think, maybe Protestant, if anything, probably more like neutral. You scrunch the bag up with your elbow, the shop assistant couldn't really tell you where to go, and knitted his brow a little, before then explaining the way to the information stand. There a friendly girl whose cap and shirt carry the shopping centre logo, points outside, over a bridge, *so far from the mall*, you ask, and for a moment the girl doesn't know what you mean, so you say it again: *shopping centre*. Now the girl shrugs, obviously her way of agreeing, you march off, over the bridge, and don't know why a tired imitation of a church had to be made here, there are enough real ones, and they must be more beautiful than this.

Although you went all the way over the bridge, the bag under your arm, in the end you didn't go in. A few grannies were sitting in the entrance hall, their hair white, yellow and purple, they were eating cake and drinking coffee, the shopping centre parish provides the coffee pots and trays of cake every day. And the grannies were so cheerful, they had even brought their own whipped cream, the parish didn't have money for that, disposable funnels were poking out of their handbags. You didn't want to disturb them by requesting to view the room, you didn't want to have to show your ID, interrupt the banter, it was for the best that they met here, since no one else asked after them, after God or anything else. Outside just bags on legs, the eco-cosmetics chain prints their bags with a palm tree, that's as eco as it gets; everyone's diaries are breathing down their necks and have cancelled Sundays. Inside you drink coffee with the grannies, the shopping centre project is ecumenical, they tell you, and that's enough information for you.

What you would really like is to be in your bathtub, that is a quiet space too, offering everything you need for a peaceful retreat. Dozing in the mountains of bubbles, not seeing the dimples in your skin, when did that start actually, that your backside chose cellulite, in any case you have bought the Luca Toni shirt in XXL, so that it can hang baggily over it. You could brush your thighs and expose them to cold showers, use the Q10 lotion and hope that it has an effect, you could pluck your eyebrows and give some real attention to cleaning the gaps between your teeth, just to remind yourself of back when all of that was not only unnecessary but simply unimaginable. Back then, when you had just pulled yourself together after the *This is not a scientific approach*, had refused to say hi to the bearded and sandaled lecturer or to go to his seminar, had no idea what Q10 was and had never bought dental floss, you landed next to someone in the library and immediately never wanted to get up again. That evening he didn't take you home, you found out the reason for that later. He was using bedclothes that he was ashamed of, that he was afraid you wouldn't lie in, Borussia Dortmund colours, and probably he was right. When you were then living together, in a flat under the roof, the club threw the championship away in the last match of the season, and you rummaged in the wardrobe for the old sheets and put them on the bed, to console him.

With editor-in-chief Kunst you had already learnt to be less trouble, the live writer's love letter was your only slip up, two days later in the office, as mentioned – blank cheques, give away. He separated from his wife, for you, in any case, but she only stayed at a friend's and her sister's for a few weeks, she wanted to stay at his for a transition period, as a base from which to hunt for a place near to her job. That is when you realized for the first time that absolutely everyone plays by different rules. A career without job protection, an unprotected job description, later you started to sleep with the people you interviewed, and the editor-in-chief's wife had soon found a flat and spent several weeks renovating it, then he reported with relief that she was gone now and had ordered a sofa for starters. The sofa arrived and stayed for one night, she sent it back the next morning, she didn't like it, it seemed completely pointless. So the renovated flat remained uninhabited, and there was no more talk of a transition period. Your Waterloo was suitably celebrated, you took your own sofa to the tip, bought carpets and cushions, they paid themselves off with the first interview, post-interview, *love never fails*, as St Paul says, the diary has cancelled Sundays, but the day he'll leave is fixed, noted down, never again this person who comes in the same door in the

evening with you and wishes for nothing else. That is what you know, this last thing, disguised as bedclothes or a ex-wife who doesn't want a long journey to work.

You carry on researching.

As well as multifunctional and universal, holistic is another category, so you go into the mind, body & spirit sector now, you have wrapped a fluffy towel around yourself and let yourself be heated up to ninety degrees. Even this sauna is part of the comprehensive survey and it too wants to be a quiet space, admittedly without confession or coffee and cake, instead with essential oils and mandalas, and regularly changing coloured light. You can't judge whether or not here you really sweat in a more spiritual way. Today is Women's Only day, and you prefer it like that, it's some consolation to see other dimpled skin. In any case, taking the soul into account seems increasingly to be an economic factor, even in spa retreats, *I want to look good when I'm naked*, it is about meditation, about centring yourself, wherever that centre is, whatever is going on there, the Lord's Prayer, a prayer to the sun, offering flowers, as long as it is holistic.

The person sitting next to you has sweat on her forehead as she stares at the mandala on the wall opposite, you could book a ying and yang session after this, the paper would pay, probably. You suddenly find yourself here in this spiritual sauna thinking of Martin Luther, you certainly haven't ever, anywhere spent time thinking of him, not even at Halloween, although you don't open your door on principle, when children ring the bell, shouting out for sweets, you find it repulsive that putting on an ugly plastic mask is now reason enough for presents, at least the epiphany singers earn their donations, you would open for them, but you don't see them going around collecting in the North.

Why did Luther go to so much trouble? Central station. Stadium. Shopping centre. Sauna. Full of travellers, fans, customers and fluffy towel women – the market is tough now, the beer-sponsored chapel in the VIP catacombs issues letters of indulgence. You have never thought about Martin Luther, *here I stand, I can do no other* – he just nailed them to the door, his rules, he caused an unavoidable furore and said good riddance to belonging.

You climb down into the immersion pool, your skin is burning. You'll leave ying and yang, as well as holistic as a category. Once home you pull the Luca Toni shirt on and

crawl under the sheet. You dream yourself back to the night that you slept in bedclothes meant to console another person – that was the last time you were naked.

The next morning the seaman's hostel is already waiting for your research and definition, neither multifunctional nor universal, certainly not holistic, but multi-religious – which means that there is a space gathering together everything that people need for their beliefs. As you go in: a Bible and a cross, you ask yourself yet again if that is actually helpful, praying to an executed man, a flayed victim who almost always just turned his cheek, is that a workable guiding principle, doesn't that all collapse when human dignity is invoked, and surely everyone believes in that since people became humanists? For that too there are theoretical writings here and a picture, abstract of course, that invites seafaring atheists to meditate, they won't have any money for the mandala spas, no paper will pay their bill, but you really don't want to start thinking now about working conditions and pay on container ships. Your gaze moving to the right, the star of David and menorah, the candelabrum with seven branches, one for each day of creation. There is probably a torah roll lying in the cupboard, in case anyone wants to study here, the ancient God, known to Christians too, *an eye for an eye, and he saw, that it was good*. Nevertheless one text in the Old Testament that almost converted you once:

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

At the wedding of the library man, you immediately never wanted to get up again, and the best man read that, *best man*, you suddenly had to fear that love might really never fail, and the bride, you barely knew her. At least you are still friends today, at the reception the smiles on other people's faces, *how lovely, a good relationship with the ex, for a change*.

What the hell are does? And how does a roof hold this space together? Left from you a Buddha is squatting in a niche, you can't ever point your feet at him, the guidebook on my beach holiday knew that, you can't step onto the temple's threshold either, but what happens if an ignorant Catholic, Jew or Muslim just stops in the doorway – do they insult the Buddha then? The prayer mat and beads lie in another niche, one look and everyone knows which way Mecca is, whether it matters to them or not. Do the seafarers disturb each other, if they are praying in parallel, does the Song of Solomon

tolerate suras? And aren't they all tired anyway and just wanting to get to the port's whores, to celebrate the service that brought them all there?

If you were asked, instead of multi-religious you would say *eclectic*, you don't like it here, after all you avoid the yoghurt shelves in supermarkets because of the decisions you would have to make there, let your press ID fall as often as you like, no one is going to make them for you. At least your feet have never pointed at Buddha, a young prince who rode out four times and saw poverty, old age, sickness, death. And he couldn't bear it and quickly declared the world an illusion.

In the last niche you find a flaming ornament, half bird, half man, you have no idea, will have to ask and would bet on Hindu – maybe a god with a sweet tooth, with an exposed side, open to bribes? You passed the intermediate exams with an archaeologist, who claimed he was sacrificing Artemis, in his garden.

For an hour you drift from one niche to another, no seaman in sight, they must still be following a red light, container ships have cancelled Sundays too or whatever other days can be holy, and you almost miss the central station woman with her gaze. Here there's only a surly man squatting outside, behind the counter, responsible for coffee, beds and the worldwide web, not for anything else, he makes a point of that. He's never been in the room himself, why should he, he lives on land, not a ship, the sacred niches are cleaned every two weeks, and yes, sometimes a chaplain comes, not that they have much English here. Briefly you feel like crying for the poor sailors, the container ship slaves, far from home, from their own churches, temples and brothels, offered nothing more here than a bed, coffee, internet access and a niche that is cleaned every two weeks. But it's work after all, your research, and you know that if you lose your light touch you will never be able to write again. You ask the surly guy if you can use the computer, you can, and search for *Quiet Space*. A link does indeed appear and wishes you a warm welcome: *gallery, meditation, prayer board* – who finds the internet so loud that they need to programme this stuff?

The gallery's devotional images are even better than yesterday's oil painting, the prayer board is just a click away, Moni has immortalized herself on it, asking and praying, for all to see, that Uwe won't leave her. You are tempted to write Moni an email, suggesting she leave her computer, move her arse, a walk in the woods can help remedy boy problems, even a haircut, you know that from personal experience, and if you really want to get down to essentials: then why not pray in a real church, that's

what they are there for, aren't they? And rarely just since yesterday. What kind of a generation is it, you ask yourself, that posts its lovesickness on to a prayer board? Was Halloween brought to northern Germany for them, Luther's image printed on sweets, quiet spaces established, multifunctional, universal, holistic and multi-religious, devotional branches in fact, still analogue for now. What do they want, *time out, chill out*, what is it that they need to rest up from yet again?

If you should, against all likelihood, ever reproduce, *with pain*, you will set the alarm every Sunday and drag your child to the service, it will have to learn the Lord's Prayer by heart, the creed and the Kyrie as well, then it can decide against it as far as you're concerned, definition by definition, but for real please, not in the lite version, not virtually or over coffee and cake, not accompanied by a sponsor's name, not sweating it out in the eco-sauna, if you had a child you would read the whole Bible to it from an early age. You should ask yourself if you aren't slowly losing your mind with this topic, but also, if everything wasn't lost long ago.

You have set up an interview, at the airport. Although you had actually finished with the *chapel* category, good pictures are the be-all and end-all, an airport chaplain, that interested you, that's the opposite of job protection and an unprotected job description, it is exactly what you call someone who has a church at an airport and at the gates any number of sheep, most of whom don't even know that that is what they are.

He is younger than you thought he would be, wears a grey editor-in-chief's suit, with a little silver cross on his lapel, you find it somehow sexy. You start with his job, *what I do is not exactly en vogue*, he says with a straight face, and the phrase *mischievous face* comes to mind, which leads to you blurting everything out: the train station, shopping centre, spa, seaman's hostel and internet, and that you can't actually work out what to make of it, what kind of topic it is and who actually sent you. At that he laughs, and at some point you find yourself laughing too. He doesn't know what to do, more than keep the space open, he explains, you wonder briefly whether you should mention the club shirt, the bed linen, the ex-wife and her sofa, the dimpled skin on your backside and that you have always liked to belong. You don't know what is allowed and what isn't with a man of God, you have never talked to one before, how much man is there in one, enough to have noticed that you held your breath when you held out your hand to him, your interview partner?

Instead you ask him if he knows his Hindu gods, by chance, out of personal interest you want to clear up the flaming ornament, half bird, half man, and he says, Yes, that

is Vishnu, the All-Pervading One, and he certainly wouldn't want sweets. You dig deeper, where did the airport chaplain learn that, and are thankful for a further topic, and he explains about Asia after the tsunami, two weeks of pastoral care work, *pastoral care*, and then he tells you that people regularly die up there, on board, luckily that never happened when you were in the air, at least you never got wind of it, then he's beeped like a doctor on call, for pastoral care. You ask him to say something about what happens when you die, what he believes, how you can bear it, when it's hard enough during your life to stick at something, to have a lasting sense of belonging to something, and then just this perspective of darkness, the cold and worms. Two funerals last year and both times almost a breakdown, and the people in the coffins weren't even close to you, but you couldn't find anything to hold onto, strange actually, you had expected you would, the ground opened up beneath you and in view of that, nothing else counted, not career or ID, neither beauty nor love, as brief as they are, there below the worms are waiting, to eat human pride, including your own, that's all, is all there is, and you had to cry so hard that you were embarrassed, that you considered driving to A & E to be given Valium.

By now you don't know how long you have been talking for, the airport chaplain is still listening, something in his gaze when it rests on you that you don't know, that neither the station lady nor anyone else had in their gaze, it has something to do with warmth in the widest sense. You end up talking kitsch, the worst clichés, that you never want to be applicable, and when you stop talking he clears his throat. He often meets people who are afraid of flying, he says, and yet that is the only reasonable reaction, what madness, to be taken up thousands of feet with only metal sheeting around you and an engine that could give up at any minute, a fallible person you don't know behind the controls, it would be better to ask what those people without a fear of flying are repressing, how sick are they? And how else should you react to dying, if not with horror, endless tears and a wish for Valium, how sick is it to stand fully composed at an open grave?

You can't judge whether it's really helpful for someone who suffers from a fear of flying to hear this, but for you it's as if heavy animals have shifted from your shoulders and for a moment you see yourself in a Protestant vicarage, your five ruddy-cheeked children around a table, a big-heartedly open door, warm soup always on the hob, and a good word for everyone. You hear the alarm clock go off on Sunday morning, all five children scrubbed clean, you go to church, pray the Lord's Prayer

together, without a prayer to the sun being an alternative, and your husband preaches the sermon. Or a jeep trip through one of the deserts where the needy live, you are at the wheel in a threadbare dress, a cross around your neck and you are on the way to the mission school, the clinic, the well – the chaplain at your side.

No one could fail to see the ring on his finger. That and his cross contradict any claim that he might have difficulties with confessions. Just how did someone like him smuggle himself in here, how did the church let someone in who only knows how to keep the space open? Ideas of inside and outside only do harm, he believes, you can certainly understand the Gospel like that, Jesus made the outside inside, and was crucified for it in the end. Then he comes back to your original question and thinks that *dust to dust* is a consolation after all. Your face wrinkles up in disgust, *perhaps for a rabbit*, but compared to all the effort of being a human, dust at the beginning and the end really isn't enough. *That sounds like hurt feelings*, he suggests, again with a straight face. For a moment you are lost for words, then you admit he's right and giggle. Right in the airport church, *between heaven and hell*, you can't stop giggling, a metal cross above the altar, no body on it, words from the Psalms around it, you'll have to read them later – and maybe there's a third option, maybe not chance, but the opposite of all your Waterloos: Buddha is to blame for Q10. The young prince, deeply hurt by poverty, old age, sickness, death, quickly declared the world an illusion. While you are still giggling, you feel tears collecting, your bath would be the only safe place now, but you are working, after all, researching.

Now the airport chaplain asks you to cast a glance into the mosque next door. You open the door together, an ugly carpet and slippers, an ornate niche towards Mecca, mint green, and eyes full of reproach. You have no business here, *we are protected by a Muslim*, he has no business here, and together you close the door. Back in the church you leaf distractedly through the visitors' book, just to steady yourself a little more, noticing that people write to God, directly, they seem to be sure that God reads it too, and thank him for insight and reflection, for blessing and consolation. You have never thanked anybody for things like that, and that's how you plan to carry on, instead you write your mobile number and email address in the book. You feel that's not enough and ask the airport chaplain for another pen, scarlet red, you know the words exactly that once almost converted you. The wedding ring and cross don't worry you any more, who on earth asks for a confession like that, you write:

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

- Translated by Stefan Tobler