

Sub-Kamiture (Issue June 2017) / Nippon Design Center

We saw your work for the first time at the exhibition of the Japan Media Arts Festival last year. We were really shocked to see that a guy only in underwear was furious in a black wooden box and we thought, it is such a powerful artwork. Since then, we have been interested in the works you are creating. We'd like to introduce you to more Japanese people through this magazine. It would be great if we could hear your attitude to your works and your overall activity focusing on "Wutbürger".

Sub-Kamiture: We are sorry about this impolite question, but is the guy in the „Wutbürger“ work yourself?

Andreas Lutz: This is not an impolite question, in fact, I was asked this a lot of times before. But no, this guy is not me. His name is Andreas Genschmar, a German actor and musician from Berlin. We are so lucky that we picked him for this video installation and he is the perfect impersonator of the character of Stefan W., the „Wutbürger“. When I say we, I talk about Christoph Grünberger and myself, as we initiated this video installation together.

S-K: We saw the caption at the exhibition that said, the work questions the contemporary relationship between the personal and the social/political. Is this the work that you take over citizen's protest movement or did you create it based on your political thought?

AL: Well, this is a good question and I'm happy to tell here how this project started and how it and the public perception in Germany shifted over time. Imagine, around 2010 in Germany there was a movement in Stuttgart / Southern Germany of people who protested against building a new main train station. At this time, this was a really big issue in German media, because this kind of protests would only be expected maybe in Hamburg or in Berlin — cities with a kind of leftist character — but never in Stuttgart. Stuttgart is the area in Germany where car industries like Mercedes-Benz and Porsche have their main branch offices. So this means objectively, that this is kind of a wealthy, conservative area and the people as well, so maybe really satisfied or no need to go on the streets and protest, because they all lead, again objectively, a really good life. Even more was the public wonder and kind of amusement, that this wealthy bourgeois people — teachers, professors, doctors — would meet every week to protest against this new train station, starting very calmly but with increasing anger and volume. During this time, German magazine „Der Spiegel“ would call these people „Wutbürger“ for the first time, and defined them as kind of former „good“ citizens, but out of disappointment of these politics (in Stuttgart) would now turn against the local government. They identified the „Wutbürger“ as kind of older, wealthy people with a conservative lifestyle and because most of them were retired, they would have enough time to direct all their focus and energy towards this collective aim.

And with this background and this public perception at that time, we started the „Wutbürger“ video installation. Because the term „Wutbürger“ was only used to describe the collective movement, we

got really interested in analyzing the single anger and fear of an individual. The German term „Wutbürger“ is the same in singular as in plural, but since it was mainly used with its plural, collective meaning, which could be translated as „enraged citizens“, we were really interested to show as well the other, singular meaning, which could be translated as „an enraged citizen“, the anger of one, the anger which lies in each of us.

And after preparing the fictional biography and story of Stefan W. — which is a metaphor for „everybody“ — and shooting the play as a live performance in the box, we started a short guerrilla intervention tour through Germany in the summer of 2014. And this was the moment when the individual and the collective, the private and the public / political meanings of the term „Wutbürger“ converged again. Now, we placed the box with the play of Stefan W. — arguing about his personal problems and anger — in front of typical places which collective „Wutbürger“ would argue against, for example, nuclear power plants, surveillance facilities, the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, to name a few.

And at this time, the whole term „Wutbürger“ — as publicly perceived — shifted into a new direction, because there was a new movement born in Dresden / Eastern Germany, which was called PEGIDA. In the beginning, German media would use the term „Wutbürger“ as well for this collective group, but it turned out really fast that the aim of this group was totally different from the one of the group in Stuttgart, for which the term was originally created for. The first year it was kind of misty and the PEGIDA movement would march every Monday through Dresden because they saw themselves as the last bastion of saving the „christian, occidental Germany“ from the assumed invasion of the islamic influences. And besides, there were some people who may have had the similar background and aims as the Stuttgart „Wutbürger“; it turns out that the main group was very right-wing, nationalist orientated, going as far as the „neo-nazi“ wing. And at this point, the term „Wutbürger“ was no longer used to describe these PEGIDA people, because there was a main difference between these two groups: hate. Or, as German chancellor Angela Merkel described them, as „people who carry hate inside their hearts“. The people who spoke publicly for or at the PEGIDA marches, people like Geert Wilders or Marine Le Pen, people who gain more and more power in Europe right now, embody in their original statement just hate, nothing more. At least in my opinion.

And this is when a new shift happened, but this time regarding the perception of our video installation and the character of Stefan W. It was clear that most of the people who marched for PEGIDA first in Dresden, later in more cities throughout Germany, were people who's anger against refugees, muslims, politicians had one, same origin: their own individual anger and fears. Why would people in Dresden, the city with the smallest percentage of refugees and muslims in Germany, fear being overtaken by refugees and muslims? No, their true fears, their true statement came from deep within, from a whole lifetime aggregated and now, at this point, ready to disrupt anything which would accidentally be there: the story of Stefan W. And there's no doubt about it

that this individual fear and anger isn't real, rather, through the video installation and the analysis of the private and public anger, the actual motives of these people now get revealed.

S-K: Why did you express by using a box and the media of video?

AL: From the very beginning on it was clear for us that we wanted to make a video installation which would come to the people and not vice versa. Normally, to view (video) art, you need to go to a museum or an art gallery. But in this case, people get confronted with a life size, sometimes naked man, in their habitual and ordinary surroundings. Every time when we exhibit the box in public space, the most interesting thing for me is to observe the reactions of people when they walk by in front of the box and think — at least for a moment — that there's a real man inside who's shouting at them or behaves differently from what one would expect in public. There were some remarkable situations, for example in Örebro / Sweden, where the box was placed in a large shopping mall and people who just wanted to do their weekend shopping got really confused and didn't know what to expect from this unpredictable man in front of them. Or in Brussels / Belgium, where the box was placed between two large former office buildings, where you could sense the absence of all the working and now jobless people, which empowered the loneliness of Stefan W. even more, so that the visitors who would see this got really quiet and calm. I think for me moments like this make me go further and believe even more that you can have an impact or give an impulse to see things differently through art.

S-K: Were there any troubles when you created this work?

AL: No, not particular problems. We worked on the preparations for the play and staging over two years, and, of course, we had some trouble sometimes. But this is and will always be the case when you create something original. You will inevitably find out some things while you're already on the way.

S-K: What do you think that anger is?

AL: I would always differ between anger and wrath, „Wut“ and „Zorn“. I don't know if there's an exact translation in English or Japanese, but in German, there's a huge difference between these two words. Anger or „Wut“ — as it would be the most likely translation for „Wutbürger“ as „man / citizen with anger“ — has a more personal, more private and a more emotional meaning. Anger can drive you blind, it has the power to make you lose all control so that you would do things you never did before. For me, anger always comes from the heart, which means that it has the same power as love does.

And wrath as „Zorn“, on the opposite side, is more rational, more mind-controlled. People driven by this feeling would never go blind because of wrath, it's more like a power that pushes them when they feel there is injustice and they think they're right. This word is derived from the ancient greek

„thymos“ which means a „civilized furor of the citizen“. In Germany, there’s also the expression of „gerechter Zorn“ which describes that this kind of anger is always driven by an objective, just aim. Wrath has a more political meaning and always a subjectively right or good impetus. So to say and returning to the description of our „Wutbürger“ video installation, the correct expression for the people of the original movement in Stuttgart would likely be „Zornbürger“, and the people of the PEGIDA movement described more correctly as „Wutbürger“, or later as „Hassbürger“ or „hateful citizen“.

Maybe you could say first there’s wrath / „Zorn“, when you have the feeling there’s injustice and you want to change things. But when you try and try and you fail and there’s no way to get through, then wrath becomes anger / „Wut“, because you still think that you’re right but nobody else sees your point. And when you’re in this angry emotional mood for a certain time and begin to feel helpless, your anger can finally transform into hate / „Hass“. And once people are in this state, there’s no more place for empathy, appreciation and acceptance for the subject of their hate.

S-K: What propels you?

AL: I think, like I described it before, it’s the moments when you recognize that something you would first think for yourself, and then decided to go all the way and put your idea into a real, physical piece and then to see that you can change how other people sometimes see or sense the world. For me, this is and has been always truly remarkable and the biggest drive I can imagine.

S-K: Where do you get inspiration from for creating the works?

AL: I think the biggest inspiration is just life. Maybe it sounds too obvious, but I believe the work and the things I’m doing now are the result of things I’ve seen, heard, sensed, and did since I came into this world. And this makes me see the world, of course, differently from anybody else, as everybody creates his, her or its own world. And I try to take this inspiration — my particular lifetime experience — and transform it into pieces like video, light, sound and kinetic installations. Others do so by creating music, running marathons, traveling the world, being good parents or just by simply smiling to their opposite.

S-K: What especially do you pay attention to when you create the works?

AL: Through the years I’ve learned that every single detail — and may it even be the smallest detail — needs particular attention. Because only in this way, the message, the story, the statement which I want to express can come in its purest form to the one who perceives the work. How could a visitor understand the inherent, already abstracted meaning of a work, if I weren’t paying attention to trying to reveal the true inner statement in the creating process?

For me, a „good“ work as well as a sort of meaningful art always comes with these two layers: the first layer is when there’s a piece which you perceive in its physical, visual, audible or even non-

expressible presence when you enter a space. In this moment, it has a singular, individual meaning just for you, because you don't know anything about it. It can attract you, it can annoy you, it can make you cry or it even has the power to change your mind — the way you look at the world — into a new direction. In my opinion, this first impression is achieved through the aesthetic, the objective or subjective beauty of the work.

The second layer comes over time, when you already like this work or sensed that there's some kind of meaning to you. You would start to get interested in what the artist's thoughts were in order to create this particular piece, why he'd do this at this time, what his influences were that lead him to this work. This means, at this point, your individual meaning of the work converges with the thoughts the artist already implied. And from my experience when I go to a museum or a gallery for myself or from what I've heard people say about my work, this is where sometimes a new dialogue starts. If the visitor were to see things like the artist does, it's alright and this is what art is as well. But for me the more interesting point is that you appreciate and respect the work in the first place, but you would see things differently and because of this, you would start to think and maybe have discussions with others about your and their point of view. And I guess this is my original impetus when creating works of art: by putting my statement as a new starting point, I hope it will facilitate communication.

S-K: Do you have anything you are interested in now?

AL: I couldn't emphasize a particular interest here. But of course, I constantly try to broaden my mind and my experiences, for example, by going to the theater. The way contemporary theater in Berlin debates current topics is quite interesting and I always leave the performances with questions and new ideas. Where I grew up, going to the theater would mostly mean just watching a classical version of "Romeo and Juliet" or "Carmen", which in a way could also be interesting, but kind of bored me always because it often was too dramatic and too expressive. And additionally, at this time, I wasn't sensitive regarding the underlying, general topics which are communicated in these plays. You could say back then I could just see the surface, the first layer as I described before, but had no sense or no interest for the second, much more important layer.

S-K: What would you like to do in the future?

AL: Basically, at this point in my life, I'm really happy with what I'm able to do and I try to keep this also for the future. Things will always change, but at least for myself I have found the basis and my way to express things which are important to me and, in a way, how I want to contribute to our society.

Biography

Andreas Lutz's (*1981 in Freiburg, Germany) initial works refer to alternative human machine interaction and the approach, to create integrated and universal communication systems. In his recent work, he increasingly analyzes and reveals phenomenons of perception versus reality and principles of abstract aesthetics with audio-visual installations. The creation of experimental soundscapes and the relation of semiotics and sound are further aspects of his work.

Among others, Lutz's work has been exhibited at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe (Germany), the National Art Center Tokyo (Japan), the OpenArt Biennale in Örebro (Sweden) and won the Excellence Award at the 19th Japan Media and Arts Festival.

Website

<http://www.andreaslutz.com/>

Catalogue for the Wutbürger video installation

<http://shop.gestalten.com/wutbuenger.html>