

Who wants to tell us something?

by Karsten Ehlers

Andreas is one of us-the SEZ-goers, the Depeche Mode listeners, the Westpaket recipients, the Intershop connoisseurs, the stonewashed-jeans wearers. We were too young to truly suffer under the East.

We were too old not to notice anything. Old enough to see ourselves as East Berliners. We are the former Young Pioneers, who could perhaps be seen as the last generation of the GDR. When we began to think, we visited memorials to murdered anti-fascists. We enjoyed singing the political children's songs in school, which sounded nice, since the lyrics weren't so important to us. Somehow, the "little trumpet player" became our sad friend, whom the evil fascists had killed. We learned to read and write-without knowing it at the time-from Brecht.

Then, when the West was suddenly everywhere, we heard for the first time that we, as Germans, had lost the war, though we were taught that we were freed. It was very clear to us: unlike us, fascists were evil, and fortunately that time is past. We are the new ones. We honestly don't want to repeat any mistakes. Especially not that one.

We didn't move to the far right and never complained about Turks, as foreign as they seemed to us at first. The foreign was more interesting than threatening. We didn't secretly admire Hitler, either. The necessity of a national identity was quite uninteresting to us-among other reasons, because the eternal fatherland we were taught to love now apparently lay in shatters. We, however, weren't shattered. We had just gotten started and had nothing more or less than our understanding of ourselves. We knew exactly what we liked and what we didn't. We didn't want to lie, to allow ourselves to be spied upon. We wanted to enjoy the "freedom from" and make something of the "freedom to." Andreas does this, especially the former, in a variety of ways. His professional and artistic abilities have helped make him the "Chancellor's photographer." Didn't Angela Merkel allow herself to be photographed in a seemingly romantic fashion, like a philosopher searching for a solution, who ultimately has no choice but to accept the current injustice as the least of all evils?

The only people Mühe can provoke with his latest exhibition are those whose German-bourgeois understanding of themselves lacks a clear relationship to the past, who can't separate themselves from the events that took place on one and the same piece of land. Perhaps Mühe is tired of being praised by the leaders of the Western world. He can afford to stick his finger into a wound. A wound that gapes open when one secretly enjoys the clarity of the Tempelhof airport building, when one loses oneself for a moment in thoughts of Germania, and remains unsure of how to deal with the history of East and West Germany. Mühe sticks his middle finger not only into this wound, but also into the center of West Germany, which is so concerned about its reputation out of fear that someone might find out that it doesn't

quite have a handle on itself. After all, its domestic intelligence agency was very successful in organizing the "National Socialist Underground." Mühe makes this clear as well.

A similar problem arises before every game played by the German national football team. Why is the same song sung today as between 1933 and 1945? The lyrics are different now, but the melody is the same. If you hum it, you can, if you choose, imagine the old text and dream of the Lebensraum in the East. By preserving the melody, we've avoided breaking with the old tradition. However, it is precisely this that Andreas Mühe does in his work. The elaborately staged heroics are presented in the form of urinating soldiers, and the mountains are helpless to stop it. Mühe doesn't surrender to the apparently endless series of arguments, without having to remain silent, simply by doing what he can do best. He destroys the myth.

He takes the Nazis' aesthetics away from them. Thus, it is possible to plainly state: That is a Nazi. He's pissing. This is completely different than the way he would have been portrayed before-finally. No more myth. No more demonization. Why should the edge on which Andreas balances these provocations be so narrow? If you are irreproachable, if you don't have any skeletons in the closet, you can deal with forms as forms, with attitudes, with distance, can clearly confront a topic without fear. Without fear of being caught. Fear of falling into a questionable glorification. After all, the subject is in the past. If your heart is pure, you can even afford to crack jokes about minorities. We are also a minority, without a lobby, without a homeland, and we don't care. The perpetual guilty conscience of our leaders is not our own. We are as German as any German. No more and no less. Anyone can understand that if he wants to. We know both German states. We know the difference between the GDR and the German Reich of 1933 to 1945, and also the difference between West and East. Our understanding of ourselves doesn't depend on our understanding of totalitarianism. We don't need an extension of either of these ideas to repeatedly recite the lack of alternatives in the present. The freedom that we hoped to gain from the West has left its mark on us, even though this hope was disappointed. It is inside us. It is what it is, and was what it was. The future is ours to shape.

Hopefully Andreas Mühe will keep pressing the shutter button with his middle finger.