

Guidelines
2015-2012

In Thomas Mann's novel 'The Magic Mountain', the protagonist, Hans Castorp, at some point escapes for a little while from the warm and safe environment of Berghof, the sanatorium where he is being treated. He goes out skiing on the mountains and gets trapped in a snowstorm. Under the circumstances of danger, time acquires for him a purely subjective sense, everything seems longer. Eventually he finds shelter under the projecting roof of a closed hut in the middle of nowhere and there, leaning against a column, he falls asleep. He has a dream about 'the nature of man, and about a courteous, reasonable, and respectful community of men'. As he awakes and contemplates his dream, he asks:

'Death or life – illness or health – spirit or nature. Are those really contradictions? I ask you: Are those problems? No, they are not problems, and the question of their nobility is not a problem, either. Death kicks over its traces in the midst of life, and this would not be life if it did not, and in the middle is where the *homo Dei's* state is found – in the middle between kicking over the traces and reason – just as his condition is somewhere between mystical community and windy individualism. I can see all that from my column here. And in that state let him commune with himself, fine, gallant, genial, and respectful – for he alone is noble, and not that set of contradictions. Man is the master of contradictions, they occur through him, and so he is more noble than they. More noble than death, too noble for it – that is the freedom of his mind. More noble than life, too noble for it – that is the devotion of his heart. There, I have rhymed it all together, dreamed a poem of humankind. I will remember it. I will be good. I will grant death no dominion over my thoughts. For in that is found goodness and brotherly love, and in that alone. Death is a great power. You take off your hat and tiptoe past his presence, rocking your way forward. He wears the ceremonial ruff of what has been, and you put on austere black in his honor. Reason stands foolish before him, for reason is only virtue, but death is freedom and kicking over the traces, chaos and lust. Lust, my dream says, not love. Death and love – there is no rhyming them, that is a preposterous rhyme, a false rhyme. Love stands opposed to death – it alone, and not reason, is stronger than death. Only love, and not reason, yields kind thoughts. And form, too, comes only from love and goodness: form and the cultivated manners of man's fair state, of a reasonable, genial community – out of silent regard for the bloody banquet. Oh, what a clear dream I've dreamed, how well I've 'played king'! I will remember it. I will keep faith with death in my heart, but I will clearly remember that if faithfulness to death and to what is past rules our thoughts and deeds, that leads only to wickedness, dark lust, and hatred of humankind. *For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts.* And with that I shall awaken. For with that I have dreamed my dream to its end, to its goal. I've long been searching for that truth: in the meadow where Hippe appeared to me, on my balcony, everywhere. The search for it drove me into these snowy mountains. And now I have it. My dream has granted it to me so clearly that I will always remember.'¹

The cling to life and quest of a personal guideline has led Andreas Sell in various adventures. His everyday activities, thoughts, questions, readings, wanderings, plans compose his book *Lifestyles*, 2015. This book has been an on-going project for four years. It could have never ended and last as long as his life. It is an autobiography, a self-portrait and a shared diary. The reader bears witness of his projects and solitary

¹ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods, (London: Everyman's Library, 2005) 586-587

meanderings. His common or uncommon lifestyle becomes an open book reflecting on the construction of a personal and social space.

Andreas Sell works on the making of space. He builds, maps, arranges, represents a space to receive the self and the other; a physical, mental and sentimental space to expose or protect, to be visited or inhabited. Thus his practice explores personal and social relationships and reflects on people's links to their surroundings. It engages in processes of transition, adaptation, attachment and detachment starting from his personal experience. His work coincides with his life story, composing both a material and immaterial narration.

After a big tour to different countries and trials of various lifestyles, he moved to the island of Lesbos. He ended up there two years ago as he was looking for a piece of land to build a summerhouse for one person. An island, a piece of land surrounded by sea, exemplifies isolation and autonomy. The remote location of his chosen land on the island brings forth the idea of an escape alluding to the romantic quest for a life away from the ordinary social conventions. Andreas Sell bought this land to build a solitary refuge and retreat, an accommodation that creates and simultaneously fills an empty space. A house constitutes an archetypal construction, a shelter that protects from the external conditions and separates the private from the public realm. Every part of the conception of his house has been invested with friendship and its purpose was to provide healing solitude. The initial idea was that he would design and build the house by himself, stay there and make a living by renting it out. It was thought as both an artistic and living project with symbolic and financial value reflecting on the conditions that allow a certain freedom. But, to what extent is freedom a private quest and can be attained personally?

Lesbos, a large and fertile island of the North Aegean at the periphery of Greece close to the Turkish coastline, for the past months has been receiving thousands of refugees who are waiting to register for asylum applications. At present, the purpose and use of Andreas Sell's shelter is yet to be defined. He is also without permanent domicile. He lives in many other houses as guest offering his help as an informal exchange for their hospitality. He has also hosted other guests in other people's houses while being hosted himself. After he finished the construction of his house, he decided not to live in it or rent it out for an income but to found an association and run it with other people. Through different dwelling experiences he has been exploring self-sufficiency and interdependence, the economy of relations as a sharing of emotions, goods, services and perspectives.

Like he is now shifting from the guest-host roles, in the past he shifted from the employee, free-lancer and unemployed status. At some point he decided to leave and try another form of life without home, schedule and everyday facilities. It was a way to test the liberties and restrictions of living without routine and assurance. Then, his relation to space and time shaped his own subjective map and calendar. While in flux and in a quest of defining his individual position in the world and within society, he was confronted with his personal desires and limits, the regularity of roles and the social order that we take for granted. These issues were also present in some of his previous projects. He had aimed to be a catalyst in facilitating the wishes of others through actions or money. He was asking people to make a wish and tried to fulfill it or paid them to continue doing what they had already been doing for as long as they wanted. When he left everything familiar behind, he focused on deciphering his own wishes beyond any given or assumed role.

After a long wander and life 'on the road', he returned to Berlin, his base at the time, for a little while. He worked for four months on dismantling and assembling anew the

furniture and appliances of his apartment transforming them into sculptures. His home was serving both as a living and working space while his everyday objects became sculptures that he could still use. He presented them *in situ* turning his apartment also into an exhibition space. The title of the show, *German Evangelical Gay*, 2012 recalls a classified ad applied to the supply and demand protocol; it gives too much and at the same time too little information about what is exhibited and who exhibits. The exhibition challenged the effort of categorization addressing the multiplicity of identities and eventual contradictions that one incorporates. At the end of the show he left again.

He went to his mother's house to help her move out and go to live within a Christian community. She was suffering from panic attacks. As she could take very few things with her and could not deal with an overfull house, he assisted her in finding her way out. After having accomplished a process of assemblage with *German Evangelical Gay*, this time he worked on clearance. He went through the opposite endeavor and separated into categories tons of things of different kinds of values accumulated over the years. He had to decide what to keep, throw away, give, sell. In the meantime he made a series of sculptures out of leftover materials and objects. His sculptures dealt with waste, in the sense of overuse or underuse, they negotiated the series of attachments and detachments that compose a life-story. As memory preserves alters or confuses one's stories, each separate part of the sculptures carried its own history which was intertwined with that of the others. *Panic Attack Antidepressant Household Clearance* weighted the material and immaterial load of things.

Later in the same year he stayed in the house of two people that were sick because of strong dependencies to substances and to one another. Illness is a form of transformation that changes the order of the self and affects the others; it consumes the body, as life itself. Work shapes the matter and gives it form, transforms it into objects that might last more than a man's life. The sculptures *07.04.-28.06.*, made during this period, reflect on cycles of recovery and relapse. The patterns of sculptural forms crystallized patterns of behavior. The consistencies, inconsistencies, shapes and breaks of matter approached life and mortality, the condition of human existence as a transition from immateriality to matter and vice versa.

In transit to Lesbos, before he went to seek for his land, he presented in his temporary house in Athens a three-day show entitled *Travel Group*, 2013. The series of sculptures and drawings formed together a construction plan and mechanism for a place to be found and a house to be built. The same works were subsequently presented at the port of Lesbos, Mytilene, immediately upon his arrival. This double exposure mediated on how the same things look from another perspective and marked a rite of passage from one state to another.

When he moved to Lesbos, in different houses with different hosts and guest, he worked on the installation *Built without a plan*, 2014. The works constituted models of fragments of the upcoming house. They shaped a space and its representations in the sense of simulating and devising how things are and will be. The wooden plan of his plot combined the land's abstract shape, as found on a map, with the sense of the space, as memory can recall it. The painting depicting the view of the bay from his plot, commissioned to a local painter, alluded to religious iconography with the golden sky being the halo of the landscape. The ready-made and the hand-made supplemented each other in a search for their origin and originality while performance as an art practice and every-day life practice were plagiarized in the acts of making. As earlier in his installation *Guideline to eat a slice of toast within eight bites*, 2013, he composed a material self-reflective act of reinventing things from scratch, learning them again, seeing them anew. By copying existing objects

and breaking down the gestures that compose a process, he has traced a path while providing its detours. The guideline, as search and track of a personal route, prevented from the possibility of getting lost while acknowledging it.

Lost in Holiday, 2014 an installation in the middle of the olive groves in Lesvos, was a 1:1 scale model of the house he was building. It was its sculptural equivalent in polytarp welcoming guests and ghosts. *Lost in Holiday* stood for his house as a scarecrow in the fields stands for a man. The crows are often associated with death, as they eat corpses. In many fairytales the hero is found in the woods and there appears a hut, inhabited either by a bad witch or a wise lady. The acquaintance with the good or the evil advances the story and brings the resolution. All kinds of pleasures and fears can be found in the woods and a house can amplify or sooth them. But, no shelter can protect from death and *Lost in Holiday* standing in the middle of a remote, pastoral landscape acknowledges the meaning of 'Et in Arcadia Ego'.

Under the roof of the closed hut in the snowy mountains, Hans Castorp made his revelatory dream resulting that: 'And form, too, comes only from love and goodness: form and the cultivated manners of man's fair state, of a reasonable, genial community – out of silent regard for the bloody banquet'. Hans Castorp forgot this truth that he would remember forever as soon as he returned and spent some time in the safe environment of Berghof. And thus, in Andreas Sell's work form comes from finding and losing the 'truth', from recognizing, subordinating or forgetting the power of death.

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