



«21», Hanover, Festival Theaterformen, June 2013

21 – Memories of growing up. A long-term project by Mats Staub

SYNOPSIS Frau Zirkelbach celebrated her twenty-first birthday in 1939, Herr Krause in 1970 and Frau Krejcikova in 2001. In which year did you turn twenty-one? What happened that year? And – how did you come of age?

Mats Staub takes a great deal of time to discuss these questions with people of different age groups. He visits them again after three months: Filming their facial expressions as they listen intently to the edited recordings. Their emotions range from happy to sad, from a sense of feeling proud to a visible reflection of what was said.

The video installation «21» consists of storytellers listening to their own recollections. Visitors to the exhibition become part of the listening experience, sharing this intimate moment with the respective narrator. A number of individual portraits can be seen, spanning a number of generations.

«21» is a long-term project that will continue to develop at various locations over a number of years. New portraits will be recorded at each stop along the way, gradually generating an extraordinary gallery of memories from the last and present century.

After initially visiting Frankfurt am Main (Künstlerhaus Mousonturm), Hanover (Festival Theaterformen) Bern (Museum of Communication), Belgrade (KC Grad), Zurich (Gessnerallee), Weimar (Kunstfest Weimar), Vienna (Wiener Festwochen), Freiburg (Theater Freiburg) and Noorderzon Festival (Groningen), the project is currently on the lookout for new locations to ensure its further development.



1945, Frau Winterstein



1976, Frau Gebhart



1994, Frau Lapi

IDEA, BACKGROUND

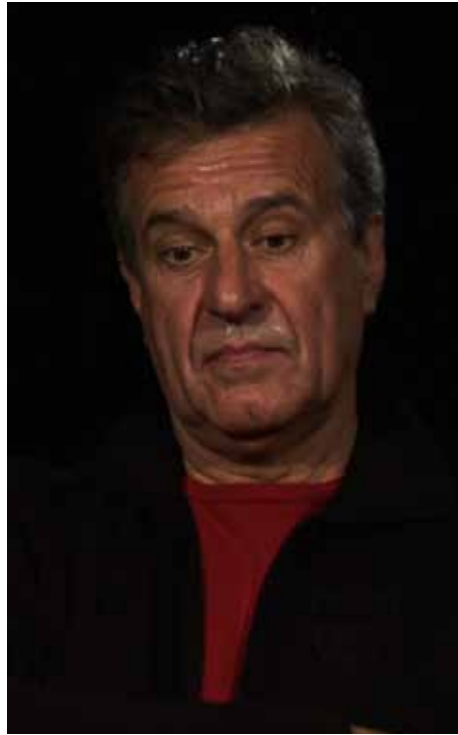
This long-term project is based on experiences acquired during the long-term project «My Grandparents | Memory Bureau», which has been developing gradually over the past five years at theatres and museums in twelve towns and cities (for example at Zürcher Theaterspektakel 2008, Wiener Festwochen 2009, Musée d'art modern et contemporain Geneva 2010, Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main 2012). During this period I have listened to 300 people sharing tales about their grandparents – and I have been fascinated time and time again by these faces of remembrance. «21» ties in with these works while venturing into unknown territory.

The starting point for a new work is always very personal. 1993, the year in which I turned twenty-one, marked a significant transition in my life. Only in retrospect was I able to fully appreciate this, even though the review of this period has changed somewhat over time – it definitely appeared different ten years ago than it does today. I am particularly interested in how memories shape present actions. And as people go through the transition to adulthood I am curious about the contradiction of their search for both independence and integration – the interaction of their first consciously taken decisions, of the contemporary historical context and of the social, normative patterns which typify individual biographies. Stories about a person's twenty-first year convey both the shared experiences of a generation as well as private circumstances and events, which despite their differences give an accurate snapshot of a period in time. At the same time reports – about leaving home, a first job or a first love – arouse memories in the minds of the visitors of decisive events in their own lives.

A personal starting point is important for the basis upon which the work is created – dialogue. I don't carry out interviews in which I only ask questions. They are conversations in which I am usually the listener, but



1948, Herr Rohn



1970, Herr Krause



1993, Herr Schrauff

sometimes also the narrator. People need time – and guidance to ensure they are not just talking, but actually telling a story, which the people sitting opposite can grasp and which stirs memories. I have to become personally involved in the conversation, but then sort of disappear. I remove my own voice from the recordings and start to compose a narration. Several hours of work are condensed into no more than ten minutes. I meet up with the people again after roughly three months and film them listening to their own tales.

Visitors to «21» see the faces of people on large screens listening to their respective stories and can listen to the exact same stories through headphones. They watch the actual storytellers paying attention to their own voice being played back to them, thus providing their own memories with a completely new perspective. The voices give the impression that the narrators are walking on familiar ground while reminiscing about past events, implementing common structures. But the look on their faces while listening to their own stories provides a contrast to this impression – as the video images reveal more unconscious and subtle emotions than the vocal content. Just listening to stories allows people to maintain a critical distance in order to scrutinise what they said, expressing their thoughts through facial expressions and occasional sounds. However it also forces the people to interpret their past from a different perspective, something that is clearly reflected in their faces in the absence of verbal expression. The delicacy of a smile, the shedding of a thoughtful tear or a sudden moment of reflection convey the feelings of the people on the screens and their personal experiences better than mere words could ever do. At the same time, it is these fragile, intimate moments which encourage us to contemplate the nature of memories in general and our own stories and recollections in particular.

REALISATION, GOALS

The long-term project «21» aims to create a 'gallery of years', giving an account of each year from the end of the 1930s onwards from various perspectives. This goal can only be achieved gradually and in numerous stages – part of the current collection is displayed and a new part created at each location.

In the actual collection the oldest person describes the year 1938, the youngest one 2011. Very rarely are the same years depicted twice, a characteristic that is very appealing – for instance, after turning twenty-one in 2001, Frau Krejčikova worked as an illegal nanny in Frankfurt am Main, Frau Maennel graduated from university and travelled through Bolivia, and Madame Farioli lost her graphic design job and her apartment during the Argentinean economic crisis before moving to Western Switzerland, where she still lives, as part of an agricultural course. But there are still large gaps, as many years have yet to be accounted for.

Each new location helps to close this gap, while implementing the project effectively within a local context. Besides the German and the Swiss German version with more than 100 portraits, there are till now a constantly growing number of portraits in French and in English.

«21» features standard mobile equipment which adapts to various situations while still maintaining an air of originality. The equipment consists of 15 programmable, upright screens (several portraits can be shown on each screen on loop play or selected individually; see the photos on the front page and below); visitors sit opposite and at eye level with the portraits, listening to their stories through headphones.

Mats Staub, 2016



«21», Bern, Museum of Communication, September 2013

DATES *20 – 28 October 2016*
Kaserne Basel

5 July – 6 August 2017
The Market Photo Workshop Gallery, Johannesburg

November 2018 - January 2019 (tbc)
Historisches Museum Frankfurt

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