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# Butt x Better Festival - We wanted a party and all we got was activism!

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The Butt x Better Festival and the synergies between bohemia and protest by Thomas Scheele



The Butt x Better (BxB, formerly “But & Better”) is a counter-fashion festival in Berlin that takes place each year parallel to the massive fashion trade fair „Bread & Butter“. It forms a counterpart to the glorification of consumption, elitist design, body cult and unsustainable conditions of production evident in fashion culture. The critique of Butt x Better, however, is expressed in diverse, undogmatic and humoristic ways. Its main elements include upcycling workshops, music shows, exhibitions of room and light installations as well as a

colourful demonstration and rave through the city center. Lastly, BxB's centre-piece is a two hour long, highly curated and bizarre catwalk show staging a wild mix of costume designers, sustainable clothing designers, performance artists and artistic acts. While collaborating with Upcycling groups throughout the last year, we have concentrated on garbage as the prime material for creative works and thus, somewhat coined the term „Trashion“-Festival for BxB.

The festival is organized by our collective Findus' Geburtstag, or Findus' Birthday; a name based on a Swedish comic book about the cat Findus who one day decides to celebrate birthdays many times each year, whenever he feels like it, randomly creating beautiful moments from his repetitious daily life routine. Doesn't sound very much like activism, does it?

Well, in the first place Findus' Geburtstag isn't a group of activists and this is where the exciting part of this article should begin. Because the story of Findus' Geburtstag and the BxB festival is that in December 2010 eight people were sitting together in a flat planning just another house party. The later the night got the more exuberant the visions became. Eventually, someone threw in the idea that we should hold the party in the basement of our building, where a former supermarket had been left abandoned for years. More curious than hopeful we contacted the landlord. Our first unspecified request to rent the space was answered with a humongous price. With one of the usual accidents of fate occurring, a friend told us about the Bread & Butter which was to take place across the road from our building in one month's time. He came up with the idea to disguise our party as a non-profit fashion exhibition lasting for two days; the first day a vernisage, the second day the finnisage. We sketched a concept, headlined it with something Dada like „But & Better“, sent it off, waited - and got the keys!

We were shocked. Now we had three weeks left to prepare a huge, unique and disastrous location for something that was to be loud and somewhat connected to fashion, maybe. We invited everyone we knew to participate in the project and told them about the exciting trick we played on our landlord. Many didn't quite catch the irony of the story, though. So word spread and suddenly we received about 15 requests from real newcomer fashion designers. The parody was perfect. There really would be a catwalk inside this worn down, old supermarket.

The first BxB was a major success. The house was packed with about 700 guests, we had formed a network of 100 artists and helpers and created an unseen hilarious scenario. It also was a disaster. The police came as expected, did not

care much about art, kicked out the whole raving lot and fined us. We made out just even and with bad press. But proud we were.

Our second edition took place only six months later in July 2011. The venue was a very new club project that was starting in a formerly abandoned dog food factory. We had planned to go the whole way non stop from Friday to Sunday with open air parties during daytime. But then, only days before the festival, the club got into a legal dispute and was temporarily forbidden to play outdoor music. This was an emergency. We had learned not to ignore the rules, we needed to play by them. So as respected citizens of Berlin we registered a demonstration under the title „Stop Fashion Terror!“, had it approved in the last moment and celebrated a glorious morning march from the club through the streets of Berlin escorted by, indeed, the blue authorities blocking cars to have us pass and allow us to spread our profound message to the sounds of bass.

It sounds funny but it was actually a milestone for our development. Firstly, we coincidentally got to know new designers who dedicate their work to environmentalism, sustainability and community projects. Thus, we learned new ways in which fashion acts as an agent in the global society and discovered new potentials for our project to become a useful platform for activism. And secondly, we got good press! Now don't underestimate this because our festival without having, at that time, a very coherent message itself, offered a great story and exciting images for politically committed journalists to inform the public about the dark sides of fashion production-- and have people read this! So Butt x Better #2 became a tool for activism. And, to make a long story short, in the course of two more editions which have since followed, each one of us has become more of an activist him- or herself.

Nowadays, all designers who participate in the BxB Show produce in sustainable ways, mostly through upcycling techniques. BxB offers a wide network for finding new collaborators, and it opens a fascinating stage to creatively promote a change in consumption to a diverse audience that has, to a wide extent, not been responsive to traditional forms of activism. Forms of activism which, if you will allow a personal comment, often demonstrate a strength in combining super-abstract academia with dull slogans: „Crush Capitalism“ - fantastic but how, what after, and optionally: why?! If you sell change as something that can be achieved only by asceticism, long discussions and great suffering - you won't sell much.

BxB is openly more in tune with lines like „If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution.“ There are many who criticise this approach for apparently reducing

topics of violence, oppression and misery to mere entertainment for middle class urban hippies. But we stand to it, because our actions may be imperfect but they are not deceiving. We went from house party to Trashion-Festival. We create small change. We create it in many ways and people. And it's truly enjoyable.

## CREW

Eight people, loosely organized as the arts collective „Findus Geburtstag“. Many of us are also engaged in the upcycling project house „Funkhaus Grünau“ in Berlin where synergies between art and environmentalism are explored.

## STASH (materials needed)

90% trash, 10% screws.

IT ALL STARTED, BECAUSE ... (what was the topic, problem, etc)

...we wanted a very large house party.

WE WANTED TO SAY THAT (message of the action)

Complicated ideas are bad ideas. Make it easy to make a change.

BIG BROTHER ... (media reaction)

Articles and reportages by: Spiegel Online, rbb Abendschau, Tip Berlin, Zitty Berlin, Flux FM (former Motor FM), Twen FM, The Telegraph (UK, newspaper), Canal + (F, TV), KBS (South Korea, TV)

CAN BE REPEATED, IF ... (useful tips)

...we ignite enthusiasm for the project, form a strong team and get going. That's all.





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**Visuals by:**  
Roland Pretz, Tau Pibernat

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