A Touch of Documenta in Kassel

The Daimler Blog, March 11 2015 by Patrick Schaefer

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*Independently translated from German using Google Translator by East-Trans-Education-Services - for educational purposes only

Since May of last year, I have been working in the Communications Office at the Mercedes-Benz plant in Kassel, Europe's largest production plant for commercial vehicle axles and axle components at Daimler AG. Let's put it this way: Our axles move the world.

The Importance of our Production Facility: Without us, no G-Class, Sprinter, Bus, Antos or Actos would roll over the streets because we produce both the front and rear axles of all these vehicles. But we don't just produce the axles, the vehicles would also be motionless without us because we produce their drive-shafts. We are the leading production facility for this type of mechanical technology. Every year, about a half-million of our axles and axle components are installed in vehicles at a wide variety of locations in Germany, Europe, and around the world.

Together with my colleagues in the Communications Department, I have been able to realize many exciting projects here in Kassel. These important projects were diverse, and they involved direct communication with our nearly 3,000 employees across the production facility regarding internal events such as Board visits, business meetings, masters days, and event management (family days, product launches) or external events for executives. On these occasions, I regularly met interesting people from the regional economic community, as well as the art and cultural community.

And the latter leads us to a discussion of the current project here in Kassel, in which we embark on a new path. For the first time, we will be part of an art project titled FACTORY / ART / WORK. In this project, the the Visitor & Meeting Room of the factory's Central Information Center will become an art studio. This breathes a touch of **Documenta** into our work environment.

What is Documenta: it is the world's most important contemporary art fair, it takes place every five years in Kassel and lasts 100 days. The first Documenta was organized in 1955 and is due to the initiative of Arnold Bode. Currently the plans for Documenta 14, which occurs in 2017, are in full swing.

Back to the project: In early November of last year, we received an inquiry from the Association of Metal and Electrical Companies, Hesse, in which we are a member, asking if we want to participate in an art project as part of its 125th anniversary in 2015. The plan was, with the support of about fourteen member companies, to mount an exhibition of firm-specific art works supported by the participants. The artists would be suggested by the Kassel Art Association and selected together with the respective companies. Each artist would travel to the company and create the artwork on their premises over a period of about two weeks. After initial hesitation, and several discussions on how and where: we finally gave the Association positive feedback. In mid-November 2014, we met with the AGV and the Art Association, where we presented our work, our products, and our key values in order to facilitate the selection of a suitable artist for the project.

The Chosen Artist: The choice fell on an American Word-Art artist named Michael Winkler, who was very spontaneous and arrived in December to spend two days in Kassel taking photos of our axle plant. With lots of pictures, information, and brochures in his luggage; he went home to prepare for his nearly two-week stay from 5 March 2015.

Here we go: Winkler has now arrived in Kassel and is fully dedicated to his project. We want to involve our employees in the development process, so three days a week we have times when the art studio is open to visit. As a thank you for visiting, every employee gets a limited-edition, signed print titled "role" created by Michael Winkler and artistically inspired by the products of the Kassel plant.

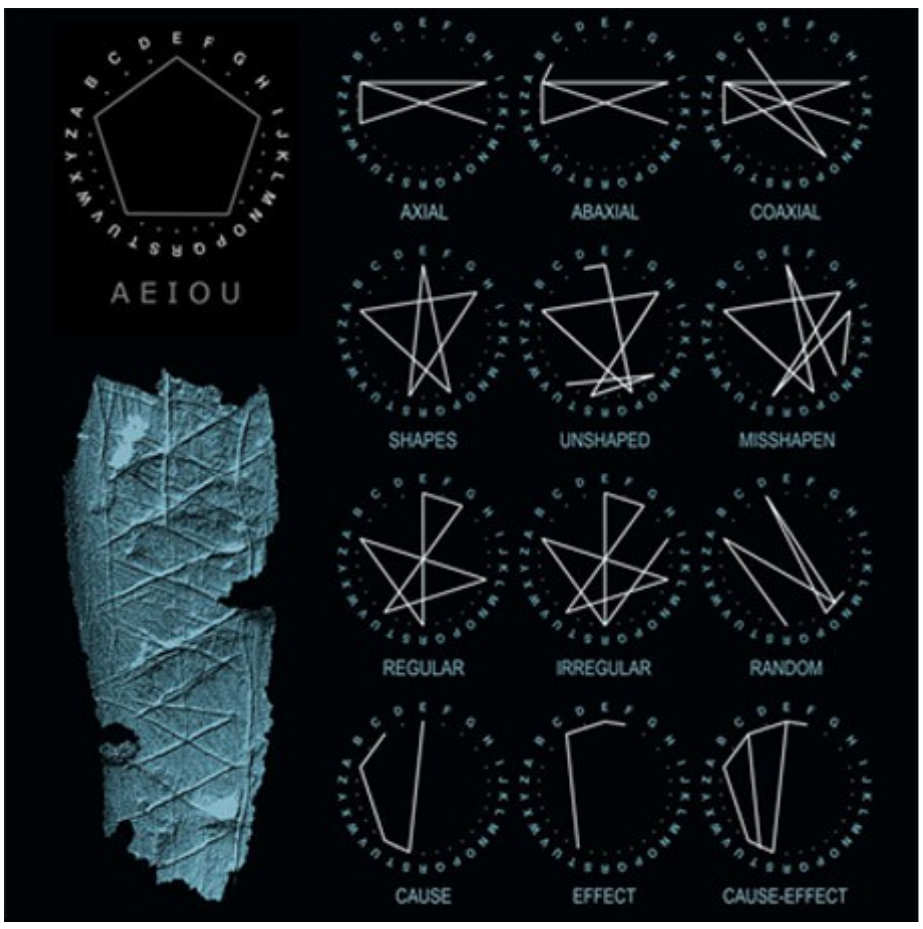
Who is this Michael Winkler?

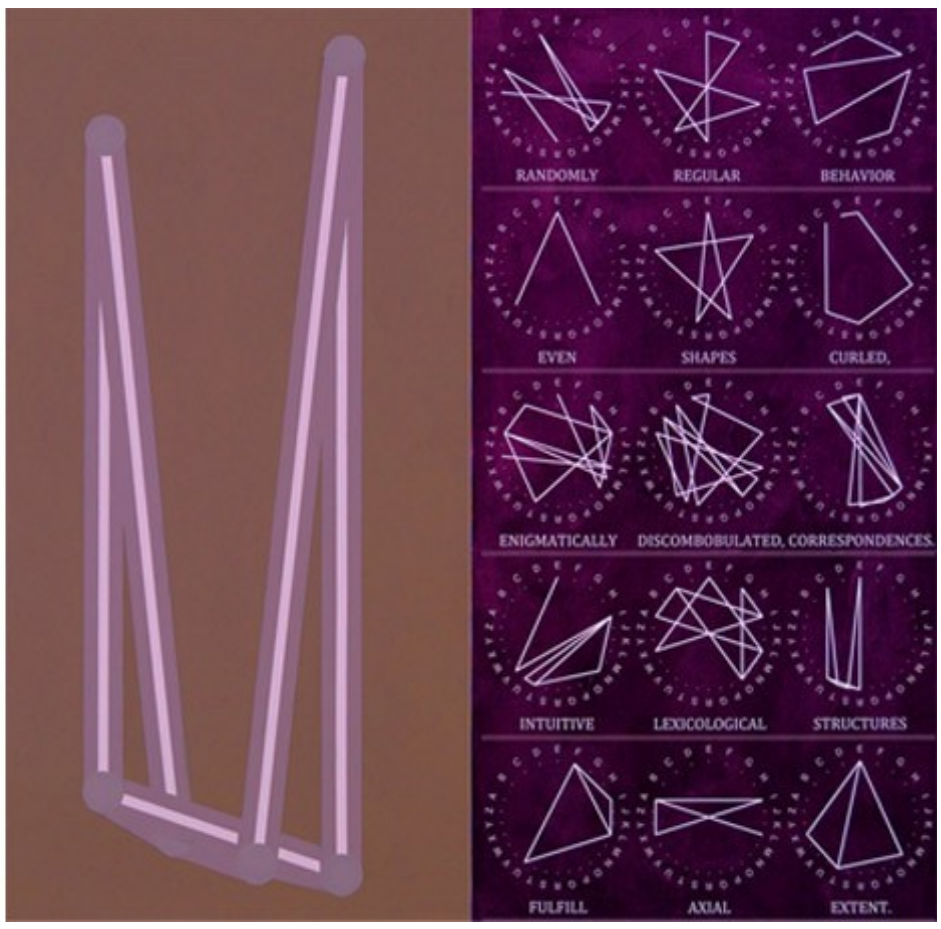
He was born in 1952 in Lima, Ohio, and lives and works in New York. He deals with visual arts, there are two important components underlying his work that are irrevocably linked. On the one hand, the language, or rather the Roman alphabet, and on the other, abstract shapes such as points, lines, circles and rectangles. He combines both to create abstract forms from words.

He describes how this works as follows:

To create abstract shapes using the spelling of words, the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet

are represented as a circular arrangement of 26 points. Each point represents the location of a particular letter. Lines are then drawn from point to point according to the spelling of each word, automatically creating an abstract form.

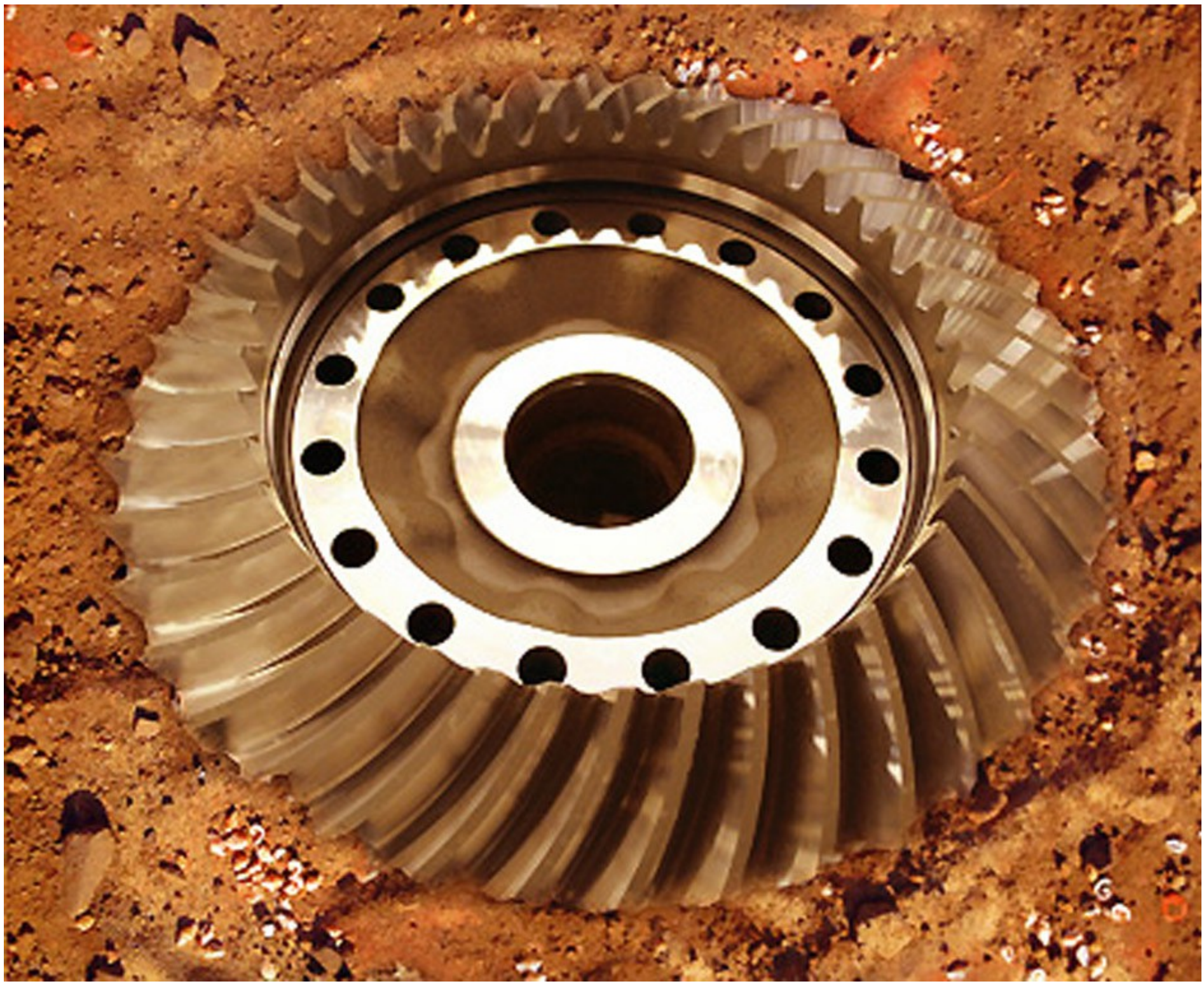




Ok, what we know so far. But first**,** one other thing. On his initial visit here in the factory, I showed him all possible axles, components, and items that we produce. Michael Winkler very quickly discovered an important component for his project, a choice with which we are also particularly pleased - because in the Kassel plant , it plays an important role, namely the crown of our heavy truck rear axles. As already mentioned, his choice is a component of the complete wheel set (axle drive) of the rear axle, and it represents superior manufacturing expertise. But for the artist, it is considered the key component from another point of view, it is not simply a round, machined workpiece. For him, there is more behind his interest.

Why exactly it is of key interest he clarified to me in a short science fiction story: Imagine another highly developed civilization visited the Earth after we were gone and found the gear. What would it tell them about us? Complex machine made objects are always created by more than one person. This means that the gear would tell them that we had worked together to produce it. And the degree of cooperation would tell them that we had very good language skills and a highly developed culture. They would understand the role of the gear in a machine, as it is a fundamental mechanical device. The ultra-efficient

design of the gear would tell them that our society places value on innovative refinements, which would be a sign that we were interested in continuous improvement. They would respect our civilization.



He goes on to say: That is why for me as a visual / conceptual artist the large gear is not just a part of a mechanical structure or a visually beautiful object, but a sign that carries information. It's like the signs of a language, except that it is universally understandable because its shape expresses a mechanical concept that emerges from the physical laws of nature.

So I have not seen it that way, and I probably would never have thought to see it that way. But that's what the art is going to be about.

I'm curious to see how Michael Winkler brings our gear, the Latin alphabet and abstract shapes together on a canvas, because he has already told me he will also work with brush and paint.

Tags: axles , Actros , Antos ,documentation , G-Class , Culture , Art , Mercedes-Benz plant in Kassel

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(For more about Michael Winkler and his work, visit: **Winkler**Word**Art**.com)