

*TW: Europe*

Jonas Höschl

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Critical art, Adorno writes, must elude capitalist exploitation and the “identity requirement of reality”.<sup>1</sup> Art reflects its production conditions, it is true. But for Adorno, explicit engagement stands “in dangerous proximity to propaganda and proves itself implicitly in agreement with the existing conditions”.<sup>2</sup> For the field of contemporary political art, however, formal aesthetic, substantive, and personal overlappings between art, activism, journalism, and law are symptomatic. Investigations and research projects related to pictures implement aspects of the factual, as well as of supposed authenticity, in the exhibition room. But where does critical art end and engagement begin? And how can one’s own engagement harmonize with the profession of artist, if the two are not to merge seamlessly?

In his first solo exhibition *TW: Europe*, Jonas Höschl approaches these questions by reflecting upon himself and the media. At the showing’s center are two spatially expansive, multi-media installations: *Europe is lost* (2018) and *09. September 2015, Röske* (2021). Both works create an associative, sometimes violent spatial structure in which the artist deals with his subjective feeling of being torn between art and activism. *Europe is lost* (2018) consists of three work elements distributed in the exhibition space: a large-format, black-and-white photograph, mounted on a wooden movable wall; a sound and video work on the reverse side of that wall; and a series of black-framed woodcuts distributed in the room. The latter show portraits of people whom Höschl got to know in refugee camps. The depictions take up the thread of a pictorial- and media-historical iconography of police identification photography. With it, the artist points to the frequent criminalization of people who have fled and whose public perception is crucially determined by the media’s forms of depiction. The wooden wall shows a large-format black-and-white photo. In it, the contours of two figures can be made out in a landscape swathed in thick fog. This recalls Caspar David Friedrich’s iconic paintings of figures seen from the rear and a pictorial tradition of German Romanticism. As scenes of an idealized past, their fields of mythical motifs are to this day part of nationalistic, identitarian, and ethnic ideologies of history. Höschl marks them as a foundation of the current European politics of isolation.

On the back of the wall, an iPhone shows montaged footage of crowds of storming people in border areas. The accumulation of obvious pictorial-cultural codes creates an overdetermination. With it, the artist attempts to decipher a (rightwing) populist pictorial language and to reveal its mechanisms. This criticism of journalistic reporting is repeated in his most recent work, *And let my cry* (2022): it is the transcript of an (internal) recording the Bavarian Broadcasting Company made during the setup and rehearsal for the memorial service for the victims of the racist attack in Munich’s Olympia shopping center in 2016. Although none of the nine victims were Christian, the service was held in Munich’s Catholic Cathedral of Our Dear Lady. This implies a specific ignorance and blindness that manifested itself in the reporting on the attack and the subsequent investigations: false reports led to panic in the city, and despite the perpetrator’s unambiguous statements in chat forums, authorities long pointed to his psychiatric treatment as a motive for a supposed killing spree.

Höschl proceeds with similar reflection about the media in *09. September 2015, Röske* (2021). The large-format installation comprises 10 black-lacquered, steel stand-up displays. Widely distributed across the exhibition space, they bear glass plates into which translucent four-color silk screen pictures are burned. These are screenshots of individual online articles from which the artist has foregrounded depictions and uses them to make his own activist practice the theme again: as a photographer and activist, Höschl documented in the summer of 2015 the catastrophic conditions in a camp for refugees at the European Union’s external border between Serbia and Hungary. The image of a Hungarian camerawoman using a leg to trip a person fleeing during unrest was seen around the world. At the moment when the picture was taken, Höschl was standing next to her. The photo testifies to his eyewitnessing and asserts her own. It remains unclear what role the artist was playing when the camerawoman took the picture. As a leftist activist, he protested against the pan-EU policy of isolationism; as a photographer, he strove to document the events. The Hungarian camerawoman transformed from an observer into an actor and co-perpetrator with the security forces. What influence did Höschl have on the events? What impact did his presence have? Could he have intervened? Can the photographic image have a repressive or emancipatory effect similar to that of physical intervention?

A strength of Höschl’s artistic works is that they ask these questions instead of wanting to answer them with supposed factuality and authenticity. In this, Höschl’s works are distinct from an engagement that declares itself in agreement with the existing conditions. The artist does not seek to predetermine an unambiguous way of interpreting his installations and the media representations they deal with. Rather, in the tradition of aesthetic willfulness, their immanent openness to different interpretations and multifacetedness makes it possible to question what is shown and, with that, the necessity to render it discursive. An accompanying film program from nine different positions underscores his ambition to understand this project of discursivization as that of a multiperspectival and polyphonic collective. The participating artists come from the artist’s milieu of activists, friends, and artists: Dominik Bais, Anna Baranowski, Cihan Cakmak, Tim Erdmann & Christina Gotz (with a music video for Disarstar featuring Nura), Frankfurter Hauptschule, Laura Leppert, Kalas Liebfried, Cana Bilir-Meier and belit sağ. In widely divergent ways, each of them deals with urgent themes of our present: racism and discrimination; populism and rightwing extremism; debates about restitution and monuments; many-layered constructions of identity and the politics of memory; collaboration and solidarity; and trauma and tenderness.

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p: 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ines Kleesattel: *Politische Kunst-Kritik. Zwischen Rancière und Adorno*, Vienna 2016, p. 142.

Text by Mira Anneli Naß

Exhibition views by Peter Oliver Wolff







[Störgeräusche]

„Spannung erhöhen im letzten Ton, bisschen den ausladen lassen. Das üben wir bitte einmal. Wir nehmen einmal – 26, Sopran Eins und singen alle gemeinsam ab 26, Sopran Eins. Und los!“

„And let my cry ...“

„Wenn der Chor fertig ist, oder?“  
„Ja, wenn die mal kurz ruhig sind. Nur 'ne Anseh-Probe, die Beschallung ist gerade unabhängig von unserm Ü-Wagen, nur dann hat unser ...“  
„Damit Sie sich nicht wundern, warum die das so aus dem Lot haben. Das muss so sein, schauen's mal, weil wir haben nämlich da, wenn sie da ...“  
„Rückkopplung.“  
„... die Osterkerze und das Kreuz. So im Anschnitt. Und wenn Sie nämlich hier stehen, stehen Sie genau davor. Deswegen müssen Sie da stehen, Und das Mikrofon da wieder bisschen mehr zurück.“  
„Das Mikro ist von unserem Ü-Wagen offen?“  
„Ja, das möchte ich. Also, wenn die mit dem Stück fertig sind. Weil sonst ist es irgendwie doof.“  
„Okay.“

„Die Frau steht dann irgendwo da so. Und vielleicht, nur vielleicht, zeig ich Ihnen dann ein bisschen nach da, dann müssen Sie einen Hauch nach rechts gehen. Weil ich zeig Ihnen nach da, einen Hauch.“  
„Soll ich lieber in die Kamera rein schauen, oder eher ...“  
„Nein.“  
„Nicht? Nicht, ok.“  
„Sie machen es genau wie immer.“

„Grüß Gott.“

„Nicht in die Kamera schauen.“  
„Genau, ne – weil beim, anfangs hat es mal geheißt. Ah, jetzt geht's. Okay? Darf ich?“

„Herr, erhöere unser Gebet.“

„Es ist immer dasselbe. Nochmal?“

„Herr – Herr, erhöere unser Gebet.“

„Gut, gerne, gerne. Ich mach das sehr gerne.“

[Chor]

„Manchmal geb ich so schön da hinten den Einsatz, da seid ihr überhaupt nicht mit gemeint.“ [Gelächter] „Also zweite Strophe noch einmal, damit die Bässe so – mummel, mummel – die richtigen Töne haben. Zweite Strophe von Absatz: Von Zweifel ... Und jetzt!“

„Von Zweifeln ist mein Leben übermannt, / mein Unvermögen hält mich ganz gefangen.“

„Männer!“

„Hast du mit Namen mich in deine Hand, / in dein Erbarmen fest mich eingeschrieben? / Nimmst du mich auf in dein gelobtes Land?“

„Da ist das C, nimmst du mich auf in dein gelobtes Land. Machen wir nochmal: Nimmst du mich auf ... Männer fangen an. Takt 44, Eins und Zwei und ...“

„Nimmst du mich auf in dein gelobtes Land?“

„Ein Ton tiefer, ein Ton tiefer. Nimmst du mich auf. Nimmst ... Und!“

„Nimmst du mich auf in dein gelobtes Land? / Werd ich dich noch mit neuen Augen sehen?“

„Orgel Eins und wir fangen gemeinsam an. Wir machen das nochmal für den Sopran und dann ham'as. Jetzt!“

„Sprich du das Wort, das tröstet und befreit / und das mich führt in deinen großen Frieden. / Schließ auf das Land, das keine Grenzen kennt, / und laß mich unter deinen Kindern leben. / Sei du mein täglich Brot, so wahr du lebst.“

„Sei du mein täglich – Achtung, bitte – Sei du mein tä ..., Sei du ... Und, jetzt!“

„Sei du mein täglich Brot, so wahr du lebst. / Du bist mein Atem, wenn ich zu dir bete.“

[Getusche]

„Ein gemeinsamer Gedenkgottesdienst, gestaltet von verschiedensten Vertretern der Religion hier im Liebfrauenodm. Kardinal Marx und Bischof Bedford-Strohm werden diesen Gottesdienst ... Ich bin gar nicht geplant, aber die Andrea hat gesagt, wenn ganz was Schlimmes passiert und irgendjemand irgendwas sagen muss, können wir von hier drauf gehen. Genau. Wart amal schnell, die ... Ähm, Wolfram, jetzt bist du wieder. Ok. Ja. Wart amal schnell Wolfram, weil die Andrea wollt' no.“

[Kirchenglocken]

