

La Vie Des Souris  
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Galerie Conradi, 2017

1)

George Orwell's 1945 classic fable "Animal Farm" no doubt inspired Willi Fährmann's children's book "Der überaus starke Willibald" ("The Exceedingly Strong Willibald"), a work of reform pedagogy that came out in 1983. But unlike Orwell's protagonists, those in Fährmann's short story are almost all mice. And where Orwell handled his historical references with painstaking accuracy, Fährmann, in writing his short story, seems to have aimed primarily for an easy-to-grasp parable about a theme that seems perpetually relevant: populism and how it reduces complex issues. The lifeworld of the author's target audience is evident also in the tower of children's building blocks with which the gang of mice under Willibald's dictatorial leadership tries to reach the sausage heaven in the pantry. In the reality of my own life as it was in 2005, that tower was the enormously tall bookcase in my unrenovated subsidized flat. On the top shelf, wrapped in golden aluminum foil, stood a chocolate replica of a beer bottle from the south German brewery Rothaus. A giveaway advertising the Tannenzäpfle brand, it had been given to me in the summer of 2005 by Karola Grässlin, director of the Braunschweiger Kunstverein, as a thank you after a performance and lecture in her gallery. That fall, the Italian restaurant directly below me closed due to bankruptcy, and the resident mice migrated up to my floor. Life with these guests turned out to be less spectacular than I'd feared. I deported a few who'd walked into live traps to the next park, and over time the others left as well. The episode faded from memory until I wanted to reposition Grässlin's gift. To my surprise, all I held in my hand was the immaculate golden chocolate beer bottle mold. The smart and agile rodents had removed the content in little pieces through a tiny hole in a corner, presumably so I wouldn't suspect a thing. All that was left was a fragile empty wrapping foil and the echo of the mellifluous words with which the director had handed me her present: "In St. Georgen, Tannenzäpfle is just beer, but in the rest of Germany it'll soon be a hipster brand!" As I later read in the paper, Thomas Schäuble, then chairman of the board of the brewing company deep in the Black Forest, didn't think so. What would make any manager ecstatic was seen with mixed feelings at Rothaus. Expansion, he thought, was a self-defeating proposition: "We can't do that year after year!"

2)

By January 2009, the wrapping, now a crumpled-up ball of aluminum, still sat in the dusty corner between my coal-fired heating stove and the bookcase. No mice had visited me in a long time. Perhaps because the rooms previously occupied by the Italian restaurant had for some time been taken up by a wine store with an exquisite lunch menu. It was around then that a musician friend invited me to join him on a trip to Tangier. He knew I was a fan of the Moroccan band Nass El Ghiwane and suggested that I should come and learn more about the music scene. Morocco had long been a dream destination. I saw myself chatting with the Gnawa singer Omar Sayed in Casablanca and bringing a truckload of vintage vinyls back to Germany. Tangier, too, was a fantastic place to start: the historic distinction would open all sorts of doors for me. But once we were there it turned out that you don't get in touch with a national hero on short notice. Our hosts were appreciative of my peculiar interests, but any possible avenue I might pursue was dismissed as too complicated. We toured northeastern Morocco with a Maghrebi gangsta rapper, chaperoned most of the time by paramilitary security guys who helpfully served opium tea against our diarrhea. I didn't find a single record. The format was unpopular; I was told that in the more recent past, music had been circulated on audiocassette. The vinyl editions of Nass El Ghiwane's albums were manufactured in Paris and solely for the melancholy-affluent- migrant market. CDs and MP3s were the present, and the mobile phone was the playback device of the future. I soon realized that the problem of distorted perceptions was mutual. When I assured people that I'd exchanged my few euros for dirhams and my bags weren't stuffed with dollars, my interlocutors, looking over their shoulders toward the Spanish coast, accused me of lying. The mood usually didn't turn truly aggressive until we consciously tried not to act like tourists. Then again, that was mostly because our interactions played out on stages like the medina. What we naïvely thought of as authentic was a playing field on which strict rules were in effect. The young men

who worked it had become accustomed to catering to the postcolonial expectations with which the majority of the Europeans who flocked there on a regular basis approached them. Neither side seemed willing to change that without a fight. I wished I'd never left the Schengen Area.

3)

The agreement on Switzerland's entry to the Schengen Area went into effect in March 2008 and was implemented after the necessary security systems had been put in place at the country's borders by the end of the same year and at the airports in the spring of 2009. Even before the end of 2008, border controls had been gradually wound down and replaced by random police checks in a 30-kilometer-wide swath along the border. So when I was awarded an almost yearlong residency in Basel—not far from the three-country point—in 2013, I didn't need a visa. Before I even got there, I was issued a temporary passport indicating that I was not authorized to work. I was welcome, but with restrictions. It was in Switzerland that I first sealed my Macbook's camera with a colorful marker sticker. I'm not sure how much that decision had to do with the residency, but the inspiration of a custom-made sticker pack by the Electronic Frontier Foundation certainly fell on fertile ground in the Helvetian climate of social control. The EFF had advertised its sticker as an "unhackable anti-surveillance technology." From that moment on I often caught myself staring at the covered camera and wondering whether I was being paranoid. I imagined mice sitting behind a taped-over hole and trying to interpret the noises and reflections of light on the other side. In Fähmann's book mentioned above, Willibald insisted on nailing the cat door to the garden shut. What the ruler over the mice either didn't know or deliberately didn't tell his subjects: the door had only swung outward to begin with, so no one was ever going to break into the house that way. By contrast, the threat that someone might invade my private sphere through the camera portal integrated into the computer wasn't imaginary at all. Researchers had demonstrated how to remotely activate the camera without turning on the green control light that would alert the user. A new market seemed to open up, though one that promised to close the doors forever.

#### Front Room

- O.T. (Drei gewinnt), 2016 - 210 X 210 - (1)
- O.T. (Mittelklasse scharf) 2017 - 100 X 140 - (1)
- O.T. (Regenbogen über La Santé), 2017 - 80 X 100 - (1)
- O.T. (Mauseloch), 2017 - Ø 100 - (1)
- O.T. (Teil 1 {Grün} eines Stereoskopie-inspirierten Diptychons, welches eine Maus simuliert, die von Fettsäureamiden betrunken ist), 2017 - 100 X 140 - (1)
- O.T. (Teil 2 {Rot} eines Stereoskopie-inspirierten Diptychons, welches eine Maus simuliert, die von Fettsäureamiden betrunken ist), 2017 - 100 X 140 - (1)
- O.T. (Markierungspunkte), 2017 - 70 X 179 - (3)
- O.T. (Lied 1 / Rot), 2017 - 50 X 70 - (3)
- O.T. (Lied 2 / Grün), 2017 - 50 X 70 - (3)
- O.T. (Lied 3 / Blau) 2017 - 50 X 70 - (3)

#### Rear Room

- O.T. (Tür in der Medina von Boujad 01), 2017 - 80 X 120 - (2)
- O.T. (Tür in der Medina von Boujad 02), 2017 - 80 X 120 - (2)
- O.T. (Die Festung), 2017 - Ø 200 - (2)
- O.T. (Von Spartel nach Trafalgar schauend), 2017 - 100 X 140 - (2)
- O.T. (Sand über Gibraltar), 2009 - 70 X 100 - (2)
- O.T. (Titanic, April 2009), 2009 / 2017 - 9 X 40 X 60 - (2)