

**MICHAEL  
JANSSEN**

**JONATHAN SCHMIDT-OTT**

# Jonathan Schmidt-Ott

1976 Born in Berlin, lives and works in Berlin

## EDUCATION

2010 MFA diploma in Montage/Editing, Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 ~*Vollmond*, Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin
- 2016 *The tree*, curator: Yukitomo Hamasaki, mAtter, Digger Gallery, Tokyo, curator: Yukitomo Hamasaki, mAtter, gift\_lab, Tokyo  
*Off Course*, Dzialdov, Berlin, Germany
- 2014 *fall*, Dzialdov, Berlin, Germany
- 2013 *Pferde stärken*, Four Corners, Labyrinth Photographic, London, UK
- 2012 "Y", The Sassoon Gallery, London, UK

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 „...why not hug the strangers.“, Dzialdov, Berlin
- 2016 *The Gallery Store*, Studiolo, Berlin
- 2015 *Malfunction*, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*The Stare Show*, Four Corners, Labyrinth Photographic, London  
*Apart*, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*Limited Editions*, Lubomirov-Easton, London
- 2014 *Boot*, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*A year in development*, Four Corners, Labyrinth Photographic London
- 2013 *Crowd*, Chocolate Factory, London  
*Painting Forever...*, Little Bread Pedlar, London  
*House*, Little Bread Pedlar, London  
*Due*, ASC Studio, Bond House, London  
*Swan*, Belfast Photo Festival, Catalyst Arts Gallery, Belfast  
*A year in development*, Four Corners, Labyrinth Photographic, London
- 2012 *Cheval Ivre*, Bateau Ivre, Berlin
- 2010 *Papergirl #5 We've got the drive*, Neurotitan, Berlin  
*TAPS: Improvisations with Paul Burwell*, Matt's Gallery, London

## CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- 2017 *L'homme Sauvage*, Dzialdov, Berlin  
„...why not hug the strangers.“, Dzialdov, Berlin
- 2015 *Malfunction*, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*What Remains*, Keith Ashley, Dzialdov, Berlin
- 2014 *TAG*, Tal Regev, Anne Bean, Gioia Meller Marcovicz, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*re-boot*, exhibition & performance event, Dzialdov, Berlin  
*Boot*, exhibition & performance event, Dzialdov, Berlin  
Foundation of the project space Dzialdov, Berlin (dzialdov.de)

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2013            *Painting Forever...*, The Pedlars Workshop, London  
*House*, The Pedlars Workshop, London

## FILM PROJECTS

2015            *Garten9*, (loop)  
2011            *(Psycho)*, (loop)  
*Anti extraordinäre Schaustellung* (2 min)  
2010            *Ende* (1:29 min)  
2008            *Momentum*, (1:39 min)  
2006            *Road*, (loop)

## RESIDENCIES

2010            Artist in Residence, GRAD, Belgrad, Serbien, project: White City

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

2017            *silent growth*, artist book, a+G publishing, Berlin  
2015            *What Remains*, Keith Ashley, catalog, a+G publishing, Berlin  
2014            , artist book, a+G publishing, London  
2013            *Painting Forever...*, catalog, a+G publishing, in collaboration with Tal Regev, London  
*House*, artist book, in collaboration with Oliver Griffin, London  
*Pferde stärken*, risograph edition, a+G publishing, London  
*fall*, artist book, a+G publishing, Berlin  
2012            "Y", catalog, a+G publishing, London  
2011            *En Passant*, artist book, a+G publishing, Berlin  
2010            *White City*, artist book, a+G publishing, Berlin

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*Jonathan Schmidt-Ott, Untitled, 2022, Tennis balls, coat hanger, concrete*

# Jonathan Schmidt-Ott



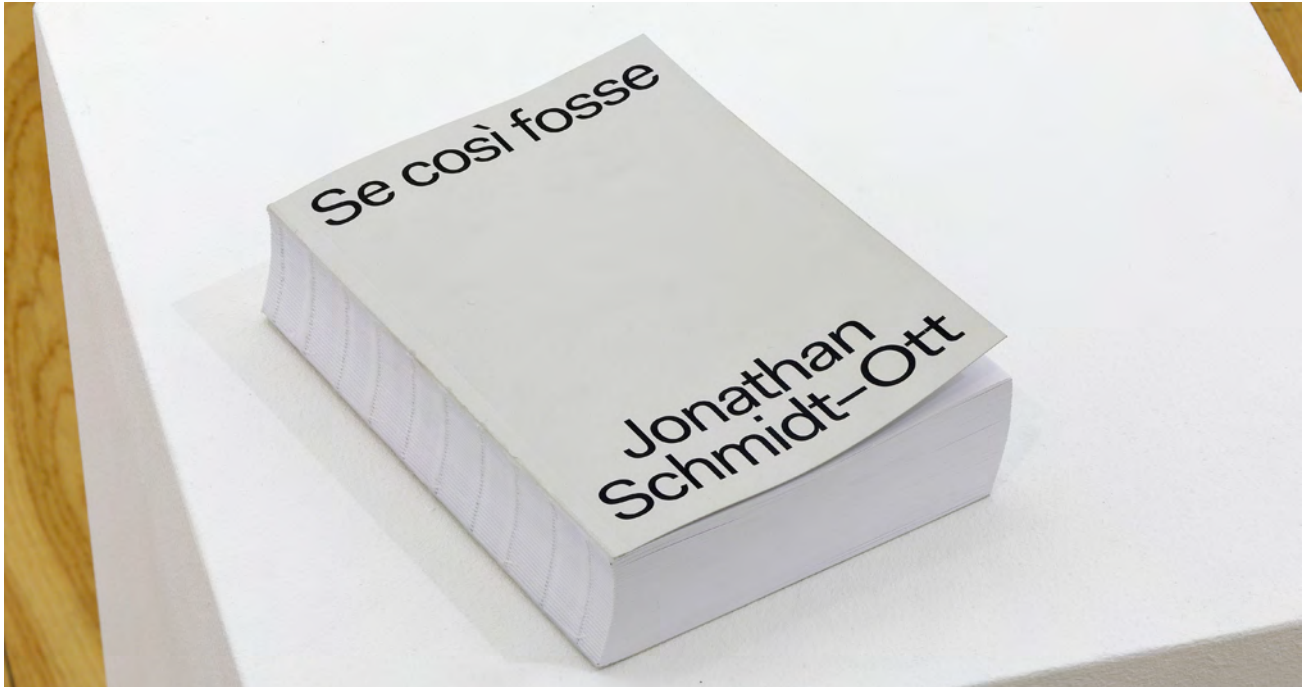
~Vollmond, Jonathan Schmidt-Ott, 2018, Installation view, Galerie Michael Janssen

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*~Vollmond*, Jonathan Schmidt-Ott, 2018, Installation view, Galerie Michael Janssen



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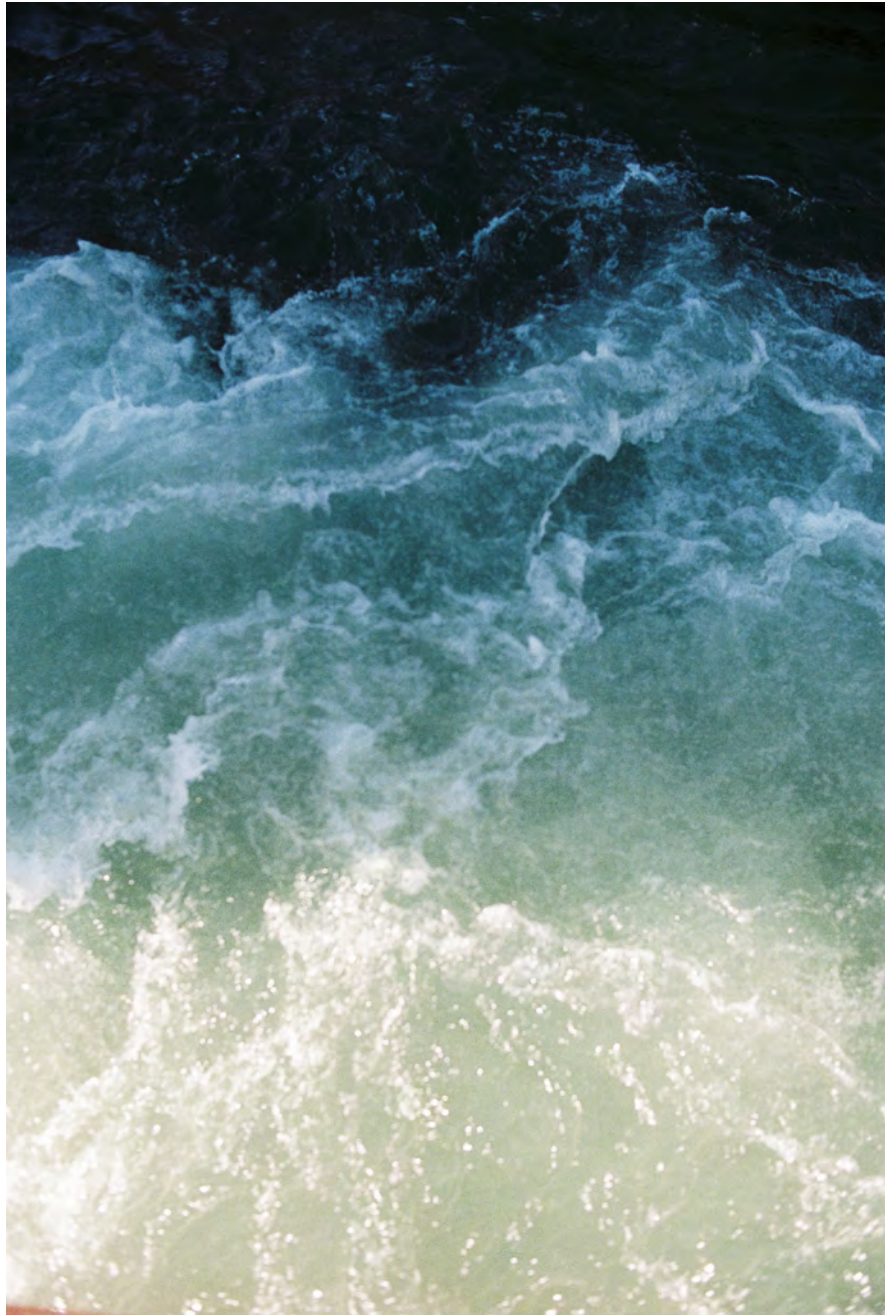
*Silent Growth 140*, 2016, dimensions variable, c-print

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*L'abyme 27, 2016, dimensions variable, c-print*

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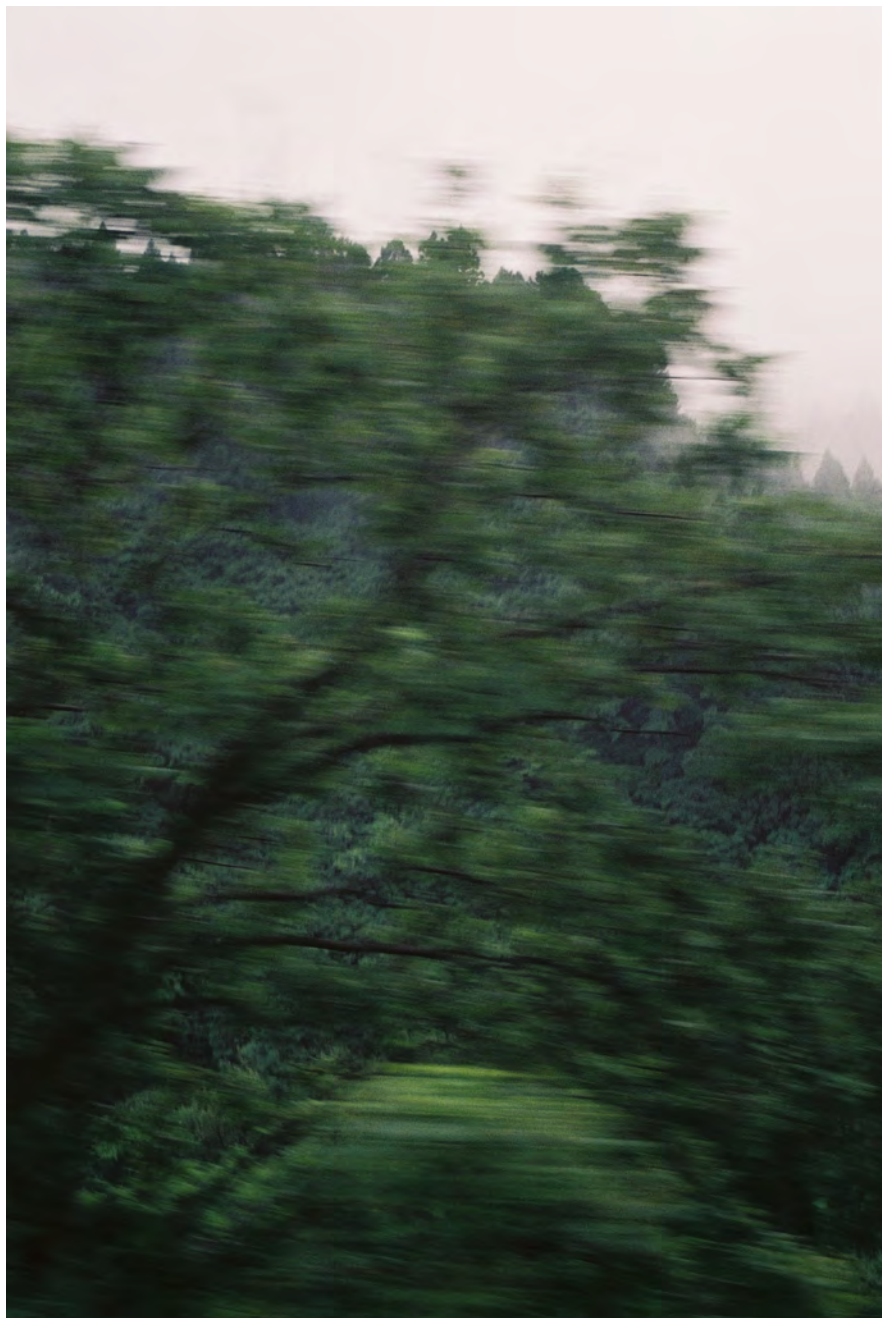
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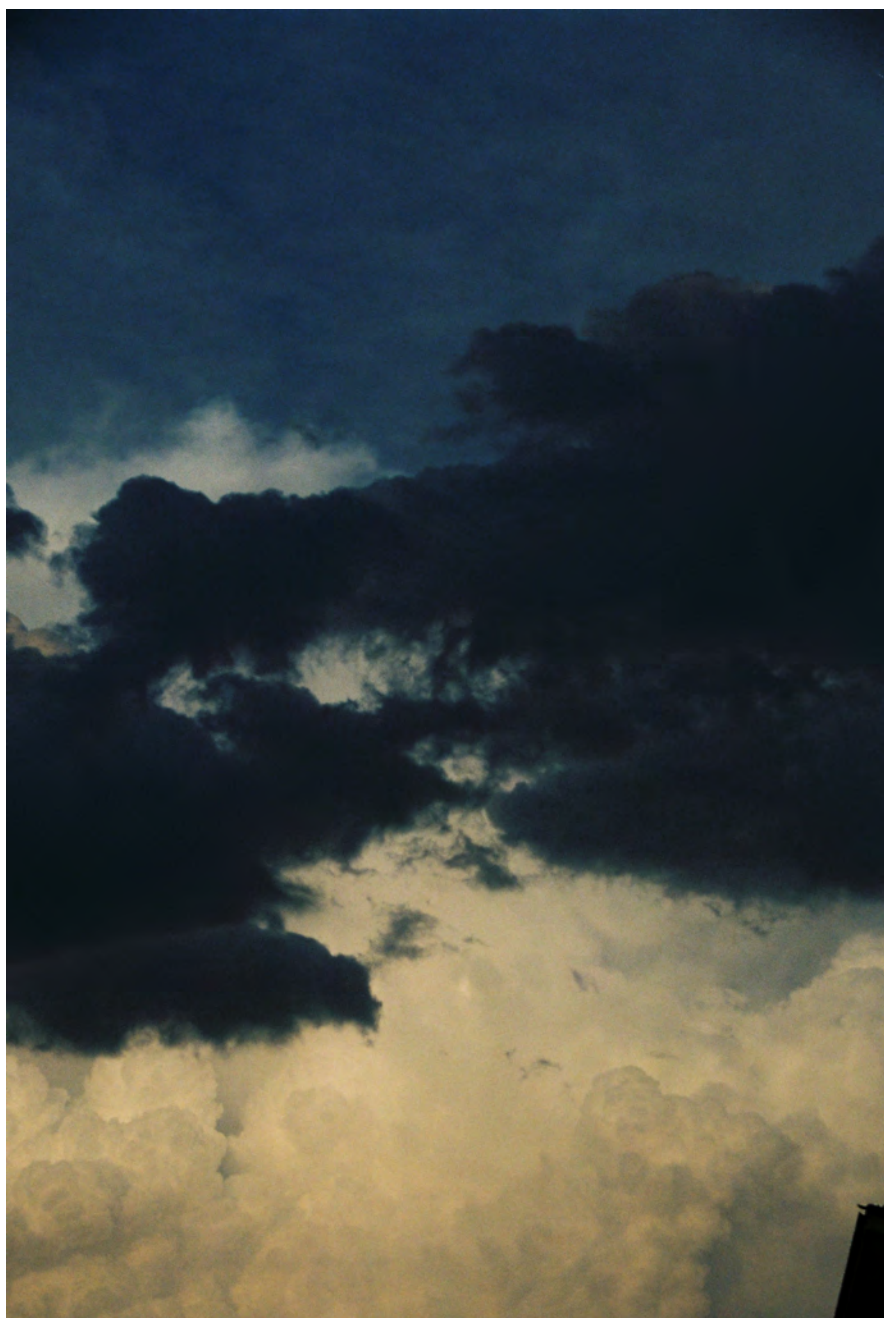
*Silent Growth 4*, 2016, dimensions variable, c-print

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*Lunée 1*, 2018, dimensions variable, c-print

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~Vollmond 7, 2018, dimensions variable, c-print

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## Precise/Approximate: Reflections on the Photography of Jonathan Schmidt-Ott

PATRICK J. REED

1

The cave paintings at Lascaux demonstrate a truism so fundamental it hardly needs stating: humans have long held a deep-rooted fascination with beasts. Dependency and survival complicate the issue, of course, as do questions regarding companionship and domestication, but they are factors belonging to the same curiosity. How do animals feel to the touch? How do they taste? How can we name them, and how are we different? These meditations are perceivable in Lascaux's many images of the horse, which are figure studies and motion studies and portraits of a creature to whom humans were always attuned. Their modern designations serve both science and myth: The Second Chinese Horse, The Polychrome Headless Horse, The Upside-Down Horse, et. al.

2

Leap forward some 19,000 years, when Eadweard Muybridge's electro-photographic investigation into animal locomotion testify that this prehistoric fascination with animals perdured, especially for the horse. Consider further his 1878 gait-analysis study, *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop*, wherein equine mechanics were scrutinized with split-second precision. The famous photographs proved a horse attains momentary flight when its hooves simultaneously tuck under the body during a gallop. Once more, the horse is frozen in time and space for humans to admire and know it better.

3

131 years later, Jonathan Schmidt-Ott stood in a field near Biarritz with the ocean in his ear and a camera to his eye. Six horses filled the lens. The ancient fascination guided him, and the subject looked back with an eternal gaze. The resulting seven photographs record an interspecies moment awakened to all the history and symbolism the horse now holds. Collectively, they are titled *~Vollmond* (2009) because the full moon was nigh.

Six of the photographs are horizontally oriented to accommodate the equine bodies. A group shot of the herd is the most visually dense. It is a tense scene—as though thunder is about to break and with it a stampede. “For me this image stands for death,” Schmidt-Ott said in a 2013 interview with architect Johannes Schulze-Icking.<sup>1</sup> Although his sentiment is informed by early silent cinema—an era when startled horses indicated gunfire and, therefore, murder—his comment taps into a wider folklore linking the Equidae to grave misfortune. Recall *Conquest, War, Famine, and Death* in *The Book of Revelation*; or, more specifically, Act II of *Macbeth*, when Duncan's horses become deranged after his stabbing.

OLD MAN. 'Tis said they eat each other.  
ROSS. They did so, to th'amazement of mine eyes 2

The atmospheric tension in the photograph is literally underscored by its severe compositional frame, which cuts off the horses' legs above the knee. Intentional or not, it is a violent choice made by the photographer, one that could obliquely allude to glue manufacturing. It is also a choice that places the image within a formalist category here named “horses in suspension.” Horses like *Sallie Gardner* or the aforementioned *Upside-down Horse*, which depicts the animal, mid-fall, on a rock deep within Lascaux. If we are to understand Schmidt-Ott's image as only an image, free from external referent, then his tight herd does appear to float against the background (and by extension the wall or page that is the substrate for its display). However, the horse-in-suspension defies literal interpretation and invites extrapolation, much to the benefit of our logical minds, for they cannot help but predict the next moment. And so the animal crashes to ground or wins the race or stands firm on its intact legs.

Schmidt-Ott, a former film scholar and technician with a vested interest in Gestalt psychology, greatly advocates the “next moment” and the gap between image, reality, and the imagined truth. For him, a

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photograph is never discretely bound. Rather, it is a moment plucked from limitless life that, though recontextualized, remains an index to all the lives and experiences that intersected on the way to its making—and all those it touches when viewed. Perhaps this concept accounts for the tranquility present in even his most intense pictures, the oppression of a singular narrative replaced by a holism that accommodates everyone and then some.

With so capacious an outlook, there remains little wonder that the moon, nocturnal companion to all, is among Schmidt-Ott's other archetypal preoccupations. Large portions of his oeuvre are wholly dedicated to the lunar sphere, which is photographed with a repetition worthy of Muybridge. A product authored by a true obsessive if ever there was one, and the differences between its iterations are sometimes distinguishable only by a change in cloud cover or a paler glow.

## 4

It was once believed moonbeams produced milk that coated cave walls. In reality, the substance is a carbonate crystal deposit. The milk occurs the world over, including a region in southwestern France called Dordogne, home to Lascaux. The Galerie du Mondmilch is among Lascaux's quieter marvels. Located beyond the Shaft of the Deadman but before the Chamber of Felines, it is seen by neither the sun nor, despite its namesake, the moon. How its beams would have curved their way into its recesses is beyond knowing, but the carbonate is there. It has made the walls remarkably soft, and, therefore, unsuitable for a parietal frieze. In effect, the passage is a geological intestine too glutted with moon milk for the paintings that are the cave's great fame.

## 5

In other series, formal cognates of the moon are similarly isolated against the sky. Temple (2018) features a falcon flying solo at sunset, and the sun appears so coldly brilliant in Rae (2018) that its day-for-night disguise is betrayed only by its telltale crepuscular rays. The camera exposes itself in these images via a faint, pink halo—an artifact produced by the lens.

Again, the artist in conversation with Johannes Schulze-Icking:

“There are two definitions of what an artefact is. Either it's something like a stone, which was worked on in order for it to be used as a tool, an arrow, an arrowhead. If you find that somewhere, if you excavate it, then it is an artefact.

[...] the second definition is about the occurring errors or even better mistakes in measuring-tools. It becomes particularly apparent when it comes to lenses, so-called distortions, when working with a microscope or telescope. You know that these errors will always occur. Another example, looking at today's digital age, are the little pixelations or colour irritations you sometimes find in photographs. These are also artefacts.”<sup>3</sup> Some photographers are averse to lens distortion, whereas others, including Schmidt-Ott, embrace a flare or a shadowy vignette. It signals the camera apparatus and its operator, who is negotiating the decisive moment or, in this case, deciding all moments cradle equal importance, and to capture the aesthetic serendipity in one is simply to appreciate it all the more.

## 6

~Vollmond contains one image unlike the rest, a vertically-oriented horse portrait taken at close range with a flash. The light burst is reflected in the horse's glassy eyes as a luminous glow. At first, the reflection appears white—an approximate moon—but closer inspection reveals the visible spectrum. Its iridescence stands for all the richness of human perception, as well as the limited scope of what we can perceive. Note the curious error that makes the artefact. 'Tis a gift to look a horse in the eye.

1, 3 : Exhibition notes, Labyrinth Photographic, Pferde stärken, Four Corners, London, 2013.

2 : William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, The RSC Shakespeare (New York: The Modern Library, 2007, 2009). II.iv.22-23.

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## Aus der Perspektive des Betrachters. Notizen zum Werk von Jonathan Schmidt-Ott

*LUKAS FEIREISS*

Der vorliegende Band präsentiert Arbeiten des Fotografen und Künstlers Jonathan Schmidt-Ott aus den vergangenen zehn Jahren. Zu sehen sind Bilder unterschiedlicher Gattungen wie Portraits, Stillleben, Naturstudien, Himmelsaufnahmen, Architekturfotografie, Landschaftsbilder und vieles mehr, in knapp betitelten Werkserien.

Diese Bildstrecken stellen in sich geschlossene, narrative Einheiten dar, die in der Verknüpfung von gleichermaßen autobiografischen und assoziativen Momenten einen zutiefst persönlichen Blick vermitteln. Es sind ebenso dichterische wie unprätentiöse Bestandsaufnahmen einer intimen Auseinandersetzung des Künstlers mit der Welt.

Trotz des Verzichts auf jegliche Inszenierung ist die Erzählperspektive hier niemals neutral. Jonathan Schmidt-Ott scheint in seinen Bildern die Welt um sich herum zu entdecken und sie sich damit zugleich zu eigen zu machen. Seine subjektive Innen- und Weltschau erschließt sich dem Betrachter in fragmentarischen Ausschnitten - in sich ruhend, spontan entstanden und intuitiv. Wolkenformationen, an sich schmiegende Körper, Alter, ein leerer Parkplatz, eine junge Frau, Haare im Wind, Pflanzen am Straßenrand, Pferdeblicke, Schattenspiele, eine vom Wind gewölbte Sonnenliege, Algen in trüben Wassern, Wellengänge, Straßenzüge und immer wieder Himmel.

An die Stelle einer linearen Handlung setzt Schmidt-Ott den freien Wechsel von stillen, stimmungreichen Beobachtungen seiner Umwelt in farbigen und schwarzweißen Sequenzen, die eine prägnante bildsprachliche Poesie und Folgerichtigkeit entwickeln. Die einzelnen Bilder gewinnen dabei an Eigenständigkeit und stellen sich zugleich in den Dienst des übergeordneten Narrativ. Auch wenn der größere Zusammenhang, zu dem sich diese Aufnahmen fügen, in gewisser Weise in der Vergegenwärtigung der Wahrnehmungen, Gedanken, Gefühle und Reflexionen des Künstlers in seiner Umwelt besteht, so erlauben Jonathan Schmidt-Otts Bildwelten doch zugleich vielschichtige Interpretationsansätze. Ultimatив erlangen sie erst durch die Perspektive des Betrachters ihre ganz eigene Wahrheit.

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## Je suis un Berliner

XAVER VON MENTZINGEN

Pour une obscure raison, Jonathan a voulu inclure un texte en français dans ce livre. Du coup il s'est adressé à moi, un ami Berlinois résidant à Paris depuis plus de 20 ans et qui n'a malheureusement pas l'habitude de ce genre d'exercice. Pour être honnête, c'est un peu comme une invitation à être témoin de mariage - c'est-à-dire un grand honneur mais aussi une lourde responsabilité. Encore quelque chose que j'ai envie de procrastiner. Heureusement Jonathan m'a assuré que je pouvais écrire tout et rien - juste quelques lignes en français lui suffisaient - sa seule condition était que j'écrive quelque chose de vrai.

Mais d'où lui vient cette obsession pour la France (et pour la vérité) ?

Jonathan emploie parfois des titres en français pour ses séries de photos, il vient régulièrement à Paris, il passe depuis sa plus jeune enfance ses vacances dans les Landes à faire du surf... Est-ce c'est juste une nostalgie de ses séjours estivaux ou s'agit-il (aussi) de ce désir germanique de « Vivre comme Dieu en France », une expression allemande qui résume cette élégante façon de vivre à la française dont nous sommes secrètement jaloux ?

Je pense que la réponse à cette question se trouve dans les photos de Jonathan:

Sans trop vouloir tomber dans les clichés, le travail photographique de Jonathan est très berlinois - cool, libre, sans prétention, spontané et vrai. Comme j'ai pu le constater lors de nos balades à travers la banlieue parisienne, sous un froid glacial, une pluie battante et une lumière sombre... la prise de vue de Jonathan reste toujours rapide, précise et honnête. Que ce soit les barres des HLM, des algues dans la mer, un ciel nuageux ou un objet banal comme un transat, Jonathan réussit à sublimer ces lieux et objets. A travers des jeux de lumière et d'ombre, des couches de brume, des mouvements du vent, il leur donne une nouvelle vie et surtout une âme. Il saisit le moment, si triste soit-il, et révèle sa beauté.

Je sais évidemment que les standards de beauté diffèrent fortement d'un pays à l'autre et j'ai toujours eu l'impression que ceci est particulièrement vrai si on traverse le Rhin. J'ai souvent entendu que beaucoup de choses qui sont faites en Allemagne (et surtout à Berlin) sont trop « laides » pour un public français.

Chez Jonathan c'est différent. Il possède cette pureté, cette brutalité, cette originalité et cette authenticité du Berlin d'antan - d'avant Airbnb & Google quand la ville était encore « pauvre et sexy ». Un travail commercial, trop lisse et joli ne serait jamais une option pour lui. Mais son esprit berlinois sauvage et radical ne se perd pas non plus dans une violente esthétique de squat de Kreuzberg. Au contraire, elle s'adoucit à travers un traitement qui me rappelle un raffinement à la française: l'emploi de couleurs pastels mates, de formes épurées géométriques et des détails subtiles.

Grâce à ces outils, les photos de Jonathan se caractérisent par une beauté discrète sans prétention qui dévoile la grande sensibilité de l'auteur. Il émane d'elles quelque chose de nostalgique et d'énigmatique. Les titres sibyllins que Jonathan donnent à ses séries renforcent cet aspect. Les images et les mots se fondent et nous parlent avec délicatesse et mélancolie ....et c'est ainsi que je comprends toute la particularité de ces photos: le travail de Jonathan est celui d'un poète. Un poète qui cache derrière sa coque brute germanique un noyau tendre latin.

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*OLIVER GRIFFIN*

It's all the same when you look through a lens of a camera. Any camera; the great equalizer of life. Only in regard to making the philosophy of existentialism real, I guess. In the way that it makes it a pure visual experimental mess that can be translated on a two-dimensional surface, not worrying about the distancing involved. Because it's all the same to this machine; for Infinity is not distance in photography, just a symbol engraved on a lens that comes after the number ten. Along with the maths that at aperture setting F11, it's all in the same plane of focus. One holistic chaos of aesthetics' when used correctly. The Perfection that makes happiness; the colours and shapes. But that's not what people love, it's the happy mistakes. The failure of this stubborn and nihilistic act. As the concept of being human hits you with the idea you're always doing something wrong and this process is impossibly beautiful. Believing it is better than everything else in existence, only because it can fold time and space on to the same page. That's what love looks like; arrogance. Because this medium that everyone uses all the time is just better than you, for all the reason I've listed in this paragraph.



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## Se così fosse

### Qual è il rapporto tra artefatto e fotografia?

DILETTA VENTURI

Etimologicamente il termine artefatto (dal latino *arte factus*) ha il significato di “fatto ad arte, con artificio”. Per definizione si può quindi considerare artefatto un oggetto che deriva da un processo trasformativo intenzionale da parte dell’uomo. Quest’ultimo modifica un oggetto prodotto dalla natura per trarvi un vantaggio, lasciando a sua volta le sue tracce su di esso. Un artefatto può essere ad esempio una qualsiasi pietra trasformata in utensile, in statuetta o incisa milioni e milioni di anni fa e che, ritrovata dall’archeologo, si distingue da tutte le altre pietre che la circondano proprio per le tracce lasciate dal lavoro dell’uomo che l’ha trasformata. Andando più a fondo nell’etimologia del termine, inoltre, emerge che il vocabolo artefatto contiene la radice ariana “ar” che in sanscrito ha il senso principale di “andare, mettere in moto, muoversi verso qualcosa” e che racchiude in sé anche la nozione di “adattare, rendere compiuto e perfetto”. L’artefatto è un oggetto concretizzato a partire da un oggetto immaginato dall’uomo. Qui il muoversi verso qualcosa: l’uomo si proietta in avanti, nel futuro, immaginando un oggetto che non esiste nel qui e ora, nel presente, ma che egli può realizzare modificando qualcosa di preesistente. L’artefatto è dunque innanzitutto un oggetto immaginato, un oggetto del futuro, ideale che diventa presente, materiale nel momento in cui viene concretizzato attraverso la trasformazione di ciò che già esiste in natura, “adattato” all’intenzione, all’idea, all’immaginazione dell’uomo.

Come la pietra scolpita o incisa anche una foto può, in un certo senso, esser considerata un artefatto. Solo raramente questa rappresenta infatti una semplice riproduzione meccanica della realtà che ci circonda, ma è piuttosto una rielaborazione di essa. La realtà immortalata nella foto è filtrata, si potrebbe dire “trasformata” dall’intenzione, dall’immaginazione del fotografo, che attraverso determinate scelte, inquadrature, focus, scelta dell’obiettivo, messa in scena o in certi casi addirittura modifiche attraverso processi chimici o correzioni digitali, riproduce non soltanto la realtà che ci circonda, ma sceglie cosa farci o non farci vedere di questa e soprattutto come farcela vedere.

L’altro aspetto interessante che riguarda il rapporto tra artefatto e fotografia si riferisce non tanto al fotografo quanto all’osservatore di una foto, quindi alla sua ricezione ed è strettamente collegato alla “Gestalttheorie”, la “teoria della Gestalt” o “teoria della forma” (dal tedesco *Gestalt*=forma e *Theorie*=teoria). Secondo tale teoria la percezione della totalità è primaria rispetto a quella delle parti che la compongono. La percezione è un processo immediato che avviene attraverso determinate regole di organizzazione dei dati percepiti ed è perciò influenzata dalle esperienze percettive precedenti. In breve la nostra mente è capace di ricostruire una qualsiasi forma (Gestalt) anche se questa non appare completa. Basta un solo dettaglio o una parte, seppur incompleta, di una figura a farci associare questa a qualcosa di conosciuto ed a completarla ricostruendo la figura intera. Così accade che, qualora un soggetto rappresentato in foto risulti sfuocato o in parte tagliato fuori dall’inquadratura, la nostra mente riesca comunque a comprenderne la totalità e addirittura a ricostruirne le parti mancanti, completandone la forma non-finita o indefinita per associazione, attraverso l’immaginazione.

E se, tenendo conto della Gestalttheorie e restando fedeli ai concetti espressi dalla radice sanscrita “ar” che l’etimologia del termine artefatto si porta con sé, si potesse considerare una foto un artefatto non solo del fotografo che l’ha scattata ma anche dell’osservatore che guardandola si trovi, seppur inconsciamente, a completarla con la propria immaginazione?