

Tobias Hauser

Author

The history of 20th century architecture is not just a history of spectacular forms, original ideas that are constantly outdoing each other and Utopian designs for living, record vertical performances and horizontal façade spectacles—it is just as much the history of inhuman dormitory towns, faceless newly built districts, proliferating slums and shabby industrial districts. And not least, the European history of architecture and urban space in this century is also a history of the „topographies of terror“. From Stalinist labour camps via the geography of National Socialist murder and bullying down to the most recent mass graves and devastation by war in Bosnia and Kosovo, a balance of terror and loss could be made opened that, speaking metaphorically, shrouds large areas of the historical space in nocturnal darkness, like a harsh shadow—as if it were behind the back of the brilliant and illuminated achievements of Modernism.

The subject of the political landscape and of architecture as part of this topography plays a major part for Tobias Hauser, alongside the thematic complexes of ideology, power and violence, which he approaches through a kind of joyful yet absurd material poetry. That historical darkness condenses in Tobias Hauser's pictures, graphic cycles, wall objects, sculptures and installations, which address the dark side of architecture and the urban environment as described above, and is enriched by further dimensions and nuances. The darkness of our century of great wars is linked in his work with the black-grey of underground and town plans from the situationists' publications and pamphlets, and it forms an alliance with the poetic and mythical darkness of the Paris of the Surrealists, discovers Alfred Kubin's night as a timely colour-scheme for the millennium as it draws to a close, and finally follows Piranesi into his shadowy empire of the Carceri, in order to decipher his labyrinthine system of galleries, steps and corridors that lead nowhere and negate any human scale as a signature and emblematic copy of our age.

In 1993, when Tobias Hauser set up his *Weißes Hauptquartier/White Headquarter* in one of Europe's most symbolically highly charged squares, in the middle of Pariser Platz, which was then a desert-like empty space beyond the Brandenburg Gate, this significant gesture was already the result of research he had conducted over a number of years, in the form of graphics or pictures, on the theme of the political landscape. The *Headquarter* was open only at night, and functioned as a kind of self-referential unit, with a power generator and lighting mast. Pedestrians had to make their way through the fencing that was still in place and past the guards in the square in order to look into the container, which was lit up at night. Inside it were four carved tables flanked by twelve emblems in white-painted wood on the wall. A mysterious place that radiated coldness and seemed as if made for conspiratorial meetings of anonymous political string-pullers who had to make up their minds about the ongoing fate of Berlin, the former four-power city.

The group of work called *Stadtpläne (Faltpläne)* (Town Plans/Folding Plans) appeared in the same year, 1993, as a companion piece to the *Weißes Hauptquartier*; it was complemented by more graphic and sculptural works on the subject of town plans in the course of the 90s. For the *Faltpläne*, Hauser had projected the street network of central areas of Graz, Warsaw and Sarajevo on to large sheets of grey paper and represented the buildings with black and white chalk in the manner of Kubin as dark sculptural blocks. Linked by the name Sarajevo, as a synonym for the First World War and the victims of the devastation of the Bosnian war, the beginning and the end of the century of the world wars are brought together; Graz, for the Nazis the „capital of the people's uprising“, retains in our perception its former reputation as a chosen stronghold of the Nazi movement; and finally Warsaw, whose name is inseparably linked in the 20th century with the Warsaw ghetto massacre. The three town plans, in whose street names the

dark stories still seem to be firmly written, when put together form a dramatically darkened, craggy political relief, into which the light of reason and humanity soaks without making any effect. And at the same time these town plans, like many of Hauser's works, acquire an element of the absurd, indeed of the comic from the way in which they exaggerate and aggravate the element of crisis. The work called *Das Versteck* (The Hiding Place), 1995, tells us how the individual can withdraw, protect himself, defend himself and finally absent himself in the midst of such fateful devastation. A small area is separated from the rest of the space by bare, white branches; there is a machine gun in the form of fasces, a carved wooden sleeping bag and a canister engraved with the absurdly nihilistic formula „Everybody gets mixed up in everything that is wrong”, and in addition there are two wooden reliefs on the wall with a fence-like thicket, hints of a landscape and distance blocks of flats—all this symbolizes the artist's position on the fringes of society. As the hiding place has been abandoned, we can assume: the artist is on his way into town to set off from their on the next bus to continue his life principle of the *dérive*, of situational drifting around.

We should have these works by Tobias Hauser in front of us when sitting down on the bench of the *Haltestelle* (Stop) he has conceived for the “The Space Here Is Everywhere” exhibition and set up in the park of the Villa Merkel. The sculpture is both a monument and a useful object, and has a highly condensed metaphoric and actual subversive potential. In the *Haltestelle* light box, transparent town plans of Esslingen and Sarajevo are superimposed. The symbol on the „stop” sign blends the symbols of right- and left-wing despotism together, and the inscription „Fin de Siècle. Linie 2000” suggest the pessimistic interpretation that the ideological blindness and the „dark” energies of this century that we thought were overcome could also remain significant for our political timetables over the turn of the millennium. And yes:

we arrive here with and from our past, to be taken away into an uncertain future by the „Number 2000”.

Quelle: