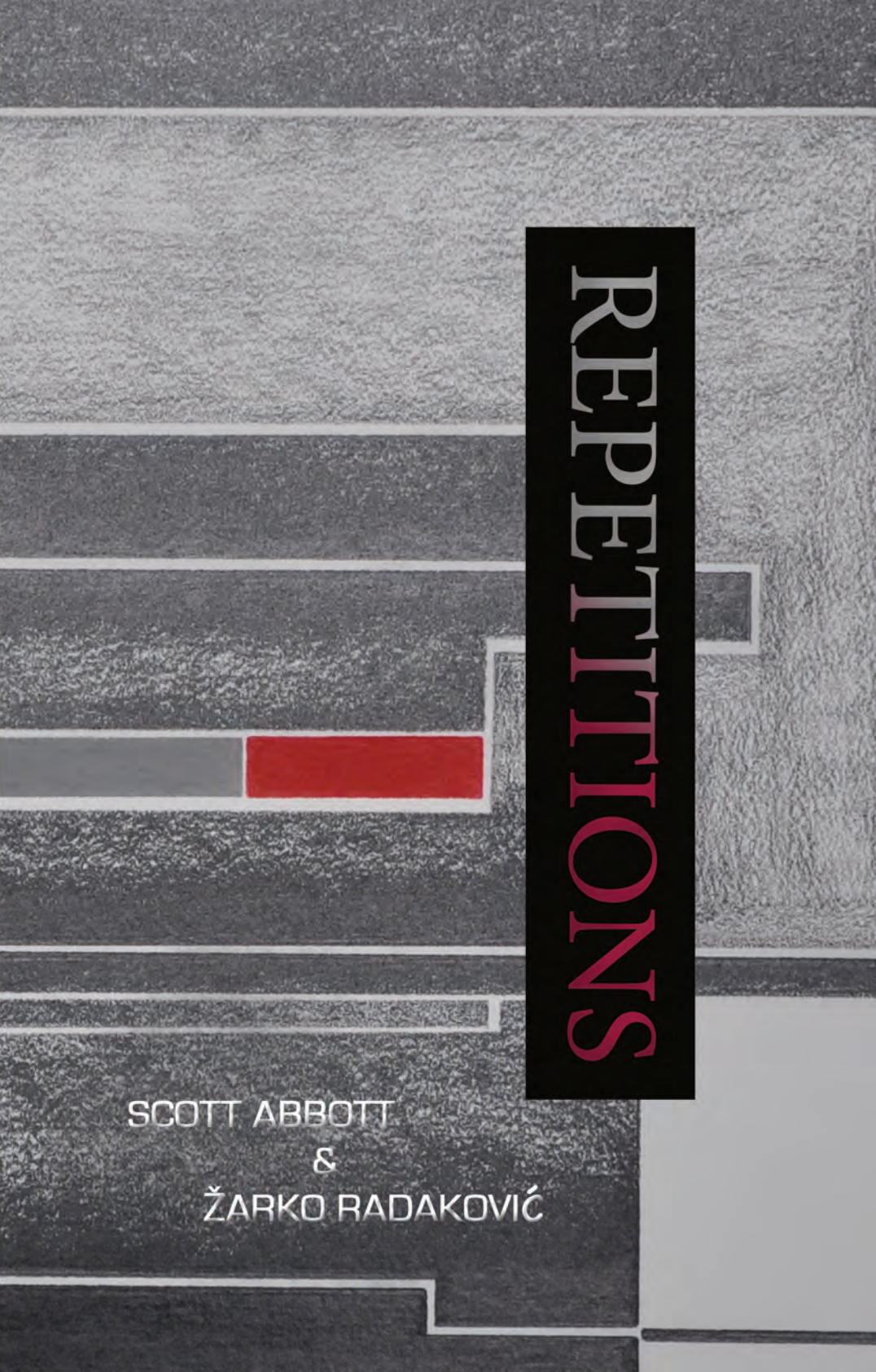
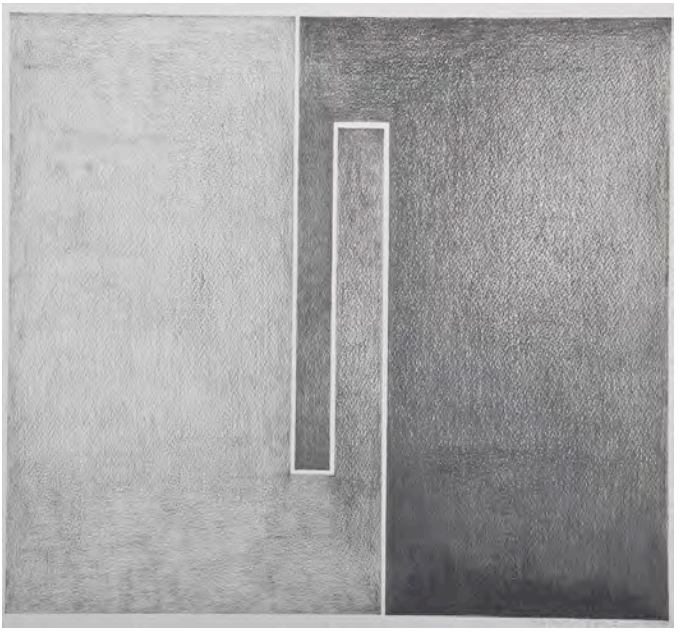

REPETITIONS
SCOTT ABBOTT
&
ŽARKO RADAKOVIĆ

Repetitions

REPETITIONS



Scott Abbott and Žarko Radaković

punctum books ⋆ brooklyn, ny

REPETITIONS

Published originally as:
Ponavljanje (Belgrade: Vreme knjige, 1994)

First published in 2013 by
punctum books
Brooklyn, New York
http://punctumbooks.com

ISBN-13: 978-0615851334
ISBN-10: 0615851339

Cover and title-page artwork by Nina Pops, with permission of the artist.

Facing-page drawing by Heather Masciandaro.

Creative-Editorial Team: Sarah George, Stephen Kearse, Christy Koester, Natalie Lapacek & Mary McCormick

Von der öden Wiederhoung zur seligmachenden Wiederholung: d.h. die Freude des Wiederholens wird erst möglich, wenn ich, ins Ungewisse aufgebrochen, ratlos bin.

Peter Handke, *Phantasien der Wiederholung*

From empty repetition to sanctifying repetition: that is, the joy of repetition is only possible when I, having departed into the unknown, am at a loss.

Peter Handke, *Fantasies of Repetition*

Od pukog ponavljanja ka spasonosnom ponavljanju: to jest radost ponavljanja postaje moguća tek kada si, pošavši u neizvesnosnost, bespomoćan.

Peter Handke, *Fantazije ponavljanja*

Table of Contents

Preface

Long ago, the writer Peter Handke left us his story *Repetition* . . . ("I covered you at night." "I listened to your breathing." "I smelled your skin.") . . . The perception of phenomena and the experiencing of the world—even testing the reality of books—were changing under the burden of "historical events" . . . ("Are you there?" "Have you changed?" "Do you still walk with that kind, clumsy gait of yours."). . .

For a decade, then, (one translating, the other transmitting, as lecturer),[1] we were "indefatigable" readers of Handke's stories. And we considered the book *Repetition* to be the crowning glory. And we saw the tail end of the decade in which the book had come into being (eighth in the twentieth century) as "evil": with its discourse that killed perception, its perception that killed feeling, its feeling that killed thought, its thought that killed storytelling . . .

Handke's book remained an emblem of the Beautiful (love, harmony) in the late, ecological, storytelling-era. A lyrical appeal to defend the geography of the Written . . . As we read, therefore, we did not remain in the closed space of a room. We went "out" to read: not *out of* the book but *with* it: into "the open" ("ins Offene") . . .

This, then, is Corporeal Travel-reading and Travel-writing. This is the Conquest of Geography. The Fixing of Tracks. And, by means of the sensual truth of bookish space, the Measuring of Oneself in the Book and the Testing of the Book in Us. And Repetition. That is, Inscription: of the One (who was born in the country of Handke's Landscapes—under the "new order," however, "dispossessed of" "that

[1] Scott Abbott is a university professor and writer; Žarko Radaković is a writer and translator.

soil there") and of the Other (coming from far away to Handke's space—"from there," yet closer to the here-residing than many of those "from here") . . .

The book recounts the movements of "foreigners."

The action begins in Handke's story *Repetition*. There, its beginning runs as follows:

> *A quarter of a century, or a day, has passed since I arrived in Jesenice. . . . I ought to have felt free, for . . . the summer months lay open before me. But I had set out with mixed feelings. . . . Besides . . . during the past year . . . I suddenly found myself alone. . . . (The truth was that I simply didn't have the money . . . .) Another reason . . . was that I had never been outside of Austria.*
>
> *After a glance at my . . . passport, the border guard in Jesenice spoke to me in his language. When I failed to understand, he told me in German that . . . my name would have been better suited to . . . the border guard. The elderly official . . . in civilian clothes, white-haired, with the round, rimless glasses of a scholar . . . suddenly grew grave, came a step closer, and looked me solemnly in the eye. . . .*[2]

[2] Peter Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Collier, 1988), 3–4.

Foreigners in a Novel(ist)'s Landscape

Scott Abbott

First Repetition: Travel Reading

> The man waiting for him was a translator from a foreign country who for some days had been tracing the itineraries of a book set in the region and now wished to ask the author a few questions.
>
> Peter Handke, *The Afternoon of a Writer*

> And twofold always:
> May God us keep
> From single vision
> And Newton's sleep.
>
> William Blake, letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802

❁ 8 May 1989, Salt Lake City

Bursting with gregarious energy, "Elder" and "Sister" Smith find their places in front of me on the plane from Salt Lake City. Plastic name tags impose Mormon missionary identities on their pastel and wrinkled selves. "Going from Idaho Falls to London," they tell their (perhaps) inquisitive neighbor. A crowd of children and grandchildren swarmed around them at the airport. Two video cameras recorded the proud departure. Their message will be the true gospel and the experience of twice six decades.

Over Chicago the weather is too rough for us to land. For an hour we circle blindly. The plane shudders through dark clouds. It banks steeply, then more steeply still, slipping down and around a slippery vortex. I lose every sense of direction, and attribute the same confusion to the pilot. I long for the ground. Simply to stand on the ground.

In New York's Kennedy Airport, I walk behind the missionary

couple. Their shy gapings suggest that New York is far from the sheltered valleys of Idaho and Utah. (How can I, having braced against the bitter wind of Bear Lake for four winters as a child, fall for the cliché of sheltered Idaho valleys?) Nonetheless, trailing together up the concourse, the sweetly dedicated Mormons now breathe (and know they breath) the same lukewarm air that circulates through the moist lungs of rosy-faced priests, black-bearded Jews, brown-skinned women wrapped tightly in brilliant saris, black men wound into white turbans, long-limbed women jacked up on stiletto heels, well fed men packed into immaculate business suits, sheared soldiers in uniform, young punks in their un-uniforms. A welter of inhaling, exhaling, perfumed, starched, garlicked, sweating, diseased, powdered, angst-ridden, exulting, lusting, saintly, human beings.

Now the couple from Idaho Falls, he wearing his Boy-Scout-Council tie tack, she with her fine bone structure and seemly deference to the patriarch by her side, now these translucent-haired missionaries are cast into the World.

And I, a "worldly traveler," set myself apart from these aged fellow Mormons. Pretending to Joyce's "scrupulous meanness," my mind and pen disclose the missionaries' shallow innocence and reveal my own sagacity.

Despite my economy ticket, by some inexplicable grace, I have been assigned a "clipper-class" seat on the New York-to-Frankfurt flight. A wide seat with unlimited leg room. A single, quiet neighbor. Directly in front of me, in the nose of the 747, sit the first-class passengers. Even grace cannot bring a regular passenger that far.

While the plane drones across the Atlantic, I read Peter Handke's novel *Repetition*. The protagonist, Filip Kobal, reads his brother Gregor's notebook while searching for him in Yugoslavia.

If someone were to notice the book and ask me about my trip I would describe my work with Handke's texts, my plan to travel in the Austrian and Slovenian landscapes of *Repetition* with Handke's Serbo-Croatian translator.

In the next-to-last row of first-class seats a barrel-chested man works with an oversized black hand-bound book whose text has exploded across pale green pages, the dainty lines of which are unable to control the scattered words and rampant winged dots. Armed with thick red and blue pencils, the man struggles to order the chaos. Strong blue strokes cross out entire unruly sections. Powerful red strokes underline and lend weight to flighty passages. The fierce reading is disturbed only momentarily when the barrel-chested reader takes off

his shoes and stuffs plump feet into a pair of Pan Am slippers. A black silk shirt caresses his skin and a green-and-red sweater vest stretches across his broad belly. Measured against his girth his arms are an afterthought. His elbows reach only half way to what would be his waist. A weighty Rolex spans his upholstered wrist. Concentrating once again, he holds the book up to weak eyes. A florid man with thick glasses. Curly red-blonde hair. A pointed nose.

Later, far over the Atlantic, the reader accepts a glass of wine from a flight attendant and for the first time sets the book aside. I can read the gold-stamped title: *Tannhäuser*. Several first-class passengers note the turn from book to wine and swarm to him. The airplane's droning engines keep me from hearing the conversations, but I can follow the extravagant gestures: "Stupendous!" "Magnificent!" "Marvelous!"

My clipper-class neighbor sleeps the entire journey.

❀ 9 May

At the Frankfurt airport they wave me past without even glancing at my passport. They so blithely assume my innocence.

A cheap hotel, a hundred noisy meters from the train station—police sirens, ambulances, streetcars, automobiles, jackhammers, cranes, riveting guns. The manager gives me a key and explains that the front door will be locked at 11 p.m. I watch his one good eye jump from side to side while his other eye whitely stares (or doesn't stare) straight ahead. He hands me a registration form with his left arm. There is no right arm. A small man. A humped back. I am not making this up. My room on the fourth floor has a twelve-foot ceiling. It is twice as high as it is wide, as high as it is long.

In the evening I see a film, *La Lectrice*. The pleasure of the text and the text of pleasure. Reading as sexual provocation. The beautiful professional reader offers her clients THE GOLDEN FLEECE. After the film I contemplate Europe as an erotic text, as a mysterious mistress. Intercourse with the abstraction "Europe," I suppose, will not harm my marriage, such as it is. I pass the storefront office of an organization promoting sex education. Fastened to a wall is a machine dispensing free prophylactics—from the Greek "to keep guard before" (what a pedant). Simple devices to guard against disease and prevent pregnancy. At the same time they are advertised as decreasing in no sense the sensuous pleasure of the encounter. Competing values: sensitivity and protection. To experience this part of Europe as I want—with curiosity, openness, and sensitivity—I will expose myself

to disease and risk conceiving children. Or will I "guard against," keeping my insular "self" intact?

> Literature is mostly about having sex and not having children. Life is the other way around.
>
> David Lodge

Feverish dreams. Shouts during the night in German, Turkish, and English. A violent thunderstorm. Finally I sleep long and well despite riots on the street and in my psyche—a naked man reads into an expanding condom until it stretches too thin and bursts, freeing letters and word fragments to impregnate the universe. Monsters are born.

❀ 10 May

A rainy morning. After breakfast I call Žarko to tell him when I will arrive in Tübingen. I am absolutely incoherent, stammering inanities in this language I am supposed to know. A Germanist who can hardly speak German. A stuttering professor.

Walking along the Main river, my eyes on a crude tourist map on which the hotel manager marked the Schirn Kunsthalle at my request, I try to blend in with the Europeans strolling sedately and knowledgeably along the gravel path. The map leads me finally to the art institute. I must still, however, wrestle conspicuously with four doors before I find one open. Did I miss a sign? Suddenly inside, I am standing too close to a man and a woman who lean against a counter. They stare at me. The man behind the counter raises his eyebrows (am I not supposed to be here?).

For a confused minute we try to establish whether I want one ticket, two tickets, or a combination ticket. I am not even sure what I am being asked, but I say yes and hand over some money. With combination ticket (DM 7) in hand I enter the building. Or try to enter. There are several flights of unmarked stairs. Behind a glass door in front of me swarm the knees and elbows and backpacks of a hundred school children. Inscrutable halls branch off in every direction. Doors bear indecipherable signs. I flee up the closest set of stairs. At the top, a sign on a glass door promises: "Gallerie." Standing on a higher balcony overlooking the stairs, a woman watches while I pull and push the door. It is locked. I feel like an idiot. I look up at her, and she points helpfully to another staircase. Or is she laughing at me?

> Even Frankenstein's monster hesitated at the threshold (to the hermit's hut).
>
> Peter Handke, *Phantasien der Wiederholung*

Down I go, then up again. At the top I find, mercifully (whose mercy?), another woman who tears off my ticket stub and gestures toward an open door. Suddenly I am where I want to be—in Picasso's sketchbook: "Je suis le cahier."

After hours in the windowless womb of the Picasso exhibit, I wander through the gallery's other show: *Prospekt 89*. A selection of this year's best European art displayed in high, long, naturally lit halls. Outside it is raining hard. I take my time, sitting often along the long walls of windows, describing, reflecting, sorting through my reactions, writing with a black pen in a small notebook. What I see enflames my imagination.

A huge canvas: a man on a ladder rolls paint over the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, obliterating the figures. His shadow stretches over the disappearing work of art—"Triumph over Mastery." A black bicycle perches high on the corner of two white walls. A single red apple, a real apple, protrudes from one wall. On a podium, a second bicycle, a real bicycle. A Kandinsky painting "rides" the sturdy black bike. Behind the bicycle and up the white wall are scattered a trail of red apples, real apples—"Die suprematischen Reiter des Himmels. Triptychos post historicus."

Blocks of weathered stone—arranged like a sentence but calling sentences into question: DIE ORDNUNG DER GEGENWART IST DIE UN ORDNUNG DER ZUKUNFT. (THE ORDER OF THE PRESENT IS THE DISORDER OF THE FUTURE.)

Outside the gallery, sheets of rain drench the worn walls of a (real) Roman ruin. How to differentiate between art and the dynamic reality of ruins and rain? From somewhere the sound of tympani. A trumpet plays scales. The rain abates and a school of children clambers over the ruins. They flow from one end of the square to the other, reading the stone walls with feet and knees and palms. I trace the physical pattern and place it in the context of Roman history—and in the confrontational, playful, post-historical, disordering, triumphal context of the art behind me.

After hours among Picasso sketches and the most contemporary of art, I now sit outside and under the Schirn Kunsthalle at a table sheltered from the rain. Moving a second time among the Picasso sketchbooks I stood repeatedly next to or across from a woman.

Peripherally I could see dark hair, loose black pants, and a black jacket of raw silk. She drew me: her simple physical presence, her measured movements, her intense concentration, the mystery of her otherness coupled with the intimacy of our coordinated mental and physical stroll through Picasso's sensual vision. When I left the gallery I passed close by her. She brushed past me in the gallery's book store. And now she is sitting just inside the Kunsthalle café, half hidden behind a stone column and directly in my line of vision. Is she as aware of me as I am of her? I watch her turn the page of a book, raise a cup to her lips. She looks at me over the cup. I look down. She finishes her coffee. She leaves the café and walks right past me. I let her pass.

I mock my artistic and sexual *Wunschträume*.

❁ 11 May

On the train to Stuttgart. Quiet rain outside. Everything green. After the browns and reds and greys of my Utah desert homeland—a shocking green. The order and promise of spring fields and gardens. Along the tracks stretch colonies of meticulously tended Schrebergärten—tiny plots of planned paradise. Candide leaves Eldorado to tend to his garden—it's an old European custom. Handke's Gregor Kobal learns to tend orchards in Slovenia.

At the Stuttgart train station I again hear the soft Swabian sounds that surrounded me for three months in 1983. It's like going back to the drawn-out vowels I knew in Nashville. The train connects Swabia's melodious "ingen": Esslingen, Mettingen, Plochingen, Wendlingen, Nürtingen, Bempflingen, Metzingen, Reutlingen, Tübingen. I reread Žarko's interview with Handke in the literary journal *Nachtcafé*. It's a rich narrative, a subtle story. Žarko reveals himself gently, unobtrusively. He stumbles, retraces his steps, laughs at himself. He uses Handke's phrase as his title: "Die Welt in gewaltiger Schwebe halten" ("to hold the world in a powerful balance").

A spray-painted red swastika burns the wall of a shelter at the Nürtingen train station. A rejoinder in black redirects a bit of fascist rhetoric: "Nazis raus." (Loser, the protagonist of Handke's novel *Across*, kills a swastika-sprayer with a rock. And must then find absolution.)

Žarko picks me up at the train station at 12:12, grinning and full of welcome. He looks just like I remember him: tall, dark-haired, high broad forehead, thick eyebrows. His voice is deep, his German rich—

slight, warm hints of his Slavic mother tongue.

In six years, however, some things have changed: Žarko has a car and a driver's license. Handke, he tells me, still cannot or will not drive.

We have lunch at the University Mensa, just like old times. We talk about Handke, about the "intervening years," about mutual friends, more about Handke. Žarko is full of projects—for example, he says, parallel diaries, yours and mine, as we spend the next weeks together, as we read Handke's *Repetition*, as we travel Filip Kobal's route in Slovenia, as we follow Handke's biographical traces through Austria. Two separate yet simultaneous perspectives. Two foreigners writing about their experiences with an Austrian writer's texts and contexts. I agree immediately, flattered by the thought of my text next to his.

In the apartment he shares with Zorica, Žarko gives me a copy of his translation of Handke's *Child Story*. The dust jacket has a photo of the second "Triptychos Post Historicus" I have seen in two days, this one titled "Memories of Childhood 1983." A framed photo of a little boy hangs on a block wall. Atop a square column in the right foreground sits a bust of a child. To the left, in a corner, lie two lions. The male lion glares at the camera. The artist is a Yugoslavian acquaintance of Žarko's now living in London: Braco Dimitrijević.

At the end of his translation of *Child Story*, Žarko has included an anthology of child-related texts. Among an illustrious group of poems, short prose pieces, photos, and drawings I find my own essay: "From the Diary of a Father of Six and Husband of One (both numbers reprehensibly low in the nineteenth-century Mormon tradition the author's ancestors helped establish)."

Zorica returns home from the physics institute at the Morgenstelle and welcomes me warmly. Her eyes are sharp, intelligent, honest. I know from experience she will say exactly what she thinks. I look forward to her opinions—with some trepidation.

We eat supper. The two of them tell me about rafting and hiking in Montenegro last summer. The photos are marvelous. More marvelous still are their faces as they describe the mountainous heart of their homeland and the crazy, poetic, philosophical genius of the Montenegrins. Žarko complains that his knees are still tender from the trip.

At my urging Žarko launches into a story about his recent interview with Handke. His train arrived at the Salzburg train station just before the interview was scheduled. Unshaven, in t-shirt and Levis, he ran to the Sheraton Hotel where Handke had arranged to meet him. Hardly inside the door, Žarko was again outside, confronted by the uniform of a Sheraton employee. Could I help you, sir? she asked forcefully. I have

an appointment with someone in the bar here, Žarko answered. Perhaps I could give him a message, she suggested. No, Žarko insisted, I need to see him myself. Not even slightly moved, she played her trump card: Who is this person you are supposed to meet? Peter Handke, Žarko replied. Suddenly she was another person. So was Žarko. Oh, Herr Handke! Yes, Herr Handke. Please, let me take you to his table. This way sir.

❀ 12 May

I woke up to a room flooded with sunlight and to the sound of a hundred birds. Summer mornings on my grandparents' Colorado farm.

Lunch in the Mensa with Žarko, Zorica, and a Hungarian physicist. Zorica talks about her relationship with Žarko: We have divided up all necessary duties. "I am responsible for physics, money, the house, the car, shopping, politics, our social life. And Žarko takes care of art. It's nice not to have to worry about art."

I think she is hilarious. Žarko's not so sure.

In the evening we go to a party for Tilo, a student celebrating his success on the state examination in French (after earlier exams in German and Philosophy). He is almost as old as I am and still has his dissertation in front of him. German *Gründlichkeit*. When he says he enjoyed my *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* article on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* I like him immediately. During the next hour I meet Tilo's brother, a young jazz musician full of questions and ideas, and also a junior editor for Metzler Verlag, stuffy beyond her years. She reminds me of Henry Miller's *Red-Notebook* description of a fellow train passenger: the young man describes his early training in art and his more recent success in real estate; although he longs to return to his artistic career, he tells Miller that he can't leave the security of his business. Caught in the bonds of security, Miller writes, and only 22! And I? Forty, a house, two cars, six children, tenure, and an adolescent longing to be an artist.

In this gathering of Germans Žarko and Zorica, who have organized the celebration, are unnaturally subdued.

On the way home Žarko and I, filled with *Wanderlust*, decide that we will begin our trip early in the morning.

❁ 13 MAY

Woke up at 6:30, but didn't get underway until 10:30. Žarko and Zorica had something they had to work out (their heated Serbo-Croatian discussion made me feel like a kid whose parents are speaking a secret language). The woman at the car rental place had to fill out three different rental forms before she finally got one right. Her angry pen twice ripped into botched forms with vicious crossing strokes.

❁ 14 MAY

Early morning. I sit on the balcony of the Gostilna Rožić, a pension in Bohinj, Slovenia and watch the white-tailed swallows wheel around me. I know we are surrounded by mountains, but thick clouds and intermittent rain veil them completely.

In Handke's novel, Filip Kobal rode a train through a Karawanken mountain tunnel to get from Villach, Austria to Jesenica in Yugoslavia. Out of the cultural terrorism of Europe into the fabled "Ninth Land" of Slovenia. We couldn't *exactly* duplicate Filip's trip with our Opel Kadett; but we would drive through a parallel tunnel, a tunnel that promised to deliver Žarko from the cultural exile the mountains proclaimed and enforced.

Somewhere near the tunnel we made a wrong turn and found ourselves driving along a long lake parallel to the mountains. Only fifteen minutes away, through the tunnel, was the promised land. Back and forth we drove, sometimes sure where we were because of correspondences between countryside and map, then suddenly, inexplicably, repeatedly lost. The tunnel was carefully marked on the map, as was the Autobahn leading to it, and the name "Karawanken Tunnel" stood in tiny red letters next to the marks that meant "mountains." We could see the mountains. We could see the lake. We could drive through the streets of St. Jakob. But the map's promised 7.6-kilometer tunnel ("toll required") was simply not there. A black hole. The map's code, which had so adequately represented "reality" up to now, had become meaningless. Absence where presence was promised. A signifier with no signified. A postmodern map.

Finally we threw away the text and asked an Austrian policeman how to get to the Karawanken Tunnel. When he understood that we wanted to drive through a tunnel to get to Jesenice he smiled so broadly that his thin moustache quivered. No such place, he said, not

until the Yugoslavs finish their half. He sauntered off, still smiling. The map had brought us, anticipating the 1991 completion of the tunnel, to a place that did not yet exist.

Still, we had to cross the mountains. Before we drove to the east and then south to the Wurzenpass, I turned the wheel over to Žarko.

Žarko had never driven a car through mountains before. As we climbed the steep, winding grade, he constantly had the car one or even two gears too high. Always on the verge of stalling. I made several rude suggestions as my patience wore thin.

At the border in an alpine meadow at the top of the pass, Žarko spoke with the guard and then pulled the car into a parking lot. You need a visa, he told me, and led me into a low, dark, dirty monument to bureaucracy. I felt like saluting the official portrait of Tito with a Bronx cheer. In the interest of time I restrained myself—experience at the East-German border had taught me that such jealously guarded borders can indeed be crossed, but also that a whole afternoon might be lost in the offing. At a high counter Žarko answered questions put to him by a uniformed official. I watched several men pay what looked like huge amounts of money at another counter. There were long silences as the official flipped through several old notebooks. Habsburg vintage? I thought of Josef K. and the castle. Žarko began to fidget. The official read my passport page by page. Much better than at the airport in Frankfurt, I thought. He looked up at me and I decided not to return his stare. I looked out the dirty window, focusing on nothing. My ears registered the tinny sounds of a bureaucrat's radio playing somewhere in the building, broadcasting the immortal voice of Engelbert Humperdink: "Please release me, let me go, I don't love you any mo'." Now I was grinning. At the incongruity? No, at the congruity. I would like Yugoslavia. With a flourish the official stamped my passport.

Before we left we changed some money in the border branch of Ljubljanska banka, and for two fifty-dollar travelers checks I suddenly had more Dinar than I could fit into my back pocket. 12,000 Dinar per dollar. A millionaire.

Žarko drove again, down the winding road lined by thick forest. The official had been quite pleasant, he reported; and I told him about my memories of border crossings and the experience with Engelbert Humperdink. He laughed with me, and then added, quite seriously: you can't compare Yugoslavia with East Germany.

Now the border was crossed, Jesenice just ahead, and Filip Kobal's first experience awaited our retracing. Žarko was home. And yet not

home, he explained. This was Slovenia, and the people here spoke Slovenian. They learned Žarko's native language, Serbo-Croatian, in school. (When I first met Žarko I assumed he spoke "Yugoslavian"—I'm still embarrassed at the thought.)

Scarcely a kilometer from the border we had to stop again, this time for two steaming cars whose front left bumpers and wheels were intimately connected. The one heading down the mountain was a new Jaguar. The other, headed up the mountain, was an Alfa Romeo. We walked down to where the two drivers, both well-dressed men, conversed in German. Conversed is the right word, for this was a civilized exchange. No blood was flowing. Tempers were under control.

We could hear the siren of a police vehicle from the direction of Jesenice, and soon two young policemen arrived in a tiny car to take charge of the situation. They stalked around, chests expanded, arm muscles flexed. They photographed the scene. They began to question the two drivers and the crowd, now over 100, closed in to hear. No one was hurt and the two crumpled luxury cars were surely fully insured, so we could fully enjoy our *Schadenfreude*.

We must have been enjoying it too much, for one of the policemen began shouting and waving his arms. We were to return to our cars. I could tell that without understanding a word. We walked back up the road. A young woman going the same way responded to our spoken German with accented German of her own: Do you know why it always takes two Yugoslavian policeman to do one job? she asked, her eyes bright and one corner of her mouth pulled into a sarcastic grin. No, we admitted. Because, she said, the one can only read, but not write. And the other can only write, but not read. We laughed, flattered that she would speak with us. A half hour later we watched the policemen, the drivers, and several other men lift, bounce, and drag the Alfa Romeo to the side of the road, opening up the way for us to descend from the mountains.

An eerily clear, colorless mountain river runs into the alpine city. Downstream, leaving town, the now opaque river percolates and fumes. A dark cloud, tinted chemical yellow, simmers above the city. Žarko drove straight through the steel-milling town. We would stay overnight in Bohinj, a mountain resort better adapted to the human breathing apparatus.

On the strength of the Italian cars parked outside its restaurant (Žarko said that was a sure sign of good food) we chose a pension. By the time we had put our things in a room it was 10 p.m. Famished,

anticipating a Balkan feast, we hurried downstairs. The waiter refused to seat us. The kitchen is closed, he said. Žarko asked about other restaurants. Get out of my way, the waiter said, I have work to do. We had brought bread and cheese and apples with us, and in fact ate well; but Žarko was humiliated. It meant much to him that I like his country; and the waiter had acted like shit. Maybe the Slovenes simply don't like Serbs, I suggested. No, Žarko said, he was a Serb.

Later that night we stood on the gravel shore of an enormously still mountain lake. The silky water mirrored the bright half-moon and the surrounding mountains. Standing there in silence, Yugoslavia's highest mountain towering three-headed (Triglav) over us in the moonlit night, Žarko and I began to talk about standing and being. (The subject could just as well have been basketball, but we had covered Yugoslavs in the NBA while driving and now the bright darkness put us in a philosophical mood.) The entire day we had been traveling, racing along the Autobahn into Austria, up through the mountains into Yugoslavia. And now, on a lake shore where the slightest wave was a remarkable motion, we stood and talked about standing: the acrobats' gesture in Rilke's elegies, Handke's evocation of the *nunc stans* in *The Lesson of Mont Sainte-Victoire*—that standing gesture created by the most concentrated artistic effort, that brief moment of achieved stillness between one motion and the next, that ephemeral moment of duration, of "true feeling."

❀ 15 May

> The youth, when attracted by nature and art, feels capable of entering suddenly, with a lively effort, into the inner sanctum; the man notices, after long travels, that he still finds himself in the outer courtyards. . . . Stair, gate, entrance, vestibule, the space between the inner and outer, between the sacred and profane—only this can be the place in which we and our friends will commonly dwell.
>
> Goethe, preface to his art-historical journal *Propyläen*

Yesterday was Pentecost. We left the lake and its peaceful morning fog and drove down to the town of Bohinska Bistrica, the town where Filip Kobal reads his brother's notebook on fruit-growing and discovers the Slovenian language.

Driving past grassy meadows we saw the "hay harps" Handke's character admires: "those long, narrow wooden frames known as 'hay

harps': two wooden posts (perhaps made of concrete today) rammed into the ground, and embedded in them a number of parallel bars, on which, under a shingled roof, the first hay of the year was drying. This first crop was full of spring flowers, and the grey mass of hay was shot through with color." I was thrilled by the sight of these objects I had seen only in Handke's description. But isn't that an odd reaction? What is so thrilling about a connection between text and reality? Doesn't seeing the actual "hay harp" distract me from the language with which Handke describes them? Won't the descriptive passage now revert to a shorthand or a cipher for something I have seen, rather than serving as a "thing" itself? What is now the difference between the description and the hay-harp souvenir lamps in local gift shops?

In town we heard bells and found people streaming out of a large church. The Pentecostal churchgoers were variously dressed: from tightly buttoned traditional black suits or black dresses to casual Levis, bright t-shirts, and tennis shoes. Inside the church, kneeling worshipers were still receiving the host from a priest. A choir sang with organ accompaniment. Žarko said the sacred music was flavored with Slovenian folk songs; and he gave me a lecture about Slovenes. There are about 2 million of them, mostly strong Catholics, their religion closely allied with their nationalism. Politically dominated by Hapsburgs and then Serbs, they have fought a heroic battle over the centuries to keep their language and culture intact. Handke says there are no Slovenian words for military commands. German and Serbo-Croatian words suffice.

From the church we followed some men into the town center, not a quaint old place but a rather faceless arrangement of concrete and glass. (Am I seeing the place through Handke's eyes? He describes the place similarly.) The men congregated in a combination pastry shop and bar, a warm, steamy refuge from the rain. Where were their wives? We ordered pastry and tea and sat at a corner table. Young to middle-aged men stood at a bar. Their hands flashed in animated conversation. Around tables sat more quiet, dark-suited, little men. Even inside the café brimmed hats covered the older men's fine, lean, wrinkled heads. As Gastarbeiter in Germany, shorn of language and homeland, these Slovenes and Serbs and Croats and Turks can appear "shiftless," "stupid," "dirty," and "dishonest." I wonder how I appear to these men here. My hair is not black. I have no mustache. My clothes and gestures and mannerisms belong to a different people. How do they interpret my difference? What nightmares does the German I am speaking evoke?

On the road back down to Jesenice we got a sense for the new Slovenia: "Tennis," "Mini-Golf," and "Ski-Area." Back in the steel-milling city we sloshed through grey and yellow, chemically fortified rain to the train station restaurant where Filip Kobal sat one whole night drinking sweet, flat, east-block Cola. A picture of Tito figures prominently in the story, but yesterday we couldn't find it. Disappointment. And yet the thought of political change was bracing. Žarko checked the WC to see if Handke got it right. He did.

We looked for the mouth of the train tunnel where Filip Kobal spends his first night, unwilling to leave the border, the threshhold: "The tunnel did not strike me as an insane idea. I would go in where my train had just carried me out." We drove and walked up a dozen blind alleys before a wet garden path almost accidentally brought us face to face with the tunnel. Standing in the streaming rain Žarko photographed the heavy stone arch and the black half circle it creates.

Later we ate the Slovenian meal Žarko had promised me the night before. Dark bread, tomato-and-onion salad, soup (with a raw egg yolk staring up at me), a tender, well seasoned Schnitzel. Prosperous, dour Slovenian families ate their quiet Sunday dinners at tables around us. Four soldiers drank at one table. A huge boar's head and several sets of antlers hung heavy over the diners. Žarko glowed as I praised the food and glowed again as he drank a glass of Slivovitz. The meal cost 120,000 Dinar. But we were millionaires.

An uneventful trip across the border. "Where was the transition?" asks the narrator of *Repetition*. Just before crossing we spent the last of our money on Yugoslavian tomatoes and pears. From an official poster still tacked obediently to the back wall, Marshal Tito kept watch over the transaction.

In the late afternoon we drove through south-central Austria to Klagenfurt, the city where Handke finished high school. Exhausted from a hectic week of travel, I slept in the car while Žarko sought directions to Tanzenberg (the Catholic boarding school where Handke was a pupil for several years before moving to a school in Klagenfurt), found announcements of an exhibit of Constructivist art, and interviewed several passersby about whether they knew who Handke was (most of them didn't, but one defended him as a national hero). We were both refreshed.

Almost 12 p.m. We have found a room in St. Veit an der Glan, a town not far from the Tanzenberg boarding school. Handke's ex-wife, Libgard Schwarz, is from here. Four leather-clad motorcyclists share the next room. I can't imagine them without their helmets and leathers.

Do they wear pajamas?

After not having seen one another for six years, Žarko and I have been together nearly every minute of two days now. Travel weary, I find his mannerisms increasingly aggravating. "What! What?" he asks, pretending, I suppose, not to have heard what I have just suggested because he would rather do the opposite. And yet we share good moments—even kinship. We talk before going to sleep about Žarko's life in Germany. The eternal foreigner. Bureaucrats (and Germany is a nation of bureaucrats), noting his dark hair and registering his slight accent, call him "Du," and raise their voices.

Amos Poe's grainy film *The Foreigner*, 1977. The film concludes its inexorable, violent story when someone murders the foreigner in Battery Park. The Statue of Liberty looms in the background.

On the way from St. Veit to Tanzenberg we stop by a country soccer tournament. At least four teams have gathered, if I read the shirt colors correctly. Healthy-looking girls sell sausages and sodas from a little stand. Two teams race up and down the wet field. One goalie can punt the ball the entire length of the field. Heads crack together as players strain for the ball. Muscular legs drip blood. Feet control the ball delicately, with amazing precision, and suddenly punish it with terrifying force. A tall, thin player has his glasses ripped from his face. He picks them up and reenters the fray. Žarko photographs the goalies. We'll analyze their faces later for the anxiety Handke describes in his early novel.

Tanzenberg, in Kärnten. More shades of green than I have names for. Bright white-and-grey clouds. Dark brown, rain-soaked earth. Broad fertile valleys bordered by hills. A wisp of smoke rises from a thick stand of trees. Overlooking a wide sweep of this exorbitant landscape stands the boarding school, a long, high, heavy, stone building. An architectural witness to institutional power. The natural beauty seems to exist for the greater glory of this institution set on a hill. I can imagine why a poor village girl would be attracted to the life of a nun here. She would be honored and protected in this house. She would be beautiful in her starched black and white habit.

The school is locked up for the Pentecostal holiday, but we find three of the nuns who will speak with us. The first is feeding a cat on the kitchen doorstep, the second two wander up a lane carrying wild flowers, pine boughs, and an unwashed head of lettuce.

The woman on the porch is very shy, yet her face is radiant. We ask her about the former student, Peter Handke. She wasn't at Tanzenberg then, she says, but she knows who we are asking about. Beyond that she

tells us only that she is a simple woman, that she doesn't read much, that she works in housekeeping and not in the school.

"Are you with the Boy Scouts?" asks one of the other two nuns, brash and fat and secure in her long black and white habit. She does most of the talking while her companion nun, much leaner, does most of the smiling. From the first answers to our queries it is clear that the one who speaks most "freely" is disposed in the "best interest" of the institution, to say the least. The one who smiles from behind and who manages only a few soft interjections sheds light with each honest, kind word (and aggravates her slyer sister to no end).

"Yes, of course" ["ja freilich"] they had known Handke. He was a bit strange ["ein eigenartiger Mensch"]—"like all the boys are these days," she adds quickly. "We housekeepers don't really have much to do with the Gymnasium; but when Handke's book about his poor mother appeared we were as outraged as anyone. Yes, the professors at the Gymnasium were quite negative about it. No, none of the professors are around, all gone for Pentecost.—But Sister, Professor X. lives right over there.—That's true, Sister, but he is not at home.—Yes he is, look, his car is in the driveway.—Well! We ought to be on our way. Auf Wiedersehen."

Standing on the road between the boarding school and the stand of trees that evidently hides a Boy Scout camp, we strike up a conversation with a bearded bicyclist and his eight- or nine-year-old son. The man was himself a student in the boarding school until 1970. He knows Handke's work well. His German teacher, he says, also Handke's teacher, told the class that Handke would be a great writer. In my notebook he writes the teacher's name: "Reinhard Musar, Villach," and also the name and address of a friend working on liturgical structures in Handke's works: "Harold Boloch, Graz."

We ask what it was like as a boarding-school student. "I wouldn't send my son there," he says, although it is a superb Gymnasium. "Ten-year-old boys begin there in September and don't see their parents again until Christmas, unless the parents have enough money to come for visits. The school exists to educate future priests. Five times a day the boys take part in religious services."

"Do you know any good anecdotes about Handke?"

"Not long ago the school mounted an exhibition of the best student art over the past twenty years, including several of Handke's works. But then Handke, living in France at the time, said something derogatory about Austria that got printed in all the papers. The art teacher, enraged, took down all of Handke's work."

(When Žarko interviewed Handke in 1985, Handke told him that he was a "religiously damaged boarding-school pupil. The five years in the school are not worth telling. The words homesickness, oppression, coldness, group imprisonment are enough." Handke on his homeland: "The lard that strangles me: Austria"—this was quoted widely in the Austrian and German press.)

Žarko and I coo like adolescent girls on an outing. "We're writing a book about Peter Handke. Could you tell us anything about him?"

"Griffen: 3000 inhabitants. Griffen is a beloved summer freshness between the valleys of the Drau and the Lavan, an inviting place for long walks. It is also visited eagerly by fishermen." (Description from the map that showed a tunnel into Slovenia.)

"Griffen. The writer Peter Handke's birthplace and childhood home." So begins the entry on the town in Žarko's traveller's guide to Kärnten. Not bad, for a living author. There are advantages to being born in a village.

By the time I slow the car we have passed clear through the village. Before we reenter Griffen we drive up a country road into the surrounding low hills. It will give us a context, I argue, an overlook. A steep, winding, gravel road. Old farm houses, well spread out. Clouds sweep the hills. Fine grey and rich green. A castle ruin on a high hill dominates the town. On a ridge we stand at the edge of a newly planted field and look back and forth into two valleys. In the stillness I hear, for the first time in my life, the low call of a cuckoo. I will be 40 this summer.

Placid cows. Chickens. Cats. A heavy dog on a chain, too lazy to challenge us. We slow the car and he explodes. We joke that we have found Handke's "friend," the critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who Handke depicted as a vicious dog in *The Lesson of Mont-Sainte Victoire*. I photograph a beautiful pile of manure butting up against a rich brown reflecting pool and topped by a sturdy wheelbarrow. An old tin arrow pointing to a farm house announces the presence of a telephone.

I could spend the entire day in the hills above Griffen, but Žarko is ready to see the town.

By accident (or do the winding streets make that accident happen?) we begin our visit in the religious and touristic center of Griffen—the space shared by the church and the Tropfstein Cave. That double center, however, fails to attract us, for we have come in search of the peripheral.

In a pottery shop ("Terra Nigra! An Ancient Art Rediscovered") we

ask about Peter Handke. Both the potter and his teenage assistant stand up when we say Handke's name. With no more prompting they vie with one another to give us fragments of their versions of the Handke family story. When the potter changes the subject to his own discovery of the ancient secret of black earth the young man breaks in, impatient, and asks if he could have ten minutes off to show us Handke's grammar school and the family house where Handke's half-brother now lives. Sorry to lose his audience, the old man nonetheless says yes, and with a rush the boy leads us from the center of town.

The school, right on the town's main street, is now a pizzeria. Our young guide enjoys our laughter. He directs us to a row of houses on a hill and then must return to the secrets of Terra Nigra!

Wedged in against a wooded ridge just outside of Griffen is Altenmarkt, Handke's birthplace. (I sound like a tourist guide.) Below the ridge lie a lumberyard and a cemetery. The lumberyard must have been where the uncle had his carpenter's shop. We spend 30 minutes in the cemetery looking for Handke's mother's grave. We never find it; but because the wall and the little chapel remind us of descriptions in *Über die Dörfer*, Žarko takes several photographs.

On the road just above the cemetery, a well dressed elderly woman responds to our query by pointing down the road to the last house on the last street in town. It is the half-brother's birthday, she says and adds something about a house being torn down. She claims to have been the owner of the property. Afterward Žarko and I cannot quite agree on what she has said. We ask about Handke's mother. The woman seems to know the family well: the mother's maiden name was Maria Siutz and she is buried, not in the cemetery below, but in the cemetery of the Stift, up the road and around a corner. (So much for our photos.) The woman continues her stiff walk up the gravel road. I speculate on the relationship between this woman of property and Handke's mother. If it includes scorn and social stigma, I hope we have revenged Maria Siutz, our presence a witness to the international stature the family has attained. Žarko photographs the woman as she walks away (a dark raincoat and thin legs), and then turns down the road and takes another photo, this time of the open garage door into which, from this angle, the road seems to lead.

Now we stalk the house at Altenmarkt 6, the half-brother's house standing right at the end of the paved road, the last house in town. A black, sporty car—"Sprint!"—stands outside the garage. We peek into the doorless garage. The brother (we suppose) has painted cartoon figures on the walls. A sexy young woman, a virile young man, a

sensual cat, and the English phrase "Only you." Walt Disney's Pluto adorns the wall of a garden house. We want to go in and ask the brother about Peter, we itch to ring the doorbell. Instead Žarko takes several photographs as we walk past. What the hell are we doing here?

In the opening scene of William Golding's *The Paper Men*, an aging, alcoholic writer nearly shoots a young would-be biographer who is rooting through his rubbish. The novel ends as the would-be biographer, repeatedly frustrated by the uncooperative novelist, shoots him.

Handke is an acquired taste, one American reviewer suggests. Reading Radaković and Abbott on Handke will require an even more assiduously acquired taste.

The Stift, a former monastery, is in disrepair. Crumbling bricks disfigure what was once a smooth plaster coat. Beer and sausage booths, part of Griffen's Pentecostal celebration, are being dismantled by workmen in the rain. By some of the workmen. The others lift glasses in the pub that now occupies the southeast corner of the huge building.

Surrounded by a high, crumbling, brick-and-wood wall, the graveyard lies on the west side of the building. With little trouble we locate Maria Handke's well-tended grave. No longer an outsider.

"Maria Handke / 8.10.1920—20.11.1971" it says on the smooth front of the otherwise uncut stone. A wooden cross fronts the stone: "Bruno Handke, died 21.3.88." I photograph Žarko as he stands in front of the grave, umbrella at a slant, his hands busy with pen and notebook. He photographs me in a similar stance. Assiduous scholars. Pious pilgrims.

Over the church's massive front door hangs a statue of Mary, her foot balanced delicately on the neck of a fine green dragon. We swing open the heavy worm-eaten door and enter a working church housed in a partial ruin. Rich altar rugs lie on platforms of unpainted pine. Oak pews shine with woodwax and use. The scent of mildew. Pyramidal piles of drifted plaster gather at the base of disintegrating walls.

Inside the entrance, German and Slovenian signs give directions to the confessional. German-language pamphlets are stacked in ragged piles on a table to the left and a table to the right displays similar pamphlets in Slovenian. The naive paintings of fourteen stations of the cross circling the church have Slovenian captions: "1. Statio Jesus je k'smerti obsojen."

Fat little red prayer and song books (*Gotteslob*). Woven from red,

gold, and purple threads, three attached bookmarks dangle from each volume. Leafing through one I find the stations of the cross. The book's subtitle is "Eigentum der Kirche" (Property of the Church). I decide that is a misnomer and slip the book into my pocket (actually, Žarko's pocket; he has loaned me a good wool jacket for the trip).

"Monastery Church Maria Ascension (Haslach): The church has its origins in the 13th century, but was much altered in the following centuries. It received its west facade (Baroque) in the 18th century. Inside Romanesque style dominates. The stone Madonna from 1520 is late gothic. Left and right from her, next to the high altar from the 18th century, are Saint Augustinus and Saint Norbert. In addition numerous gravestones and coats-of-arms from the 15th through the 18th century deserve attention . . . notable stuccos . . . scholars, however, do not agree whether these stuccos can be attributed to the artist Kilian Pittner (1700)."

Is this the kind of thing I will be doing to Handke? "Peter Handke has his origins in the decade of the Third Reich. He was, however, much altered in the following decades. . . . Within, postmodern style dominates. The book published in 1986, however, is post-postmodern. . . . Also deserving attention . . . scholars, however, do not agree, whether. . . ."

However, however, however. It makes me want to throw up.

We leave the church and step out again into the dripping rain. It's time to return to Tübingen; but we are not yet satisfied. We go into the pub to see if someone there wants to talk about Handke.

Only one drinker is still there, enjoying a last drink and talking with the bartender. We give them the spiel about our book and ask if they know Handke. The young workman says he knows "Peter" well. "I sat next to him at the soccer field across the street while he wrote *The Goalie's Anxiety*. He sat there and stared at the goalie the whole time, just the goalie." The bartender, who obviously knows more about the book, wants to have his say as well: "The story takes place in Frankfurt, but Handke got his ideas right here."

"Does Handke ever come here?" Žarko asks.

"About once a year," the bartender answers. "He sits alone at a table outside in the courtyard."

"What does he drink?" I ask.

"Always a cheap white wine."

"Do people around here read Handke's books?"

The bartender says that he has read three of the books, but Handke is less read in Griffen than he ought to be. "A prophet in his own

country," he says, "you know the story."

In the car, driving along the bumpy country road between the Stift and the town, we laugh at ourselves and the information we have gathered. It all seems so trivial, yet we are fascinated by the details. We talk about the decaying Stift as an interesting place for Handke. The working church and the cemetery provide a tradition. The secularization of the cloister and the effects of entropy provide freedom from tradition.

We leave Griffen at six p.m. and head home. I sleep while Žarko drives through Klagenfurt and Villach, and when I wake up we are in the mountains. We need gas; but when Žarko passes up several opportunities to get off the Autobahn we are faced with almost a half an hour before the next exit. That tension near the end of a three-day trip gets to me and as we finally find an exit and an ARAL station I tell Žarko what an idiot he is. I offer insufferably arrogant responses to his friendly questions and well-meant statements. I am an asshole.

I drive now. In a long, two-lane claustrophobic tunnel, some kind of jeep drives up my tailpipe, although I'm driving 90 and the speed limit is 80. The impatient driver flashes his lights. When the jeep driver continues his antics I touch my brakes. He falls back. Outside the tunnel, at a toll booth where I again (as in the other direction) have to shell out DM 27, the jeep, carrying four bearded men and pulling a trailer, drives up close behind me. The driver begins to shout and swear and make obscene gestures out his window. I can't even tell what language he is speaking; but I understand him well enough and flip him the bird as we drive on.

Leaving the mountains and the bearded jeepsters behind, somewhere between Salzburg and München, we watch the sun go down, a huge red ball. It balances for a silent moment on the sharp points of pine trees lining a hill, then eases down to light my family's day in Utah.

In the dark we drive through the heart of München (Žarko insists that will be quicker than the Autobahn around the city), and then again onto the Autobahn. I drive 140-150 km per hour, passing trucks and slower cars. I have never driven this fast in my life. The speed gives me a sense of power. Power, that is, until terror takes over when a pair of headlights rushes toward me at light speed and a Porshe passes with a blast that makes our little Opel shudder. A whole fleet of cars, including, inexplicably, tiny Fiats, roar or whine past in the next hours, hell bent on destruction. In retrospect, I suppose that I too, in my own conservative way (Opel Kadett at 140 km per hour), was expressing my

own death wish.

> A delicate slowness is the tempo of these conversations.
> Nietzsche (epigraph in Handke's *Über die Dörfer*)

Not on the Autobahn.

In the dark, speeding through Germany, Žarko dozes now and then, and even when he is awake we are quiet. We listen to jazz on the radio. Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald begin a song, a song I hear as a metaphor for our journals, our parallel, repetitive, individual texts. I come alive at even the faint possibility that our texts could play off each other like these two voices. Louis sings—deeply, roughly, warmly—"I'd like to do some fishing, in a river or a creek, but I'd rather be right here with you, dancing cheek to cheek." A series of things Louis would like to do follows. Each phrase ends with a word rhyming with "cheek." "But," he sings, and returns to what he really wants. Then Ella sings through the same series, repeating the phrases in a similarly warm but entirely different voice—"I'd like to do some fishing, in a river or a creek, but I'd rather be right here with you, dancing cheek to cheek." Simple words, easy rhymes, exact and varying repetitions. Finally the two singers join their voices, weave them together, voice playing off voice, repeating a third time the words that have become, through skilled repetition, much more than hack poetry. An intimate dance, cheek to cheek.

❀ 16 May

I returned the car early this morning while Žarko and Zorica still slept. I wanted to be alone. At the university, in the quiet, natural light of the Brechtbau, I read the description in *Repetition* of Bohinska Bistrica, the church there, and the inn where Filip stayed. Having just been there, I am a much different reader than when I first read through this. On first reading, I focused on ideas, skipping geographic details, specific ones at least. Now I look also for the concrete descriptions, the material sources of the ideas. And I find that the places and things become sources for thoughts of my own. The reception of Handke's text (begun as scholarly work) is becoming a more and more creative, self-creating task. What Žarko aptly calls a productive reception.

I came to Europe half hoping to interview Handke. An interview that would put the Imprimatur on my book. An interview that would give me direct access to the man and his works. From his own lips: *the*

answer. Failing that I would find answers in the places he has been, in the places he describes. Or, like Filip Kobal, in places next to the places where his brother was.

But from the first I have been hesitant. I don't want to disturb Handke's privacy. I feel inadequate. I fear sitting in front of him and stammering like an idiot. I sense that other published interviews have been provocative at Handke's expense. I have plenty of texts with which to construct my Handke picture. I laugh at my eagerness for an interview as a source for unmediated knowledge. And I am grateful to have seen and smelled fragments of his material world.

Handke in *Die Zeit*, a wild interview with André Müller: "I would rather sense it than know it. Language is usually destructive. . . . No one will find anything really personal about me, and what I have published is a total disguise."

I spend the afternoon in a park, still unwinding from the trip.

Heavy footed and breathing hard, a man in white shorts walks through the clearing right in front of me. Recovering from a run through the woods. Halfway across the clearing he stops and does a long series of sit-ups. Then he walks up and down swinging his arms high. Finally he jogs away.

A young woman appears suddenly, unexpectedly, magically in the middle of the clearing, like Venus out of the sea (or like some other powerful cliché), sitting up in the tall grass. She pulls her shirt over her head. I can see, after she lays down, only the tops of her bare thighs and her knees. Tall grass in clumps. Yellow flowers. An old tree branch. White spheres of dandelion seeds. And two round, tanned, disembodied thighs. The thighs disappear. Now and then a hand and forearm flick into view, brushing away flies, gnats. But mostly now there is only the clearing, the breeze, and I on the park bench. A fly. A white butterfly. A tiny green aphid. Bird song. A swarm of gnats.

⊛ 17 May

10 a.m. Just got up. Last night a magical, late dinner in a garden overlooking the valley and across from the Österberg. Žarko and Zorica work the beautiful, steep piece of land for an old woman no longer up to the task. We ate grilled cutlets, grilled liver, tomato salad with garlic and onions, and drank cider and beer. Two neighbors, both pianists, came by. She dominated the scene even though her companion did most of the talking. Dancing, laughing eyes. Her tongue sliding across her lips. The young, firm curve of her forearm.

I sit and write and remember my middle-aged desire on the sunny third-floor balcony. Children play soccer on an asphalt field below. Mothers stride past. Their strong legs swing free under loose dresses as they thrust forward their babies in strollers.

Žarko works in his room. Now and then he appears with a text he wants me to read.

A breeze stirs the red and purple flowers growing on the balcony. Birds of various sorts punctuate space and time with their calls. When the breeze stops for a moment I can smell the flowers.

Žarko brings me a short piece he published in *Nachtcafé*. It describes an aimless, contemplative stroll through Tübingen, borrowing many of its phrases from a short text by Robert Walser. Language speaks us. A page of "sources" concludes the text, narrative in its juxtapositions. The citation of a book about frustrations experienced by foreign women in Germany, for instance, is followed by a reference to a book on Molotov Cocktails.

A white-haired, stooped woman walks under the balcony, a big black purse in her left hand, a little two-wheeled cart for carrying her purchases directed by her right hand. Six children, some carrying wild flowers, straggle down the path accompanied by two women in pants.

Žarko shows me a note from the writer Helmut Heissenbuttel in which Heissenbüttel snidely argues that to write about the productive Handke reception Žarko suggests would be a waste of time.

The sun eases across the sky. The balcony falls into shadow.

A hawk circles slowly over woods and meadows, dipping and swinging up again with only the most subtle of wing changes. In the distance, muted by haze, hills appear as a surrounding ring. Surrounding me—the center of the universe.

A fine, still morning.

At Tilo's party and again last night Zorica and Žarko slipped quietly into the background—foreigners, shy, not as aggressive as the natives, pulling back into anonymity, out of the brilliance of their *real* personalities. Zorica, for instance, once told Handke she liked his books but that he made bad films. Žarko is a creative dynamo. On the trip, with another foreigner, he was open, forward, and witty. How I would like to see them in Belgrade among friends, speaking their first language.

Eight p.m. Žarko and I have stopped at the garden on the way home. I weed with him until he gets nervous about the good plants I am weeding out. Now I sit and watch the last sunlight play across the

Österberg. A herd of sheep enclosed by a square fence glows yellow-gold against the green grass, and then turns ivory. Most of the sheep graze placidly. Four lambs dart between them, energetic and playful. A bird flits into an old birdhouse fastened to a small tree. I remember building a similar birdhouse with my ten-year-old son Thomas. The memory brings with it a rush of love, responsibility, desire to make every sacrifice so his life can be good. And a tinge of guilt. I have not thought about my family. The sheep are turning grey. The bright green of the grass shades into black.

⊛ 18 MAY

Eight a.m. Up two hours earlier this morning. Again the room sparkles with sunlight. Birdsong. What I hear as snatches of melody is the language of birds. When Žarko and Zorica speak Serbo-Croatian I hear only the pure form of music.

Last night's dream: I moved among a group of baby hippos. Their skin was wrinkled and baby-soft. Two of them nuzzled up against me, nipping and sucking pleasantly at my arms. As one of the heavy mouths pulled at my left arm, however, I began to be afraid. It bit down harder and harder, and the sensation of gentle warmth turned to pain. I called for help. I began to panic. The dream ended.

Nine a.m. I sit on a bench atop the Österberg, just a short walk from the Brechtbau where I left Žarko. The hill that was green from across the way is, on closer observation, also yellow and white and brown and red and purple. In places the grass is knee high (why do I always describe things as they relate to me?), and almost waist high in others. The sheep are gone this morning, but where they grazed yesterday the grass is shorter and all the flowers are gone. No yellow daisies, none of the small yellow flowers with five rounded petals, no yellow dandelions, none of the tiny white flowers that grow tall in big bunches, none of the little purple flowers, and none of the high brown and red heads of grass seed. (I'm good with names.) The sheep must prefer the taste of the colors. In return for the meadow's bounty they have littered the field with black, rounded, oblong droppings, a rich legacy for the summer and fall.

The sound of morning traffic rises from the valley. If the sheep were to eat the honking, farting, red and blue and white and orange cars there would be only the sound of birds and the breeze.

Silent swarms of bicycles roll along the path beside the canal. One

carries plastic cartons, stacked high, full of tomato seedlings. A heavy-bodied couple lumbers along on two tiny looking bikes, their fat child perched ponderously on a seat behind the man. A lithe, bearded man pulls a cart full of building materials behind his sturdy old bike. A young woman pedals swiftly by with her skirt pulled up high over strong brown legs. She leans back, her hands free of the handlebars, the wind swirling through her dark hair. A serious young man pedals steadily along with his child secure in a seat between his legs. A huge basket of fruit is strapped onto a rack over the back tire of the next bike. Another carries black bulging saddlebags. Finally a sleek yellow-and-black racing bike, its back tire flat, pushed along at a snail's pace.

Not far below me stretches a row of perfectly tended gardens. Tall, naked poles stand ready for the bean tendrils that will embrace them. Berry bushes are already green. And the brown earth is lined with fuzzy green furrows. There are gardeners at work in several of them, and somehow that activity heightens my aimless pleasure.

My first experience with the erotic beauty of such a still, free morning was in Seal Beach, California, the summer of 1972. A week's vacation from the clanging steel and chemical mud of the drilling rig. In the old VW I had just bought for $600 I drove with the derrick hand from Gila Bend, Arizona to California to visit his sister. I remember most vividly the deliciously unsettling evening with her friends in a garden where we ate vast quantities of pasta and I watched them drink what seemed like gallons of wine, and we sang "Roll me over in the clover, roll me over, lay me down, and do it again." The song, in endless rowdy variations, aroused my desire, and my inhibitions as well. I had never been intoxicated, nor had I ever rolled in the clover. Still, shyly, I savored the evening. Up early the next morning while the derrick hand, his sister, and her lover still slept, I sat in the kitchen and tried to describe the slant of the morning sunlight and the quiet freedom I felt in my gut and in my mind.

A black bird skims across the hill, dropping a white cargo, like a crop duster, to further enrich the meadow. Bees and flies and other insects work among the flowers. The sun grows warmer, and I begin my morning work with Handke's *Repetition*.

"The Blind Window"—Filip Kobal waits for the train that will take him away from home and into Yugoslavia: "I raised my head and saw in the end wall of the station a rectangle—a blind window the same whitish-grey color as the wall, but set in from it. Though no longer in the sun, this window shimmered with reflected light from somewhere. In Rinkenberg there was only one such window, and it happened to be

in the smallest house, the roadmender's, the one that looked like the porter's lodge of a nonexistent manor. It, too, was the color of the wall—yellow in that case—but was bordered with white. Whenever I passed, it caught my eye, but when I stopped to look, it always fooled me. Nevertheless, it never lost a certain undefined significance for me, and I felt that such a window was lacking in my father's house. Now, at the sight of the Mittlern blind window, I remembered."[3] He also remembers a frantic train trip his father and brother took from this station to a doctor in Klagenfurt to save his brother's eye, a trip taken in vain, for from that time on "there was nothing in [the eye's] place but a milky whiteness. But this memory explained nothing. The significance of the blind window remained undefined, but suddenly that window became a sign, and in that same moment I decided to turn back. My turning back—and here again the sign was at work—was not definitive; it applied only to the hours until the following morning, when I would really start out, really begin my journey, with successive blind windows as my objects of research, my traveling companions, my signposts. And when later, on the evening of the following day, at the station restaurant in Jesenice, I thought about the shimmering of the blind window, it still imparted a clear message—to me it meant: 'Friend, you have time'."[4] A window, I write, is generally transparent, as would be a signifier that reveals a transcendental signified. This window, however, is blind, even more opaque than the window/door Filip hopes his brother will step through in another part of the novel. The only window in the village similar to this one is in the roadmender's tiny house, a house that makes Kobal think of a nonexistent Lord's or manor house. The double motion of this signifier is characteristic of Handke's work in general—the little house both brings to mind what could be the house of lost kings and reminds one of its nonexistence. This is precisely the novel's stance in relation to metaphysics: it evokes the very thing it simultaneously reveals as absent. The roadmender was previously described in the novel as a liminal figure in the village whose work as a sign painter (artist, writer) fascinated Filip Kobal and who, along with Filip's mentally handicapped sister, was said to embody in his liminality the (real) center of the village. But just what was the meaning of that decentered centrality? Just what did the so promising blind window express? Whenever Filip stopped to decipher the message it meant, in fact,

[3] Handke, *Repetition*, trans, Manheim, 68.
[4] Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 68–69.

nothing. But if there was no clear meaning, there was still (undefined) significance. Although Filip wanted a clearer message, the openness of this signifier is as important as the fact of signification. Filip's father's house has no such window of uncertain meaning, because, I suppose, he is a man of defined significance, a tyrant, an oppressive authority figure. Although the narrator suggests that the meaning of the blind window will remain indefinite, Filip nevertheless takes the window as a sign that he should return to his family. But as an indeterminate sign, the window is also interpreted as signifying the exact opposite—as a sign of his travels, of his leaving his family. The next day, in recollection, the contradictory messages give way to a third, enigmatic, statement: "Friend, you have time."

Two hours later. The sun is much brighter and the white pages of the novel are beginning to strain my eyes. The haze has lifted some, and I can see into the valley beyond the Wurmlinger Kapelle. I make my way across the open hill, along little, shaded paths, down secret stairways, and suddenly I am back on the busy Wilhelmstrasse.

Lunch with Žarko. We write a postcard to our friend John Smith at University of California, Irvine. Žarko's note to John is a cryptic quote from *Repetition*.

8 p.m. Again in the garden looking across the narrow valley to the Österberg. I can see the bench where I sat this morning. After having sat among the yellow flowers I now know why the sheep enclosure is totally green; and I recognize that the yellow hue the sheep took on last night was the sun's reflection off the brilliant flowers.

Žarko stands in front of me watering the garden. The water's gurgling and the smell of the newly wet earth open and relax my mind and body. One of the pianists who joined us in the garden the other night is practicing in the apartment at the top of the hill. Her (or his) complicated rhythms play against the steady rush of the water. A woodpecker's trilling knock breaks in twice as percussion. And from recent memory I add the soft double bass of the cuckoo.

I lean back against a set of overgrown stone steps. To my right stand clusters of five-petaled, tiny blue flowers. Next to them larger, darker blue flowers wave unkempt fingers around purple centers. Above these sway purple flowers with bright yellow faces. To my left peonies (Germans call them Pentecost roses) are about to burst into bloom, already a week later than the promised Pentecostal flowering.

The orthopedist whose garden borders on and calls this one into question (a strictly ordered French garden as opposed to the natural

(dis)order of this English garden) has entered the scene. Žarko turns off the water at a spigot the two gardens share. The orthopedist begins to tell him about how the water was left dripping the day before. "You must turn it firmly, turn it firmly so it won't drip." It still drips a little, even after Žarko has turned it as firmly as he can. He looks around for a tool and finds a ten-foot-long spiral of metal that, later in the summer, will support beans. He sticks the end through the spigot handle and, as the neighbor demanded, leans heavily on the end of his lever and turns it firmly. The spigot handle breaks. "Jetzt habe ich Scheisse gebaut," Zarko says. (Oh, shit!)

On the way home I read Žarko a passage from *Repetition* in which Filip Kobal describes his inability to work with others. He inevitably breaks or rips things. He works too fast and gets too little done. His disgusted father always sends him away after a single, hesitant, false blow with a hammer.

❀ 19 May

Up at eight to help Žarko in the garden. In the storage shed we change into blue overalls and he gets out a long, heavy, wood-and-steel scythe. I don't even know how to hold it. "Pull back with the left hand," he says, "guide with the right. Cut a thin swathe with the tip of the blade. Work up the hill. Mow from the right to the left. This is how my grandfather taught me. And watch out for rocks." He hands me a sharpening stone, then goes to hoe weeds in the vegetable garden.

With awkward unlinked sweeps through the knee-high grass I cut a ragged swath up the steep hill. Time passes. The smooth wood in my hands grows familiar. I begin to gain a feel for the balance point of the scythe. I swing the cunning tool crisply now to cut through 90 degrees of grass, and as my skill increases the stroke lengthens. The sound and tactile sense of the sharp blade ripping through thick grass are repeated pleasures. The sure blade swings parallel to the ground in a smooth sustained efficient arc.

Under the unblinking sun I begin to sweat rivers and my breath is coming now in greedy gasps. I stop and take off my shirt, pulling the suspenders of the blue overalls back over my cadaver-white skin. Still breathing hard I take the whetstone from my pocket to sharpen the curved blade. In my trembling hand the stone slips. Blood rushes from the sudden sickle-shaped cut in my index finger. Brilliant flowing color in the still garden. I suck at the salty wound. Finally the bleeding stops and again I swing the scythe through the morning air. The glittering

blade "bites hungrily" through the high grass. The old metaphors are as new to me as the mowing. For two more hours I mow. My body has taken over the process, my mind floats free. Eventually, gradually, my arms and back and legs lose their strength. Clumsy again, I strike a rock with the blade. I look down the hill to see if Žarko has heard the bright clang of steel on stone. Before noon I finish, and while he puts up high spiral stakes for tomatoes I lay back in the freshly mown grass and smell the sweet odor and let the sun ease overtaxed muscles and blistered skin. My heart beats in my index finger.

"The blind Slovenian photographer, Evgen Bavcar: Since his first visit in Salzburg six years ago he has met with Handke repeatedly. He feels an affinity to and has 'read' Handke's last novel, *Repetition*, three times (that is, has listened to it on tape), in German, in Slovenian, and in French. An essay on Handke in the journal *La Quinzaine littéraire* is his most recent publication." (From a *Spiegel* article.) A blind photographer who reads Handk's *Repetition* in three languages with his ears. I wish we could get him to photograph us holding scythes next to a hay harp.

In the afternoon, while Žarko and Zorica plant tomatoes in the garden, I make a mad march through Tübingen carrying two plastic sacks full of my laundry. Zorica said she would do it in her little machine—"It's no big deal, *Mach kein Theater*"; but to save her the work (and out of that constant desire I have to do everything myself) I fill the sacks and set off. I have three addresses of *Wäschereien* in my pocket, two in the center of town, one across the river. My way, on a hot, sunny afternoon, leads past the house where I had seen Hans Küng in 1983. He still lives there. This time I don't see him or his BMW or his housekeeper. Beginning to sweat, I climb down the long set of stairs called Hohe Steige, walk past the university clinics, and am suddenly on familiar ground—the Herrenberger Strasse. Every day during the summer of 1983 I walked up and down this street on my way to and from the university. A sort of novel grew out of those walks, 300 pages of reflective prose (Küng, his BMW, and his housekeeper are the center of intrigue) which now adorn a spot on my bookshelf and on no one else's.

I cross a little canal and am in another century. I walk the entire length of the first street on my list, now sweating freely, my shoulders in knots from the heavy bags, but find no laundry. Around the corner, in a narrow, dark, cobblestone street, sharing the block with what looks like a still radical Club Voltaire, is the second laundry on my list. They only take in laundry, the man says. I couldn't do it myself and it would

be three days. I decide to cross the river. Behind the Stiftskirche I walk down a pedestrian street and onto the Neckar bridge. I stand at the railing, wishing I could join the carefree students having a water fight in their curious long boats or lie in the grass under the plantain trees on the strip of ground in the middle of the river. Instead I trudge along the busy street, under the underpass by the railroad station (was this here the last time I was here?), and into a new world.

Although the streets are named Uhland Straße, Hegelstraße, and Schelling Straße, the people I see on these streets are black: several black men walking along with German girls, three black men stooped down at a corner blowing up a bicycle tire with a little pump, two black men sitting on a bench while a German girl speaks to them in English—"I thought I might invite . . . ." Between the Hegel and Schellingstraßen stands a huge building housing foreign asylum seekers. On the walls surrounding the building someone has spray painted radical political statements attributed to Brecht and Engels.

The final laundry on my list is where the yellow pages promised, but like the previous one, only takes in laundry. My calves ache. My skinny arms send frantic messages of pain to my brain. My armpits flood my shirtsleeves while my mouth bakes dry. I trudge back through the town, up the hundreds of steps that I had skipped down, to what greets me, after just eight days, as a most welcome home.

Neither Žarko nor Zorica is there. I drink three glasses of water, scarf down a pear and a banana, collapse into a chair, and fall asleep.

Later, 6 p.m., with *Repetition* in hand instead of bags of dirty laundry, I enjoy a quiet stroll down the Hausserstraße to the garden. I stop to smell some lilacs and admire the gardens on garage roofs all along the street.

Zorica, Žarko, and I drive to the Foyer, a restaurant for French soldiers and dependents. The bartender is a Yugoslav friend of Žarko's who recently sent his children, now old enough for school, back to Yugoslavia. He doesn't want them to grow up as *Gastarbeiterkinder* (children of "guest workers").

After a slow and tasty dinner we join several people at a long table. Zorica introduces them as fellow sauna habitués. I look at each one and think of them naked in the sauna. I blush. Two women from Poland—one lumpy and sallow, the other a blond beauty. A big Swede who has just returned from China. A wrinkled, middle-aged Australian. A young American in a University of Kansas t-shirt. A young, skinny German who introduces himself as a theology student from Kiel. Except for the latter, we are all foreigners. And in fact, Žarko jokes, in

Swabia the North German himself is a foreigner. We communicate in German, our single common language.

The Australian does much of the talking. He perorates encyclopedically and pedantically on whatever subject comes up. The solid and plain Pole tells awkward anecdotes about how lost she is in Germany without her language and lacking the culture within which she understood her self. The other Pole, sexy, stylish, lively, with a curiously attractive line along her lower lip, says she has no problems living in Germany. She has no identity anyway, she claims, and would have as many problems going back to Poland as she has in Germany. She wants to go dancing. With laughing eyes she castigates us coquettishly for just wanting to hang around. She is provocation incarnate. She laughs and flirts and talks. Every sound that comes through her curious lips is sexual. She plays on the word "randy" for a long time. When I tell our story of looking for a tunnel that doesn't exist she intones slowly, in a deep, slightly accented voice like Marianne's in *Wings of Desire*, "ah, a tunnel, the male desire to enter a tunnel." She leans back and stretches, her body twisting like a cat's. I ask her what she does. The Australian breaks in and explains that she just lives. Someone mentions something about her being married to a former theology student who is now a dentist.

My attention turns to the Australian and the young German theology student who have, inexplicably, begun to discuss Utah and Mormons. The theology student mentions stupidity, ignorance, superstition—the insanity of founding a religion on a false reading of the Old Testament. The Australian, always ready to take the other side in an argument, defends the Mormons in a long discourse on naively courageous missionaries who once tried to convert him, on the 19th-century pioneers and their communitarian spirit. I put in my two bits, asserting my own tenuous Mormonism, but it is no use. The theology student scorns the utterly irrational movement and asserts the irrefutable rational truth of his own religiosity.

Unmoved by the arguments from religious hubris, I return my attention to the beautiful Pole. I marvel at her physicality, at her manifest desire. I contrast that, with some irony, with my own (supposed) ability to sublimate my sexuality and to be a productive member of society. When the group breaks up for the night, or for the morning, she drives off in a Mercedes. Part of me goes with her.

❀ 20 May

Dream: I'm in a room. Storm outside. The wind blows so hard that animals and fish are being forced through the walls. I pick up a little soft-shelled turtle that has a beautiful pattern on its back and show it to my wife (who also seems like Zorica). She thinks it is wonderful. Later it somehow gets into my pants leg and attaches itself to the back of my upper thigh. I call Thomas, my ten-year-old son, to help. When he can't get the turtle off (it is hanging on like a tick), I finally, worried that the head will come off but frantic to get it off, jerk it off. The head doesn't come off. The jaws grip a great mass of skin and hair.

In a story Kenneth White sent Žarko for publication in *Nachtcafé*, he quotes these lines as the finest lines about love (if they are indeed about love): "There is nothing here but this cave in the field's midst / A wild place, unlit and unfilled."

A quiet morning walk from the apartment high on one hill down through the valley and then up the Österberg. Parachutists fly off the hillside. Tennis rackets pop and ping. A cart pulled along the path by a bearded man on a bicycle rattles. Bird song. This is a walk without a goal, in contrast to the forced march yesterday to find a laundromat. The aimlessness produces the inner stillness out of which forms and ideas grow.

I have a satisfying ache in my shoulders and arms when I tense the muscles that swung the scythe (the laundry pains are another matter). I have an exact, new knowledge of mowing, a pinpointing of precisely which muscles were at work and which tendons were stretched. Each pain reiterates one of yesterday's movements (or is it already the day before yesterday?).

A small brown bird with black and white markings on its wings sits on a branch in front of me and warbles. "Warbles" is too passive a word for what the bird is doing. His throat pulses wildly and his whole body thrills with the effort.

Two ducks dive and bob in the swift water of the canal.

I hike up a trail that switchbacks through tall, well-separated trees. Scores of birds. My friends Dick and Mary Rorty would recognize these calls and markings. Avid birders, their extreme attention to detail creates a system that allows them to see more clearly. I remember a colleague's description of a trip to Hawaii: a racing, hectic, unreflective gathering of experiences, events, places. Avarice. The retelling was a listing, a showing off of details and dates and exact knowledge. There is power in that sort of exactitude, and a powerful absence.

After my mowing, the tall grass and flowers of the Österberg meadow seem unending.

In the evening Zorica feeds us asparagus and ham with a cheese sauce, a huge loaf of Bauernbrot, and a Caesar salad. She tells me, when I ask her, about her work in theoretical physics. Particles in the nucleus can be described mathematically. She works in a group that . . . crystal structure . . . pentagons, rhombi . . . from five dimensions two and from six three. . . . She says she will bring me an article. Later, alone, I head down the hill to see a movie.

> *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*
> [*Pictures of the World and Inscription of War*]
> Film by Harun Farocki
> Tübingen Premier
> Harun Farocki will be present for a discussion!

I found this advertisement on the Mensa table where I had lunch. Sure that there would be crowds, I arrive early. There are no crowds. When the film begins there are only ten people in the theater.

1858. Regierungsbauführer Meydenbauer hangs from a rope in a frail basket as he measures the cathedral in Wetzlar. The task is dangerous, and a near fatal accident stimulates his thinking about alternate ways to measure the high building. The result is the first photographically mediated measurement of a building. "It is dangerous," the film's narrator states, "to be physically present in the workplace."

The film is a series of variations and repetitions on this theme. Mediation vs. direct confrontation. Computer imaging. A machine for studying wave motion. A drawing class with a nude model: "Think, draw, think." SS photos documenting the division of Jews into those who could work and those who would be gassed immediately. Allied photographs of factories that accidently revealed and yet didn't reveal concentration camps. Photography used for "Aufklärung." Enlightenment, the film demonstrates, is an ambiguous concept. The film is difficult, confusing, exhilarating, and enlightening. The plot is intellectual. Ideas are the characters.

The lights go up and half of the audience scuttles out. Five of us remain to discuss the film with the director. Together we trail into an adjoining bar and find a table. Everyone orders something and waits nervously for the drinks to come. Farocki too seems nervous. He must have been disappointed by the tiny audience. Loud music inhibits our

conversation. An attempt to have it turned down fails. Farocki laughs uneasily. "If you don't have any questions," he says, "I can read some from an interview in *Zelluloid*." He opens a package of the film magazine. "They asked me to bring some of these along," he tells us, apologizing. "They are DM 6, if anyone is interested."

Finally someone has a question, about the soundtrack. "I did that by placing scissors across the tape to break up the sound. I tried to destroy the structure. The film is carefully ordered, so the sound track was meant to introduce chance, chaos."

Farocki, born in Java, is now a Berliner. His dark hair is pulled back and tied behind his head. Even in the bar he wears dark glasses. A black, armless T-shirt. His jacket is draped over a chair. His Levis are worn. The zipper is half down. Dark socks and worn sandals.

Someone asks about the repetition in the film: "It is the same subject, but in new contexts it becomes new material." A question about water: "Water is an old substance, little understood. Dikes built in 1961 with the best scientific methods are now ruined. The studies couldn't take into account the complexity of the ocean. The ocean must still be confronted one on one. The models just don't work."

The film was shown in San Francisco, in Minneapolis, and in Houston at film festivals. It showed for three weeks in Berlin and on TV. In a year it has earned DM 600 in fees.

I ask about the hands in the film, hands at work reading photos with a lens or flipping through a photo album. Was that you? It was. *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] has several meanings, including one related to police work. I ask if his use of the term is related to the Poiriers' work with *Spurensicherung*: "Ah, the married couple," he answers. "Yes, of course." When I ask about philosophical influences he claims he can't understand Derrida. Vilém Flusser, he says, is a strong influence. I don't recognize the name Flusser.

The discussion turns to other recent films and Farocki sees a little girl, maybe eight years old, sitting in the open door leading to a fire escape next to him. She has long black hair and brown skin. She sits and watches us for a long time. Suddenly she is gone.

Someone mentions *Wings of Desire* and Farocki bursts into diatribe: "Films like that are like prepared, frozen, conserved, fast food. They have lots of additives, sweeping music, touching plot, awful camera angles, and no substance. What did Wenders think he was doing when he made that film? He though he was making money, that's what." The invective "Hollywood" falls repeatedly.

❁ 21 May

Žarko has only showered one or two times since I arrived. He always wears the same t-shirt and Levis. He said last night he hadn't brushed his teeth since Bohinj. There is, however, no olfactory evidence of this.

Scenes from a marriage: Bottles rattle in the back of the car. "Didn't you take those out, Žarko? The heat will have ruined the wine. You can't do one single simple thing right. I can't trust you with any possible tiny little meaningless responsibility." In the car passing the garden: "Zorica, you've got to weed every time you're in the garden. Every time, Zorica." Driving gives the one not driving the chance to comment, correct, criticize. "The choke, Zorica, you have to use the choke! There, see, you've killed it."

Žarko has been nervous the last few days. Little time to write.

I sit here in the sunny kitchen and enjoy the peace while Žarko and Zorica are shopping. I would like to do some work for them, to ease the strain my presence brings. Maybe I'll finish washing the windows Zorica started yesterday.

I sit at the desk with sunlight streaming through the clean windows. Žarko will sit here in coming days and enjoy the results of my work. While in the manual mode I also put together a hibachi for the barbecue in the garden this evening. Instructions in German, French, Italian. This model of hibachi is called "Sheriff." The name evokes the myth of the American West, the adventure of the frontier. As the representative of law and order in the wild West, this hibachi will tame the chaos in their lives.

Žarko came home from the garden while I was working. I sent him into the living room with orders to collect himself and to write. The tensions will ease and he can enjoy the afternoon hike and garden party.

At noon, after recounting plots of several films and introducing me to *Wolf Solent*, a novel by John Cowper Powys, Žarko shows me reproductions of Anne and Patrick Poirier's giant eyeballs and monstrous, mythological arrows of the artists ("the intentionally beautiful misunderstanding of antiquity"). Then he picks up the hibachi and says: "You know, I want to grill myself, or shall we grill someone else."

Žarko gives me several of his newer texts to read. I am a poor reader, too tired from the exertions of the last days and the late nights to concentrate. I promise to read them again. I lay down on my back

on the rug in the study and take a nap.

When I wake up Zorica is there. She has brought several of her articles: "On the theory of collective motion in nuclei"; "Can the nuclear field be vortex free?"; "A geometric classical model of collective motion in nuclei"; "Orbits and coherent states of the symplectic group and collective theory"; "Molecular resonances and symmetries." Who says scientists aren't good with words?

In the afternoon we hike through the woods to Bebenhausen: Žarko, Tilo, Jörg (a young Swiss poet visiting Tilo and Žarko for a couple of days), Christian (a composer and translator), and Christian's two-year-old son Malte (yes, his mother, Susan, is writing a dissertation on Rilke's novel). Zorica stays home to get dinner ready for the evening. It is a beautiful Sunday afternoon and the trails are full of fellow hikers and strollers.

We walk along at a good pace. Our conversation is about translating, about Heidegger, about music, about Robert Walser's walks, about children. While sharing abstractions we miss the woods, the high trees through which the wind blows, the purple and yellow flowers in the thick grass. We also fail to notice the crowds and the helicopter that hovers overhead like an angry Junebug. Tilo and Žarko recommend a book by Michel Leiris they have recently read and Jörg talks about the novel he has begun.

After an hour or two (our abstractions also compress time) we stop by a little pond smothered by lily pads. Perched on the lily pads is a huge, gregarious family of frogs. Between them, under them, after them (Žarko and I laugh at each other as we, foreigners, try to lay hold of the right prepositions) slithers an ominous water snake. Sitting on benches in the shade, relaxed, cooling down, laughing at Malte as he clambers up and down a little incline, we watch a man approach the pond. He stares at a map held open before him. When he arrives at the edge of the pond he looks alternately at the map, the pond, the map, and the pond. Assured, but not smiling, he walks off. Now he compares map symbols to the path and to the hill ahead. Is he an employee of the map company? An inveterate semiotician? A German?

We continue our walk. It is hot. Our rested legs and feet quickly grow heavy again. We feel like academics, musicians, and writers, not outdoorsmen. Conversation turns to what time it is, how far we have to go, whether we are on the right path. It is six p.m., we have been walking for three hours, and we are somewhere in the middle of a wild animal sanctuary.

While the others sit down on some long peeled logs stacked by

foresters, to rest and to study the map Tilo has brought (perhaps a map is not such a bad idea after all), I wander off the path, alone. I need rest as much as they do, but I also need rest from the ceaseless conversation.

A metal box gleams unnaturally between two posts. "Seductive trap for bark-beetles. Works ecologically. No poison. Please do not disturb." Ecological seduction? One quarter of all living species are beetles. Someone has decided that the trees are more important than the bark-beetles.

Further into the woods, lured by green silence (ecological, no poison). I walk slowly. I empty my mind of everything not brought into it by my senses. A break in the tall trees, a small stream of water. The sun, where it strikes the water, renders it invisible. Only the faintest scent of brown. Where the light tends toward shade the water becomes a brilliant light brown. Where the shade grows darker so does the brown, a rich deep golden brown, then a dark coffee brown, and where the shadow is deepest, a thick, rippling brown only just distinguishable from black.

I follow the seductive stream and its soft liquid sounds. A quick gentle bird call. Silence. From far away the deep call of a cuckoo.

At the base of a brush-thatched mound I come upon the stream's source. A secret, deeply shaded hole overhung by hairy, green-black ferns. Two long, soft, rounded, grassy hills flank the spring and the mound. A tall, erect ash tree stands over the entire sanctuary. Its long leaves shiver in a slight breeze. In the hollow—absolute stillness. The center of the universe.

Distant calls from my fellow hikers draw me, finally, out of this seductive place.

It is seven p.m. before we straggle back into Tübingen. Zorica has a feast waiting for us in the garden. The piano playing neighbors join us, as does Susan, the American Germanist whose son Malte bears the name of her enthusiasm. A soft red moon rises over the Österberg. The sauce from thick pork steaks dribbles over our chins and we devour Bauernbrot, tomato-and-onion salad, quark with fruit, and great quantities of wine and beer and carbonated apple juice. Our conversations wander from topic to topic, as delicious to me as the food.

The form of new music vs. the form and content of new literature.

The question of whether Western tonal music is naturally pleasing to humans, whether it is part of some harmonious cosmic scheme of truth. In this context Stefan, who accompanies Eurythmy sessions for local Anthroposophists, mentions a book about music and astrology. I

argue that all semiotic systems are arbitrary (an original thought, that).

Jörg recounts scenes from his childhood. When his father left in the morning his mother locked him in his playroom, letting him out only for lunch and again when his father came home. When he was four his father went to Sweden for a year. Jörg quit speaking. For the entire year he was mute. Now he is a poet.

Stefan describes his father, a painter. During the war he lost both hands and parts of his arms. Now he straps a brush to his arm stump. He is a famous painter, Stefan asserts. He changes styles constantly. He can't button a button or tie a string. Recently a bum offered him five marks as he walked, disheveled, through a train station. I imagine Stefan playing Chopin with blunt arm stumps.

Susan begins talking about the film *Rain Man*: "The brother's transformation into a caring person was unreal. . . . Dustin Hofmann, one of my favorites, was originally considered for the other role . . . he studied autistic people for a whole year. . . ." She sounds like she is quoting from a bad review. Humorless. She asks if anyone has seen the film. No one has. She waits for a moment, then repeats the entire clichéd spiel. A fellow foreigner, trying to be more German than the Germans.

Again Žarko and Zorica fade into the background, letting others tell their stories.

❁ 22 May

Midmorning, sitting in the Brechtbau. I look out a window and watch a woman approach the building through a courtyard. Thick legs encased in blue stockings. A green coat covering a black blouse. Long, stringy, dull hair. A stout body—skin stuffed with flesh and fat, like a sausage. A joyless hunk of flesh carrying a bulging pigskin briefcase stuffed with notes for an infantile dissertation.

Žarko, who got up early this morning and came to work in the peace of the Brechtbau library, shows me a passage from *Repetition*: "Thus traveling became my home, waiting at bus stops and in train stations, being underway in general." This describes the last few days, Zarko says. From one place to another, always moving, rushing around in the car, never a moment of peace.

My experience has been almost the opposite. After the hectic arrival and two days in Frankfurt a peace has been growing in me, deeper than I have known, a green and brown stillness, a deep creative well sunk into my center from which I can draw sweet cool water forever.

After a heavy lunch in the Mensa, we drink coffee in a tiny coffee house in the center of town, 100 people in a room the size of a walk-in closet, shoulder to shoulder at narrow counters, a ritual ten minutes after lunch. Sociability, warmth, bitter coffee and sweet sugar.

In a bookstore I find a German *Filmalmanach* for 1989. I'm not sure how the book can foretell this year, but that's what it says on the cover. I look up "Harun Farocki" in the index of the thick book. There it is, with a single page number. Excited to read about the man I met last night, I flip through the book to find page 576. I am surprised when it seems that it will be part of the index. In fact it is the very page of the index where I found the name "Farocki." I read through the page and discover that the index is correct. On page 576 one can indeed find the name "Harun Farocki"—immediately preceding the number 576. Stimulated by my little adventure, I plan a book: an index of an index. Not an index of an index of a book, but a book that is wholly and only an index, with each entry the singular self-referential occurrence of the word. Perhaps I will create the words as well. And then, at the end, like a normal index, a number index: the number 1 to be found on page one and on the page of the number index, the number 2 on page two and in the number index, and so on. I will title my book *Index "Harun Farocki"* in honor of the occasion of my adventure.

I leave the bookstore with Vilem Flusser's *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* and Michel Leiris' *Das Band am Hals der Olympia*.

We decide to spend the afternoon in the garden of the Evangelisches Stift. Near the Seminary an enamel sign on a strong metal fence issues an order: "Do not lean bicycles against the fence!" Bicycles lean against the sign and along the fence. Across the street is a storefront office whose windows are plastered with calls to political action. Over the door a sign announces the Tübingen office of the anti-authoritarian Green Party—"Die Grünen." That explains the bicycles.

We walk down into the outer courtyard of the Stift. I glance into the courtyard of the house where Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin lived and studied. Religious education for future pastors. But these "pastors" preached the *Weltgeist*, art, nature, and Greece.

Down steep stairs we enter a civilized paradise. Along the Neckar River stretches a well-tended strip of grass, dotted with shade trees and lined with beds of flowers. Fully dressed people sit on white lawnchairs at small tables, reading or writing. Others, less fully dressed, lie in the sun and sleep or read. Two children push one another along a flagstone path in a little car.

On the side of the garden opposite the river rises the Stift, six

stories high. Behind it rise the walls and tile roofs of bourgeois *Fachwerk* houses. One house has had its roof stripped off, exposing the old beams. New beams shine bright yellow among the grey timbers.

I sit under a tree, reading, writing, enjoying the quiet knocking of wood against wood from punts poled past by students. A slight splash of water. Žarko stretches out in the sun, shirt and shoes off, dozing, reading, looking around. The grey of his Levis intersects the white flesh of his feet and upper body.

I finish *Repetition*. Filip returns home to his village from the Karst where he has found a kind of ephemeral utopia. Full of stillness and newly-won knowledge and love, he is met by fellow citizens who, in the not distant past, had "tortured and murdered," happy even now only if they have put someone in prison. The shock of return can be overcome, argues the calm narrator, through narration that provides a counter force to the prison house of language/culture/society.

In the beauty of the garden I experience the stillness and fullness I have come to Tübingen to find. This moment should last forever (*pace* Mephistopheles). Church bells ring three times. Three p.m. Behind me a rather unimaginative bird cheeps harshly, unvaryingly, endlessly: ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch. . . . From a house where tiles are being hung on a steep roof there comes a sudden sustained screeching, a warning shout, a curse, and a crash as the bundle of tiles shatters against pavement. The siren of an emergency vehicle wails from the Nekar bridge.

The children with the car begin to fight. The bigger child, a boy, drives away from his screaming sister. "I've got to go to work," he yells back. "I've got to take the car to work. You stay home. You don't need to work."

A long boat slides past. A young woman in the boat looks up at me. A small grey cat slips furtively across the grass. From its mouth dangles a large bird, one wing hanging crooked from the body.

❀ 23 May

10 a.m. In the Brechtbau after an early-morning walk with Žarko. A seminar on Peter Handke at the university is advertised with the following pedantry: "It is necessary, then, to reconstruct Handke's 'family-novel' in order to determine the aesthetic and poetological categories characteristic of his previous work." That's as bad as the generic title the University of South Carolina Press wanted for my book: *Understanding Peter Handke*. I'll find another publisher.

Last night we drove through the Ammertal to Pfäffingen for dinner in a Greek restaurant. We enjoyed the view and the fresh air in the growing dusk, and then an array of stars in the clear night sky. We ate Greek food—grilled lamb, vegetables (okra!), thick bread, rice-stuffed grape leaves— and drank Retsina or apple juice.

We told jokes and discussed the Wenders/Handke film *Wings of Desire*. Zorica hated it: "Bruno Ganz just played the famous Bruno Ganz; a commercial attempt to exploit German/French relationships with the French actress; it had no bite, no teeth; Wenders was much better in his film *Hammet*." Žarko didn't like it: "If you knew the current political situation in Europe you would know how bad the film is; it is a film about Berlin that has absolutely nothing to do with Berlin; and now he recasts Berlin through sentimental American glasses. Working in America Wenders has lost contact with Berlin." Jürg liked the film as much as I did, and Tilo stood undecided between the two camps. Žarko and I argued about Handke's view of truth. Moving personally from a religious center to the periphery, I claimed that Handke believes in no absolute truth. Žarko, trying to move in his life from an unrelenting periphery to a longed-for center, stated his strong sense for truth in Handke's work. Not until this morning did we come to agree that we were representing different aspects of Handke's attempt "To hold the world in a powerful balance."

❁ 24 May

Zorica left early this morning to go to work. It will surely be a relief after 13 days of hosting me to settle back into her routine. As she left she said that I had been in Europe for two weeks and haven't seen a single castle.

This is an inner tour. Europe/distance/time give me the chance to wander through my senses and thoughts. The castles along the Rhine I will pass later today are fleeting, unreal images compared to things I write and feel and see.

Žarko, Jürg, and I sit together at a table in the Brechtbau and an obliging student photographs us. We also photograph one another from where we sit, forming, photographically, several triangles, a group photo of sorts.

11 a.m. The overhead lights just flickered off. I now sit in natural light, no longer disturbed, made tense by the neon lights (I didn't even

recognize there was any tension until they were switched off).

Žarko sits back in his chair. He reads *Repetition* and stares out the window. Jürg leans forward over a French newspaper.

After lunch in the Mensa Žarko has to teach a Serbo-Croatian class. He says goodbye with a warm hug. Already I feel an enormous loss.

I walk back up to the apartment. Zorica says that although the high-rise is an ugly presence on the green hill it doesn't matter when you are in the apartment, for then you can't see the building, just the view from its windows. Quickly I gather my things together. With all the books I have bought it is quite a different load than the one I arrived with. At one o'clock I leave for the train station.

The fact that I have to catch the 1:48 train ruins what should be a quiet stroll through town. With my heavy bag hanging from my right shoulder and with a big bag of books in my left hand, I trot heavily along streets, rushing down paths I should enjoy for a last time. I count the steps on the Hohe Steige (500) instead of looking out over the city to see the castle, the red/orange tile roofs, and the greenery in which it is nestled. I lurch sweatily through the most picturesque part of town. With 15 minutes left before the train is scheduled to depart, as I contemplate whether I will have time to buy a ticket or whether I should just get on the train, I lose my way. I need to get under the castle, through a pedestrian tunnel; but I simply can't find the tunnel. I feel I am too close to the city center and turn to the right. I follow a young woman with bright bare legs under a short, full, black skirt. She ducks into a store, and I turn to the left again, headed straight for the hill with no tunnel in sight. At the end of the block I look in both directions, but find no useful information. I turn back toward the inner city, five minutes later than I already was. Next to a theater bookstore I finally find a tiny sign announcing a pedestrian and bicycle tunnel. It is cool in the tunnel, and as I slow my pace my sweat begins to dry. A dog coming from the opposite direction stops to pee on the wall.

Outside the tunnel, crossing the Nekar, I remember the night I left Tübingen in 1983. A friend walked with me from the Fichte Haus where we both had rooms. As we walked through this very tunnel I had a strong memory of having walked with her through that tunnel before. Déja vu.

I am not sure just how far the train station is, so as I pass through the beautiful park along the Nekar I continue my hectic pace. Beside a large pond, however, its green-brown water dotted with swans, I give up the race. My watch says 1:50. I can hear a train leaving the station. I sit down on a bench in the deep shade under a chestnut tree.

After the forced march it is a pleasure to take off my shoes, put down my bags, watch the swans and the ducks, and apprehend the cool, soothing shimmer of light from the pond.

Five relaxing minutes on the bench give me a renewed sense of place. An old man puts down a mat he has carried on a strap over his shoulder and sits next to me. 'Grüß Gott," he says, and I grunt in response. I don't look up. Why did he sit here? There are three empty benches in sight. I slowly cool down from my exertions. After fifteen minutes he says, "Auf Wiedersehn," picks up his pad, and leaves. He limps a little, and leans on a black cane. I move to sit in the sun on the grass among tiny white daisies. The sun, not 30 minutes ago my adversary, is now my ally. In minutes I am comfortably warm again; and I leave the park to buy my ticket.

Ticket to Bonn, DM 97. I sit in a car with ten children. One boy leans out the window, and in a voice he thinks sounds like the station announcer, barks a warning: "Achtung, bitte einsteigen und Türen schließen! Bitte, vorsicht bei der Abfahrt." The children are loud and rambunctious, enjoying themselves immensely.

The train leaves the station, and Tübingen becomes a memory. Žarko and Zorica still go about their daily business. The Brechtbau library is again full of readers and writers. On the Österberg the sheep still graze, although their nylon pen now surrounds a different plot of grass. This evening Žarko and Zorica will find the notes I left, and for a moment I will still be with them. But tomorrow I will be with other people, in another place; and next week I will be a world away.

> I had never thought it possible that I would lose this blind window;
> I had felt it to be an unalterable sign.
>
> Peter Handke, *Repetition*

Fell asleep just outside of Tübingen, didn't wake up until the train stopped at Nürtingen.

At the next station I look across the tracks where a man who looks like a Turk stands in the doorway of a large brick and stone house. Another dark-haired man carries a crate of bottles out of the house and together they walk off along a path. Beside the house is a garden with small fruit trees and rows of vegetables. A yellow cat moves in the garden, turning from side to side, back and forth. Stiffly. It is a stuffed cat, I finally see, a scarecrow cat, its back rigid, hanging by a string from a tree. Outside of old houses all along the tracks I see Turkish children.

Three old Germans, two women and a man, stroll along a narrow, tree-lined street. They all have grey hair and are nicely dressed. Behind them a similarly dressed grey-haired man stands in the grass away from the street and pisses into some high bushes.

In Stuttgart I change to an express train. The compartment has places for six. Two old men sit across from one another next to the window. One wears a black suit, white shirt, and a black pastoral cloth over the front of his shirt. A full grey beard and mustache. He dozes most of the time in the stuffy compartment. His hand lies on a Bible. The other old man wears grey pants and a dark blue shirt. His face is wrinkled, his glasses thick, his hair thin and ethereally white. He has his belt pulled tight so a long end hangs loose. He reads a book, *Everything Testifies of Jesus of Nazareth*.

Two business-suited men in their thirties put their briefcases in the compartment and then stand, talking, out in the hall. They each open a can of beer and talk loudly about a problem in chemical engineering. They finally sit down next to the dozing pastor and his Bible.

A young man in slacks and sweater takes the last free seat in the compartment. He listens intently to the engineers' conversation and asks about the problem they are discussing. He has just finished his *Abitur*, he tells them, and has taken a two-week trip to München. One of the engineers pulls out a tiny Casio television and raises the antenna. The *Abiturient* is fascinated—these two men of the world have everything he can imagine. He (and the engineers) ignore the two old men like common fossils from an uninteresting age.

I remember something Jürg Beeler said: "Germans think because they don't understand anything. And the reverse is also true: they don't understand anything because they think."

I fall asleep in the heat, like the old pastor. When I wake up the other old man is trying to get out but is having a hard time because of my outstretched legs. "Sorry," I say in English. Awake, I think and speak in German. Asleep, I obviously revert to English. I am embarrassed at the unconscious slip. Later the same old man looks out the window, his eyes glowing. Good will radiates from his entire body.

The two old men are carefully prepared for the trip—reserved window seats, tickets in envelopes from a travel bureau. The conductor asks if they have their passports. They are on their way to Holland.

During the three-hour trip the engineers talk about technology, money, hotels, the USA, Moscow, France, vacations, cars, women, clothing, drugs, the cost of many things, computers.

I want to knock in their teeth. The two old men, in three hours,

exchange only four sentences.

Four people sit on a gravel spit in the middle of the Rhine. All in a row, facing the train. A single bicycle stands next to them.

❀ 29 May

> I won't go directly to Hölderlin's grave. . . . My decision frees me, because my journey won't have a goal.
>
> Miroslav Mandić, a wandering Yugoslav poet

In the Frankfurt airport all the officials want to speak English with me. I refuse, holding on to the last vestiges of this experience.

The plane is crowded, and this time my seat is squarely in the middle of the economy-class ghetto. An old woman is struggling to put her luggage cart in the overhead bin. I offer to help. The cart cuts my thumb. The blood reminds me of Žarko's garden. I sit back and congratulate myself on my goodness. (The virtuous one!) A young German asks if he can put a bag under the seat in front of me. I gesture at my long legs, note how long the trip will be, and send him packing. (The decisive, energetic one!)

I soon find I am surrounded by Russians emigrating to the U.S. They are tense. Before the plane leaves the airport three of them who have come from West Berlin to Frankfurt are called to the front of the plane for some reason. The man sitting next to me gets up and sits down ten times before the plane leaves the gate. In the air he seems relieved and walks around the plane. He talks loudly with the Russians in the seats in front of us and with another group behind us. After a while he asks if I am German and speaks to me in German—a bit broken, but understandable. He is sweating. He takes off his suit coat and reveals a white shirt and bright suspenders—red, white, and blue stripes laced with stars. Uncle Sam. Short grey hair, grey suit, short-sleeved white shirt, bright grey tie with red and blue stripes, bullet head. 52 years old.

He has a sponsor in Texas, Fort Worth, he tells me. He will work as a "Frigidaire mechanic." He has been in Belgrade for nine months in a camp for emigrants, and finally has the papers to enter the U.S. Out of the overhead compartment he pulls a bright plastic UNICEF bag filled with various documents giving him the right to go to the U.S.

In response to my question he says Perestroika/Glasnost will take fifty years and he will be dead by then. House, car, money—he had all that, but freedom—he can't live longer without it. He has bags of

peanuts that he eats while he drinks big cans of German beer. The peanuts still have their skins and are slightly to well burnt. He insists that I have some with him. He pours half a sack onto his tray. The skins and crumbs fly about. He has been working, he says, in a Belgrade factory where they roast them.

There are 24 Russian emigrants on the plane, he says. When he goes off to talk with some of them the woman on the other side of me asks about him. I tell her he is a Russian emigrating to the U.S. She tells me he's not Russian, but Romanian. He is speaking Romanian, she says. I ask him later and he says his country has two languages—Russian and Romanian.

He asks where I am from. Yes, I know Utah, he says. On a napkin he draws a map— California next to Utah, then Arizona, Texas, a question mark, and finally Florida. Lots of Mormons in Utah! I tell him I am a Mormon. How many wives do you have? Seven. He understands immediately it is a joke. Mormons are good, he says, and draws another map with the Mississippi running to the left of Texas and slanting toward New York. To the left he writes Nord, and to the right Süd. In the war, he says, Mormons were good. I read it in a book. The black man wanted to go away, the Mormons helped. I wince and tell him I admire his sense for history.

He goes to the WC, returns with a friend. He introduces him—a friend, comrade, he says, a doctor—for teeth, and he points at his mouth. The man waves his hand, embarrassed.

The woman next to me is from Hungary, she says, on her way, for a second time in five years, to visit a daughter in Cleveland.

The Russian/Romanian leafs through *The Economist*, *Fortune*, *Manhattan*, *Inc.*, and through a magazine for computer experts. I tell him they are for capitalist businessmen. Uninteresting, I say, and he puts the dangerous material back.

The movie *Rain Man* begins to play on a screen in front of us. A silent movie, for I have not rented a headset. I see it through the eyes of Harun Farocki's film. A scene, of course, where Dustin Hoffman shows off his incredible memory. Crossing a bridge to show change of place. The beautiful Tom Cruise. Dustin discovers Tom and ? in bed and sets off a squabble. Dustin looks like a caricature of a handicapped person. Tom on the telephone—the many calls so Dustin can show off his knowledge of telephone numbers. Dustin causes trouble at the scene of an accident. There's Tom on the phone again.

My neighbor's UNICEF bag has a colorful picture of a rural St. Nicolas leading a sled-pulling donkey over a frozen pond. A cute

squirrel and a gingerbread village. The dark sky glows with huge stars. It doesn't look much like Fort Worth.

Oh! Tom discovers that Dustin can count cards and they win big at blackjack. A sexy showgirl in a skimpy Egyptian costume shows us how powerful and virile Tom and Dustin are as they erect wonderful piles of chips. Oh no! Tom's girlfriend (where did she come from?) is putting the moves on Dustin in a golden elevator. Dustin tries to look especially infantile here.

It's Hollywood. Everything is explained. In Farocki's film the viewer has to do the work, associating, drawing conclusions, moving from image to idea.

Isn't that touching? The brothers with heads together, a light kiss on the forehead to show affection. And now Tom sends Dustin off on a train. Tom walks off sadly. Doesn't he look cool in his sunglasses. Is that a smirk or a smile? Well, that's all folks. Looney Tunes.

I recall the parachutists on the Österberg. The pull to fill the chute, the run to the edge of the cliff, the jump, the swooping flight, and the contact with the ground. One man fills his chute, runs, and is pulled back up the hill. Every time he tries he is higher than when he began. An updraft? The chute positioned wrong. With the exception of some ski trips and the pleasures of teaching my Handke seminar, the year was a blank. What did I write? What did I think? What did I feel?

For three weeks I have felt like a desert plant when the rain comes. An entire growth cycle in a few days. And now I return to the drought.

The Hungarian woman next to me has made me smile—she leaned over and asked if I was a writer. The whole trip you have been writing. Are you writing a book? I tell her that that is indeed the case, that I have just take a trip to Yugoslavia and am writing a book about the trip. It's beautiful, I tell her, especially the Karawanken mountains. She tells me she worked for a travel bureau before she retired, that she made trips to Yugoslavia, Romania, Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and the U.S. Yugoslavia is the best, she says. Then Austria, then Czechoslovakia, and then (with a hint of apology) comes the U.S.

I ask her if she will write her name and address in my book. Oh no, she says, and as her mouth opens in a smile she covers her blackened, chipped teeth with her hand. I have already said too much, she says. You'll write about me in your book.

The crew has announced that we will soon be in New York. The Russian/Romanian is beginning to reanimate. He has put on his suit coat and keeps trying to look out the windows, although from where we sit only the huge wings can be seen. I ask if his heart is beating fast.

He says, a little, and grins broadly.

❁ 10 June, Transition from Day to Night

Sitting alone on a sandstone boulder under the towering cliffs called "Watchman" (Zions National Park, Utah).

In the last sunlight the sandstone cliffs above me flush vermillion, maroon, magenta, rust. The colors are already leaching out of the cliffs on the west side of the canyon. Bright, white wisps of cloud. A half moon: cold, white, sharply defined, quiet, passive. Unlike the aggressive red sun.

The last time the moon was in this phase I stood with Žarko on a moonlit mountain lakeshore in Bohinj, Slovenia. Awed by the dark reflection in the still lake, excited to be away from our routines, we reflected on standing, on stasis, and on being. *Dastehen*. *Dasein*. Standing as a created moment of transition, the place between one movement and the next. The brief moment when the moon floats free, full or new, neither waxing nor waning. The brilliant, fleeting, satisfying interstice. *Zwischenraum*.

Chattering, darting swallows hunt high-flying insects. Much higher, two tiny military jets turn silently to the southeast. Suddenly, briefly, their skins flash bright silver, mirroring the ball of flames below the horizon. Each jet trails a double vapor trail, white against the fading blue of the sky.

Below me Maren, Joseph, Nathan, and Thomas play catch with a football. Happy, nonreflective, simple play. A herd of six deer feeds along the road, slowly pursued by a boy in blue who wants to feed them and more deviously stalked by a woman with a camera. The deer keep the same distance from both. A seventh deer, a buck, stands aside, his antlers covered with velvet.

In the trees above me red-throated birds converse or exult or play or dispute or warn one another. Heard by my ears the foreign tongue has no content, but is the purely formal language of music. Like Žarko's Serbo-Croatian.

For hours Susan and the babies have been playing in the cool eddies of the Virgin River.

The moon is brighter now. The vapor trails pink. Bats have joined the swallows in their hunt for insects. The black and brown mammalflutter and jerk through the sky, tracing ragged lines. The swallows wheel and sweep and dart. Smooth curved lines.

A cool breeze springs up. Two more deer wander by. The moon has a bright, clear, sharp, curved right edge and a much rougher, vaguer, flat left edge.

There have been insects sounding all day, but now, in the growing dark, as the colors fall silent, the chirpings and high hummings and buzzings and raspings are more insistent.

The vapor trails and balls of clouds turn grey. Colors below coalesce into blackness. A stubby bat skims my forehead. The deer are just shapes now, visible only when they move. Two of them race by just below, their quick, thrusting sounds more visible than their shapes.

The children and Susan return from their games. I can sense their dark forms trailing in pairs across the field and hear them talk cheerfully about dinner as they climb the bank. A single cricket sounds loudly, incessantly. Like a dry quill on rough paper.

❁ 11 June, Transition from Night to Day

Early Morning Hike up the Narrows of the Virgin River—with Joseph, Thomas, and Nathan.

The water is cold! No room for a path. Just the canyon walls and the clear river rushing over its rocky bed, against its rocky banks. At 6 a.m. we are the only hikers. The early morning canyon is ours to discover. The rocks are slippery. Walking sticks give us a third point of balance. In some places wide curves and rock falls have formed islands on which we can take momentary refuge from the cold river. There are trees and cattails on the larger ones.

High above us the west wall blazes red with new sunlight. In the deep shadow of the canyon floor (can the swiftly flowing river we are walking in be called a floor?) we look back at a stretch of east wall wet with seeping water and find it glowing golden in the light reflected off the high west wall. A thread of water, perhaps as thick as my wrist, drawn thin by the two-hundred-foot wall down which it tumbles.

Stubby black birds wade in and skim over the water. Standing on a rock they dance, a repeated knee bend, a bounce. We bounce along with the birds and laugh to see one another repeat the gesture so well.

Standing in a deep shadow, the canyon walls overhanging so completely that they allow no glimpse of the sky, I find, about head high, a hollow worn into the rock. Inside is a perfect still life: two round stones the size of a baseball, one tan, the other red. Between them grows a single, thin plant. A tiny Zen garden.

⊛ 2 JUNE 1991

Tunnel to Yugoslavia-Klagenfurt—Just before the beginning of the summer travel season, the Karawanken Tunnel opened today at 6 am. The 7864-meter-long tube connects the Austrian state of Kärnten with the Yugoslavian republic Slovenia. Motorists will no longer have to cross the steep mountain passes (Wurzenpass, 19% grade; Loiblpass, 24%). Access is only possible by way of local roads until 1992. Use of the tunnel costs 13 DM.

Under the Stone Bridge

Žarko Radaković

Translated by Ivana Djordjević

Second Repetition: Travel Writing

for Zorica

✠ 13 MAY 1989

BOHINJ, 24.00

We crossed the border about seven p.m.

Around 7.30: on the road to Jesenice. An accident.

Arrived at Bohinj about nine p.m. ("Why wouldn't Dr Živojin Dacić let me bring paper for Julije Knifer?")

✠ 14 MAY 1989

BOHINJ, 10.00

Scott got up early today. He had a shower. ("The water was warm," he said.)

We discussed the problem of "standing" in the work of Rilke and Handke (standing beneath a tree by the lake). "Heidegger talks about 'standing' in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*," said Scott. In the text *Repetition*, by Peter Handke, we looked for passages that referred to the problem of standing. Scott began by reading aloud a passage from page 141: "Mit grossen Schritten, als sei ich der Entschluss in Person, ging ich in die Schalterhalle und kaufte eine Fahrkarte; mit grossen Schritten, wie einer, der endlich weiss, dass er etwas nicht mehr für sich allein tut, lief ich durch die Unterführung zum hintersten Bahnsteig. . . ."[5] It was a passage that, in my opinion, had to do with

[5]"With long strides, like decision incarnate, I went into the station and bought

"motion." Scott didn't claim that it was about standing, but he was not convinced that it was about "motion" either. For a while I talked about Robert Walser. Then I thought long about Knifer. Then about Brinkmann. Then about Šalamun. (I didn't think about Šekularac.)

The previous evening we had "stood" ("for a while") by the lake. We stared long at the water that hardly seemed to move. At one point, however, Scott said that the water "moved." In my opinion, the water was slick ("as a mirror"). To the left, under a stone bridge, the river could be heard flowing. Out there ("to the south")—something you could only imagine in the dark—the water "rolled." There, the lake, drained, away. Immediately, the waves turned silence into noise. "What a quiet landscape," I thought. "What, a, quiet, landscape," Scott said. ("It is now completely dark," I failed to say. I noticed. I saw.) The mountains looked, like a wall, or, a curtain, or merely ships "that stand . . . at anchor."

For breakfast we had "fried eggs." She was friendly: the owner of the hotel. Scott drank tea. I drank "coffee with milk." She even charged us the price for the room we had agreed on the night before.

I talked while we ate: "He started by teasing his girlfriend . . . Then he got scared . . . Late that night he was arrested . . . In the morning he phoned . . . While he talked about the time he had spent at the police station, I talked about the time I had spent with him . . . He seemed to be trying to tell me something else . . . Me too, I meant to tell *him* something else . . . We exchanged good-byes and hung up . . . ." Scott listened carefully, observing me as I, looking past him, observed through the window a policeman who was looking inside through the window, observing Scott. The moment my eyes met his, he would concentrate on the food, or the waitress. The moment his eyes met mine, I would concentrate on the policeman. The moment I looked at Scott, he would concentrate on me.

The previous evening I had had a row with the waiter. He would not serve us. We arrived tired, and hungry (and mud-spattered). Uncivil words aroused a most unpleasant feeling in me. Yes, the waiter actually swore at us. In the meantime I "went mad." I immediately felt like "pouncing" upon that man. I looked at his hair: it was "greasy." (I remembered Dr. "Živojin Dacić": in this kind of situation he would start "to swear" "at once.") Then I saw myself as a foreigner: he has just

---

a ticket; with long strides, like a man who knows at last that what he is doing is not for himself alone, I took the underpass to the far platform . . . .": Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 102.

arrived, "from Germany." I felt guilty. I wanted to defend my people from "the western invasion." I turned to Scott. The sun had long since set. Scott was silent the whole time. He watched the table with raw fish "on plates." I thought: "How do you feel now?" I looked, most probably, "like a madman." Scott was silent. He looked "as though plunged" "in ice-cold water." I uttered, for a few seconds, "no words." Scott's lips didn't move. I saw gravity in his eyes. And equanimity. Discomposure? Disappointment? "Yet only minutes ago he had talked about Rilke," and about "Standing," "so excitingly." (As if to say, "this is my life.") (In a telephone conversation once, "Dr. Dacić" was so "agitated" that he could not even complete individual sentences and string them together; instead he would break off halfway through each one and immediately start the next one, so that in the place of "discourse" there was a frantic succession of "breaks," and his "story" was a series of, say, breaks, "gaps," "fragments" and "junk," with "huge chasms yawning" between them into which you, as the listener, would immediately fall, while the speaker always remained "stalled," while the listener, "desperately" trying to join in the conversation, called out "as though from an abyss" into which more and more broken words kept falling and interrupting the answers you had embarked on, which, just like your discontinuous answers, also returned to "the hole" where you stood for a long time: first "lost," then desperate, then "zany," and, at last, an Artist, for, it was only by "intervening" that you endured—by imagination, the only tool available to your muteness, bringing together junk, constructing, working, leveling, amidst pervasive disarray, the solid ground, and erecting a wondrous, almost unreal building that emerged "from the Hole," becoming more and more solid, clearer and clearer, until, "at last," it detached itself entirely from its architect; and went on growing, of its own will, by self-extension, while its hapless and unwitting architects, Speaker and Listener, You and Him, became integral parts of it: for instance, the one became a Chimney and the other a Gutter; the one a Staircase, the other a Terrace; the one a Garage, the other an Attic; and so on; and so forth.) I had seen the same agitation on Scott's face once already, before we had set out on our journey. At the time we were discussing the subject of "Handke and women." We were reading together an article published in a supplement to the German weekly *Die Zeit*, liberally illustrated with photographs of the Author and his girlfriend. Although I was embarrassed (on whose behalf?) by the yellow-press approach to the serious and troubled life of the artist, whom, by the way, I knew personally, I was willing to see elements of journalistic experimen-

tation in this article. So, I concealed my agitation. Scott, for his part, was perfectly calm. And grave. And stern. (Unlike me, who was "agitated.")

Right now it is pouring rain. Scott is sitting on the hotel terrace and writing in his Diary. I photograph him. He raises his head. Pensively, he gazes into the distance.

I talked for a while about the impossibility of storytelling. Before that, I had read a passage from page 47 of Handke's *Repetition*, and before that, a passage from page 15. I insisted on narrative-less narration. I immediately adduced the passage from page 15 in support of my position. Here is the quotation:

> . . . das Einander-in-die-Arme-Fallen, das Lieb-Haben, das Lieben als ein beständiges, so schonendes wie rückhaltloses, so ruhiges wie aufschreihaftes, als ein klärendes, erhellendes Erzählen . . . . Und was erzählte ich? . . . Weder Vorfälle noch Ereignisse, sondern die einfachen Vorgänge, oder auch bloss einen Anblick, ein Geräusch, einen Geruch. Und der Strahl des kleinen Springbrunnens jenseits der Strasse, das Rot des Zeitungskiosks, die Benzinschwaden der Laster: Sie blieben, indem ich sie im stillen erzählte, nicht mehr für sich, sondern spielten eins in das andere. Und der da erzählte, das war gar nicht ich, sondern es, das Erleben selber.[6]

I was so absorbed in the reading that I saw even Scott as part of the text: He recited it personally. In my voice. From his own belly . . . he "stood" and listened carefully . . . I moved to page 47 of the book. There were a series of descriptions there of sensations with, I explained, not a single event. And even if there had been any, they would immediately have been "reduced" by the sensory-perceptive apparatus of the subject. I said: "Standing is motion in depth. Walking is always

[6] ". . . falling-into-one-another's-arms, loving, being fond of one another, as a constant, forbearing yet unreserved, calm yet exclamatory, clarifying and illuminating telling. . . . And what was I telling? . . . Neither incidents nor events, but mere impressions, a sight, a sound, a smell. The jet of the little fountain across the street, the red of the newspaper kiosk, the exhaust fumes of—the heavy trucks—once I told her about them, they ceased to exist in themselves and merged with one another. And the teller was not I, it was experience itself": Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 15.

movement and concatenation 'along the horizontal axis.'" Scott talked about the writer's static impulse. "To stop and remain standing!" he said. . . . At one point thunder was heard. . . . *Nunc stans*. . . . I asked him what he now thought of "Postmodernism." He spoke about a "swinging pendulum": "The pendulum has now reached the point marked—Message," he said. "He has now moved to 'Post-Post-modernism.'" "Yes, you may be right," I said.

"Narratives are dead and buried!" I said. "We must narrate!" he said. "That is now impossible!" I said. "The solution is to search for Messages," he said. "But what if no Great Things are going on!" I said. "It is precisely when we 'stand' that we are at the center of the most momentous events!" he said. "Even bloody changes of regime cannot have the significance of the French Revolution," I said. "But it is possible, by means of storytelling, to turn everything into Myths," he said. . . . Scott stared at the ceiling, as though working something out. I stared at the floor, as though listening for something. "How do we connect that heavy, all-embracing eventlessness with 'sought-for' meaning and messages?" I said. "By means of storytelling, storytelling," he said.

At one point I had the impression that I was talking with Sreten Ugričić, to whom I once said that Stories about powerful Sensations could now only dissolve into Stories-without-events. ("That is now a necessity," I thought.) To Vasa Pavković, too—who saw in Handke's "narration" "meticulous description," which also confirms, to the great chagrin of all, the death of rock'n'roll in fiction—I meant to say something "useful." (The Story eluded me.) . . . I turned to the wall, and saw the face of Slavica Stojanović in the pattern of the wall paint. ("Who is this woman?" I asked, "visibly excited." "She realizes that you are flesh that, perhaps, 'ought to be fucked,'" Zorica said.) "Am I to strip just like that, am I to show myself naked 'just like that,' only 'just like that,' just because I am 'handsome' and 'big,' 'because' somebody wants me 'at any price,' 'because' I haven't a red cent, though I have something to sell, but cannot make up my mind, so it seems I'm not quite sure what to do with myself, for a pestilential specter is scouring the world, there is no justice, this is not a war, we are just prey to nightly agitation? . . . No! . . . O, I'd rather be impotent, ugly, evil, alone, unfree, and useful! . . . O, I want no Stories! . . . O, I want no Language! . . . I want no Chronology, I want no Starring role in an expensive movie! I want nothing. . . . I have no time. . . . I'm in a rush." And I told the "journalist" on the TV screen: "You motherfucking dickhead, do you want me to play Jagger, who's already past it anyway,

manager of the biggest and least productive enterprise in the country, and still to be unaware that Dylan has been packed off before his time as a politician who has gone up shit creek?" . . . No! . . . You cunt! . . . I want!: Gentle concatenation! Tender continuation!—not of events, but of perceptions! and sensations! thoughts! and feelings! . . . Storytelling must be! a tailoring! ("Screw you, shitheads!"[7]) and a composing! in which the narrator! becomes! a hero! just like his listeners! Because he is! UnObtrusive! Because he is no! LawGiver!" . . . I turned to page forty-eight of *Repetition,* and I read that bit where the hero, Filip Kobal, Tells the children a Story, "with the help of certain paraphernalia." "Which, actually, 'have a calming effect.'" And I thought, along with the text: "Hier versuchte ich mich . . . als Erzähler; rieb mitunter ein Streichholz an, schlug zwei Steine gegeneinander, blies in die zur Hohlkugel geformten Hände; kam dabei freilich über das Beschwören von Abläufen—dem Gehen von Klumpfüssen, dem Anschwellen von Wasser, dem Sichnähern eines Irrlichts—nie hinaus. Die Zuhörer wollten auch gar keine Handlung, die Abläufe allein taten es schon."[8]

In the end, I merely gave the waiter a reproachful look, turned towards the exit, and went to bed. The waiter did not turn to look at me. He took no note of me at all. At one point he may have given Scott Abbott a once-over. Inquisitive. "From top to toe." For it was clear—as I suddenly realized—that Scott was a stranger here.

⊛ Jesenice, 12.00

Clouds of smog. The sky above the ironworks. The station. A supermarket. A tall building. No picture of Tito hangs in the station bar. The Belgrade weekly information magazine ("NIN"), at the station newsstand, does not contain Velikić's review of Handke's *The Lesson of Mont-Sainte Victoire* in my Serbo-Croat translation. Before the entrance to the waiting room: gypsies.

---

[7] Cf. Žarko Radaković, *Tübingen* (Belgrade: Pan Dušicki, 1990), 53.

[8] "I would try my hand as a storyteller. From time to time, I would strike a match, tap two stones together, blow into my cupped hands. Actually, I never did more than evoke sounds and sights: clubfeet walking, a stream swelling, a will-o'-the-wisp coming closer. And my listeners were not eager for a story, they were satisfied with my evocations": Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 32.

⊛ KLAGENFURT, 17.00

As soon as I ordered coffee (in a downtown restaurant), I knew: this was to be the beginning of a text about a restaurant which will tell of the restaurant where I ordered coffee and where men had neatly trimmed hair, still wet from combing. The waiter had a thin, clipped mustache. The short sleeves of his shirt were rolled up.

There are red reflections on the ceiling, from the whisky bottles above the bar.

I ask myself: "Where could it be, the grammar school once attended by my 'vanished' hero, friend, and brother, Peter Handke?" The reply was provided by the music that spread through the room, and the bass tone

beat against my heart

as a carpet-beater beats a rug that hangs in the yard. And I look, to myself, defeated. And I walk the streets, aimlessly. Acquaintances avert their eyes from my face. It begins to hail; luckily, a hundred meters away there is a large stable; we hide in the hay; cows; in a corner, an almost invisible horse, keeps flicking its tail.

The street is, nevertheless, narrow. Lazy. First I asked an elderly man where downtown was. My final question was: "Which grammar school did Peter Handke attend?" The old man had a green cloak. It was "the wrong man." Maybe deaf? In any case, he had a furrow, on his brow, so deep. I saw layer upon layer of dust in it. Then worms, too.

⊛ TANZENBERG, 19.00

The church.

In Klagenfurt, after I asked the old man in the green cloak and with a blue blemish on his lip if he knew which grammar school Peter Handke had attended, and he replied that he didn't know—he walked with a stick and trembled—I went on down the street. I passed a poster with the words: "Vom Konstruktivismus bis zur Systemkunst." A girl knelt at the edge of a fountain, photographing the facade of a nearby house. Two men came up to her and at once turned to me, who was just addressing the girl with the words, "which grammar school did Peter Handke attend?" Instead of the girl, a man answered. With the words: "the grammar school at Viktrim." "Who is Peter Handke?" she asked; "A writer," another man said. In the middle of the road, the asphalt was inlaid with a path of cut granite. In front of a grocer's I

stopped a young couple. The boy was inordinately fat. Fair hair, downy beard. The girl was smooth-complexioned, warm-haired and soft-eyed, all winsome, shy, slim, with a serene smile and profound eyes, "sexy." I asked the question, "Where is the grammar school building?" The boy spoke brusquely and with supreme confidence. The girl's head clung to his shoulder all the time. I looked towards a crane that stood between two buildings, in the direction indicated by the boy's pointing finger, then down the street towards the church spire. There the sky spread in clumps of fog and all of a sudden I saw in it a fruit bowl, upturned, and from the very top, of the figure a drop of a squashed strawberry's red juice slithered down.

We reached Tanzenberg on a beautiful early evening. The monastery is like a tanker, heavily loaded, anchored in a port that has long since lost its former importance. (Not Trieste. Not Pula . . . not the pleasant smell of Dr. Živojin Dacić's garage.) Before the entrance to the left-hand wing of the building cars were parked: an Opel-Kadett, a Toyota, a Fiat, and a Mazda. Through the glass pane of the door one could see a corridor leading inside, into the heart of the monastery. I climbed the stairs before the church door. Whiteness had practically swallowed whatever was in the room. Like a whale. The walls dissolved into frescoes. Like fat in a pan. Chairs were neatly aligned. Flowers, in a few places. Like a meadow. On a platform before the altar there is a microphone. The window is stained-glass. Silence. I hear my own breathing. Outside the building, on the very edge of the plateau where the land drops away steeply towards the picture of a beautiful landscape, a man, descending towards the little soccer field in the background. There are boys there. They are shooting at the goal. A green net has been stretched between the posts, so that the ball bounces back and a boy immediately dashes at it and "blasts" at the goal.

"Who is Peter Handke?" we ask. One of the boys has yellow hair and "flashing eyes." He explains that the boys are not boarders at the monastery school but day students. To our question "where can one spend the night?" he said that there was a place close by that, "long ago," used to be "always open." We made for the first entrance at left, to the right of the church door. In the dark atrium there is a plaque with the history of the monastery engraved on it. To the right there is a door and from behind it there comes the voice of someone "who is on the phone right now." To the left is a door, behind which music is heard. We go through the middle door. A colonnade runs around the courtyard. There is a vase with a flower at one of the windows. The air is clear. Suddenly a pigeon soars. Its wings flap. Silence alights on the

landscape that rises high, high and narrow, as a view from a prison yard. Damp air washes the smooth walls. Darkness drops tear-like through the windows. The smell of potatoes and onions wafts through an opening. Is there anyone here, today? You gaze, as a twelve-year-old boy, you stand before the beginning of the "distance" that spreads in the distance, your gaze comes to rest on the boy scouts who stand around the flagpole in shorts and neckerchiefs, looking like "Nazis" who, instead of holding guns and wearing leather overcoats, wear "shorts" (which doesn't mean that they aren't Nazis). They are all polite. They return our greetings. We ask a man with a child a few questions. Both are pushing bicycles. The man has a beard, and teeth blackened by smoking. "Artists are sensitive. They don't brook constraints. Others don't brook constraints either, but then others hardly notice them." He spoke slowly and convincingly. "The schoolteacher predicted Handke's future course quite early." "We went to church five times a day." "The former headmaster is deaf." "The young headmaster does not know Handke." "Has Handke ever been to Tanzenberg again?" I asked. At one point the man gave me a short, slanting look. The road before us meandered towards the sky, where a bird, a swallow, performing acrobatics at breakneck speed, traced the following words from *Repetition*:

"Und was war mit mir? Ich erkannte, daß mit den Jahren im Internat meine Jugend vergangen war, ohne daß ich diese, auch nur in einem Augenblick, erfahren hätte. Und ich sah die Jugend als einen Fluß, als ein freies Zusammenströmen und gemeinsames Weiterfließen, wovon ich mit dem Eintritt ins Internat, mit allen übrigen dort, ausgesperrt worden war. Es war eine verlorene Zeit, die nicht mehr nachzuholen war. Es fehlte mir etwas, etwas Lebensentscheidendes, und es würde mir immer fehlen. Wie manchem Gleichaltrigem im Dorf gebrach es mir an einem Körperteil; doch war dieser nicht von mir abgetrennt worden, wie ein Fuß oder eine Hand, sondern hatte sich gar nicht erst ausbilden können, und war ausserdem nicht bloß eine sogenannte Extremität, vielmehr ein durch nichts zu ersetzendes Organ. Mein Gebrechen hieß, daß ich mit den andern nicht mehr mitkonnte: weder mittun noch mitreden. Es war, als sei ich."[9]

[9] "And what about me? It came to me that during my years at the seminary my youth had passed but I had never for one moment known the experience of youth. I saw youth as a river, a free confluence and flow from which I was excluded when I entered the seminary. My years at the seminary were lost time

✻ 15 May 1989
St. Veit a. d. Glan, 9.00

For breakfast we had bologna, tea, coffee with milk, butter, jam, cheese, pastries, brown and white bread.

The water we showered with had been heated to 70°C.

The towel is white this morning, "with pink stripes."

I had no toothbrush.

Scott was the first to get up.

I wanted us to go down to the dining room at once.

"The woman behind the bar is a fat sow," I thought.

The man who sits at a table behind my back is whispering, his voice "like the hissing of a milk-warmer."

Three boys, bikers, like "three he-goats."

I was telling Scott about the trouble I had with my pants this morning, and my voice rumbled like a washing machine.

Scott looked towards the ceiling.

Nuns are waiting for us at Tanzenberg.

At the entrance to the area before the monastery building: a fire engine will be standing.

For a long time a group of Japanese will be entering the church.

✻ Klagenfurt, 11.00

At the exhibition *Exacta—From Constructivism to Systemic Art*.

Before the paintings of Francois Morellet—1. Two raster patterns with vertical lines, 1952; 2. Blue-Red, 1982;

To the left: Leon Polk Smith—1. Encounter on an intersecting line, 1942; 2. Black-Yellow, 1983;

Then before the paintings of: Henrik Stazewski—1. Composition, 1931; 2. Structure of a plane, 1980;

To the left: Jeffrey Steele—1. Form II, 1961; 2. Syntagma IV, 23 . . . 31, 1980;

---

that could never be retrieved. In me something was missing, and would always be missing. Like many young men in the village, I had lost a part of my body; it had not been cut off like a hand or a foot; no, it had never had a chance to grow; and it was no mere extremity, so to speak, but an irreplaceable organ. My trouble was that I couldn't go along with the others; I couldn't join in their activities or talk with them. I was . . .": Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 31.

Then: Enzo Mari—1. Variation on a theme, 1953; 2. Labyrinth, 1967;

Richard Paul Lohse—1. Twelve vertical and horizontal progressions; 2. A row of series in four vertical rows;

Gianni Colombo—1. Four free lines crossing a rectangle at twelve temporal intervals, 1961; 2. Radius, 1973;

Cesar Domela—1. Geometric structure No. 4; 2. Relief No. 169.

A board on one of the walls said:

"Some of these artists' works are obviously concerned only with Watching, only with the Experience of the 'flow of Watching' . . . The forms, which do not seem to refer to anything, do not leave us indifferent nevertheless . . . ."

Elsewhere it said: "An artist's interest in the art of other artists is in itself already art . . . ."

At one point I thought: "Why is everything so simplified in the German language?"

Scott is in another room of the museum.

The museum resembles a monastery.

⊛ Tanzenberg, 12.00

A nun is feeding a cat.

Two nuns in the grass.

A nun carries a head of lettuce in her hand.

A nun opens the gate of the right-hand (in relation to the church) wing of the monastery.

A nun holds a blade of grass in her hand.

A nun opens the gate of the right-hand wing of the monastery.

A nun holds a blade of grass in her hand.

⊛ Griffen, 13.00

At thirteen hours sharp we stopped before the church in Griffen. A small, placid street. The houses are gentle. Grass sprinkled with white polka dots. It rains.

Before that, we had climbed to the top of a nearby hill. It offered an unrestricted view of the town. On our way there we saw cows, a van (full of children), two ruins, a church memorial (covered with lilac), a pile of manure. From a wooded slope the song of a cuckoo was heard. Fog rolled, cotton-like, down in the hollow. The trees were all

smothered by the exhalations . . . .

I run out of the car. I walk towards the church. Scott steps up his pace. His turned-up pant legs are suddenly transformed into feeding troughs. Unusually solemn and exalted noises, smells, and voices reach us from the church. Catholic and baroque, the large and heavy church suddenly turns into an Orthodox one, squat, broad, and rounded. Festively dressed couples come out of the building and start to dance.

Opposite the church there is a shop that makes and sells black pottery, *Terra nigra*. It is owned by Frank Kerhowetz. He spoke English with Scott, although Scott's German was good. He spoke Serbo-Croat with me, although my German was good enough.

A boy was also present, whose name neither Scott nor I have ever been able to remember. To Scott's question, if he knew who Peter Handke was, the boy said that he did. To my question, if he knew where the house of Handke's brother was, the boy said that he did. To Scott's question, how far it was from the house of Handke's brother to the *Terra nigra* workshop, the boy said that he would take us "there."

On the way to Altenmarkt he told us about Peter. He had never seen him, but he knew that "for a while he taught German language and literature in the school at Pustritz." "He lived there too." Maybe he did see him, but was never sure that it was actually "he." The boy stopped before the pizzeria on the main street and said, "That used to be Handke's elementary school." We stood some time in front of the huge window. "The school is now a restaurant," I said. Scott laughed. The boy stood and looked at us proudly and significantly. He spoke very fast. He switched subjects. I couldn't follow him. I walked slowly alongside him, yet felt as if I were cantering.

At the entrance to Altenmarkt the boy shows us the house of Handke's half-brother. It stood on a bluff under a huge cliff. The roof structure peeps put from among the green branches of a thick wood. "There's the house," said the boy. I looked at him and felt as I did in Marrakech, in 1981, when a swarm of boys took me round the city and afterwards asked for change. The boy, who reminded me incredibly of a girl in the village of Kosovo polje, in 1977, was silent and looked me straight in the eye. I didn't blink. He smiled. "There's the house," said Scott. It was as if we could hear the soundtrack of Howard Hawks's *El Dorado*, The sky suddenly turned clear and blue. Clouds were noisy as they moved across the sky. I saw arrows raining on the tiny cemetery before us. "There's the house," I repeated.

We part from the boy.

At the bottom of the slope there is a tiny cemetery, surrounded by a

low wall. A little church stands in the middle. We spread out and go to look at the graves. I walk on the left side of the central alley, Scott walks on the right. It begins to rain. The graves are lined up in very strict order. On one of the graves it said, "Jovan Savic (1923-1977)." At one point Scott shakes his head. I stand and watch the graves on the slope and at the foot of the bluff under the cliff; they look like rows of vines in a vineyard. A wind is blowing. We leave the cemetery, visibly moved. And tranquil too. Now we are climbing up a path towards the macadam road that leads uphill to the right and, to the left, to a yellow house whose rear gable we can see. In front of it, one can see it from the distance, is a garage. In front of it, clearly recognizable, a black Opel Ascona is parked. In front of the house itself is a woman. She is moving towards us. Slowly. She wears a grey coat. Only when she came up to us did we notice that she wore glasses.

⊛ Stift, 16.15

The Stift cemetery is opulent. True, the graves are aligned, but not that strictly. A white stone on a grave bore the words "Maria Handke (8 October 1920—20 November 1971)." On a wooden cross laid over the white stone it said "Bruno Handke 21—March 1988." "Aren't the communist party and Tito for me what the church and religion were for Handke," I thought. "And the seminary," I added. "The church is opulent." "Tito always wore a white suit too."

The stones on the graves of the Handkes and Siutzes are of irregular shape. No right angles. Broken grey-and-white stone.

The woman with glasses was old. She seemed to tremble. Asked, "Where do the Handkes live?" She pointed to the house and immediately fell silent. Asked, "Where was Peter Handke born?" She replied that the house no longer existed because she and her family had bought it and pulled it down. Asked, "What was Handke's grandfather's name?" She replied "Siutz." Asked, "What is Handke's sister's name?" She replied, "Monika." Asked, "Where is Maria Handke buried?" She replied, "At the Stift." Asked, "Is Peter Handke really a Slovene?" She said, "To a small degree." (She emphasized *small*.) Asked, "Who among the Handkes was a carpenter?" She replied, "Peter's uncle."

As we walked down a street in Altenmarkt, I saw a curtain shifting in a window and through it the inquisitive heads of an old man and an old woman. "They must have been sitting at the table, drinking their

afternoon coffee," I said to Scott. The road meandered among houses that stood amid flowers and trim lawns. It was unusually quiet. I thought, "How trim!" While we ate at a place not far from the pizzeria/school, I thought, "What a terrible place to live." The sign at the crossroads said, "Yugoslavia 31 km." In the church I recognized the Slovene script under the icons on the wall. "What determination!" I said aloud in Serbo-Croat. Scott, who was sitting on a chair at that moment and thumbing through a Bible, heard me, glanced back, but did not understand me. I saw a smile in his eyes. The church was so gaudy and bedizened that it immediately recalled the restaurant in Klagenfurt where I had had coffee while Scott was asleep in the car. Still, darkness swallowed the gaudiness and subdued it with an unreal mist that seemed painted in oil on wood. I remembered the trip to Griffen and the tiny bridge where we had watched a game of village soccer. That, too, had seemed unreal, like something described in a book or seen in a film. The goalie had stood "stock-still." Scott had said, "They play a rough game." Girls had sat behind the goal, together with boys who didn't watch the game but the girls who didn't watch the game giggled. Not for a minute could I imagine Peter in the church. I saw him among the spectators by the soccer field. He stood aside, just behind the sausage stand. "A strange man," the nun had said at Tanzenberg. She carried a bunch of flowers in her hand, and a head of lettuce, the leaves of which fluttered, as the old woman's hands trembled visibly. The other nun had talked long and volubly. "Yet she had said little," I said to Scott. "The novel *Wunschloses Unglück* was not received well at the seminary," the other nun had said. Scott remembered the tunnel that we had sought in Jesenice and, having failed to find it, decided that either it was not yet completed or it had not been started yet. We had looked for it even before we crossed the border between Austria and Yugoslavia. We cruised along the border for a dozen kilometers, on the Austrian side of the Karawanken. We resembled policemen in a patrol car. Afterwards, at Jesenice, we found the *old* railway tunnel. It was not real, more like an image from a novel. It rained, "cats and dogs." We strayed around, soaked to the skin. I carried a camera in my hand. I was afraid someone might see us. I was afraid of the Yugoslav police. I photographed the tunnel furtively, through the branches of a tree. I looked at Scott, whose face was drenched with rain and the wet wind. He was, nevertheless, "so clear." "A handsome man," I thought.

Scott was born on 14 August 1949, I remembered at that moment.

Zorica was born on 10 May 1949, I immediately added to that

thought.

Peter Handke was born on 6 December 1942, I solemnly concluded. I pitched into a hollow filled with water. A train was just emerging from the tunnel. It rumbled along importantly, entering the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. At that moment I heard the national anthem, "O Slavs!"

Quotation from *Repetition*: "Am frühen Abend stand ich unten in der Stadt, auf der großen Brücke über die Drau. Diese, keine hundert Kilometer östlich von meinem Geburtstdorf, war ein anderer Fluß geworden. Zuhause eingesenkt in das Trogtal, versteckt unter Wildwuchs, die Ufer kaum zugänglich, das Wasser fast lautlos, trat sie hier in Marburg hervor als die weithin sichtbare, glänzende Ader der Ebene, rasch dahinfliessend, mit einem besonderen Wind, die Sandbuchten hier und da schon eine Vorahnung des Schwarzen Meeres. Mit dem Auge des Bruders betrachtet, erschien sie mir fürstlich, wie beflaggt von unzähligen Wimpeln, und die geriffelten Wellen wiederholten die leeren Viehsteige, so wie die Schattenbilder der Waggons von der parallelen Eisenbahnbrücke die blinden Fenster des verborgenen Reichs. Die Flüße der Vorkriegszeiten trieben wieder stromab, eins nach dem andern. Feierabendliches Gehen auf der Brücke, immer dichter, die Leute alle schnell unterwegs, mit vom Wind geweiteten Augen. Die Laternenkugeln erstrahlten weiss. In der Brücke waren jene seitlichen Ausbuchtungen, welche seit damals mein Blick auf allen Brücken der Welt sucht. Im Rücken die unablässig Dahingehenden, von denen es mir unter den Sohlen schütterte, umklammerte ich mit beiden Händen das Geländer, bis ich die Brücke samt dem Wind, der Nacht, den Lampen und den Passanten auf mich übertragen hatte, und dachte: 'Nein, wir sind nicht heimatlos'."[10]

[10] "Late in the afternoon, I was in the town below, standing on the big bridge across the Drava. Less than a hundred kilometers east of my native village, it had become a different river. At home, sunk in its trough-like valley, hidden by rank growth, its banks almost inaccessible, its flow almost soundless, it emerged here in Maribor as the glittering artery of the plain, visible from far off, flowing swiftly, with a wind of its own and sandy coves here and there, which offered a foretaste of the Black Sea. Looking at it through my brother's eyes, I thought it regal, as though adorned with innumerable pennants, and its ruffled waters seemed to repeat the empty cow paths, just as the shadows of the railroad cars on the parallel railroad bridge seemed to repeat the blind windows of the hidden kingdom. The rafts of prewar times drifted downstream, one after another. Close-of-business bustle on the bridge, more and more people, all in a hurry, their eyes widened by the wind. The globes of the

And I decided, then and there, to tell a story.
Yet the story kept eluding me, drawing me into itself.

✠ 16 MAY 1989
TÜBINGEN, 15.30

In St. Veit a. d. Glan we got up a little before eight (8 a.m.). (That was yesterday, 15 May 1989. I'm repeating my account of the events.) Scott showered first, then I had a shower. For some time, waiting for Scott to return from the bathroom, I wrote these lines. At one point I saw Scott's pants and shirt on the floor. I wondered, "Will he put them on again or will he change?"

At one point, waiting for Scott to return from the bathroom, I saw, in my mind's eye, Scott crouched over his bag in front of the wardrobe. He was wearing long johns. His body was tender, and frail. He looked like a boy. On the other hand, he resembled James Coburn in Peckinpah's last movie (*Cross of Iron*). I thought, "This man must be protected." When, in this half-sleep—it was early in the morning—I felt like putting my arm around him, I saw before me a rocky cliff, identical to that in Griffen, above the town and the road to Altenmarkt, the one that we later, having walked for several hours, observed from below, filled with a [Kantian] sense of the sublime. And: Images of some familiar heroes appeared before me: King Kong, John Wayne (in the movie *Rio Bravo*), Kit (from a pulp novel by the little-known Georges Clinton), a steamroller (from the road that was just being repaired), a tank truck (on the Belgrade-Zagreb highway in distant 1986), the Federal Government building in the Yugoslav capital (in distant 1968), Volume II of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, the absolute boxing champion of the world in (distant) 1987. (One of the heroes could have been Peter Handke in some passages of *Child Story*, the book I translated into Serbo-Croat in distant 1988.) I felt safe.

So, in the dining room of the *Pension*, at breakfast, I sat with my back turned to a roomful of guests. Three young men in leather jackets, with long greasy hair, who had arrived last night on motorbikes (that

---

lamps glowed white. The bridge had those lateral salients which at that time I looked for in all bridges. The endless flow behind me shook the ground under my feet; I clutched the railing in both hands, until I had transposed the bridge, the wind, the night, the lamps, and the passersby to myself. And I thought: 'No, we are not homeless'.": Handke, *Repetition*, trans. Manheim, 237–238.

"farted" loudly), as if they were tanks—I had run into them in the corridor (last night), they wore helmets on their heads—and, scared, I escaped to the toilet. Now the "boys" were tame, "friendly," they "wished" the waitress "good appetite," one of them even said to everybody in the room "all the best" and "Hi," and, to the girl by the window, "cheers."

The waitress was an unusually stout, I'd say even fat, woman. She walked in a long black wraparound skirt with slits. She kept moving. If she hadn't been a waitress I would have wondered, "What's the matter with her?" As it was, I merely followed her movements through the room. She disappeared, going past us, behind the kitchen doors behind Scott's back, stayed there for a while, came back, this time with her arms full of plates, breadbaskets, jugs with tea and coffee, egg cups and cutlery wrapped in napkins, went past our table again, but, this time, back to the dining room, towards the guests who ate placidly at their tables (like stabled horses before brimful troughs), or patiently waited for their breakfast (like "Chinamen" in "a rice line").

At a table slightly to the left, a stout woman was sitting. Almost indistinguishable from the waitress. The only difference was in a few decorative details on her dress. Obese, (charmingly) "sow-like," at one point she came up to our table, and addressed the waitress just as she was writing out our check for the room and breakfast. I thought I saw double. I looked at Scott. Now, I thought, the newcomer will pounce and strangle the two "tender men" with both arms. Mirrored in Scott's pupils, I saw the other woman too, the waitress: she was pulling us by the ears, slapping our faces, and pressing us to her huge breasts.

We settled the check with the waitress. It was already nine. Light was creeping through the window curtains (like a stray dog through a broken fence). Suddenly, in the aroma of white coffee and cheese I smelled the fresh asphalt of the road, where the "boys" were revving up their engines, about to leave. We rose, slowly, from the table. I turned to face the dining room. It was empty. Only one of the tables had guests, a "happy family": father, mother, two children and, under the table, a dog. They munched in silence. From time to time the man would caress the dog with his foot. At one point, the woman uttered the names of neighboring villages in a low voice: Reipersdorf, Unterbrückendorf, Bruckl, Klein St. Veit, Obertrixen, Völkermarkt, Haimburg, Poppendorf, Zellbach, Pustritz, Rausch, Erlach, Hirschenau, Weissenegg, Lind, St. Kollman, Haberberg, Griffen. One of the children was spitting pieces of unchewed food onto its plate. The other looked in our direction. We walked, huge, tall, like poplars, cities, or

mountains. At one point Scott Abbott turned and looked, triumphantly, at the dog on the floor. I struck up a song that resounded through the hall, and was even multiplied in some of the parts, so that my voice was transformed into a chorus.

I remembered Tanzenberg. It had been late afternoon. To the right of the road that led to the plateau before the entrance to the church portal there had been a group of boy scouts. They seemed utterly reduced in size. There was barely any distance between us. Scott thought that they were "high school students" from the "castle." I concurred with his opinion, though with some reserve, this time unvoiced. I merely empathized with Scott's perceptions. Besides, everything favored my expectations in our search for Handke. Perhaps there existed, throughout this brief "field" trip, a "borderless zone" between Scott and myself. We were together every minute and we experienced every minute "in parallel." Yet, were our experiences identical? As soon as anything occurred, I would immediately see Scott. As soon as I immersed myself in an event or role—in the courtyard of the convent, for instance, I walked between the colonnades softly and alone, imagining a cowled figure behind the corner, a dagger in his hand, or, elsewhere, in a curving corridor, I imagined myself running into two naked nuns in a passionate embrace—I would immediately see Scott and his eyes that looked in the same direction and saw the same images. However, when our gazes met, I realized that his impressions ran in a different direction after all. "Perhaps they were always a step closer to pure thought," I thought. "Or else they shortened and filtered imagination," I wrote in my notebook. True, there was no tangible proof of the difference of our impressions. At a crossroads a man on a bicycle wished us both a "nice day!" which might have sounded as though he had addressed only one of us (for we were indeed as one). In a field we stood and watched boys play soccer, and when the ball flew our way and landed between us, a boy cried, "Return the ball!" (to whom?); and when Scott kicked it back, hitting his shoe against a stone, it was as if I had kicked the ball and hit my shoe against a stone. I even said "Sorry!" to which Scott replied, "That's all right!"—On the other hand, some conversations brought out subtle differences between us. For example, as we strolled round the convent, I said at one point, "There are onions and potatoes in the cellar, therefore, somebody must be living here," to which Scott added, "I imagine Handke 'standing' there in the corner in a posture of 'delicate balance.'" Or, to my statement that, "The nuns seem to have run off to town to a clothing accessories sale," Scott remarked, "I see them as they

make dinner, and one 'stands' by the table chopping parsley, another 'stands' by the cooker stirring the stew in a pot, a third 'stands' in the doorway looking in the direction of the cooker, while a fourth walks into the kitchen saying, 'move away and *stand* there'." So, our positions were quite different after all, I decided, and wrote that down in my notebook. One thing, however, we shared at all times: our conversations were like clothes that you could always take off or change, or an umbrella that you could always fold and put away, or the "beginning" of something "else" that opened beyond "what was said" and extended far and wide in its texture and its course, which formed a world, unequal, though close, to the simultaneously existing other world. Naturally, my sentence, "You have to tell the border guard how long you mean to stay in Yugoslavia, in order to get a visa"—spoken in the context of a situation that we both found ourselves in at the border, around 7 p.m. on 13 May 1989, about to cross into Yugoslavia—was intimately related to his sentence, "In East Germany the border guards were really rude." Both sentences were truthful accounts of actual facts. But whereas I did not worry about Scott at all, knowing that he would certainly get a visa, and worried much more about myself—I expected the guards would interrogate me endlessly and subject me to a "body-search" (in fact, one of them, having stared long at my passport, told me, "Get yourself to that office over there!" in an unpleasant tone)—Scott was afraid that he would not get a visa at all and that he would be forced, at best, to travel under the control and in the company of security agents, which would have jeopardized many things, chief of all our search for the tunnel at Jesenice (from page 1 of Handke's *Repetition*). Scott was white as a sheet. I was white too, as a sheet, but also as the pale and drowsy face of a beautiful woman who was just emerging from the city hospital, having been told the news of her husband's death, still unaware, in these first few drunken-like paces, that she had just become a widow.

[Finally, I also have to say that today, the 16th of May, 1989 (at the end of our journey "to the center of the earth"), the "Congress of the *Raspis*" is actually being held in Belgrade, the (premature) gathering of a tiny group of corresponding Yugoslav authors, which ought to have been preceded by a longer period of mutual correspondence.]

⊛ 17 May 1989
Tübingen

After all, the border guard (who thumbed Scott's passport at length) never looked Scott in the eye, nor did he even check the fidelity of the passport photograph, but (with an angry look on his face, now and then compressed to the ellipse of a murderer's look, or the muzzle of a Doberman pinscher ready to snarl and bark most ferociously) he turned to me, in a voice out of an Alban Berg opera: "Get yourself to that office over there!"

On our way to Tanzenberg from the town of St. Veit a. d. Glan, in the village of Hörzendorf we stood for a while by the little village soccer field, watching a local match. The players run across the field, shouting "here!" At one point the referee raises both arms, the ball whizzes past his head and grazes his ear, the spectators laugh, they sit behind the goal in front of which the goalkeeper walks "back and forth" all the time, upright, never once bends, never pulls up his socks, never adjusts his shorts, stared at by the "girls and boys" who "lounge" on the benches, drinking beer and eating sausages, "eyeing" one another, grinning, giggling, and never for a moment looking at the field or the players, as if the latter played for themselves alone, as if they didn't need an audience at all, or else, as if they needed an audience's presence only, but not its attention, in which case it ceases to be an audience and becomes "friends," "girls," "buddies," "pals," "brothers"; there are two men in front of the beer and sausage stand, their elbows on the counter, "staring" at a chubby girl, the "vendor"; in front of a tree, to the left of the stand, another "team" are "training," in red jerseys, independently of the match being played on the big field, one of the "players" stands by the tree as "goalkeeper," among the "shooters" an older man stands out, with a mustache and in a tracksuit that clings immaculately to his body, he keeps adjusting his clothes, pulls up his shorts with his hands, smoothes his hair, glancing at the benches and tables by the sausage stand where "girls" and "boys" are sitting, as I've already said, while all around him younger "players" are darting "like chickens" or like a "posy," wearing soccer shoes known as "boots," which resemble boxing gloves for the feet, or metal "knuckle-dusters" worn on the hand in gang fights, or "bricks tied to the feet" of the victim to be thrown into a river, or (if we like) "mammoth feet." Scott was standing close to the touch line, ten meters from the corner flag, level with the "penalty spot," where the "goalkeeper" was going back

and forth, upright, never once bending, never pulling up his "socks"; at one point the ball of the "team" that were training by the tree rolled up to Scott; Scott kicked the ball towards the mustached player who was just pulling up his shorts and smoothing his hair with both palms; the girl at the sausage stand looked at Scott with longing, as if spellbound by his technically flawless and accurately directed kick, but also as if she knew that he was an "American"; and I saw in her eyes soft and gentle cleaving to the strong body of a man whose one arm encircles the girl's waist while the other supports a Harley Davidson motorcycle with high handlebars, and before them, across the endless expanse of the prairie, on a background of shimmering bluish-red mountains, the sun, a fiery ball, setting, scatters the brightest and "loveliest" colors; Scott stood by the touch line and "followed the game" attentively; at one point I had the impression that he squatted and touched the ground with his hand, picking up the dust with his fingers, that he wore jeans, tall boots, and a blue (or red) bandanna round his neck; a moment later he said, "Rough game"; I said, "Your sons would like to be here now"; he turned to me (and the sausage stand behind my back, and the "team" that was training between the stand and me); and I saw him looking at me as if I were the stand or "the team training" over there; I suddenly felt like someone "else": I wore a mustache and a sweater of un-dyed wool, my hands were huge, my hips like beech joints, my face furrowed, I was spitting in the grass, kicking the ball sky high, and shouting, "Jump, for fuck's sake!" "Give me the ball, you ape!" "Go on, there!" "The head, the head!" Then I stopped to watch the girls; I moved, slowly, and heavily, towards the goal post, leaned on the crossbar and roared my head off, imitating "jungle howling"; whenever my gaze wandered from the mountain tops of the Karawanken to Scott's eyes, his gaze would wander from my eyes to the mountain tops of the Karawanken; I felt as a man "with no superstructure"; as if I were sitting in an auditorium where "by raising their hands comrades voted to elect a new party secretary, whose candidacy has been unopposed"; I saw myself in front of the TV and watched the "TV news" and quarreled with my family, claiming that what had been "said clearly and in public" bore no relationship to "the actual state of affairs"; I heard reproachful words; I felt the reproachful looks of my nearest and dearest; "You have betrayed us, you have brought us nothing, you are doing nothing tangible for us," I heard; I felt like someone who drives a huge limousine but hasn't got "a red cent" in his bank account; I felt like someone who listens to disco music all day long and "never even reads" the newspaper headlines; I

felt like a man in his "Sunday best" who stands in front of the village church, having just got out of a car, the suitcase in his hand full of million-dinar notes with which he pays for coffee in a restaurant, for mineral water in the station café, cigarettes at the fairground stand, the soccer ball for his child, sold to him by Gypsies in the underground passageway; I wear a straw hat, a sombrero; the shoes are black, "pointed," with a hole in the sole, which I raise as a horse about to be shod. Scott calmly watches my "standing" and "observation"; he is silent, no muscle twitches under his eye; from time to time his lips spread in a serene smile; he shows white teeth, does not grin; his wide-ranging look encompasses both the space before him and the people in the space before the space before him: an expansive landscape, complete with mountains, lakes, and the rain that drizzles, with quiet dignity, and solemnly, so that one has the impression that the weather is sunny today.

We arrived at Klagenfurt around 11. (All this was the day before yesterday, 15 May 1989; I repeat my account of those events; my memories are elastic like dough; the fog, that morning, seems to be dispersing only now.) We stopped at the "Theaterplatz" square.

✠ 18 May 1989

Tübingen

Seen from the street we arrived on, the space is like a huge film screen, semicircular, and also resembles an amphitheater. At one point I felt both as a man returning to his own homeland and as a tourist in a foreign country. The houses are familiar, yet beautiful. I see every detail more clearly than ever, some for the first time "in my life," others for the "hundredth time," and "there's the coat of arms on the facade," I tell Scott in my mind's eye. In reality I step firmly on the accelerator, gently release the clutch, and reverse the car. I park (according to regulations) at the end of the street (neither a boulevard nor a "back street") and we are already entering the square with determined steps. We seem to have just crept onto the terrace in front of the museum building we had been looking for. Tracker-like, Scott "marked" the target with a flash of his eyes. Attuned, like a warrior in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, to all kinds of group movement, I walked, as if following the paths of victory and glory, only a few paces behind Scott. Excited as a randy dog, I entered, through the gate, the hall of the museum: I looked for the toilet at once; I failed to find it; appeased, balanced, with

unconcealed curiosity, I made my way to the exhibition room.

The exhibition could be taken in at a glance. There was little there to drive a real connoisseur of "exact art" to move from painting to painting; instead, the viewer was "required" always to place himself at the vantage points that allowed him to embrace all the individual works in a single (frozen) "look." And even if there was no such "position," one could quite easily imagine a viewpoint such that paintings "beyond one's ken" could not only be imagined but also ordered and harmonized, whereas those who possessed that insane urge to play could also draw imaginary lines: imaginary lines, indicated in geometry by intermittent lines (----), could delineate the invisible remaining part of the rectangle of the room, and it was also possible, by means of imaginary lines (----), to draw the shape of those subtle and secret connections between individual paintings that, "standing" at a vantage point of the kind that I have just described, I, strangely (unable to explain to myself "why"), always observed three at a time, my gaze drifting from the first to the second, on to the third, and then back, encompassing quite clearly the space between the imaginary lines, which was always, of course, triangular. So that, at one point, by means of "imaginary lines," "intermittent" and "curved," like furrows in poor, rocky, calcareous soil, I connected the paintings *Syntagma IV, 23 . . . 31* by Jeffrey Steele, *Four Free Lines Crossing a Rectangle at Twelve Temporal Intervals* by Gianni Colombo, and *Twelve Vertical and Horizontal Progressions* by Richard Paul Lohse. In the process of drawing the "furrows," I saw a farmer too—it could have been my grandfather, Miloš Pantić—with sweaty armpits, breathless, bent-backed (like a camel), his sun-bleached shirt untucked: he drove skinny "cattle" before him: he shouted "Shoo, ox, shoo!" He bent to remove the dry branches that got tangled with his peasant shoes. And I heard the crushing of heavy stones under the plowshares. I saw the plowshares twist on the hard calcareous rock. A moment later I had problems: In an attempt to construct the next triangle I sought the paintings that would "exactly" fit my experiences and, especially, emotions ("experiences" were here crucial!). I searched, carried by the power of "linking intuition" (the ability to string together logically unconnected events that are still subversively contiguous and establish relationships of "kin" in which the "experiential subject" and "construction principle," is both a "moving viewpoint" and a "premonitory instance"). I sought, driven by the "lust for spatial expansion" (a desire to establish a fulcrum in space, an act similar to opening a window or door or poking holes through the newspaper in the middle of reading

and entering, by looking through the hole, into the "beyond of reading" and of the newspaper itself). I sought, driven by "productive horror of the void" (a state of body, and of mind, in which trembling spreads like a rising tempest, turning all the superabundance of life into a hollow vessel that the waves of trembling, shuddering, and horror sink at once, so that the vessel fills up, and the erstwhile exuberance of life, the erstwhile void, becomes an absolute swarm, a thick mass of light and dreaming, a hard and serene sky, and the sloughed off skin of the naked clap of seeing; the state lasts no more than a fraction of a second, an instant; it cannot be expressed; it must be described). I discovered a triangular conjunction. I started from the haphazardly "discovered" *Blue-Red* by Francois Morellet (I think that at the same time I felt the duration of spring, my own body as a phallus that old women danced about, becoming more and more clearly virgins with each round, while out there, in the Theaterplatz, the raindrops were like tiny bees that buzzed gently and let fall warm and balmy drops of sticky honey from their hot proboscises). I took my cue from Henrik Stazewski's *Structure of a Plane*, where, I must say, the warmth of old age was such a primary and corporeal sensation that I turned into my own ancestor, going on to transform myself into my own offspring, so that all three of us—the ancestor, myself, and the offspring—closed the "circle of joy" in the midst of the idyll of field labor, in the ring of soft end-of-day chatter, and, metamorphosed into an old woman sitting on a bench beneath a walnut tree. We told each other fairy stories, the church bell from the steeple roused the waves of dusk, the crickets chirped, a dog barked, the warm smell of manure, lilacs, the only barber shop in the village is only a few houses away towards the crossroads, the chest heaves, I embraced the Trinity, I was Happy and Good, and Whole, and this state lasted a short while only, for I was suddenly yanked (a father and daughter entered the hall at that moment) to the Northern City: it was an exhibition space, cold as a cellar, empty, with marble walls hung with paintings by the same master, familiar and close to me (father, brother, and companion), I heard him call, I felt his head on my shoulder, I saw the Look of the incurably ill, I felt the Twitch of the skinny, shrunken hand and icy fingers of an Artist with no self, an Artist with no paintings of his own, an Artist without Paper and pencil, without Space, he changed Thoughts and Words, driving them, rolling, pushing, and kicking them, in meanders that interlock, yet never really touch, with no meaning, no beginning or end, forever Sketches, endless Labor, Creation and Destruction, and I opened, wide, my eyes, pushed them out

until my gaze came to a halt, looked for a third painting, and that was the final act of my "triangulo-inventive-activity." And my gaze shot out as a ball in a pinball machine. It wandered, bouncing off the walls and paintings, which now turned into cold gravestones (uninscribed). Some paintings were metal partitions of an industrial-waste dump. Others were glass panes on skyscrapers. I couldn't point my gazes in any direction. I could give them no orientation. They moved out of control. I did not "experience." The space expanded and contracted. Desire turned into rage. All internal receptors turned into a "system for the dissolution of systems." I felt a physical *horror vacui*. In the exhibition hall containing the exhibition *Exacta, From Constructivism to Systemic Art 1915-1985*, I looked in vain for Julije Knifer's painting *Meander Tu-A-Bi-Ha-Da I/II 1977*.

19 May 1989

Tübingen

"We are left speechless."

"Indifferent."

"I feel that conversations are superfluous."

"Ever since I saw Tarkovsky's movies . . ."

"The dinar isn't worth the paper it's printed on …"

"Irrational . . . "

"Heroes . . . "

"East, West . . . "

"A prostitute since the age of seventeen . . . "

"He broke into a parked car and stole a leather bag and tools."

"They don't like him. They don't read him much. But they are proud of him."

"I was absolutely plastered."

"She got the award."

"He waited slyly for others to make the first move. Then he would step in as if he were in charge."

"They betrayed the people."

"He copied it all word for word."

"She lay on her back and masturbated."

"On our Republic's anniversary . . ."

"He wasn't pleased . . ."

"There's been no rain for weeks . . . "

20 MAY 1989
TÜBINGEN

To read "the thing," and "the way," "what," and "how," one wants.

Not to reach the goal. To talk about the goal. To be the goal.

First we waited for him at the railway station. People were getting off the train.

21 MAY 1989
TÜBINGEN

In a conversation with me, in 1985, Peter Handke spoke about the difference between remembrance and memory, saying that he preferred "remembrance," which he called "a pleasant state" in which you are "active," a "searcher" . . . .

For three days now, like a "Lonesome Cowboy," I have roamed the mountains and stage sets, searching for Tanzenberg, the bastion of a childhood, the "shelter" of parental pride and "base" for intended conquests . . . . (All that was seven days ago. I am in Tübingen now. This is "Repetition!")

Boy scouts, arranged around the flagpole with a fluttering banner, were (as I have already stressed) a sign of welcome. Only afterwards do I picture—their camp. The field is like a fairground on the outskirts of the town; the boy scouts are like the Hitler-Jugend, like adults disguised as children, children in power, reprisals in miniature, an animated cartoon about landscape and the foreign legion, an ant-like economic system. . . .

The air is unusually clear, and washed out. Clusters of mist, driven by the wind towards the east wing of the castle, merged imperceptibly with the linen hung out to dry, and the entire area of the plateau in front of the church was redolent with fabric softener. And I saw an Opel Kadett, 1.3.1—I, sitting in the front seat, saw it as a silver, smoothly groomed, shining, grey-coated, fleet-footed, gently-leaping, yet-like-a-rocket-in-the-sky, horse. Gently trotting, like an archer in a saddle, I bent the field of vision. Riding a gentle curve, my gaze hit the rear-view mirror. There, with a partisan bomber's bang, which at once quietly resounded across the surrounding hills, I ran into Scott's gaze, which gently melted into the colors of a smile: the purplish-grey mist of sunset; the wind bends blades of grass in the spacious sports grounds;

to the left of the goal where no-one is standing: a fish pond; to the right of the pond boys are practicing, arranged in a line, they shoot, they ram the ball into the vacant goal. We went down a narrow path amid snails, like letters of an enchanted alphabet, their horns pointing to all the four corners of the world and all the intermediate points. "Do you know Peter Handke?" was our question. The boys replied with sneers. One even opened his mouth. He didn't choke, he didn't belch, he didn't shout. He merely breathed out hard and kicked the ball fiercely into the goal. We enter the goal area, approach the goal posts, touch the crossbar, Scott swings from the taut net. We are in the goal. There is whizzing from all sides, like a battlefield. We talk. We kick. We shout. "These are not Tanzenberg boys!" we say in unison. "These are not Tanzenberg boys!" Scott says. "These are scamps!" I say. "These are scamps!" we say in unison. "Wags!" I say. "Wags!" Scott says.

Evening falls. The horizon changes colors. First it is Dark-Green. After a while Blood-Red appears. Dark-Blue comes on somewhat later. Then Black descends, solemnly, like a cape. "So, that's Night," I said to Scott. She threatened to creep into the corridors of the monastery building. As if dressed in transparent robes. She moved soundlessly up stairs. Her face was white, quiet, soft, and enticing. I slid my tongue across her lips. I felt her breath on my cheek. "Night" followed us, joined us, and stayed with us.

And the next day, on the way to Tanzenberg, fog caught in the tree branches here and there.

The road led through a picturesque landscape. Women in white coats emerged from solitary houses on hilltops and in meadows. They looked like doctors. They emerged, white-coated, mostly from stables, where they had just milked the cows, and they wore white coats—"for reasons of hygiene!" I said aloud to Scott, whom I pictured as a farmer who had forgotten to wash his hands before milking the cows, but remembered, afterwards, that the milk would not be drunk by himself or his household anyway, but by strangers in the city, so he mixed it with water and sold it to the cooperative, the local authority, or a company that buys products in bulk, and, on second thought, decided that he hadn't got all that much out of it, for the price was set by Me, chairman of the city's economic board . . . . Scott calmly drove along the winding road that threaded its way between fruit trees and white milestones.

Two kilometers from the monastery we overtook two nuns. They carried plants they had picked: herbs, vegetables, twigs. They walked

on the left, as the regulations say they should: facing the vehicles. They wore black robes. I didn't feel their presence physically. Yet they were present in my mind. (In my soul? Well, it wasn't physically that I felt them!)

We parked in the same place as the previous day.

We walked round the castle.

We stopped in certain places.

We stood, talking.

We walked, silently.

One of the wings of the building branched into several houses that had been "built onto it," which reminded me of primary school. It was, in fact, a grammar school. The additional wing: a student hostel. In one of the rooms someone was obviously on the phone. Hard rock was heard from the next room. For an instant I thought I was merely entering one of the many discos. Out of the corner of my eye I registered details that reminded me of "old churches," "warehouses," "caves," "wells" . . . .

From the room whence telephone voices came there suddenly "shot out" a young man in a red parka. He vanished in the direction of the boy scout camp.

Stacked behind the hostel—"a pile of wood." In a shed, "things" are scattered "all over the place." A "shovel" lies behind an upturned wheelbarrow. The rake that leans on a tree by the shed is tall; it reaches all the way to a fork in the branches where an old "straw hat" hangs from a nail, its front frayed to a "hole" through which Scott sees a butterfly and exclaims, merrily, "Look, a butterfly!"

Looking from the shed towards the entrance of the monastery, you see it clearly: a large mottled cat drags itself along. Its tail is curved, and the head, like an extension of the body, which it actually is, points to a bowl placed by the wall, where the tips of black shoes can be seen on the trampled earth, beneath the hem of a faded blue habit, tied with a chain up there, at the waist, gathered in folds further up, at the breast, its top, around the head, extending into a white wimple. Asked whether she knows Handke, the nun says, "Yes!" She couldn't tell us more about him, but, "There are people," she says, "who know all about that."

The cat pushed around the bowl into which the old woman poured bones, chicken necks, feet, offal . . . from a plastic bag. Suddenly I realized that nuns lived like everybody else. I turned towards the hill that rose, right behind the shed, fronting the back of the monastery building. I saw two nuns there. They were the same nuns we'd driven

past in our car only minutes before. They had just arrived. Their arms were full of: wild flowers, twigs, sprigs of herb, and heads of lettuce. Behind them in the picture a mild slope rose up. At the top of the little hill stood a shack and a greenhouse. In front of the latter, vegetable beds. They stretched between rows of plants. A small group of people stood in the distance.

We went through the space between the shed and the back of the monastery. We ran into the nuns. We were unable to avoid them, and they were unable to avoid us. Asked if they knew Handke, they replied in unison, "Of course!" "What kind of a man is he?" we asked in unison. "Strange!" they said. One of the women seemed to speak "for all the others." As if repeating the opinion of everyone else. For example: she stated that Handke's book *Wunschloses Unglück* (my translation of it has been published by *Decije novine*, who entitled it *Horror vacui*) had been "unfavorably received" at the monastery. She didn't say that she agreed with this opinion, but she didn't reject it either. The other woman—let us call her, also, an "old woman"—was left out. She kept trying to join in the conversation, but with no success. In her hand she held a sprig of some herb and a twig. (The first woman—another "old woman"—held a head of lettuce and a bunch of wild flowers in her hand.) "Are these wild flowers?" Scott asked. The old woman replied, in the affirmative: "Yes, these are wild flowers!" addressing both Scott and the old woman with the cat, but not the old woman with the twig. And then I felt a powerful urge not to disturb her in her quiet benevolence. The woman—who reminded me irresistibly of my grandmother—suddenly spoke out most clearly: "In that house, up there (she pointed her finger towards the top of the hill), lives a man who knows a lot about Handke!" We turned to look at the hill. "The man, however, is away!" said the first old woman. The other old woman merely looked at the front door. The old woman with the cat sank deeper still into the bowl, where the cat was devouring the few remaining shreds of bone, feet, and offal. Scott looked at a branch of the tree in front of us. I gazed sadly at the cat. I felt pain. I thought slowly. Then with lightning speed. I watched horror movies. I read books on conspiracies. I didn't answer the phone. I felt harassed from all directions. Still, I didn't cry.

We parted politely. Smiling.

A bit later, as my finger touched the doorbell at the entrance to the monastery wing—Scott photographed me at close range, then came to the door and rang the bell once more—the Second Old Woman appeared again, now with only two sprigs of herb between her fingers.

She was unlocking the door. She opened it wide. She said quietly, benevolently: "Everybody is at church."

Scott sits at my desk. He writes. From time to time he gets up, takes books down from the shelves. He writes down some of the titles in a grey notebook. He takes some books with him to the desk. He stacks some books on the cabinet.

I sit in "Scott's room." I write. From time to time I get up, take books down from the shelves. I write down some of the titles in a brown leather-bound notebook. I take some books with me to the desk. I stack some books on the cabinet. I stack Bruce Chatwin's books apart, one on top of the other. Then I pile three books by Ernst Jünger on top of them. But, only moments later, I return Jünger's books to the shelf, and add to the pile the few books by Kenneth White that I own. Moments later, I place all the books by Robert Walser next to the Chatwin-White pile, and turn them into another pile. I immediately add to it all my books by Handke. On top of them I place Segalen. On top of Segalen, Fulton's picture books. On top of Fulton, Mandić. On top of Mandić, Brinkmann. On top of Brinkmann, Jünger again. And so forth.

Last night the Swiss poet Jürg Beeler arrived in Tübingen. The man has had a collection of poetry, *Tag, Maulschele, Tag*, published by *Ammann-Verlag* of Zürich. He won a prize for the book. He arrived by train. After protracted deliberations, he decided not to stay with me but with Tilo Klaiber.

At one point I thought I was sitting in the shed in front of the back entrance of the monastery. Instead of the cat, I saw Handke, who sat on the bare ground, wore hiking boots, and propped himself on a hiking staff. He laughed and spoke softly: "I am a profoundly . . . a thoroughly dialectical writer. That is part of writing. . . . Instead of dialectics one might say: weaving: to-and-fro. . . . It's the to-and-fro that one thinks through. . . . In the thinking through of the to-and-fro, the delight of storytelling emerges . . . . Do you get my meaning?"[11]

[11] Cf. Peter Handke and Žarko Radaković, "Razgovor"/"Conversation," *Književna kritika* 1 (1986); reprinted in: Peter Handke, *Spori povratak kuci/Slow Homecoming* (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novne, 1990).

"Children have an especially developed sense of repetition."

"Roads, even when they aren't circular, are repetitions."

"Repetition is slow progress."

In a sanitarium at Steinhof, near Vienna, I listened to a woman who kept repeating the words "Eine Verstellung."

Every morning, as I walk to work hurriedly, breathing seems to me a horrid repetition. . . . Later, on my way back home, breathing is the repetition of the loveliest passages from the loveliest operas. My motion is ballet. My steps are rhythm. And my thoughts: a repetition of the world's history.

✠ 22 MAY 1989

TÜBINGEN

"The homesickness of my years at the seminary was a thing of the past" (*Repetition*, 46) . . . "I came to feel at home while on the move" (*Repetition*, 43) . . . "the glossy-black wooden ticket office floor; the roaring of the cast-iron stoves; the banging of doors; the flapping of posters against the bus-ports outside; the trembling of a starting bus, the crackling and banging of another that was parking; the blowing of dust, leaves, snow, and newspapers through the windy street; faint yellow . . . high up in the trees; the cracked supports of the ports; the rusting sheet-metal signs indicating destinations" (*Repetition*, 45).

"'That is enough action for me,'" Scott said.

"'No need for anything more to happen,'" I said.

"'This in itself is Plenty,'" he said.

"'Here is the 'hub of events','" I said.

"True, 'in a story' 'the hero' can 'be' 'someone who claims to be God, or an idiot who, ridiculed by all when he got in, avenged himself during the night ride by steering the bus off a precipice,'" Scott said.

"Yes," I said.

"Well, yes," Scott said.

"The hero can also be someone who is never detached from the observer, but always identifies with him and approves, until a moment comes when he becomes 'it,' and hatred is there instead of distance . . . . Afterwards he remembers 'it' with some pangs of conscience, and conscience is there instead of identification . . . And he runs away from 'it,' and from 'himself,' and from everything,'" I said (or merely narrated).

"Once upon a time there were 'peasant women," Scott started narrating (or saying). "Their 'movements' 'around the house,' 'from spot to spot,' 'resembled walking.' 'They walked from the table to the cooker, from the cooker to the kitchen cupboard, from the cupboard back to the table.'"

"This walking within a constricted space begins with 'standing,' doesn't it?" I said.

"It is the swift sequence of hurried striding, not standing on-tiptoe, rushing from place-to-place, shifting from foot-to-foot, turning round and further-hurried-striding," Scott was saying.

"Once upon a time there was a man who 'sat in a circle with similar men'," I started narrating. "They were telling jokes," I went on, "The man always showed his approval by laughing, yet every time a sigh too late," I continued from what I had already said. "He understood what was being said, but couldn't see the point of the joke," I went on. "He had no sense of ambiguity and allusion," I continued from what I had already said. "He took other people's stories quite literally," I went on. "During brief moments of silence you could see in his eyes that he experienced the narrated bits as very serious indeed," I continued from what I had already said. The story was developing in Triads. It went on and followed from earlier segments. It spun itself out. It drew in the listener, who tumbled in as if standing "where three borders meet." (At a crossing? traveling? on a bridge?)

"That's exactly how I once lounged about with my pals," Scott followed on.

The wind bent the huge tree before us, every leaf moved separately, the branches seemed to breathe, some seemed to whisper . . .

The road to Griffen led through a landscape that we crossed, for the first time ever, yet, seemingly familiar . . .

There is a quiet place at the entrance to "The Dream." It is fringed with a line of variously colored houses. A garden with fruit trees in front of each house. Soft mown grass beneath the trees. A woman with bared breasts lolls in the sun beneath a fruit tree. A cat with its prey in its maw. The river runs silently. The noise of children on the other bank. Silence. Water splashing. A man sits at a table and yawns. His mouth stretches out and turns into the rim of a soup cauldron from a hospital kitchen. As if there will now be a general rush towards him, to start lunch. He slurps some soup, then pours it from his spoon over the plate, which produces a tiny rattling noise. A bone jumps out of the pot, straight into the mouth of a dog, which, abruptly, stops barking.

Heaven's gate is the window of a shed through which we see logs scattered over the floor planks. Footsteps in the dark are the soft shuffling of sandals. The wind rustles, drawing the curtains over the window, whose pane suddenly drops and the lavish picture of a moment ago vanishes. Heaven is not an easy place. At one point, it seems, unbearable. The man in shorts is, perhaps, a news vendor who was sacked yesterday. And, we think, he will now be metamorphosed, and multiplied, and he will spread out, as a long procession of demonstrators (brandishing hoes, scythes, pitchforks).

In the evening we sat, five of us, and quietly ate. For a while we talked. Jürg Beeler, the Swiss poet, repeated once again these significant words: "Lemons are a silent kind of citrus fruit. I have slept with bananas. My cat meowed jealously all the time."

✠ 23 MAY 1989

TÜBINGEN

It is Tuesday, 11 o'clock. Jürg Beeler sits at my table, to my right. Scott sits at a table behind my back. I sit in front of Scott, to the left of Jürg.

I am propped on my elbows; Scott, too, is propped on his elbows; Jürg is propped on his elbows as well.

We write.

Scott's pen is white. Jürg's pen is green. My pen is black.

The notebook that Scott is writing in right now is small, grey. The notebook that Jürg is writing in right now is white, large. My notebook is medium-sized and brown.

Last night's conversation at Pfeffingen pointed to the possibility of a "society of readers." There we were: Scott Abbott, Jürg Beeler, Zorka Papadopolos, Tilo Klaiber, Žarko Radaković. Under discussion were Handke, Wenders, and Storytelling. Abbott agreed with Beeler. Radakovic agreed with Papadopolos. Klaiber agreed with Abbott, but not with Beeler. Beeler agreed with Papadopolos, but not with Radaković. Scott was in his element. It was a beautiful warm evening beneath a vine in the garden. Not a particle stirred in all nature. Everything merged so gently into One. Only a few details of objects, of the protagonists' faces, and of technical objects were enlarged and clear.

Early afternoon. Scott left a few minutes ago. On the desk in my room there are books, crammed folders, a pencil sharpener, an ashtray,

a calendar, and two letters from Scott.

Dear Jürg,

I sought your gaze at Pfeffingen last night. I found it resting on the tip of the collar of Tilo Klaiber's shirt.

Pure drops of select thoughts trickled down your cheeks.

At one point I thought you were one of those who might once have gone for a walk with Robert Walser. I was afraid that you might "end up" in a madhouse yourself. You were somehow tired. "Melancholy," I whispered, realizing that you yearned for "something else." I knew that you were devoted. Yet possessive too. And that you were capable of hatred. As if you were at your most alive when alone. (I was certain: You missed your wife!)

Dearest Zorica,

the moment you got up from the chair and stepped towards the rose bush in bloom I saw your body outlined beneath the sumptuous skirt in bright African colors. Your skin seemed to be part of me. Smooth, shiny, ever-firm. It smelled of your breath and I loved and cherished your objections to the great author Peter Handke, whom I loved in an entirely different way. Your thoughts were clear and exact. And your smile more limpid than the wine from the south to which you belonged more than the south itself. You sang like Senegalese shepherds. I covered you as you slept like a lion cub. I looked at you, I cried, I laughed, and told you the latest jokes. And in Scott's face, which looked at you with the look of a child, I saw a limpid and serene sky.

My dear Tilo,

your affection for Ulrich, Klaus, and Miroslav Mandić is proof of your love for me, who has felt your love for them for years. I stretched and spread like the linden tree in front of the Central Library. You didn't like Handke. Then you suddenly came to like him. And as we were shopping for stereos together, I saw you grow excited over a NAD amplifier, just as I once did, reading *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*. I never ceased to believe in your epistolary thirst for fresh writing. You were discreet even when you shouted. You were noisy even when you slept. I loved the way you sat in a chair, your arms folded on your knees. I loved the way you ate bread. I liked the apples on your table. Didn't we use to meet unexpectedly in the unlikeliest parts of town. Sometimes we would walk into old buildings and admire

the waxed wooden staircases. You were everybody's loyal friend. You could read aloud.

Dear Scott,

my mother too—like Gregor Kobal's—is descended from rebels. A remote ancestor of mine, Mladen Pantić, had amassed a fortune by looting before he crossed the Sava, fleeing from Macva to the Pannonian plain. He settled on the slopes of Mt. Sainte-Victoire. His son, Miloš, my grandfather and great-great-grandfather, later a prosperous farmer, spent his life talking about buried treasure, yet never looked for it. They said that Mladen had kept the secret till his very last breath, and took it with him to the grave. "In the stubble field, beneath the old pear,"' were his last words, which remain an enigma. The plain still extends as far as the eye can see. Only the odd line of poplars in front of a farm obstructs the gaze that ranges over infinity.

Dear Jürg,

at the baker's today, before my very eyes, they unloaded rolls that, in my nose, smelled of gunpowder.

Dear Scott,

in the field today, I gathered the hay that you cut on 19 May 1989 and piled it into small stacks. It has been dry for days.

Dear Miroslav,

I've had no news of your movements. Do get in touch.

Dear Dragan,

I read your piece in NIN. It's fine.

Dear Peter,

according to information that I've only had from Maruša, you ought to be in Greece. I have read Bruce Chatwin. I never stopped thinking of you.

The woman who is now hanging out the wash is my neighbor.

Eight years ago, we lived in another high-rise, but on the fourth floor.

Dear Peter,

I've been reading Ponge, Bove, and Char, in your translation.

A sentence from one of Nietzsche's books returns me to *Repetitions*.

✠ 26 May 1989

Tübingen

It said somewhere in a book that the collapse of Austria was no other than the expected consequence of the workings of the Austro-Hungarian spirit of "irresponsibility and slackness"; the product of numerous "shallow" and "inconsistently carried out" jobs; "insufficient severity"; "lack of motivation in defending one's own integrity"; "Athenian cunning," true, "plenty of temperament," and "a wealth of hedonistic experience"; nevertheless, "unpreparedness" in "times of crisis."

As I sat in a café in Klagenfurt (it was 14 May 1989), I felt on my face the man who served me. His "slackness" could easily turn into "patient waiting." I imagined myself as a boorish, drunken man, an ill-mannered man. The man sent a few reproachful looks in my direction. I spat on the floor. The man spoke a warning word aloud. I threw my plate at the window. I swore. Only then did the man call the bouncers . . . .

In another country, in a situation in which I had behaved exactly the same way, I was taken straight to the police station, without a single word. The man there never budged, never batted an eyelid. He was even polite all the time.

There was once a man whom public opinion, and even his friends, always declared to be stupid. He always reacted "without thinking"; while others kept silent, watched, waited, assessed the situation and, above all, thought. The man's reactions were usually wrong. The reactions of others, the product, no doubt, of lengthy preparation by means of thinking, were always "right."

✠ 28 May 1989
Tübingen

There were glasses on a wall, ranged on shelves resembling towers and pillars. Above the brandy glasses there was an oblong vessel filled with a turbulent viscous liquid, in which the color blue spread and rolled like a wave. From below, a thick shaft of light, like inverted rain, undermined the liquid with a clarity that burst above the source of the light, reminiscent of agitatedly outflowing blood.

On the table are a beer glass, a salt cellar, a container with napkins and drinking straws, an ashtray, and a can of condensed milk, as well as the notebook in which I now write these letters with this pen.

The thought of Scott Abbott pains me. There is always the image of a man in an impeccably ironed shirt and precisely creased pants, with a clear expression on his face. White teeth. Ears neither small nor large. Every hair in its proper place. The idea that he is now sitting in his little room in Frankfurt, engrossed in the anthroposophic writings that he uses merely as material for his novel, draws me further away, towards the exhibition pavilion where *Prospect* is staged, and where a *Triptych post historicus* by Braca Dimitrijević quietly resides.

✠ 3 June 1989
Tübingen

So, we arrived in Griffen around noon (that was on 15 May 1989, this is a Repetition). First we roamed, driving slowly along the narrow streets. The place lies on low ground, bordered, on one side, by a huge, steep cliff. The houses start on the very foothills of the mountain. The hilly part of town is called Altenmarkt. It lies south of the road, which is the main street as well. Both sides of the road spill out and merge with other streets. The ground has been evened out. And while the main street is noisy, smaller side streets and those that run parallel with it are quiet. "This place could be like something in the States,"' I told Scott. "This place could be somewhere in the American Midwest," Scott confirmed.

✠ 6 June 1989
Tübingen

The thought of Handke does not feel strange and remote. But the thought of Griffen is beginning to feel "strange and remote."

✠ 15 June 1989
Tübingen

I dreamt last night of Tomaž Šalamun. He was a huge, burly man, with cropped hair, dependable. His children were there too, Maruša, Zorica, and my father. We were all casually dressed. Tomaž and my father wore grey suits. Yet the color of the fabric was closer to a brownish-petrol-blue. Both were suntanned.

When I woke up my first thought was "Andraž Šalamun." Tonight I am to talk with Toza Vlajković. On the subject of Handke. For Radio Belgrade's "202" channel.

✠ 10 May 1991
Cologne

On 28 June 1989, the sixth centenary of the battle of Kosovo was observed at Kosovo polje, in the autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija, in the republic of Serbia, in Yugoslavia. The masses gathered on the broad expanse of the plain of Kosovo to hear a commemorative address by their President, Slobodan Milošević.

Anselm Weidner, journalist of the German radio station Süddeutsche Rundfunk, and I, his interpreter, arrived in Priština on 28 June 1989. (The text that I reproduce here was written on 29 June 1989, and I copy it here today, by pen; in other words, I repeat it.) After a crazy journey at breakneck speed from Tübingen to Ljubljana, from Ljubljana to Zagreb, from Zagreb to Belgrade, we completed the lap from Belgrade to Priština too.

At Ljubljana, having arrived in a Toyota car, we missed the plane to Belgrade and boarded the plane to Zagreb where, after a bit of wrangling, we "missed the opportunity" to talk to the People in Charge in the building of Radio Zagreb (for the People in Charge "weren't there at all"; for "every time I am in Zagreb I lose my temper over the

lack of information"), so that, after a conversation with the obliging lady who worked in the office of the "Aviogenex" company, we walked listlessly down Amruš street, whose meandering course took us unfailingly to the house number thirteen.

At Julije Knifer's, the atmosphere was "cozy." The dog gnawed at one of my shoes. Nada was coating eggplants with bread crumbs. Ana was unaffected and sweet. Knifer, as always in similar situations, held his joined hands at the nape of his neck. Those were moments of pure feeling, of clear looks and inner peace. Even the voice of Slobodan Milošević on television was slightly more restrained.

Belgrade. It's as if, amidst powerful emotions and evident family ties, we have been reduced to operatives and operations. Those were hours of increasingly frequent conversations with Anselm Weidner, the hours of a "businesslike" Anselm, the hours we spent in an office in the airport building, and the hours that we worked in the office of the "Adria" company, where we made several expensive phone calls to Hamburg, Stuttgart, Munich, Bremen, Saarbrücken, and Cologne.

Priština. A fog-wrapped evening. Utter darkness and silence. The smell of earth and stale fruit. In one place I saw a man walking along the road who tottered, ran into a group of men who grabbed him by his upper clothes and dragged him into the dark. The bus that runs from the airport to the city is driven by an elderly man. At one point a young man gets up from the seat next to mine and informs the driver that he had forgotten his luggage at the airport. The driver's reply is lost in the noise of tanks that roll down the road at that very moment.

Before the Grand hotel, downtown. A group of young men, Serbs, is protesting against an illegally parked bus (the driver is Albanian). At one point a scuffle breaks out, which ends with the enraged young men breaking into the bus and dragging out the driver. Shouting. Oaths.

In front of the hotel several Albanians offer us a taxi. We leave. In the direction of a cheaper hotel, the "Peony of Kosovo." (It is now 29 June 1989, and the text was written at breakfast that same day; this is a repetition.) Anselm has a double serving of breakfast. (It's cheap.) In the hall of the hotel we run into people from Belgrade Radio and TV. (They address us in voices that sound like a news bulletin.) One of them suggests we meet up again in Belgrade.

The newsstand across the street from the hotel garden. Sitting

under a chestnut tree. A quick perusal of the papers.

The shoeshine boy asked me for double the money, because he had "used different colors of shoeshine."

Taxi driver. A fleshy, heavy man, but not fat. He offers to drive us to Kosovo polje. We reject the offer. We make for the building of the provincial government. Security checks at the entrance. First a face scrutinizes us through the glass of the doorman's cubicle. Our passports are taken away. Two men go up the stairs. They return after a few minutes. Then another two arrive. Everybody looks at us, moving hurriedly. The faces are not smiling. Nor are they stern. All the time I look Anselm in the eye. He looks around, bewildered. When I thought they would throw us out, they lead us away.

Stairs. Corridors. Rooms. Doors. In a medium-sized room we sit down in armchairs. There is a bronze relief of Josip Broz on the wall. A door opens. Marija Gaši steps into the room, placing a soft, plump leg on the carpet. "A fine-looking woman,"' I think. Expensively dressed, I notice. She orders fruit juice for us, fruit juice and coffee for herself. The room is padded. A picture of Josip Broz hangs on the wall. The voice of Marija Gaši is unusually coquettish. Charming movements, elegant gestures, a dignified look on her face. The woman feels important. She communicates the feeling to us. And I turn to Anselm, I notice that he feels important too, and he gives me a meaningful look, as if he could see that I too feel important. Marija Gaši said that "Kosovo hasn't lost its autonomy." Dryly, in an utterly controlled manner, yet in a ringing voice, she spoke of clashes in which "twenty-four people died." She rose from her chair several times. She returned to her place, lowering her soft and succulent body. She seemed to want to step towards Anselm. I almost felt like going out of the room and leaving them alone. What kept me nailed to my chair was the sight of a heavy cut-glass ashtray on the table and the weight of Tito's figure in bronze relief, which pressed so hard on the wall that I thought it would burst through it and that through the crack we would be able to see Đilas, Kardelj, Ranković, and Kidrić. Anselm crossed his legs, pouted his lips, and twitched his mustache. Marija said, in a charming voice, that she "loved Slobodan Milošević." I imagined myself writing this down "word for word" in my notebook. I kept my hands crossed on my knees. I watched Marija's heaving breasts. With measured words, and in a warm voice, she spoke. She didn't know "exactly how many people attended yesterday's rally at Kosovo polje," for "the celebration did not take place at the stadium,"' where "you always know how many people

are gathered "or you can at least "have a more definite impression" of their numbers. "How many Albanians are there in Kosovo"? She again couldn't exactly tell us, but it was almost certain that "the figure was close to 90 per cent." She said that demonstrators had "thrown stones at the police." Some were "even armed." (That had been, she said, in March 1989.) "The police never immediately reacted by shooting," she said. Anselm twitched his mustache, frowned, laid his hand on his knee, scratched his chin with the other hand, and plucked a horsehair from the seat, whose springs tinkled softly. "But the police had to return the demonstrators' fire," she said. She also said that we were "too interested" in matters of security and "too little" in economic ones. "That's right," I thought. So, rather than banging the table with my fist and spitting out harsh words across the back of the office chair: "How many enterprises were solvent in the first quarter?" "How much has been produced for export this year?" "To what extent do other republics participate in production?" "Are there privately-owned enterprises here?" "What about standards?"' "What about wages?" "Are idle enterprises being closed down!" "Screw all this expense-account spending!" "Fuck the factories that are opened only to increase employment figures on paper!' "Fuck all this hysteria!" "Screw reason!" "Screw work!" "Screw plain facts!" "Screw awareness of one's own potential!" "Get your ass off to the fields, where peppers grow like grass and pile up before the houses like stones after a major earthquake!" "Tiny shops, sprouting up like mushrooms," "packed pastry shops," "ice cream," "the noise of merriment," "frescoes glittering in monasteries," "tobacco leaves fanned out like lungs," "tractors," "tourist coaches," "huge bunches of grapes fall out of overloaded trucks, on which groups of hens immediately converge, pecking and performing ballet steps," "flocks of sparrows descend on the potato fields, to devour pests collectively," "thousands of workers, with hoes and spades across their shoulders, march as one and sing marching songs that resound like the sirens of hundreds of buses carrying hundreds of thousands of soccer fans," "millions of ants in orderly lines are conquering new fields of endeavor, new markets, new areas of manufacturing and intellectual activity," "swarms of bees are reforming the economic system and boosting the workers' zeal with their buzzing," "while the army and police, composed of wolves, snakes, mosquitoes, and spiders, suddenly turn into dogs, cats, ducklings, and ladybirds and they all doze placidly together on the grass before a well of clear water." Marija Gaši crossed her legs discreetly. Her short skirt rode up a bit towards the hips, revealing a

sumptuous thigh, clearly delineating the knee of a plump leg that, together with the large and shapely breasts, made for a figure of exotic harmony and flavor. She spoke flawless French, and English. I wrote down her sentences, perfect, in my notebook, enchanted, feeling Anselm's breathing as the gentle breeze and springtime twittering of birds at Kosovo polje, six hundred years ago.

Right now we are sitting in the garden of the "Peony of Kosovo" hotel. (This was on 29 June 1989. That was when I wrote these lines in my notebook, bound in dark-brown calfskin. This book is called *Repetitions*. It is being written by my friend Scott and myself. And today is 11 May 1991. In other words, I am copying the story of Kosovo polje into the book called *Repetitions*.) The street is unusually busy. Many people, very different. The Albanians always walk towards a definite goal. The Serbs mostly sit. Heavy and immobile, they radiate their massive energies that seem to trace the walkers' paths in loud conversations, deep voices, resolute thoughts, heavy words, long mouthfuls and great gulps at the dining table. "A complex life,"' Anselm says at one point. "It's a life with no pre-established patterns,"' he goes on, rolling a cigarette and looking relaxed in a way that is entirely unfamiliar to me. "The Balkans are a chaos without iteration, entropy, or mirrors," I said, "simply, a mess." I went on, "and I find it hard to think in your language here," I concluded. "The German mentality is a mentality of horror," Anselm said. "What do you mean,"' I asked. "The pressure of a stone on every cell," I said. "Chaos is always a product of the influence and interference of other systems of thought and models of life," I said. "I find it hard to think of all this in my language, which is now yours too," he said and, suddenly, asked with determination, "is Priština Jerusalem?" At that moment I remembered a woman on the plane from Belgrade to Priština, who sat uptight throughout the flight, expecting the explosion of a time bomb and our shared death.

Meanwhile the following took place:

The obese cabby drove us to Kosovo polje. On the way there he talked, and said the following: "You see, there, that rally that was, there, that was, a million people there, a million and a half, so, as they say, for example, there wasn't a single Albanian, maybe a few, there wasn't, ten per cent, no Albanian, very much, there was some, and why there was, because, for example, we Albanians, when we like, you know, the picture of Tito, but there was no picture of Tito, you know, only Slobo, Slobodan, and, you know, soon as there's no picture of Tito, what can

you do, this is Tito's Yugoslavia, right, it's Tito's Yugoslavia, you know, I, why should I go when there's no picture of Tito, we Albanian, we gonna follow Tito, what Tito said, we're gonna . . . ." I sat in the back seat of the limousine. Anselm sat in the front seat, next to the driver. I looked between the driver and Anselm, towards the plain where the road vanished in perspective, shifting my gaze from left to right, from Anselm's face to the driver's, and back. All the time, the driver drove half-facing me. I asked him: "Right, tell me, what do you think are the real problems, here in Kosovo, I mean, not just yesterday, yesterday there was this celebration . . . ." The driver immediately took up my words: "Yup. Six hundred years . . . ." I immediately took up his words: "How many people were there yesterday?" The driver said: "I guess, 'bout a million, million, sure." I asked: "Weren't there two million?" The driver said: "No, there weren't." I asked: "What do you think have been people's problems here, in recent years." The driver said: "Well, you know, for me, I had no work six years, and I got friends of mine who had no work ten years, and when you got no work, you know, you bury your family, or what." Turning to me, who was sitting in the back, Anselm said: "Frag mal ihn, ob diese Feindschaft, von der immer im Ausland geredet wird, zwischen Serben und Albanern, wirklich gibt." I said to the driver: "So, you think the problems here are mainly economic." The driver was silent and drove on without looking at either myself or Anselm. I said: "And about the Serbs, you know, Serbs and Albanians, conflicts, that kind of thing, do they exist." The driver turned round and said: "Well, look, you know, we never touch anyone, we Albanians, you know, we, never touch anyone. They, you know, soon as they're out of school they get work, you know, and we wait ten years. You tell me, you know, is that fair or not." The driver fell silent and gazed over the steering wheel. A muted silence seemed to reign for a while. Only the noise of the automobile engine was heard. The sun was so bright that its color turned to Red and Orange. Anselm's nose was red too. His voice, too, grew darker. He said: "Frag mal ihn weiter . . . Die offizielle Zahl der Toten ist vier und zwanzig . . . ." I said at once: "He wants to know, how many dead, dammit, at the demonstrations, does anybody know for sure." The driver said curtly: "Well, about that, I'm sure I don't know, I don't know." I went on immediately: "It's officially known, they said officially, twenty-four or twenty-five, is that right." The driver answered curtly: "Well, I don't know nothing about that." I went on immediately: "But surely some people were killed." The driver replied curtly: "I don't know. I don't know about that." I went on: "And about the conflicts that take place

around here, are they between the police and demonstrators, or between the Serbs and Albanians." The driver said: "Well, they demonstrated, I, they said, they demonstrated, they just had a picture of Tito and wanted their rights, and they really didn't do nothing, you know, they, nothing, they wouldn't stop. That kind of thing."

It was a slow conversation rather than a long one, very similar to the road we drove along. The heat outside was great and the wind wafted it in through all the four open windows. Burnt earth, "mown grass,"' "cinders thrown over the wheat,"' cornfields in the distance, "trampled" for the most part. At the end of the horizon, mountain tops, which resembled both walls and the clouds that continued them. All the time I felt as if I wasn't in Yugoslavia at all. All the time I kept thinking of Van Gogh's paintings.

At Kosovo polje we sat for a long time in a restaurant. We ate. The interior of the restaurant was ornate. The waiter took unusually long to serve us. Tito's picture hung exactly above the glass rack. A pair of boxing gloves hung on another wall. The head of a dark-skinned man could be seen below them. "A Gypsy," Anselm said. The room had one glass wall, looking out onto a tiny square. Just beyond the wall, on a little verandah with tables and chairs, two policemen sat at a table, their backs to the glass wall, rifles slung from their shoulders. They sat leaning against the glass wall. In front of them, on the verandah, a group of people were standing. They had come seeking shelter from the pouring rain. The people stood in various attitudes. Some rested on sticks, hoes, spades. Others were propping up full sacks. A third group merely stared into the distance. And a fourth at the sky. All had their backs turned to the policemen, who observed their bodies with calm looks. Anselm and I, sitting at a table in the restaurant right behind the glass wall, watched the back of the policemen's heads. All the time I had the impression that someone was watching me from behind. I turned round and saw the waiter: He stood leaning against the wall and looked me in the eye.

Through a gap between the bodies of the people on the verandah I suddenly saw a grocery store across the street. In front of the store crates with fruit and vegetables were piled: tomatoes, peaches, pears, apricots, plums, and lettuce. The grocer bustled constantly about the crates, kept a watchful eye on them as if they were children, moved the fruit from one end of the crate to the other. He pottered around, never stopping in his motion. And he didn't look like someone who would sit, say, in the restaurant across the street and order food and a bottle

of wine and eat at length and drink and talk in a deep voice. He looked like someone who would work ceaselessly and die on his feet.

We went into the grocery store. It was a dark, narrow room from whose shadows there suddenly emerged the shapes of brightly colored objects. Through the store window you could see the fruit and vegetable crates outside, and before them a huge puddle was spreading in the roadway, fed by water from a burst main. The puddle was observed from across the street by the people on the verandah of the restaurant, and between their bodies you could see the eyes of the policemen, who sat there leaning against the glass wall of the eatery, watching the people's bodies, while the ends of rifle barrels, spear-like, could be seen above their heads. The grocer is a fair-haired elderly man. His concentration was entirely focused on the work in hand. Every moment was filled with work. He never rested. Yet he moved neither hysterically nor brusquely, but always harmoniously, softly, and gently. He spoke little.

We bought several kilos of fruit. We paid. We made our way down the street. A multitude of people were sitting in restaurants and pubs. They were quite different from the grocer. They ate, they drank, and they talked loudly. They also seemed physically heavier than the grocer. They looked like lumps of rock that couldn't be moved. All this time—I am quite certain—the grocer was pouring water over his lettuce, dusting each fruit, sprinkling the peaches with dew. He wore a blue coat. He gave me change to the very last cent, and "wouldn't even hear" of a tip.

We are sitting in a pastry shop. A boy works behind the counter. He distributes ice cream cones and cups to the infrequent customers. Most of them are children. Anselm orders an enormous serving of ice cream. He puts the bags with a kilo of pears, two kilos of apricots, a kilo of tomatoes, two kilos of plums, and a kilo and a half of peppers down at his feet. The vendor deftly throws scoops of ice cream into a silver metal goblet and tells us about the two days when he didn't sell an ounce of ice cream. "Because of the ban" that was in force, he says calmly. It was a well-lit, airy room. A pinball machine (but I took it for a jukebox) stood next to the wall. Several boys and girls stood round the pinball machine (but I saw them as belles and commandos). At the table, Anselm ate his ice cream greedily (but I saw him as a private eye). At one point a young man in a black T-shirt came into the room. He spoke German, with an Austrian accent. He said he was from Klagenfurt. He hasn't read any Handke. He plays tennis. He resells refrigerators. His family is from a neighboring village. The guy here,

the vendor, is a school friend of his. He had lively eyes. Yet his facial expression was frozen, as in Egyptian frescoes. (I have long been "very fond of" Coptic painting.) The young man sat down beside Anselm and bought him another ice cream. Anselm moved the bag with the peppers, which tumbled across his shoes. Scattered tomatoes rolled over the floor. We picked them up, the vendor, the boys, the girls, and I. Meanwhile the young man and Anselm discussed Carinthia.

The bus ride into town was quite ordinary. On the seat behind me there was an old woman with three little girls on her lap. They were all incredibly alike. The only difference was in their age, which you could determine by their differing corporeal dimensions. The eldest girl had the longest little legs, the biggest little head, the longest hair. In some things, quite the opposite was the case: The youngest had the biggest little eyes, the deepest voice, and the most restless gaze. We got off at the last stop, in a street which also marked the boundary of the old quarter. The streets meander, to meet (perhaps) somewhere at the center of the quarter. The houses are lined up like dominoes. The facades, jutting, overhang the sidewalk where a field of piled garbage and scattered stones is spreading, visibly. A line of ants was marching across an old box. One of the houses was no more than frontage. Behind it, a small space was concealed, an erstwhile room, its walls half torn down. Grass and weeds rose high from the floor . . . . We stop before a store-window with rings and jewelry. Silver wire, strung out on the white fabric-covered bottom of the window, glints in the evening sunlight. I squatted to peer at a small ring in the left-hand corner of the window. Silence. A sunbeam, which hit the pane at a right angle, penetrated through the window and, spilling into reddish streaks, was refracted over the ring, which suddenly turned into a large circle. At the same time it extinguished itself there at its center, shining back, instead of a glint, a "coarse" light. And it soaked up moisture, which immediately dried and turned into a skein of warmth. I bought it at once, without hesitating.

Only a few steps away, we found ourselves in a tailor's shop. Anselm immediately tried on a jacket and pants. "They look good on you,"' I said. He stood in front of a mirror, striking attitudes. "A good fit, the suit," said the tailor. He was Albanian, a man of our age, in a blue coat. He sat behind the counter, looking towards the window, through the pane and out, at the passers-by who filed past as fashion models on a catwalk. One wore a jacket with overlong sleeves. Another had pants torn at the seat. The third wore a floor-length robe. The fourth had his shirt-tails untucked. The fifth wore a winter coat. The

sixth was a policeman with a rifle. The seventh, an old man with a loaf of bread under his arm. The eighth was a child dragging a branch behind it. The tailor was stitching up the hems of the jacket. A smoking iron stood upright on the counter before him. The tailor, a large man with grey-blond cropped hair and eyes like glowing potatoes, smiled from his pupils. At the same time he flashed his eyes. Then he rose from the chair, sat on the counter, turned to me, and we immediately "became close."

At the end of this story, however, though I might have died before the day was out, I found myself in middle life; I looked at the spring sun on my blank paper, thought back on the autumn and winter, and wrote: Storytelling, there is nothing more worldly than you, nothing more just, my holy of holies. Storytelling, patron saint of long-range combat, my lady. Storytelling, most spacious of all vehicles, heavenly chariot. Eye of my story, reflect me, for you alone know me and appreciate me. Blue of heaven, descend into the plain, thanks to my storytelling. Storytelling, music of sympathy, forgive us, forgive and dedicate us. Story, give the letters another shake, blow through the word sequences, order yourself into script, and give us, through your particular pattern, our common pattern. Story, repeat, that is, renew, postpone, again and again, a decision that must not be. Blind windows and empty cow paths, be the incentive and hallmark of my story. Long live my storytelling! It must go on. May the sun of my storytelling stand forever over the Ninth Country, which can perish only with the last breath of life. Exiles from the land of storytelling, come back from dismal Pontus. Descendant, when I am here no longer, you will reach me in the land of storytelling, the Ninth Country. Storyteller in your misshapen hut, you with the sense of locality, fall silent if you will, silent down through the centuries, harkening to the outside, delving into your own soul, but then, King, Child, get hold of yourself, prop yourself on your elbows, smile all around you, take a deep breath, and start all over again with your all-appeasing "And then . . . ."[12]

[12] These words form the final section of the book *Die Wiederholung* by Peter Handke. There, in the present tense, in German, and not italicized, they run as follows: "Ich dagegen sehe mich, mag ich auch heute noch sterben, am Ende dieser Erzählung nun in der Mitte meines Lebens, betrachte die Frühlingssonne auf dem leeren Papier, denke zurück an den Herbst und den Winter und schreibe: Erzählung, nichts Weltlicheres als du, nichts Gerechteres, mein Allerheiligstes. Erzäh-

lung, Patronin des Fernkämpfers, meine Herrin, Erzählung, geräumigstes aller Fahrzeuge, Himmelswagen. Auge der Erzählung, spiegele mich, denn allein du erkennst mich und würdigst mich. Blau des Himmels, komm in die Niederung herab durch die Erzählung. Erzählung, Musik der Teilnahme, begnadige, begnade und weihe uns. Erzählung, würfle die Lettern frisch, durchwehe die Wortfolgen, füg dich zur Schrift und gib, in deinem besonderen, unser gemeinsames Muster. Erzählung, wiederhole, das heisst, erneuere; immer neu hinausschiebend eine Entscheidung, welche nicht sein darf. Blinde Fenster und leere Viehsteige, seid der Erzählung Ansporn und Wasserzeichen. Es lebe die Erzählung. Die Erzählung muss weitergehen. Die Sonne der Erzählung, sie stehe für immer über dem erst mit dem letzten Lebenshauch zerstörbaren neunten Land. Verbannte aus dem land der Erzählung, zurück mit euch vom tristen Pontus. Nachfahr, wenn ich nicht mehr hier bin, du erreichst mich im Land der Erzählung, im neunten Land. Erzähler in deiner verwachsenen Feldhütte, du mit dem Ortssinn, magst ruhig verstummen, schweigen vielleicht durch die Jahrhunderte, horchend nach aussen, dich versenkend nach innen, doch dann, König, Kind, sammle dich, richte dich auf, stütze dich auf die Ellenbogen, lächle im Kreis, hole tief Atem und heb wieder an mit deinem allen Widerstreit schlichtenden: 'Und . . . ."

BIOGRAPHIES

Scott Abbott is the author of *Fictions of Freemasonry: Freemasonry and the German Novel* and of two books with Žarko Radaković; *Ponanvljanje* (*Repetitions*) and *Vampiri & Razumni rečnik* (*Vampires & A Reasonable Dictionary*). He was the jazz critic for the *Salt Lake Observer* and co-author, with Sam Rushforth, of the series "Wild Rides, Wild Flowers: Biking and Botanizing the Great Western Trail" which appeared for four years in *Catalyst Magazine* (forthcoming as a book with Torrey House Press). He has translated Peter Handke's *A Journey to the Rivers: Justice for Serbia* (Viking) and Handke's play *Voyage by Dugout, the Play of the Film of the War* (PAJ). A translation of Handke's "To Duration, A Poem" is forthcoming with The Last Books, Amsterdam. Abbott has published reviews of books and art in *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Open Letters Monthly,* and *Catalyst Magazine*. He is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Utah Valley University and has published literary-critical articles on Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Grass, and Handke. With Lyn Bennett, he is working on a book about how barbed wire was given meaning in late nineteenth-century advertising and then in literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries ("It was a nun they say invented barbed wire." James Joyce, *Ulysses*). For a book to be called "On Standing," he is analyzing the metaphor of standing in literature and philosophy

(Herder, Humboldt, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Derrida; Goncharov and Dostoevsky; Kleist and Döblin; Rilke and Knausgaard; Faulkner and Morrison; and in the poetry of Dickinson, Eliot, Norris, Jarman, Hass, and Ashbery). He lives in Woodland Hills, Utah.

Žarko Radaković is the author of several experimental novels published in Belgrade, including *Tübingen*, *Knifer*, *Ponanvljanje* (Repetitions, with Scott Abbott), *Emigracija* (Emigration), *Pogled* (The View), *Vampiri & Razumni rečnik* (Vampires & A Reasonable Dictionary, with Scott Abbott), *Strah od Emigracije* (Fear of Emigration), *Era*, and *Knjiga o muzici* (A Book about Music, with David Albahari). He has translated more than twenty of Austrian author Peter Handke's books into Serbian and has been traveling companion and translator for Handke during repeated trips to Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. He collaborated on three performances with performance artist Slobodan Era Milivojević (1971, 1973, and 1974; the 1973 performance, titled "Turtle," is described in the book *Era*). He recorded numerous audio and video interviews with Croatian painter Julije Knifer, edited a special edition of the literary journal *Flugasche* about Knifer, and wrote the book *Knifer*). His recent work with Serbian/German artist Nina Pops includes collaboration on a series of collages that feature manuscript translations of Peter Handke's novel *Bildverlust* (The Loss of Images, or *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*) and Pops' "translations" of the text into images. Radaković edited an edition of the German literary magazine *Nachtcafé* on the theme of Walking, and more recently, with Peter Handke, an edition of the German literary magazine *Schreibheft* on "Literature from Serbia." He has published essays on art, jazz, and literature. David Albahari described Radaković as "one of the few absolutely isolated, independent, creative personalities of contemporary Serbian prose. . . . He deals with our language like a foreign language in the same way Beckett uses the English language and Handke the German language. . . . I think I will not be wrong when I say that Žarko . . . is the most radical Serbian writer of the present time." He lives in Cologne, Germany.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted, for their love and forbearance, to Lyn, Joe, Maren, Tom, Nate, Ben, Sam and Tim. Financial support for the translation came from Utah Valley University.

Scott Abbott

Repetitions

Scott Abbott & Žarko Radaković

The man waiting for him was a translator from a foreign country who for some days had been tracing the itineraries of a book set in the region and now wished to ask the author a few questions.
~Peter Handke, *The Afternoon of a Writer*

Repetition, Peter Handke's novel about a young Austrian's trip to Slovenia to find traces of his lost brother, is a remarkable exploration of the ways our languages structure experience. Radaković's and Abbott's *Repetitions* is about language as well. Structured as a travel narrative, the book pits the Serbo-Croatian perspective of a man who grew up in Communist Yugoslavia against the English perspective of a man who grew up Mormon in the American West. The two authors are both foreigners in this story, for they must communicate in the only language they have in common, German. They follow Handke's narrator into Slovenia and then visit Handke's own formative landscapes in Austria. The possibility of narration in two voices, complicated by the third voice that is Peter Handke's own narrator, is the question that guides the traveling and the reading and the writing.

Repetitions was published in Serbo-Croatian in Belgrade in 1994. In 2008 Abbott and Radaković published a second book in Belgrade: *Vampires & A Reasonable Dictionary*—also available in English with punctum books. The two books bracket a horrendous period in the history of the former Yugoslavia. The authors changed during that period as well—divorces, new partners, new jobs. Peter Handke, while metamorphosing into the bête noire of the press after his attacks on media portrayals of the Yugoslav wars, became the authors' friend and entered their second text as a fellow traveler.

punctum books
spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion

Abbott, Scott; Radaković, Žarko

Repetitions

punctum books, 2013
ISBN: 9780615851334

https://punctumbooks.com/titles/repetitions/

https://www.doi.org/10.21983/P3.0039.1.00