

ide hintze

die schule für dichtung in  
wien

-

the vienna poetry school

notes for a lecture  
at the  
jack kerouac school for disembodied  
poetics

boulder, colorado, usa  
3rd july 1995

in europe - as you may already know - the idea of the "lehr-und lernbarkeit von literatur", the learnability and teachability of literature, has always met with and still meets with considerable scepticism. with the exception of the gorki institute in moscow and the literatur-institut in leipzig, no other academies have offered creative writing courses at university level. this being the case, it was natural that the schule für dichtung in wien (sfd) should take steps to establish contact with both of these institutes shortly after its own establishment in 1991. the moscow and leipzig institutes, in turn, helped the sfd in its early stages by supplying us with theoretical and practical advice, and also by sending us experienced poets/teachers such as andrej bitov, anatolij potapov, peter gosse and helmut richter to lead classes, student-interviews, and to give lectures and public readings of their own works. through these contacts, we learned much about organizational matters and curriculum planning, about socio-aesthetic-literary connections, and received a new understanding of literature from the standpoint of its teaching and learning values.

the problem with both of these institutes, however, was that they were founded and organized during communist times and were therefore subjected to state and secret service control, which of course largely nullified the principle of freedom or poetic self-determination. moreover, their ambition to bring even the education of writers in line with a certain ideology did not provide us with a very useful model. to top everything, since the breakdown of communism, both institutes have run into extreme financial, organizational and moral difficulties. we have to assume from all of this that the days of our collaboration with the gorki institute and the *literaturinstitut leipzig* are numbered, and that the sfd will soon have the rather dubious status of being the only extant institution in europe of its kind.

when talking about european influences, we certainly have to mention sappho. sappho, from the island of lesbos in greece, was the last poetic genius who founded a poetry school in europe. we went there in 1983 and 1985 to see what the island is like. eressos, sappho's birthplace, has nowadays become something like an international mecca for lesbians and poets. it is a magical place. the whole island is idyllic. mytilini, its capital, was the place of sappho's school, 2500 years ago. as far as i know, there were still some matriarchal traditions alive in lesbos, and she was teaching people how to write, how to sing, how to dance, how to play the lyre, how to prepare for marriage, how to practice a poetical lifestyle within the community.

there was a moisopolon domos, a house of those who cultivated the muses, where they were performing rituals for aphrodite. there was a kind of aphrodite cult. they were praying to the love goddess. that was the center of their spiritual activity. lesbos was the fountainhead of greek song, and sappho the creator and practitioner of a knowledge that we really would like to realize one day at our school: namely, that of eros as the most effective medium of teaching and learning.

one important partner for the sfd is asia's only literature academy, the *literature institute nguyen du* in hanoi. its rector, professor doctor huyhn khai vinh, visited us in vienna in september 1992 and in his lectures, presentations and class

work he shared with us some of the principles of vietnamese literature and of his institute. "each of our students", he explained, "is supported and accompanied throughout his whole course of studies by a writer who is already mature and experienced, in sort of a mentor system." at the sfd , our students and teachers followed his explanations with great interest and in october 1993, i myself had a brief first-hand exposure to their work methods and some related traditions when i was invited to the nguyen du institute to lead a class and, later on, to go on a reading tour through the country, both north and south.

it was interesting to learn that in vietnam there is an ancient tradition built around the learning and teaching of literature. already in the year 1070, one of their institutes, which focused on teaching the classics of confucianism, had as one of its main goals the teaching of the art of poetry and prose-making. since that time, great poetic masters have continued these traditions and cultivated them. the line has extended from le thanh tong, the 15th century emperor who wrote the first chapter of vietnamese history and founded the tao-dan academy, and on to nguyen du, the poet who, 200 years ago, drafted the 3,254-verse national epic "the girl kieu": a story about a beautiful woman who was separated from her lover and sold as a concubine to save her family. further still, the line extends to nguyen tat tanh, alias nguyen ai quoc, alias ho chi minh who, as revolutionary and statesman, also joined the ranks of great poets in the body of world literature.

one of the principal forms of poetry taught in vietnam, the *hat chau van*, is an incanted form made up of intoning, chanting and speaking, which is used to hypnotize people who are spiritually afflicted. others include *hat a dao*, a popular form mixing song and poetry; *ho*, work poems which are sung; *ly*, love poems which are sung; and *ho mia nhi*, four-line songs which, i have heard, are about the young boat women on the perfume river in hue.

very artificial for our ears, very common, very popular in vietnam is the so-called 6/8-style. the first verse comprises 6 syllables, which means it consists of 6 words (the vietnamese language only knows one-syllable-words). the second verse comprises 8. the third again 6. the fourth again 8. and so on. the 6-syllable-verse and the following 8-syllable-verse are composed as a double line of verse. the last syllable of the first line rhymes with the sixth syllable of the second. and the last syllable of the second with the last of the first of the following double-line verse.

here is one example. it was written by luong ngoc an. the title is *tuong rang* ("it seems"):

"tuong rang chi noi yeu toi  
ngo dau loi ay bao nguoi da nghe  
tuong rang khue cac phong the  
ngo dau noi ay di ve buom ong  
tuong rang nuoc chi mot dong  
ngo dau chop be mua dong dau nguon

va dau do cuoi con duong  
co ngoi mieu vang tan huong vat vo"

i cannot give you an english translation, but at least you can hear the sounds.  
however, for those of you in the group who know some german, here is a  
translation:

"es scheint":

"es scheint, als ob du das wort liebe nur für mich sprichst  
aber, wer hätte das gedacht, dieses wort haben schon viele  
andere gehört  
es scheint, als ob du ein keusches mädchen bist, das in seinem  
zimmer bleibt  
aber, wer hätte das gedacht, an diesem ort sind schon viele  
schmetterlinge und bienen vorbei geflogen  
es scheint, als ob das wasser ruhig in eine richtung fließt  
aber, wer hätte das gedacht, es gibt auch stürme und gewitter an  
der quelle  
und irgendwo am ende des weg  
einen einsamen, kalten tempel"<sup>1</sup>

in addition, in hanoi even today there are remains of an ancient poetry school  
which can be visited. these ruins, which date from the beginning of this millenium,  
are of a so-called "literature temple", built to further confucian teachings, and are  
the oldest ruins in the world of a once-flourishing poetry school.

in november 1993, the sfd signed a cooperation agreement with the nguyen  
du literature institute and, in the interim, we have been exchanging teaching  
materials, working on a joint anthology project and are now planning to set up  
reciprocal teaching annexes and extension facilities.

the most important partner for the sfd is, of course, your school. i first heard  
about it in december 1980, when i met allen ginsberg in vienna. after a one-hour-long  
discussion about poets' unions, the existence or non-existence of the soul,  
messianic traditions, rimbaud, gogol, sappho, the hopis, etc., he invited me to  
come to boulder, colorado, where he and anne waldman were serving as directors  
of a so-called *jack kerouac school of disembodied poetics*.

(he said: "then for another project we have in boulder, colorado, the jack

---

<sup>1</sup> translation: ms truong le kim hoa. assistance: cih

kerouac school of disembodied poetics, and that has a place where young poets can come and learn from older poets. and our principle there is that in order to teach there a poet once must have written a notable work, right? but there's no money there, and i teach there and direct it and i pay in order to direct it because there's so little money."<sup>2</sup>) in june 1987, mathias pongracz, a practicing buddhist and an old friend of mine, told me, he had just visited a strange buddhist university, called the *naropa institute*.

in may 1989 i made the acquaintance of the viennese lyric poet christian loidl who told me he had visited the *kerouac school* only the summer before. he was enthusiastic about ginsberg, burroughs, waldman and the "fucking buddhas" he had seen. in 1990, loidl and i, and in 1991, christine huber, another viennese poet of our age, enrolled as students at this haven of poet-gurus.

we appreciated the well-thought-out performance scheme we found here. we appreciated the level of management and finance policy. also impressive were the corporate identity, the sense of community, the communal eros, the preference for non-academic, 'outrider' poets, the image of a literary woodstock. at the kerouac school, we did not learn how to become authors of a poem. rather, we learned how to become authors of a poetry school.

in may 1991, loidl, huber and i, together with sonja orator, a management genia, and gertraud könig, a scholar in russian literature, founded the sfd. allen ginsberg and anne waldman helped us with letters of support. waldman, hollo, collom, mac low, tardos provided their personal presence as teachers at our opening "academy" in april 1992. andrew schelling was a teacher and performer at our fifth international "academy" in september 1993, together with ginsberg and waldman.

allen ginsberg: "i'm interested in your efforts to found a poetry school in vienna. if it is done so that the teachers themselves have accomplished some "notable work" of poetry, it can be a useful community with practical results in knowledge & inspiration. best luck to all who are working on this project."

anne waldman: "i give my whole-hearted support and encouragement! it is an excellent idea and also serves the young artist who feels such marginality in our contemporary world. please let us know if our school here in the u.s. can be of help in this visionary project."

anselm hollo: "in a time like the present, in which arts and their practitioners find themselves once again threatened by chauvinistic and isolationist tendencies in the political climate, an enterprise like the schule für dichtung deserves all the help it can get from persons and organizations concerned with the future of free and fruitful cultural exchange."

anne tardos: "i am honored to be a part of this project and i am pleased to

---

<sup>2</sup> in: christian ide hntze. "die lyrische guerilla".

declare my full support and encouragement. students should greatly benefit from the diversity of the faculty you have selected, and the workshops, lectures, and interviews you have scheduled. the school is a wonderful idea and promises to be successful."

jackson mac low: "it is well known that no one can teach another person "how to write poetry." but through careful discussion of the work of younger poets and their artistic aims, experienced poets can help them clarify their individual intentions ... i strongly support the schule für dichtung in wien."

meanwhile we established steady relationships. far from being already an equally qualified partner, we hope to achieve the status of a sister institute sometimes in the near future. right now, the sfd relates to the kerouac school like a student relates to a teacher. to give you an idea, here's a list, not at all complete, of what we are still trying to learn from you:

- a poetry-school, organized and ruled quite autonomously by poets themselves.
- the comradeship, frankness and commitment to social issues. feminist and racism issues. eastern and western traditions.
- the female response to male-dominated poetry scenes.
- the idea of a spontaneous poetics. with special emphasis on making or creating writing that reflects the nature of mind or a grammar-thought observed during composition time.
- development and refinement of spontaneous-mind poetic activity for purposes of teaching, enlightenment and beauty, or aesthetic pleasure.
- reinforcement of attention to concrete particulars and a sane relationship to the phenomenal world.
- exploration of existing texts as a conscious probe into different imaginative energies of life and death, utilizing ancient and modern literary methods, and practices such as: collage, cut-up, dream, and journal investigations, spontaneous composition, confession and narrative, chance operation, prosody study, song, social investigative scholarship, found-object aesthetics.
- the connection with performance, the formal patterns of rock and pop music.
- vocalization of texts, reading aloud, the poem as a spoken action, even as a spontaneously spoken happening, including unrevised utterance of rhymes and syllables and asemantic sounds.
- the tradition of poets working with open form.
- the fact that teaching is done by practicing poets whose primary preoccupation heretofore has been poetizing rather than teaching.
- poetry readings where students and teachers share the same stage.
- development of an active, participatory community. teachers working very close to the students.
- integration of the local literary people.
- exploratory poetics, experimental poetics, expansive poetics.
- a poetics that is concerned with ecology and the political issues.
- a responsible poetics.

our first public appearance - a one-week symposium held in april 1992 at the university of applied arts - with many distinguished austrian and international writers, was a rousing success. this was a surprise. poetry was hardly considered to be something that can be taught or learned, especially in austria in the 1990s.

the symposium focused on the question of teaching from theoretical and practical points of view, and at the same time proved through a series of lively poetic events that poetry is a form of contagious energy. students had abundant opportunities not only to listen to writers who have created prominent works but also to enter into a direct exchange with them in workshops, group discussions, shared readings, student interviews (discussing students' work), and more informal events.

a general atmosphere of creative celebration, sometimes provocative exchange and broad acclaim in the european media encouraged the continuation of this project despite continued financial difficulties.

the sfd is a place of encounter between poets both accomplished and less accomplished, an autonomously run school for literature, a place for poetological communication, workshop for projects in teaching poetry, an academy for research into letters and speech sounds, archive for pioneering literary documents, emporium for verbal fantasies, a laboratory for transforming literary impulses into group events, and a welcoming center for travelling poets.

now that most nations are engaged in a struggle for survival, almost always at the expense of the weak, the strengthening of human relations across language barriers through poetic ties, and heightening the individual's sensitivity and power of expression should be considered of vital importance in enhancing human values on a global scale.

the sfd hasn't yet decided to go for a year-round program. repeated, regularly-organized meetings, e.g. in the context of a master class, rupture the aura of strangeness and the nimbus of inaccessibility. inspiration, instead of being a product of methodically-directed conscious expansion, is rather a moment beyond the horizon, more a matter of forgetting and "unlearning" than of remembering and instruction.

the sfd organizes so-called "academies" twice a year. each academy last for 14 days, with ten to twelve poets teaching classes, giving student interviews, holding lectures, giving readings and performances, and presenting work results together with their students at a final reading-party. each class has 6 meetings, and each meeting is 2 hours long. it's more or less the schedule of the summer writing programm of the *kerouac school*. with 2 differences: students are given the possibility of enrolling in several classes; and there is a low-price policy: the student fees are only token fees. most of the time, talented students have no money. so part of our budget is spent on subsidizing our students. without students, a poetry school would make no sense at all.

the writers that we invited included inger christensen (denmark), huynh khai vinh, pham thi hoai (vietnam), henri chopin (france), blixia bargeld, ginka steinwachs, peter gosse, katja lange-mueller (germany), andrej bitow, anatolij potapow (russia), h.c.artmann, wolfgang bauer, gerhard rühm, elfriede czurda,

ferdinand schmatz, marianne gruber (austria) and the above mentioned poets of your school.

before i move on to some other principles of our school, i would like to show you a short exemple of a students' work. it was done in september 1992 by 15 students, a mixture of members from all the classes. there's not enough time now to explain all the meanings, all the methods, how it was made up, which parts were solo and which parts were chorus. it's more like a friendly greeting from vienna. its metre is the traditional viennese waltz. and the poem runs like this:

regenschirm silberknauf  
edeltraut hinterland  
staubsauger blütenstaub  
schlankheitstee gertenschlank

regen tee blüten knauf  
edel schirm gerten land  
staub tentraut hinter staub  
sau heits ber schlank sil schlank

wedel tee blüten werk  
weis sel schirm wurzel wann  
staub tentraut \* walzer  
sau heits weiss wer \* was

warm \* werk wurzelt wir  
weiss wir \* wurzel wann  
weiss \* war walzer \*  
was \* \* \* \* was

### 1) lehr und lernbarkeit:

"the teachability and learnability of literature" is a catch-phrase that we have developed to address the whole question of whether literature can or should in fact be taught and/or learned. a catch-phrase which only last saturday passed serious testing by translation-guru, anselm hollo, when he himself said: yes, "lehrund lernbarkeit von literatur" can be translated into english as "the teachability and learnability of literature".



anthony judge, the australian organizational researcher who currently lives in brussels, addressed this issue in a paper called "poetry making - policy making" which he delivered at one of our academies: he said: "it could be much less a question of whether poetry is 'appreciated' or used to 'raise consciousness', and much more a matter of how desperately insights from the discipline of poetry-making are needed in the present crisis of policy-making."

against a background of splintering ideology-based systems - a background imprinted with widespread scepticism towards all types of political or social "utopias" - you could say that the light is now falling on the poet, in the hope that some sort of ordering or creative principles can somehow help to restore the ordering and creative principles that society now lacks.

these hopes can only be fulfilled if poets can succeed in freeing themselves from mundane or mythic dependencies and build around themselves a sphere of freedom. a sphere in which the need both for tradition and permanent revolution are reconciled. a sphere which therefore is institutional and anti-institutional at one and the same time. a school of poetry can conceivably serve as this type of sphere. it needs the knowledge and techniques of the "poetry maker;" and a communal approach to poetic endeavor. it also needs a revision of the image of the romantic "genius", which is based on isolation and secrecy about the poetic process.

with the cooperation of the great masters of the unlearnable and unteachable, the sfd is working towards broadening the romantic literary approach to teaching and learning. class projects, lectures, student-interviews, workshops, hikes, coffee-house visits, stage performances, research projects, conferences, student assemblies, magazine and book productions are the first milestones along this path. also discussions about and research into the processes of teaching and learning itself. what happens in your brain? what does it do to your body?

## 2) multilingualism:

in the light of the current political situation, particularly in europe, and given the growing international trend towards interweaving production, mediation and discourse, in economics as well as in the field of ecology, the question of national language and cultural barriers, as applied to literature, has also gained importance - retrospectively as well as prospectively. national poets are losing their exclusive claims to their own cultural traditions. sephardic songs, turkish "village" lyrics, vietnamese water puppet theater, the beatles, the velvet underground: they are all out there, not only as a function of multicultural politics but also because they are being drawn in, and are becoming part and parcel of the literary work itself.

with the cooperation of some of the great masters of the german language, the sfd is working towards broadening the literary reserves of our national or mothertongue by taking aspects of other languages into account. allen ginsberg, for example, from the us, andrej bitov from russia, inger christensen from denmark, the frenchman henri chopin, gerhard kofler from south tyrol have all worked with us. as has anne tardos who was born in hungary, grew up in austria and france

and now lives in new york, with her synchronous hungarian-german-french-english compositions.

### 3) a new cultural code:

in recent times, it has become more and more obvious that the alphabet is losing meaning as a base-code for our cultural communication. a new cultural code is in the making. one that is not yet codified. one which integrates acoustic, visual and computer-generated elements with the standard written forms. one which displays, above all, a marked analphabetic - or, to be more precise - antialphabetic tendency.

naturally, all of these phenomenons are of growing interest to writers. especially in the german-speaking countries where - in contrast to the more orally oriented anglo-saxon traditions - the gutenber universe is still in full power.

until today, literary offerings in the electronic media are scarce, and are mainly limited to various forms of "book publicity." as yet, there is hardly any demand for audio tapes, records, cds or videos of literary works. any single clipshow on mtv, even when it is not meant to be poetic, is actually more poetic these days than the so-called "artworks" that are being produced.

with the cooperation of some of the great masters of written poetry, the sfd is working towards broadening the literary concepts derived from the book-culture, to include an array of non-written ingredients: acoustic, visual, performance, installation, marketing, p.r., d.j., cooking, space, landscape. poets and artists who have worked with us on this include jackson maclow, blixia bargeld, gerhard rühm, anne waldman, falco, konstantin wecker, anne tardos.

### 4) solidarity: three exemples:

a) after german unification, a series of acts of violence occurred. the victims in one case were vietnamese workers. their houses, most of which were old barracks, were set on fire. many people died. many were badly injured. we took the chance to invite the vietnamese community living in vienna to work with us. we invited a vietnamese poet from vietnam to hold classes in their mother-tongue. we offered free attendance.

b) since vienna is a city of turkish, bosnian, serbian, slovenian and croatian so-called "gastarbeiter" (foreign workers, cheap labour from abroad), we started a series of classes held in turkish, bosnian, serbian, slovenian and croatian language.

c) street artists are still facing heavy legal limitations in their work. street artists are considered to be hindering commercial interests of vienna's tourist shop owners. we organized a benefit-performance-show and a street-demonstration in the city of vienna as a way of helping to defend our street artists' rights.

ide hintze: the schule für dichtung in wien - the vienna poetry school  
notes for a lecture, kerouac school, boulder, 3rd july, 1995

---

i would like to close with a statement by ed sanders:

"it is very important to crosspollinate."

(video, statements by anne waldman, jack collom, andrew schelling)

[www.sfd.at](http://www.sfd.at)