

## Excursus NY Spring 1971

An Austrian Cultural Package Arrives for a 21 events in 28 days USA marathon...

By the time the Austrian threesome - Handke, Kolleritsch, Libgart Schwarz - arrived in New York in the Spring of 1971 I had been beseeched by Siegfried Unseld, as he does the Left-Handed Woman to become the Suhrkamp agent to replace the fine ex-Berliner Joan Daves, who had her nose full of that representation. See <http://www.roloff.freehosting.net/index.htm>

for a detailed account of what transpired during the two years I endured working for the Obergauner and his Foreign Rights Hyena, Helene Ritzerfeld, also for the relationship with Farrar, Straus + Giroux.

I had managed to put Handke's work over at Farrar, Straus with support from Susan Sontag - barely: had it not been for Robert Giroux realizing Handke's talent that ass-licking stiletto man Michael DeCapua - as I will memorialize him justly in the annals of literature - would have had his way again and as he would have once more in the future and shot down another of my projects. KASPAR AND OTHER PLAYS had been published, to some fine reviews, of as yet officially unperformed plays. I had given up my own royalties as translator to get two plays finally done, officially, at B.A.M. A clown named Schulz, a clown in every which way in American parlance and a clown suit made for him by his American hippie girl friend Barbara Becker [a.k.a. "Slave girl"] had appeared in my office who wanted to do them, since I had not gotten anywhere in a couple of years I had no reason to say no. <http://www.schulz-keil.faithweb.com/photo.html>

Since Princeton 1966 [see Footnote for Princeton] I had seen Handke once more, in 1969, in Berlin, to discuss my translation of KASPAR ["more abstract, as abstract as

possible" had been the author's wish] and my heart had sunk at the prospect of finding the German originals for the quotes from American black mask type novels that DER HAUSIERER contains, I might have asked Handke whether he could help me find them. As it was, GOALIE was substituted for HAUSIERER in the contract I had drawn prior to becoming Suhrkamp agent and thus also Handke's U.S. agent. I had translated GOALIE, too, by then.

I had already run around town with a wild ex-pat troupe that had re-appeared from San Miguel de Allende with my friend the actor and writer Michael Locascio and a certain JB in whose scrawny arms "the Hammer" - Neil Cassidy - had expired one cold Mexican Tequila night on some railroad tracks - to give a hint of how relatively hardcore down-low hippie precincts we are now in - and will not except for mere mention indicate what the weed they brought with them elicited in me... - and arranged for one shot performances of PUBLIC INSULT and SELF-ACCUSATION at any venue that would have us, me and my trusty Sony tape recorder, weight about 20 pounds those days. I had worked with Herbert Berghof and E.G. Marshall at his HB studio on two two week performances of these plays and of KASPAR. E.G. Marshall! A memorably intelligent actor. NY was a fairly wide open town those days, it would become far more open in the next ten years. [FN-2]

In Berlin Handke had shown me Baby Amina as we left his dank prince's apartment in the Uhlandstrasse, Adorno had told me of the ownership of this anything but princely rat hole, and I had thought it perfectly normal - look at Handke's A CHILD'S STORY, a pretty good account [but for its leaving out the lay-a-broad's womanizing or any real mention of the girl's mother!] of those years that also touch on Berlin, and am I ever glad that I like little more than *liebäugeln* with babies - as compared to the revolutionaries who lacked time and interest for the like in their self-important endeavors. Handke's "showing" and invariably wanting to go quickly outdoors [we worked at a table at an outdoor at my old familiar Ku-Damm] would eventually become to seem other than "normal." I had also translated all of the early plays but for Quodlibet, which I would do a few years later during a half year's trip half way round the world and back on the Hellenic Splendor.

The Austrian Threesome appeared to think that the Suhrkamp Rep's small apartment was their home away from

home. Handke at once moved them out of the Austrian assigned hotel on Lexington Avenue into his there-after forever preferred New York abode, F. Scott Fitzgerald's Algonquin. Uwe Johnson would stay in the next door, far cheaper, Iroquois. I was beginning to learn the odd ways of the once fabulous seeming writers' - who it turned out "all scratched themselves at the same spots" as did ordinary mortals - invariable eccentricities. We tramped to the premiere of what struck me as a barely good enough performance, the reviewers, Steve Kroll in Newsweek still comes to mind, seemed to like it fine, so did Mel Gussow at the NY Times. Not so Herr Handke who felt it was just as well it had been done in Brooklyn, of course how would he know that B.A.M. and being outside Manhattan was becoming an "in" thing. He went backstage and must have had unhappy words with the director, Wieland Schulz [passport name, a.k.a. Schulz-Keil.

<http://www.schulz-keil.faithweb.com/photo.html>

for during our ride back to Manhattan, to Elaine's, my home away from home since 1965 when it had just been a hole in the wall on Second Avenue, Handke said that he thought Schulz was very dark. When I, who had no particular reason to be apprehensive, questioned that assessment, Handke qualified himself by saying "at least very German." I of course was keenly aware that Handke was a genius, but learned to appreciate his x-ray vision for character only with time; that he, too, would prove "very dark" and "very German", differently of course and with that admixture of salvaging Slovenian Maria Sivec, and incomparable to the ultimate masochist Schulz whom John Houston sent to Mexico City to bring some real whores on to the set in Cuernavaca of Under the Volcano, proud of being a pimp, I could not imagine such perverse character structures at the time - live and learn, never live long enough - came as a surprise only because Handke's genius had made me forget all about my initial 1966 impressions. Translating these works - challenging, but to understand them would take half a life time, to understand what genius can accomplish.

I had not had time to attend rehearsals, the Jezebel, the only one who could have accomplished this, for whom I had broken out of a six year marriage, had had the part of the woman in Self-Accusation; however, Pamela Bellwood [King] who had been married to Peter Bellwood of The Fringe had got a good part, in the touring company

of *Butterflies Are Free* I think it was, and had fluttered the coop [sorry I couldn't resist], and had mentioned that the director shouted. What German director did not shout? - well, I never saw Herbert Berghof shout. It was a first alert, like others tucked away in the underground storage bin. Handke I imagine was unaware of most of the preceding, and he never asked, as a matter of fact during the 20 years that the relationship translator author lasted he never asked the simplest of questions, such as where were you born, when did you get to the U.S., where did you go to school, whose parents child are you - and so I have to agree with Marie Colbin's assessment that Handke is a one-eyed mono-maniac, entirely self-involved to which numerous documents testify that Malte Herwig provides in his *MEISTER DER DAEMMERUNG*, especially the letter to Siegfried Unseld seceding from Suhrkamp Verlag because Siegfried is also publishing the *Reichs-Kanickel*, and the lengthy diary complaint about Sophie Semin's son from an earlier affair behaving as unselfconscious possessor of Handke's space in his house in Chaville. I was never at ease with Handke even prior to what he did with my girlfriend Judith Thurman, and I don't think just because I was awed by his genius, the early impressions that that then proved so premonitiously accurate [Footnote 1] I expect played into that, if there had been a chessboard out during my visits to Rue Montmorency in the 70s we might have gotten something on, those days when some of us at Elaine's and the crossstreet bar Eric's followed every move of Bobby Fischer's championship games was the last hey-day of my chess. According to a letter Handke wrote to Kolleritsch [see their published correspondence] I was "pleasantly boring" - I imagine he could not imagine how boorish I found someone who didn't have a glass of water for a city walker who had walked some miles to his place and unless we went out really didn't seem to want his guest around for at most ten minutes. One must read *WEIGHT OF THE WORLD* and *MOMENT OF TRUE FEELING* to appreciate Handke's state of mind during those days after his mother had committed suicide and his insulted and neglected wife had split. - I was at ease and talkative as could be with no end of people but my then uncomprehended gut feelings made me freeze in the presence of murderers and major criminals. Schulz with his act of being one of the guys and saying "shit" at the right moment - it took me a long time to admit that Handke had been right about him and in five minutes.

At Elaine's it seemed perfectly normal, as though we had been flirting for a long time, for Libgart and me to play footsie and hold hands under Table 3 while the Bicycle-built-for-Two Kolleritsch-Handke was entwined intellectually. As we left Elaine's Handke wanted to take a photo of the three of us, Libgart in the center. I realized by the way she moved my hand away from her tush and placed it around her right hip that she was a woman with finesse. I wanted to "walk back" - to the Algonquin, a mere two miles, but Handke was tired. I seemed to have lacked the finesse to instruct Libgart to spend an afternoon at "a hairdressers." Either by that evening or subsequently, at the Austrian Institute, on its long winding staircase, I saw Libgart "perform" an entrance from that marvel THE RIDE ACROSS LAKE CONSTANCE - I noticed how proud Handke was of her as a bewitching and light as air performer. That damned peripheral vision again! Within a day or so I gave a party at my three room apartment at 55<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and invited two of Handke's earliest American backers, the critics Richard Gilman and Stanley Kaufman, maybe a dozen people, no one from Farrar, Straus best as I recall, and it was when the two critics and Handke and I were a foursome, and Gilman who had noticed Handke's use of Wittgensteinian [Philosophical Investigations] forms of querying language in RIDE [Gilman had not experienced a performance and so we, good friends to be, would forever argue about the irrelevance of Wittgenstein to what an audience undergoes as the ordinary logic of their word world is destroyed and they are set free], it may have been Gilman asking some lit-crit question along those lines that Handke dropped out down to the left and squatted down by my record player on the lowest shelf of a book case and put on a Beatles Record [?] that I subsequently realized something had been ... too much... perhaps one of those episodes that he terms "autistic" to Herbert Gampfer. The "dark fellow" with the Alan Ginsberg Karl Marx visage all the time stood by the window to the apartment building shaft into which I had once tossed my wedding ring. After everyone had left, it occurred to Handke, it was the first thing he said, to say that I had was gay. This might have made for more than an awkward moment, but Libgart who might have of course pointed to herself, quickly mentioned the also departed flaxen-haired beauty, Renate Karlin, who had had to leave to look after her two splendid kids. In retrospect what strikes me as odd about myself that here I am having this passionate affair with Renate, which founders on insane jealousy on my part, and I'd have been willing, money

allowing, to run off with Libgart, to wherever. Handke would have had his breakdown a year or so earlier. Renate was a recently divorced professor of art at Sarah Lawrence, who could what my even harder working beautiful painter-illustrator teacher wife had been too stubborn and socially incompetent to do, .e.g. hold her own, and not be fazed by the tough talk at the so male oriented Table 4, the "big table", at Elaine's - it took very little really to be admitted to the circle if you were a woman, but only two other women come to mind who could handle it, Anthea Sylbert who was married to my close friend and author Paul Sylbert, and the woman who did the acrostics for the New York Magazine, Mary Ann Madden, and tended to hang with friend Tom Buckley, a New York Times reporter who had been in 'Nam, she had a touch of that forties hard drinking reporter gal about her that seemed to admit you to the male club. Renate was entirely feminine but smart, and charming, and had fine hind legs of her own. And yet... so much for my sainthood. Perhaps Handke still had Ginsberg's pass at him via me of 5 years earlier in mind, or noticed that I held my cigarette the way my mother had. I might have pointed out to him that he had squatted down by my record player like a woman!

At the Threesome's return from 21 cities in 28 days jaunt through the US, that is memorialized in SHORT LETTER, they seemed to have headed straight for my apartment, Fredi Kolleritch collapsed on what had been my marriage bed, tachycardia, Libgart, too, was exhausted and got to rest on the daybed in my work space, all I did was some *liebaeugeln* as Handke seemingly energized by the trip experience asked whether there were any international news stands about: indeed, he had come to the right area, both Rizzoli's and a fancy hotel, the Carlton [?] had them and were within about a block. Had there been images of him in those pages? I failed to ask at his return. Oh yes, Handke asked me whether I could guess whose signature they had wheeled during a flight to Atlanta. I threw up my arms. Muhamed Ali's on their way to Atlanta. What kids we all were, straight out of the Ride Across Lake Constance, not to forget its sinister bass line. Libgart and I continued where we had left off with our secret little touches and feelies - all this ever evoked from the twosome, it was Kolleritch who spoke up: "Libgart du bist so anders." Was she ever! Anyhow, I made her feel desired who had not been made love to since the birth of her daughter several years before. And so her finally leaving the monster came as no

surprise to me.

We also had lunch one time at the Russian Tea Room on West 57th, they had gone to see a musical play I think with Lauren Bacall in it, Handke was disappointed in her of whom he of course had those marvelous memories as a film actress. At one point we also met with the translator Joachim Neugroeschel, another mama's boy whose mother via the Austrian Institute had arranged for the meeting. Handke nearly threw up at the physical ugliness of Neugroeschel, whose character would turn out to match his physique. The people I was willing to put up with! Joachim was a pretty good translator, I used him a lot later at Urizen, and when I read my translations of INNERWORLD at the Goethe House asked him to join me with his Celan. There would be a second time that Handke nearly puked, at Barbara Rose as the then wife of the friend Jerry Leiber when I was working on putting some songs into THEY ARE DYING OUT, this was in Paris, at the Rue Montmorency. Her character, too, would match her physique, like her daughter, Rachel Stella by whom I would allow myself to be seduced in 1979 and have a great two old shoes year with until I had to make myself impossible at a time I could not have a lead shoe dragging on me, Barbara had been cute when young, but aged badly. Thus Handke's sense of the aesthetic and the moral seem to match. No wonder he sometimes is overcome with self-disgust.

Later, back on the West Coast in the 80s, I heard of Handke's behavior at UC Riverside's Austrian shin-dig, he had cursed everyone as idiots and gone off with a woman not his wife. Donald Daviau who ran that operation before he took Summers off to drive the USA in his Goldwing, of French Canadian working class origins, in many ways a splendid man, did not take kindly to Handke's Tourettism, and it cost Handke a special issue of the magazine he edited.

#### FOOT NOTE [1]

Allow me to put my initial impressions of Peter Handke in summary fashion, and let me start with my initial involvement with this great writer, "The first time I saw your face, so much like a fifth Beatle, wearing those gangsta shades" I suppose it would be in an Amurrican musical - at Princeton 1966. After Handke's famous first major - quite a few prior minor ones in Austria - public performance at Princeton, and after the party that I and Jakov Lind and Pannah Grady gave for the Gruppe at Pannah's splendid apartment in the Dakota [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dakota](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dakota)

a complex most famous as the scene of the murder of John Lennon in fall 1980, I knew the following matters about Peter Handke:

1] That he was an exhibitionist - a matter I knew not only from his first performance where he so famously attacked what had been read at the *Gruppe* meeting for being descriptively impotent - which his first novel, the 1964 *DIE HORNISSEN* certainly is not - but because Handke announced to West German media from the Empire State building that he was "the new Kafka." We recall the first announcing that he was "the first." And later Handke would confide the full extent of his exhibitionism to me. Handke has made a spectacle of himself - since age 2 says someone who had a number of affairs with single mothers whose children were none too happy to see Mommy in bed fucking someone else! Once analytically trained I became more discreet and aware, at least in that respect.

2] That he was a potential revolutionary who lacked deference for his elders, that he would break rules.

3] That here was a killer I noticed at the look that came over Handke's face at the sight of a Max Frisch book lying on a display table as the assembled filed out of the hall. The look of murderous envy and ambition that passed over his face! Looks like that are not easily forgotten, but they can go underground. - Herwig's *MEISTER DER DAEMMERUNG* contains Handke's own admissions along those lines, unless you fail to glean so from his texts. Potentially a complete psychopath if literature were not his salvation. He wanted to murder Marie Colbin we find out in *Moravian Nights*. Herwig's book is complicitous with Handke in the way it elides Colbin's famous set of charges, nor does Herwig call Handke when he lies to his face that he "maybe gave her a kick in the ass, I don't know I may have slapped her too." Handke is the man who once said that if he is caught out he will lie at once, and I don't think he was lying when he said that. Sing sorrow!

4] That as someone dressed like the fifth Beatle Handke might have an identity problems, "I want to be someone like someone else was once" - say Franz Kafka - that he was possibly modish, a photo model.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/mikerol/HANDKE3ONLINE#>

5] That he had eye problems, as he mentioned to me the first time I, one of his hosts, talked to him, his glasses affording, seemingly, a better opening line than what was really on my mind - a set of specifics as to his charge at Princeton, and whose work did he really like, for example was William Faulkner a hero of his as he was of mine, I wanted to talk literature, after all this was a literature party and I did not know his work, but did of quite a few young Austrians at that point... What made him wear dark glasses even in well modulated lighting conditions of Pannah Grady's multi-millionaire apartment where Pannah's Beat writer friends would then smash some Persian vases. "Nausea of the eye balls." Eye problems. In *The Lesson of St. Victoire* Handke mentions occasional moments of total color blindness and is speculating whether anyone else in the family suffers the same, perhaps the trove of letters from Peter Handke to his biological father Schönemann that Herwig unearthed mention that. I once spent a week checking on this of the plethora of psycho-somatic symptoms from which Handke suffers or used to, did not reach a definite conclusion; hysteria is a frequent



cause, but my guess is that the proverb "he saw black" might be most fitting in the case of someone who has half a dozen moments per day that he wants to run amok - what if we all did? - or a combination of hysteria and amok. Aside Handke's autistic episodes, hysteria and rage are the prime candidates for an explanation. It is one of a plethora of Handke's psychosomatic symptoms that fit the profile of someone who was exposed to traumatizing violent drunken primal scenes from age 2 until 12. Handke's *Essay on Tiredness* lists everything that used to make Handke tired and angry, or rather tired so angry. If Handke were entirely color blind he could of course not respond to Cezanne as he does, etc.

6] That he was a village sadist as my peripheral vision caught sight of the grin on his face as Alan Ginsberg asked me to translate that he wanted to fuck Handke. Ginsberg insisting to repeat this demand then elicited my rare steel blue Prussian dagger looks and Ginsberg backed off. I saw this dreadful self-advertiser only once more, at the end of my stint at the PEN central committee. Ginsberg wore tie and suit, another clown. Handke it turned out really did not have enough English at the time and thought it was I being propositioned, to put it mildly; a misunderstanding not cleared up until I paid Handke a visit on the Moenchsberg in 1980

<http://www.van.at/lesen/set01/roloff01.htm>

The excess of sadism and the impulses to run amok, entitlement and feeling superior, I imagine play into these gratuitous injurious acts towards those closest to Handke. Masochism, an even more disgusting feature, although you may wish for it in this instance, I do not detect in our adventurer.

On the basis of Princeton and Pannah's Party Handke I can't say was someone I was interested getting to know. Turns out he was an utterly confident fellow who on the basis of having written DIE HORNISSSEN and PUBLIC INSULT had dropped out of law school and was announcing, as he would throughout his career, here I am, it's me, I, Peter Handke-Sivec-Schönemann-Filip Kobal-Loser-Percival-Goethe-II! Of course there existed the possibility that he was more than just a show-off, that he really had something to show.

7] Reading Handke's texts within the year, that is by 1968 I had read everything then published - a profusion of other plays and essays and the second novel, DER HAUSIERER, followed in short order - it dawned on me that there was more to this man than what I had seen and experienced at Princeton and in New York - and that he would then prove to be a true darling, not just the budding monster, came I imagine as far more of a surprise and of course so did his texts. Playing around with translating the first play texts to see who might be the right translator for him they proved so delightful, both serious and playful, that I decided to do them myself - and the world has not been the same since, my world.

<http://www.handketrans.scriptmania.com/>

8] That Handke could also be the most insulting person I have ever not kicked out of my house and life is due entirely to my always knowing that he was a genius. I am awed, up to a point. [see above]

9] That he could also be, especially at a remove, the most marvelous person I have ever met - was no doubt the biggest surprise of all, and

which accounts, I expect, why his few loyal friends, all gratuitously injured over the years, bear with him and have not told him to go jump in a lake. But accounts for the fact that in the 70s in Paris he could write Kolleritsch: "Have not seen anyone the past ten days but the Portuguese cleaning lady." [It is understood that daughter Amina has to suffer her father always wanting to write and not taking her potty when she wants to go!]

10] That he would take my girlfriend and take her hard at the time and within a few weeks claim that he had not had any woman adventures - either points to his splitness, his ability to lie as Marie Colbin points out in her famous charge,

<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/0,1518,24228,00.html>

or to dissociation, but it sure spooked me - on the other hand, the girlfriend the relationship with whom his act ruined, turned out to be a habitual liar, too.

11] That he threatened to abort a non-existent friendship when I fought, in a manner not to his liking, for what he said, at the time, was the best translation he had ever seen, of his greatest text, and the best collaboration I had had it was too, with him the "elbow holder," WALK ABOUT THE VILLAGES, finally struck the kind of chord within me that said: "You know kid, aren't we lucky, if Libgart and I had eloped as I would have with your so insulted and neglected and needy dazzling, rasante wife in 1971, and if you and Judith had not, aren't we lucky - your work would not have found an equally fine translator responder." Life with Peter Handke, two adventurers, meet and part. He has the talent, I have the sense of humor and am better at cards. Long distance shock administered from the St. Monica Mts. in 1986.

[Footnote-2]

During the five years 1961 to 1966 before I got a job at Farrar, Straus I had not only been a scout in Germany but been a reader for a lot of U.S. publishers, for George Braziller's Book Find Club, had been a reader for my friend the Trotskyite novelist Danny Gordon's Columbia Pictures Reading Service, to which Publisher's Weekly supplied all publishers galleys in return for one page evaluation - Hollywood got the "story" outlines from Danny's readers. - The writer critic general darling, not a bad bone one of the few really good guys Robert Phelps had proved to provide a whole new dimension to my appreciation of British and American literature. I was the Suhrkamp Scout in NY and so got to read a lot of wonderful things in manuscripts and got to know a lot of agents, my recollection of the aging emigre agents - Joan Daves, Max Becker, Robbie Lantz, Sanford Greenberger, Kurt Bernheim - continues to grow fonder. I had had a magazine, *Metamorphosis* whose publisher Michael Lebeck from one day to the next started to lift imaginary rocks in his head as he joined a Sufi sect, and that was that. Later I would inherit his apartment at 19th and 8th Avenue, but he had sold most of his books. When I got married in 1966 I gave the apartment to the fine translator from the French and Japanese, Lane Dunlo whom I came to know because he had left a huge window drawer full of books in the Hotel Chelsea, all checked out in his name from the New York Public Library. He had superb taste, and after reading the trove I located him. This is the kind of incident that makes me

believe one might write a novel called "Worm Holes".

I had translated quite a bit and wanted to stay out of offices of any kind. I had a contract to write a biography of the anti-Hitler conspirator *Abwehr* colonel Kurt Grosskurth, chiefly because both parents had been in the German resistance who had improbably survived, as had my grandfather four concentration camps, and Grosskurth seemed an interesting parallel to what might be transpiring in certain quarters of the US Army in the 60s, and though I eventually became disenchanted with Grosskurth, who did nothing more than toss a rock at the *Reichs Chancellory* and, sent to the Eastern Front, was captured at Stalingrad, and died a Russian P.O.W., as I did with the German resistance as a whole, I put in my 5 K advance's research worth in D.C. and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich.

<http://handke-discussion.blogspot.com/2010/12/full-length-review-of-herwigs-handke.html>

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