

I. INTRODUCTION

THE CONFERENCE, MALCA, AND BEYOND

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The nature of dialogue itself, and the rules by which it is conducted, construct the interior architecture of the borderline. For within the borderline are other borderlines. There are as many of them as there are individualities seeking to assert the differences that make them 'other' and yet impel most of them to negotiate together some form of common ground, that which constitutes a community and a culture.
(Lebbeus Woods, architect)

EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT

Thirty-five scholars from four continents and eleven countries planned to attend the three-day conference on Austrian literature and culture in mid-October 2001 at Lafayette College. And then, there was September 11th: The world witnessed a terrorist act of unimaginable magnitude. New York City's skyline was changed forever, and so were the lives of many in the US and abroad. Americans took comfort and solace in the numerous expressions of solidarity that were pouring in from around the world. While everyone was nearly numb with grief, the US leaders told us: "This is war." Oh, it was so true: The sites of the ruins resembled war zones with piles of twisted metal and heaps of debris. The smell of fire and decay crept from the rubble. Yet, *Ground Zero* soon became *Ground Hero* (Cardinal Egan). From the ashes of death and destruction rose the spirit of determination to overcome this tragedy. Many Americans answered the call to raise the flag. Unfortunately, not everyone understood the display of the national symbol as a sign of compassion and sorrow for the people who lost their lives at the hands of the terrorists. For some it meant a call for vengeance and retribution.

As the media informed us about the rising tide of violence against Arab-Americans due to ignorance and racism, intolerance and hatred, we realized that now, more than ever, a positive dialog had to start. We, the organizers of the conference, became determined not to succumb to panic and despair. On the contrary, we felt that we had to come together to celebrate the dignity and sanctity of human life.

The conference's theme of "Visions and Visionaries in Contemporary Austrian Literature and Film" had become, in our opinion, particularly appropriate and thought-provoking. As scholars of Austrian literature and culture, we have long come to understand that Austrian writers have a distinctive relationship to their nation, Austria's Second Republic, and the country's fascist past. Austrian writers cannot evade writing about their country. They create stories about human frailties and strength, about strife and triumph, about suffering and joy, about dreams and nightmares. Yet, the country has a stronghold on its writers (and filmmakers), and they wrestle with it. They love it and hate it; they reject it and leave it, only to observe it from the distance; they take it apart and put it back together again: Each image is different, singular, unique. Austrian literature since 1945 has reflected the writers' love-hate relationship to their country.

Austrian writers "bauen Phantasieräume auf, erschaffen sich eine Welt, die anders ist als das Land, das sie hervorgebracht hat. Und all ihre Phantasien reagieren auf dieses Österreich, vergrößern es ins Unheimliche, verschönern es in Friedliche, verniedlichen es ins Spaßige."¹ The conference's intent was to examine trends and trendsetters of visions that manifest themselves in form (*Gestalt*) and content (*Gehalt*), e.g. spaces of utopia or dystopia, visions of a postmodern Austrian society, and notions of identity and myth. We were grateful to the large number of colleagues from the US and abroad who braved the

worrisome and taxing circumstances and traveled to Lafayette College (which lies eighty minutes west of Manhattan). Our heartfelt thanks go out to those who came and shared their research and insights and thus, contributed to the success of the 2001 Austrian Conference. In fact, everyone seemed to take pleasure in the congenial atmosphere and relish the chance to meet old friends and make new ones, even though the motto "everything is different since September 11th" was broadcast continuously over radio and TV waves. Moreover, our colleagues offered a wealth of interesting papers and stimulating discussions, e.g. on Ingeborg Bachmann, Thomas Bernhard, Lillian Faschinger, Peter Handke, Josef Haslinger, Gert Jonke, Michael Köhlmeier, Margret Kreidl, Anna Mitgutsch, Christoph Ransmayr, Elisabeth Reichart, Gerhard Roth, Johannes Mario Simmel, Marlene Streeruwitz, Werner Schwab, as well as presentations on films by Michael Haneke, Xaver Schwarzenberger, and the transgender filmmaker Hans Scheirl. Also, the writers Gerhard Kofler, Elisabeth Reichart, and Evelyn Schlag read from their work.

THE WAY WE THINK IS THE WAY WE WORK

Even though, Austrian Studies is by and large not sufficiently integrated in American German programs, the large number of conference participants confirms the continuous interest in Austrian literature and culture studies and its importance for American Germanistics. Many scholars and teachers have worked tirelessly since World War II to give voice to Austrian literature and film in the United States. Their "labor of love" has built bridges between the two countries and thus secured a dynamic intellectual and intercultural exchange.² In Spring 2001, Austrian Studies in American Germanistics

entered a new phase with the founding of the international organization MALCA (Modern Austrian Literature and Culture Association): Subscribers to the journal *Modern Austrian Literature* (MAL) are members of the new association; MALCA's annual conferences are organized by a member of the association and held annually either in the US or Canada. At both the ACTFL and MLA conferences sessions are organized by the MALCA research committee. The "Call for Papers" is published in *Modern Austrian Literature*. MALCA's first board meeting was held during the Lafayette conference.³

These recent initiatives for the advancement of Austrian Studies within American Germanistics are exciting. However, our positions as teachers and scholars in German and foreign language departments across the country are still vulnerable despite the concerted efforts to reexamine and restructure our programs during the past decade.⁴ In the era after September 11th it is more pressing than ever that we continue to engage in consciousness-raising and make aware of the need to learn about and to learn from the Other because ignorance breeds fear, and fear causes intolerance, and intolerance produces violence, terror, and death.

Since September 11th no one doubts that we live in the age of "globalization," where events that occur somewhere on the globe can affect us dramatically. In our "global village" it is vital to focus on becoming responsible, skilled, and effective "global citizens." True, the term "globalization" has acquired considerable emotive force. However, we realize that due to the evolution in information transfer (Internet) and transport (airplane), the phenomenon of "globalization" is inevitable and irreversible. The future for our students as members of the "global village" will be demanding.

As teachers and scholars of languages and literatures, we have participated in our students' preparation to become effective "global citizens." We provide our students with ample opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultures—the mere consumption of artifacts, *Bildungstourismus* alone will never suffice—, so that they can gain new insights and recognize their own prejudices. We engage them in discussions that do not trivialize differences but reflect on what makes other peoples' cultural traits valuable to them. We lead them towards making a commitment to value the Other and to accept their own cultural marginality. As a result they will grow to understand a given situation not only from their point of view but also from that of the Other. Hence, the study of foreign languages—as well as cultures, histories, and literatures contained within—provides our students with the opportunity to learn about themselves. Sander Gilman's statement remains valid: "Teaching language is not 'merely' skills transfer...Teaching language is teaching culture and teaching culture is teaching history and teaching history is teaching literature."⁵

Crossing cultural borders, illuminating inter- as well as intranational and cultural social dependencies, and transcending disciplinary boundaries bring enriching intercultural dynamics to our teaching and to our research. In fact, the way we think is the way we approach our subject matter, the way we reason is the way we conduct research: "Denkstile sind auch Arbeitsstile" (Martin Krusche, www.kultur.at). It is, therefore, important that Austrian Studies and MALCA move toward inclusiveness and define new parameters across disciplines, since interdisciplinary accomplishments in teaching and research are, in fact, intercultural achievements.

POSTMODERNITY AND BEYOND

Communication and intercultural exchange have taken on new meaning since the Internet and the Worldwide Web have become modes of information transfer. Effortlessly we navigate in cyberspace and move from the present to the past and back. "As all places of history and events around the globe become equidistant, we lose/they lose their sense of specificity and dissolve into a now that can be stored, retrieved, and changed."⁶ However, digital technology and its effects go far beyond those of accessibility and convenience: "Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness."⁷ The Internet has dramatically changed the way realities are constructed and perceived. The unrestrained export and import of music, texts, and images have moved artistic expression from the periphery towards the center, thus overlapping and blending together counter-culture with mainstream art. This has caused the dissolution of what Andreas Huyssen calls "the great divide" between the elite and popular culture.⁸

Netzwerkkultur beinhaltet all die prägenden Momente der Moderne und Postmoderne, verstärkt und vollendet sie – die Technisierung der Sinne, die Umgestaltung von Raum und Zeit, die Auflösung des Meisterwerks gerade im Moment, als es am meisten gilt. Was zum revolutionären Kulturwandel führt, sind aber nicht die Maschinen, sondern deren Benutzer – das Publikum, das seinen Rang einfordert.⁹

The virtual realities in cyberspace together with the deconstruction of meta-narratives, the fragmentation of truth, and the commodification of art constitute postmodern conditions of culture.

In a polemic published in *Austria Kultur*, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, director of New York's Austrian Cultural Forum, asks "Who's afraid of art in the age of 'd-

production'?" and discusses the wide-ranging possibilities of online and offline aspects for the creation and distribution of contemporary art.¹⁰ During the conference, the utilization of the Internet for narrative techniques and authorship, as well as for the perception of public space and the reception process played a major role. We set up several computers in an adjacent room and invited conference participants to join Martin Krusche in the *kühle Extrazimmer*. He encouraged everyone to engage in conversation whereby a narrative would be created, since—according to Krusche—the notion of "narrative" refers to a basic human need, namely to interact with others and to express ideas and feelings by "sharing myths, sharing experience, sharing perspectives in an artistic as well as an everyday manner."¹¹

Furthermore, in his "Kunst mischt sich ein"-presentation Krusche introduced the Internet salon *HOUSE* (<http://salon-house.net>). This web-based project is the brainchild of Walter Grond, Klaus Zeyringer, and Krusche. The web-based project is the brainchild of Walter Grond and Martin Krusche, two Austrian writers, and the scholar Klaus Zeyringer. In 1995, Grond met the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan. Grond tells the story:

[Karahasan] brachte mich nach Sarajewo und lebte mir vor, was der "Dialog der Kulturen" bedeuten kann. Und ich begriff, daß die Debatte um den Kulturwandel entlang der technologischen Entwicklung – Internet, Sound, [usw.], neue Mixtechniken, Samplen, Redundanz und Konvergenz der Medien – mit einer Entwicklung parallel geht, die die Begegnung der Kulturen betrifft. Interdisziplinarität und Intermedialität haben ihr Gegenüber in der Interkulturalität – im einen betrifft es den weltweiten Transport von Zeichen, im anderen den von Menschen und ihrer Gewohnheiten.¹²

The *house-salon*—accessible under the URL house-salon.net—is thus conceived as a multi-layered communication platform that features a collage of images and texts,

artistic expression and polemics. It asks for feedback and allows the visitor to engage in direct conversation with the authors. A link connects the *house-salon* to www.kultur.at where the Internet user can access a number of "rooms" and their essay contents. These rooms are currently occupied by the following writers: Friedrich Achleitner, Walter Grond, Dzevad Karahasan, Martin Krusche, Elisabeth List, Beat Mazenauer, Marlene Streeruwitz, Peter Weibel, and Klaus Zeyringer.

house-salon.net was founded on New Year's Eve 1999; it has undergone two previous structural changes, and is currently available in its third form. The home pages of the earlier versions are archived to preserve its history and easily accessible. Walter Grond's novel *Old Danube House* (published in 2000 at Haymon Verlag,) with its questions *über das fremde und die peripherie* functions as the foundation for the *house-salon* onto which the complex hypertext is constructed. In this virtual space a multitude of projects meet each other; they are all linked to each other and create multifarious narratives.

Die Grundkonzeption von house-salon.net ist das künstlerisch, wissenschaftlich, politisch gespeiste Impuls-Netzwerk, das tendenziell alle Welten zu verbinden vermag, zugleich ernsthaft und spielerisch—in einer weiter geführten Strategie des Story-Telling zur Erkennung, Vermittlung und womöglich Meisterung von Problemen: eine Öffnung im Weiter-Schreiben, Weiter-Ab-Bilden, Weiter-Denken.
(Grond, <http://house-salon.net/>)

Two intriguing and stimulating features are *Die Poetik der Grenze* by the Bosnia writer Dzevad Karahasan and *TRANSLATIONEN*. Walter Grond explains:

[Dzevad] Karahasan's *Poetik der Grenze*...[ist] sozusagen unser Theoriengenerator, der sich mit den Mitteln der Salonpraxis nährt – ein Feld, wo Theorie und Praxis, wenn nicht eins werden, dann doch in andauernder wechselseitiger Bespiegelung funktionieren. Eine Poetik der Grenze beginnt den Dialog der Kulturen... Die babylonische Sprachenverwirrung ist in diesem Haus erwünscht.
(Grond, <http://house-salon.net/>)

At the "entrance" to the "room" *TRANSLATIONEN* (also accessible under [languages], Klaus Zeyringer questions the myth that the pre-Babylonian state when everyone spoke the same language was ideal. Zeyringer opposes that notion and argues that mankind missed out on "unzählige Denkmöglichkeiten und Weltenanschauungen."

Fremdes und Peripherie-Vorstellungen stecken in Erfahrungen von Sprachenvielfalt. Ein Sprachenkanon, der nicht zuletzt gesellschaftliche Mächte repräsentiert und sie auch legitimieren kann, vermag sich vor allem auf die Rezeption auszuwirken und ästhetisch-künstlerische Peripherien zu erzeugen...Wer Vielfalt gegen Einfalt stellt, wer Eigenes in Fremdes / Fremdes in Eigenes einbeziehen will, braucht Translation.
(Grond, <http://house-salon.net/lang/index.htm>)

The *house-salon's* embrace of anti-canonical inclusiveness is striking. It stands in contrast to common postmodern thought that, focusing on aesthetics and philosophical matters, concentrates on the fragmentary properties of our pluralist societies. The *house-salon's* open-ended, polymorphous design signifies inclusion.

Even though postmodernism made visible the economic, political, gender, and colonizing hegemony inherent in western (American and European) "objectivity" and "universality," postmodern theory took little notice of its cultural and social implications. Yet the postmodern 'self'—fractured, hybrid, protean, multifaceted—has been navigating fluid cultural territories for quite some time: "Unsere Identitäten erfahren längst durch Migration vieler Menschen und die weltweite Zirkulation kultureller Zeichen ihre Veränderung" (Grond 25). The "Third World"—formerly colonized, marginalized, and disenfranchised—has disturbed the long-standing hierarchy of power by penetrating the West with its literature, its immigrants, its languages, foods, fashions, and films.

Was bisher als Dritte Welt ausgegrenzt war, nimmt heute inmitten des Eigenen Platz...Längst bereichern die Geschichten vom Überlebenskampf der Migranten, von Ihren Auseinandersetzungen mit der Gemeinschaft,

der Natur und allem, was sie sich nicht erklären können, unsere Literatur. Dichtung im deutschen Sprachraum bedeutet inzwischen auch die von Dzevad Karahasan oder Kuma Ndumbe III, von Feridun Zaimogly, Radek Knapp oder Irena Vrkljan. (Grond 19)

In the past few years, several conferences on post-postmodernity took place in the United States. The current debate, while denying the existence of a universal human nature, acknowledges universality in the possibility of cross-cultural understanding and advocates crossing. The cross-cultural experience provides opportunities for rethinking how one can understand everything "as a kind of crossing that is always ready for more crossing."¹³ The project *house-salon*, located in cyberspace, divided up into rooms linked to sub-rooms, filled with texts and text fragments, images and fractured visions, multi-lingual and multi-cultural, and accessible to anyone who surfs the Internet may well be considered a significant contribution to post-postmodernism. It is an example of how inter- and intracultural communication can be structured and conducted in our post-September 11th and post-Iraq-war era because it sheds light onto the fascinating and wide-ranging interrelations of our diverse cultures.

Ernestine Schlant states that successful societies in the post-postmodern future will be societies of "inclusiveness and instantaneity, composed of fragments that reconstitute in fluid, constantly shifting patterns, with individual members arranged in eclectic assemblages of bits and bytes of multipurpose functions, operating under the impact of derealization, even as derealization absorbs all domains...The global village does not grant escape routes" (Schlant 29).

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ENDNOTES

1. Anton Thuswaldner, ed. *Österreichisches Lesebuch* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2000) 9.
2. *Leben mit österreichischer Literatur. Begegnung mit aus Österreich stammenden amerikanischen Germanisten 1938/1988*, ed. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur und der österreichischen Gesellschaft für Literatur (Wien: Zirkular) 1990.
3. <http://flan.csusb.edu/austria/MAL.htm>
4. *Germanistics under Construction. Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Prospects*, eds. Jörg Roche and Thomas Salumets (München: Iudicium, 1996).
5. Sander L. Gilman, "The near future at the Millennium" (*Germanistics under Construction. Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Prospects*, eds. Jörg Roche and Thomas Salumets (München: Iudicium, 1996) 11.
6. Ernestine Schlant, "Postmodernism on Both Sides of the Atlantic" *After Postmodernism*, ed. Willy Riemer (Riverside: Ariadne, 2000) 28.
7. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. (London: methuen, 1982) 82.
8. *Postmoderne: Zeichen eines kulturellen Wandels*, Andreas Huyssen und Klaus R. Scherpe, Hg. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997).
9. Walter Grond, *Der Erzähler und der Cyberspace*. (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1999) 40.
10. Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, "Who's afraid of art in the age of 'd-production'?" *AUSTRIA KULTUR* (New York, May/June 2001).
11. Martin Krusche, <http://www.kultur.at/kunst/base1/core.htm>.
12. Walter Grond, <http://house-salon.net/verlag/reportagen/schreibnetz/set/1.htm>
13. Conference entitled "After Postmodernism." University of Chicago. [The conference was November 14-16, 1997]. <http://www.focusing.org/conferencereport.html>