

VÉRITÉ

MICHAEL SCHARF



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Michael Scharf

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Vérité 2000

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All moral and intellectual decline leads inevitably to material misery.

Émile Zola, *Vérité*

I Love Systems

I love systems; corporations exploit systems and deform them to channel capital. I love habits; capital destroys habits so that implements must be replaced, which requires further raw materials to be drawn and further labor added, and fetishization and idealization to be the main quality of cathexis. I love cathexes; people murder and hurt one another because their drives have been pushed into distorted images or ideas, either by genetic predisposition or by a variety of family pathologies, psychological or physical abuses, that often stem from economic factors, but cross class lines and can express themselves in large-scale non-egalitarian modes of power, as well as in their more familiar manifestations within the living space, a determiner of roles among those sharing it. Neglect, a pathology, results when unstructured time, which is now a kind of structure, is eroded by capital, which requires labor in order to accumulate, via the insinuation of value into cathexis as a result of consumerism, and not consumption, which is necessary. Even when actually coming into contact, people carry distorted images which they bring to their chosen objects, and they hurt these objects, which are people, because such images represent strong cathexes and demand to be reproduced. People also create systems specifically to coerce people into exchange, to force them to play prescribed roles which have real psychological and material realizations. These systems draw energy from libidinous dementias, from partially destroyed cathexes, and result, at best, in exchanges whose participants are profoundly alienated and which are mediated, however indirectly, by money, which was itself created when the direct comparison of the values of goods proved impossible, and is the basis for city life, a kind of idealization, which seems to be preferred by artists because of the kind of social contact it allows, because of the care that its infrastructure evinces, or has remnants of, and because of the kinds of work it affords. There is a little time to write. I am paid per hour for my cube labor, which involves writing, a “shit where I eat” problem, since writing is one way to resist the incursions of capital. But I am an agent. I love systems; they are but structures for action, for encounter and exchange, and come to life only when taken up, providing terms for decisions, terms that should be able to be accepted and used or rejected and reformed but

are not, but yet not all of them are corrupt, although the rate at which they are corrupted as they arise, meaning those systems that do not have to do with law or state or corporate power, the lag time in which they are allowed to hang, poised and expressive, is shorter and shorter, as the movement of capital has become more and more efficient, part of which is due to computers, though studies dispute the actual gains. Systems must be changed from within by agreement or destroyed by revolution, which means destroying sets of images and the people who carry them, which is accomplished by agents, who are people, and replaced by other systems, but distorted images linger as traces embodying former sets of terms, in books and in pictures, in buildings and in testimony to be discovered and recovered, or reproduce themselves through genetic predispositions triggered by abuse. Power itself forms a current wherever there is more than one agent or its image, so that in the absence of state power, which often appears to itself as a coherent, logical system directed at a collective good, but can also appear, even to itself, as an organized and perpetual structure for murder, in its absence, arising when one or another group, concentrated in a locality, has the power of enforcement without the rule of law, which is just as often abused, the results seem to be worse, as we know them from books and images, recordings and translations. Some argue that this is the case in parts of the world of which I have no right to speak, especially being a subject in a state that creates and acts on the indirect or direct demands for their exploitation, particularly in terms of labor power and raw materials, and in terms of culture and in terms of peoples' bodies, their very lives. In the U.S. itself ideas and images have been, for some, replaced with a more subtle brutality taking the place of the old, overtly physical and more directly linguistically transmitted subjection. There will always be exchange, the question is how to structure it, what system to use. People have been coerced into habits and cathexes that lead, directly and indirectly, to the exploitation of others, but this exploitation and its results are hidden from consumers, who must participate in the system or perish, ceasing to exist within recognized or vigilantly maintained alternative social formations, dying, though there will be a day when to be a consumer will not be a pejorative, for there will always be consumers as long as there are exchanges, and there will always be exchanges, but for now the exploitation and its results are hidden, so that responsibility for consumption is made impossible by more active participants in the systems, who produce them and produce images of them, and work to shunt the capital into calibrated sinks, or accounts. Those with ideas for more efficient or

transfixing systems can either work for corporations, or strike out on their own as entrepreneurs within legally defined structures, a decision which is represented as a kind of freedom. There are magazines that cover, that reproduce with words and pictures using raw materials plus labor power, including the packaging and delivery, the imagining and actualizing, the building and maintaining, the reacting and the prescribing of system creation, cover it from the idea or image stage to the addition of capital, which allows systems to materialize, literally, and to shunt the needs, habits and cathexes of people, who put their money into weighted exchanges that concentrate it with the corporation or entrepreneur, which as a legal entity has discretion as to how and when it will again appear in the public domain. Often, because of psychology, and, currently, because of poorly theorized neo-evolutionary demands, capital is concentrated and passed down among those whose genetic bases are most similar. I personally have benefited from this system in myriad ways. When my father became sick with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, he and my mother, 27 and 26 respectively, if age affects decision-making, took out a 100,000 dollar policy on his life, on which they were, with the help of other family members who had accumulated capital, able to meet the very high monthly payments as his condition worsened, and then improved, until his sudden death on May 15, 1974, after which the policy was paid in full to my mother. This policy was a partial image of the labor power represented by my father and reflected a bet by a corporation against his early death; that the labor he did, which was adjusting the habits and cathexes of people who were not able to function completely and efficiently within the system, arguably serving the ends of capital as well as of those, more directly, whose suffering he worked against, was not relevant. The apartment in which I live, in which I write this and which I own with my wife, who is 28, was bought with money directly generated by the investment of money from that policy, by the further accumulation of capital that resulted from the payment being committed to certain corporations, including Merck, Thermo Instrument, and Archer Daniels Midland, of which I had fractional ownership, and is itself, the apartment, a form of accumulated wealth, though its exchange value is dependant, like currency, on the market and easier to pass in the U.S. to people with similar genetic material or with whom legal relations are permitted. Writing this is a form of narcissism, now in wanting to insert myself in a debate over a magazine, but originally as a reaction to answering a questionnaire, which asked for certain cathexes and, indirectly, economic conditions to be named, thus aiding a kind of class con-

sciousness; since the naming recalled an image or idea of a “life,” as a life is a construct made up of representations of decisions plotted over time and intimately bound up with the control of capital, the commonality of the terms of which led to narrative conventions, the questionnaire established a basis for comparison with the decisions, cathexes and degrees of control of the participants, all of whom are at least acquaintances through text-based exchanges. The expression of my cathexis with an image of my father, here and elsewhere “in my work,” can be said to be a luxury afforded by the capital that I accumulated as a result of his death, although the cathexis would remain, I feel, regardless of the amount of capital involved since it was not known to me, conceptually let alone with numeric specificity, when the cathexis formed, which allowed a kind of cathetic purity that is often idealized, the image of love pointed toward transcendent value, one that can trump the market, within literature and most religions, and within many actual lives, if I can speak of them, other than mine, but writing depends on material conditions unattainable in most. If I am allowed to speak of your life, a set of terms and decisions plotted over time, it is a form of exchange; because of certain histories of exploitation, the subject position created by my relative control of capital and my physical characteristics encounters quite forceful and correct barriers to exchange in various contexts. Though they are often portrayed as protecting images of sets of physical characteristics or images of set of habits, called race and culture, gender and sexuality, such barriers are forms of resistance to the incursions of capital, because capital tries to keep as many of its mechanisms as possible hidden, including labor, a transcendental category, in that in most climates one cannot live without working or paying or forcing someone else to work, so that capital, an image or expression carried and directed by people, makes use of psychological prejudice as part of its hidden mechanisms for exploiting labor; it blurs into such habits and cathexes comfortably and easily, through other ideas and images, and attaches itself to them without dissipation or diffusion, as well as targeting the barriers resistance to such images provokes. To target these incursions via economic analysis is the “class trumps race” theory, which can be extended to other categories, and which when implemented led to the splintering of the left in the late 1960s in the U.S. and to the attempted recovery of origins, previously subsumed by the promise of reform and of a better life, both of which are images, origins and promises, though when lived attain the status of memory and experience, testimony and impression, genetic and economic self-justification. Such analyses are abstracted so

as to locate the systemizing terms at work, finding them in appeals such as “France for the French,” which paradoxically allows a majority within a locality to feel that their genetic material benefits from redistributive action, though the complications of having 5,000,000 post-colonial citizens, if I may speak of them, particularly as a Jew, since Jews have been closely associated with the market and demonized via that association, leading some to convert or to become adherents of Marx, a son of converts who conceived of class consciousness as the royal road to revolution, but the presence of those citizens in France has led, because of the contradictions it heightens in certain images and ideas, to the creation of parties such as the National Front, which tries to define what the French part of “France for the French” might mean, and has certain distorted cathexes with that idea, though anyone can shop at Fauchon if clean. Similar movements exist. Class does not always seem to trump race, or gender, or sexual orientation, though this may still turn out to be the result of false consciousness, which most often today is applied to consumerism, and there is no right of return, a material re-creation of images, for anyone. Some theorists believe hetero- and homosexuality to be chimeras created by capital, and believe race and gender to be so as well, though one does not hear the latter spoken of as lifestyle choices, and medical research continues into their bases.

Six Poems for Austria

THE SONG FORM AS A REFLECTION OF ACTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

White shoe. Everyone banding together and putting up
 temporary walls, scaling down the visions they brought to the city.
 Some, defeated but still active, wanted to get the word out,
 squadron-style. “He was Superman 20 years ago,”
 someone noted, “to introduce the idea of voyeurism right from the start,
 so that the wares were less interesting than the unfolding action.”
 So inclined were the guests to dream and loiter,
 festering within a purplish bit of patriotic verse (the antithesis
 of early '30s cosmopolitan cool) that there were no masses.
 There was a skeleton crew.

If the roof is wood, you can actually see
 the spots of Red Man where the workers
 had spit the juice. Rain, ices and family
 services, shingles, previous
 community profiles, exchanges
 with schools in Spain, crackings down, schools of excellence,
 spectrum of blond wood, grad students with legal pads. “I think of our school
 as a large supermarket offering every convenience.”
 We were willing to take them outright,
 Routes 3 and 17, but we were rejected. It is the shapes, in fact.

Stop eating so much, fuckball.
 But which communities, leaning toward
 Bethlehem, Cisco, or CSX,
 are likely to be considered
 magnets for the young?
 Upward, upward, upward,
 the untergang knocked

my block off, then chucked in some of their own.
If the roof is wood, cease fire, tammany hall's a liar,
can, can stand, as man can, stand, as a man can,
stand and fight or fidget, doll or dive down and stay down,
under hand-hewn timbers floated down the Colombia or Snake,
then removed to Breuer's breadbox for the inblasting of the dome.

Reactions to toys predict behaviors but not contexts.
The plusses and minuses redacted by dotted lines—
your Biedermeier plaything was gloriously phantasmal,
but who are you? There's more, more
however, more masters, that, cracked,
were made for dancing in their original form
outside the organization, Giorgio Moroder in Munich.

Keeping the elderly
in the towns they helped build, deals and discounts,
subsidized even if they can't get the notes out—totally humane.
A hidden ground of an earlier era
becomes more visible, now surrounded by flowers,
staunch loyalists. I can't believe
they're paying me to sing; I'm having
such a good time.

THREE LIEDER

a.

In a move that promises to make
 lesser known, the *sucre*
 simplifies most transactions, the music attractions.
 Sang the note *en masse*, dolomite dollarization,
 mountainous debt erased by a special act, a special desk,
 a single reflection in the transparency.
 It's the same thing, but with charts and illustrations
 McKinseying the deal. They smelt my breath.

20,000 feet of meeting space, two
 restaurants and two
 lounges,
 massive but unobtrusive steel and concrete,
 the casual visitor unaware of the causal chain,
 the microwave soup burnt mouth.

b.

All roads may lead to Rome,
 Rhône and Saône, Newark and Paris, Paris and Pittsburgh.
 First Frank One, then (valid tamarind) King George
 in tin ascended, raged, contested, commenced with waltzes,
 yet sets of boots trounced the regal nickname,
 rejected by several revelers who laughed at the host,
 but continued to snuff the coke. Rooms are done
 in gold or azure and gold. Blocked
 hideous drifted, the appointees finally got the airport built.
 That was the Bayou Blaster. This is the Allegheny Augmentation.
 No one in non-smoking notices the wig on fire,
 tin dribbling down the narrow aisle.

c.

At stake is reunification in Germany, the three
male faces of liberty, what's technically called "connection"
in the orphaned Alpine land.

There are still jobs in Germany, but they refuse to get in the car,
or leave the house. Must play the piano in octaves,
hands spread, clicking through mechanically.

Not so many Americans are coming.
They're not internalizing anything.

Recorded music, the promise of steady work,
the hegemony of the American singer—
a tone that's languorous but unflinching, an elocution superb, raw
but somehow smooth, youthful yet somehow worldly. Tomorrow's
actually a holiday, is implicitly stagy. Willful and terrible.

We have to interpret your movements,
given

those uncontent stuffed
with the beauty of others.

LAMENT FOR ADLER

I
 wanted
 an organizing principle,
 the dovebar or the love bear, or
 something we'll later have to pick
 out of our pubes. Gemeinschaftsgefühl.
 I typed a disgusting talk on the pillowcase,
 fell down as the Baron faded as distance greened.

Lazily switched helmets,
 breathed your phero-binomials,
 senses so alert as to be able, little demons, to sort the molecules
 by ruling-dominant, getting-leaning, and so forth,
 the acrid yellow like a flowery shock to the stem wet with chlorhexidine gluconate,
 sodden percale allergen miele cheese cloth encounter. Fits of passion
 collected into small looks, collected again, delayed, issued, left out. Value is feel-
 ings.
 This is something.

Hit the irresistible common
 cultural stock proves luminous, but the incredible richness of "Ramblin',"
 Guthrieloaded and Birdflit, is rightly inaccessible,
 though the reverberations
 of saying so threaten to crush the poem. Self-medicating. Small does and doses
 and does.

I broke into the cot,
 the bedroom the attic,
 as the moon's dive touched the house's tip,
 the bed's topmost knobs and stays. And I had
 a thought:
 honesty
 about
 materials,

that social feeling
 spurring
 the terror of production,
 untoward steaming up of cheap paradisaical farmhouses.
 He helped me make a few adjustments,
 set a goal from which to expect some
 end, agitated for my dismissal
 from the Zentralblatt.

I twisted and turned,
 finally came up with the strangely worded statement
 Du bist natur einen Tod schuldig.
 Fourteen people
 were carried off by the dream's yellow flood, but the bed remained
 a protective channel
 deposited by an unseen collective hand,
 rising sharply in response to the goading cheeks of youth.
 I could reproduce it perfectly.

On my walk
 stuffed
 Ponge in my pocket,
 intending to pay later, not to touch
 the dirty coin while in such a heightened state. Wandervögel
 sodajerked somaticization, deutunged diaspora,
 compressing and deferring familial revelations, determinant clusters,
 radiant nodes that must be removed like adenoids.

Speaks it proudly, holds, and then the abyss, and the immensity
 lightly rest on that dead form that
 lightly here had drained the dew that
 lit my face that bent the spoon—
 The trend is bigger,
 but an index isn't a mirror of activity;
 it doesn't feel good, but neither does a diet.

THE DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

IT'S hard for poets living in the U.S. to imagine being artistically involved with the federal government, and not just because the NEA has become a political punching bag. Though there are national arts organizations in this country, poets in the States usually have to work their way up the ladder of local grants and academic appointments in order to get noticed, and few if any of the national foundations have any sort of direct governmental representation. Groups like the National Writers Union and PEN are great at advocacy when rights are infringed upon, but they aren't designed as liaisons between writers and the government. The poet laureateship seems like the only game in town.

This separation of writers and the government is not universal. Since World War II, social-democratic countries like Canada, France, Germany, and Austria have consciously used the arts to help build national brand identity. So when I get a book in the mail from Canada's experimental Talonbooks or other similar press, often there's a little "Canada" logo with flag somewhere on the copyright page, indicating that the State has supported the project, and that the project, in some sense, supports the State. There is money in the federal budgets of these countries for poets to travel in cultural exchanges, and for study. In this way, the arts can be said to help define the State, in however small a way.

Conversely, the post-WPA American model is like church and state: The arts operate largely without explicit federal funding, and culture is seen (in theory, if not in art market-based practice) as operating outside cultural norms, protected by a set of laws and rights. The hobbling of the NEA can be seen as the result of the recent collision of an idea (art is good for citizens) with the specifics of the things artists actually say and do; the State has thus abandoned the artists. A similar thing is happening in Austria today, but in reverse: The State has become something that appalls its artists, and they are faced with the choice of abandoning it (figuratively or literally) or trying to change it back into something within which they can work.

In February of this year, 30 years of socialist-coalition rule came to an end when Austria's conservative People's Party (or ÖVP) formed an alliance with the upstart

“Freedom” Party, or FPÖ. Through its notoriously slippery and charismatic former leader, Jörg Haider, the FPÖ has espoused a noxious blend of nationalism, xenophobia, and seeming nostalgia for Austria’s Nazi past. The FPÖ’s rise to power came about despite the Social Democrats’ technical victory in the October general election. At that time the FPÖ and ÖVP each received 27 percent of the vote. The Social Democrats, who had been more or less in power since the 1970s, received 33 percent—not enough of a majority under the parliamentary system to form a government on their own. They began talks with the Conservatives, with whom the Social Democrats had been allied in many previous coalitions. (Some saw these “grand” coalitions as corrupt and nepotistic, leading, some analysts believe, to protest votes for the FPÖ.) Talks ended three months later when the Conservative Party abruptly announced that it had formed a coalition with the FPÖ, surprising its country, Europe, and the rest of the world.

The first groups to speak out against the new government were writers and artists. They have been tireless in their protests since February and have refused to acknowledge the new government as valid. In turn, one of the first acts of the new government has been to suspend most funding for writers.

It has been a time of intense activity and politicization for writers in Vienna, not just because of the cuts they are facing, but because their country has been branded as neo-fascist by the U.S., and by the rest of the European Union. (Yet this neo-fascism is certainly not unique to Austria. See G.M. Tamás’s trenchant article in this past summer’s *Boston Review*.) I went to Vienna at the end of April to talk with the poets there, to find out how they were coping with the change in their government. And I found that their situation has much to tell us, not just about the changing arts policy in Austria, but about the manner in which our own voices are heard, or not, here. The response of the poets in Austria to their situation brings our own activities into clearer focus.

Many analysts think the FPÖ has been able to take hold because Austria has not fostered a glasnost-like relationship to its Nazi past, as Germany has (the recent furor over the Konrad Adenauer Prize notwithstanding). Others disagree. “The problem is not that Austria is not dealing with the consequences of the Second World War. It is that we are not dealing with the consequences of the first,” the poet Ide Hintze

said over coffee in one of Vienna's famously pleasant cafés. Hintze, the founder of Vienna's Schule für Dichtung—Europe's only degree-granting poetry school—was trying to explain why the so-called Freedom Party has been welcomed into the coalition-based government by the Conservatives.

The Schule für Dichtung, which was founded in 1991, is not a college in the conventional sense but “more a laboratory for inspiration,” its mission statement notes. It is the first poetry school in Europe since Sappho's (!) and has been a multilingual magnet for European poetics, with classes conducted by poets from many nations in English, German, French, Spanish, and other languages. (Anne Waldman is in residence this year.) Within two days of the announcement of the coalition, Hintze and the school's other teachers canceled classes for the semester to protest the government's anti-immigration and other positions and moved onto the Web (www.sfd.at). “We said, ‘We'll go into exile. But we'll go into exile on the Internet.’ Borders do not apply there.”

In Vienna, daily protests and readings have drawn as many as a quarter of a million people, an amazing head count for a country of 8 million and a city of 1.5 million. These events continue to draw crowds of 10,000 or more. Sanctions (showing cracks at press time) have been imposed on the government by the other 14 member countries of the E.U. But the coalition remains in power.

For Hintze, it is pre-1918 Vienna, the center of the Old World, that may still have something to teach the new. “The Austro-Hungarian empire was a multi-ethnic entity. For centuries, there were at least twelve mother tongues within the empire and within the city. When the Austro-Hungarian empire collapsed in 1919 into Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other individual countries, Vienna was isolated from the sources of its diversity, and it turned in on itself.” That most of the city's historically large Jewish population either left or were killed by 1945, Hintze noted with anger and disgust, made for another cultural void.

While this view leaves Vienna's present overly determined by its past, it's hard to argue with Hintze's logic. According to the guide *Time Out Vienna*, in 1900 Vienna was the fifth-largest city in the world, population-wise. It now ranks 190th. In just the years before World War I, the city produced such figures as Schoenberg, Klimt,

Freud, and the poet Georg Trakl. Since then its artists and thinkers have had less international impact. Although novelist Robert Musil emerged in the early 1920s and the post–World War II “Vienna Group” of poets (including Ernst Jandl, who died in June), the novelist Thomas Bernhard, and the visceral Vienna Actionists of the ‘60s all made crucial contributions, the 1919 border reconfigurations clearly hindered the city’s growth, physically and artistically.

Yet the same prewar, multi-ethnic mix also notoriously produced Hitler, and the horrors of Hitlerian “purification,” Hintze argues, have recently resurfaced linguistically. “The intent was to clean the people from all these ‘problems,’ including language, which Haider represents so clearly with his statements, and which people don’t pay enough attention to. Hitler too wanted to ‘purify’ the German language.”

The poet and novelist Christine Werner concurred. “The language of the population changes from day to day. On every street corner, you encounter election posters that scorn humanity. In the media, single concepts are constantly repeated. What is taking place is a theft of language, a war of words.” (The title of Werner’s new novel, *Vienna Is Not Chicago*, is a play on a former FPÖ slogan, “Vienna Must Not Become Chicago.”) “Haider stole not just the color blue [now synonymous with the FPÖ]; he also stole from the vocabulary words that his constant mangling has rendered unusable for us.”

Examples of Haider’s twisting of language are easy to find, but difficult to pin to him. There’s the time when, on the floor of the parliament, Haider softened a reference to the Nazi death camps by calling them *straflager* (prison camps) instead of *konzentrationslager* (concentration camps). He later said he had meant the latter. He also claimed he had nothing to do with the FPÖ posters that urged citizens to stop the *Überfremdung* (overforeignization), a word frequently used in Austria’s Nazi era. Other FPÖ posters, reminiscent of the “degenerate art” propaganda of the ‘30s, attacked the Austrian avant-garde. When a sociologist published a study of Haider’s appropriation and subliminal dissemination of Nazi code words, Haider sued him.

Haider was governor of Carinthia (a southern Alpine province of more than a half million people) at the time of the elections. Nearly ten years previously, Haider had

to resign his first governorship of Carinthia when he said the Third Reich had an “orderly employment policy,” but was reelected in 1999. He has made other provocative statements, such as those sympathetic to the plight of SS officers or positing the redemptive nature of forced labor. His inclusion in the current coalition government was met with such national and international furor that Haider left Vienna and resumed his governorship. Most analysts think he has merely retreated behind the scenes, where he can continue to tap into a ready pool of hatred. As Werner notes, “The language changed, and suddenly people who had not dared to express for many years what they and so many others thought found their voices.” Others can do Haider’s talking for him.

AUSTRIA’S poets and artists have tried to meet the obfuscation and spin-control of the new government point for point. One of the most active poets in Austria right now is Gerhard Ruiss, head of the Austrian writers union, the *IG Autorinnen Autoren* (Guild of Austrian Authors). In 1971, the year after the Social Democrats came to power in Austria, more than 60 writers groups came together under the organization’s umbrella, the two most prominent being the Austrian PEN and a nationwide organization of avant-garde writers called the Grazer Autorenversammlung. The IG Autorinnen Autoren (www.literaturhaus.at/lh/IG) concerns itself with social, legal, and human rights, and with member problems such as censorship. It actively reviews all laws with literary interests. With the Documentation Center for Modern Austrian Literature and a network of regional organizations, it publishes studies and bibliographies of modern Austrian literature and keeps track of literary activity. The IG itself is “like a PR house for Austrian literature,” says Ruiss. “Literaturhaus collects things, documents things. The IG develops new projects, new ideas. We are a lobby for literature.”

Ruiss’s basement office in the Vienna Literaturhaus, which houses the two groups along with the Guild of Translators, is crowded with chest-high stacks of periodicals, open boxes of IG pamphlets, computers, and overflowing ashtrays. Talking with me and the Documentation Center’s Anne Zauner there, Ruiss described the IG’s relations with the government before the coalition took power as “difficult, but difficult in a normal way.” Austrian writers and artists, like those of Canada and France, had been able to count on a relatively stable percentage of Austria’s budget’s being devoted to the arts, and to supporting individual projects. At the very

least, the money given was “an affirmation, something which the government took pride in,” even if the funds often weren’t enough to cover many projects.

But when the coalition was formed, he and Zauner continued, “The first thing that happened was that ninety-nine percent of Austrian participants in cultural fields said no to the government.” And the government, in turn, has said no to them, diverting money that regularly went to contemporary art and literature to traditional folk arts and festivals. “One thing which one could rely on in the past was a line of communication between culture and government. One could talk about things, however difficult they became,” says Ruiss. Those lines are down now, for the most part.

The main way that poets and other artists have been communicating with the government of late is through protests and readings. Asked if the changes in government have provoked corresponding changes in poetic practice, Ruiss said, “Writers are being more direct, and now they are constructing their texts specifically to reach the public directly, whether it be at events or in culture periodicals.” The IG is currently overseeing two public reading series: a daily reading at the culture embassy, called “The Daily Reading of the Concerned Citizen,” and a weekly series of mobile events called *Literatur vom Laster*, which is a German pun for literature “from a truck” and “from a vice.”

Since the election results last year, Ruiss has spoken at dozens of demonstrations, has been on TV panel discussions (even debating Haider), and has been the moderator of many larger-scale demonstrations. One must recall the galvanizing effect of the Vietnam War on U.S. culture workers to appreciate his level of activity and determination, along with that of many other poets, writers, and artists who have made the protests so successful.

Austria, like other countries where there is relatively greater government participation in the arts, lacks the layers of grant and other private foundation money that American poets sometimes manage to secure (as well as the U.S. profusion of poet-sheltering MFA programs), so the loss of government funding, which is just starting to be felt, is a particularly severe hardship. Yet along with many others I spoke to, Ruiss was unapologetic about taking whatever government money the group

can get for now. “The government itself does not distribute the money. And it does not literally ‘pay’ the money. It is the money of the taxpayers, and it is distributed by juries. The government is the political representation of Austria, and a kind of representation which we do not accept. That’s all. So it is the attitude of the association that the government has lost the right to speak and act in the name of culture and of artists.”

The idea of the government’s speaking and acting in the name of artists is perhaps even more alien to U.S. writers than is the notion of a highly visible writers union. (The National Writers Union—NWU—while great on contract disputes and free speech, has not surfaced as a media player as has, say, the Academy of American Poets.) But Austrian poets seemed to grasp quickly the implications of such a loss—the loss of being taken seriously by the political system. Nils Jensen, the editor of the international German-language magazine *Buchkultur*, which is based in Vienna, has prepared a special issue collecting responses to the election and the coalition. Jensen (“a good German name,” he jokes) thinks that the change has yet to be assimilated by many of the country’s writers. “The older ones, the famous ones—names—they’re sitting at home and are very angry and they go to discussions, and they talk about it. They say ‘Okay. No. I have to wait, I have to work, I have to think about it, it has to settle’ in order to react fully. Many of them also had problems with the former government, and this is the way they are used to working. It’s a valid form of protest.”

But Jensen reserves his highest praise for the younger poets. “The younger people, musicians and writers doing hip-hop, rap, and so on, they reacted immediately. They had new work right away, and it was very funny, and good, you know?” He details some of the cellphone-toting activities of the “affinity groups” that take part in protests, moving quickly in small bands from one site to the next for maximum impact. “I think they are very effective. They have no names—they’re called ‘red and white’ [for the colors of the Austrian flag] and things like that. This is the future.”

The result, Jensen says, has been not only a greater political awareness on the part of a hitherto rather playful group, but the beginnings of a sea change in publishing practice. “The publishing houses, they have to work it out, and talk about it,

and it takes time and costs a lot of money. You can't print a hundred books, you have to print at least three thousand. So the houses say, 'No, it's too expensive,' and the younger poets say, 'What? Just put it up!' There's a big difference between the generations. The new direction is no longer right or left, it's just moving, doing."

Yet Jensen agreed with Ruiss that the loss of government funding would have a huge impact on poetry in Austria. The fall is the time when grants are normally renewed, and renewals do not seem to be forthcoming this year. "I think a lot of small organizations will have to stop their work," Jensen says evenly. (*Buchkultur*, as a commercial enterprise, is not affected by such withholding.)

Anthologies of post-coalition work have begun to appear. The Schule für Dichtung has produced a CD of protest poetry and songs. A great deal of material has appeared on the Web. And the "Concerned Citizen" readings and other events continue unabated. On one in a series of strangely cloudless Vienna days, I met Claudia Bitter, a young poet who had taken part in a variety of demonstrations. I asked what her reactions had been so far.

"The first change for me personally was that I could not write anymore. I was shocked. I thought I had to write in the form of cries, or I could do nothing." I asked if any of the writers groups had played a role in her response to the new government. "I'm a member of IG Autoren, and I go to the demos, but I'm not active in the groups themselves. Schickaneder Kino [a prominent organizer of poetry slams] asked me to read, but I didn't have any work. I looked through my old work, and nothing seemed appropriate." Bitter has been keeping a journal, and remains committed to protesting.

Eva Rossman, a writer and former constitutional lawyer at the Federal Chancellery, said she has less time to write because "we must keep coming out, to show that this government cannot become 'normal.'" She finds herself invited to read less frequently now, and attributes it to the looming budget cuts. "A lot of culturally and politically engaged groups are still waiting for the public money for this year, and they have the feeling that the more they stand critically against this government, the less they can expect. I think they are right." Government officials contacted for this article had not responded by press time.

Asked about the role the IG or other groups have played for her, Rossman said, “The FPÖ’s cultural attitude of *Blut und Boden* [“Blood and Home Soil”] perceives anything beyond folk culture as a provocation against themselves and homeland. They have been rather successful in making the public think that criticism against them and their government is criticism of Austria generally. The IG Autorinnen is part of the active resistance against this—it has been crucial for artists and others who don’t agree.”

Writer Werner has witnessed unprecedented involvement: “Almost everyone who writes takes part in protest actions.” Like Jensen, she finds the effects still shaking out. “It is not easy to express myself succinctly. All in all, we are confronted with a terrifying loss of spirituality, and yet there is a creative, intellectual potential that must become all the louder and fiercer.”

On the surface, it can nevertheless appear to be business as usual in Vienna. It is possible to work, shop, lounge, visit many museums, and take in concerts without having to think about who’s in charge. But the continuing protests, and work in Vienna’s profusion of galleries and other artist spaces keep one reminded, as did the large show I saw in Vienna’s famous Secession building, which included recent politically-charged works and label copy explaining them. Such presences have a real effect on maintaining civil life. I had in fact been afraid to come to Vienna, thinking the change in government would give license to thugs and violence. Gerhard Ruiss explained why that hadn’t happened:

“This situation is not the same as sixty plus years ago where it was demagoguery. It’s racist politics now, generally racist, but they have not succeeded in getting the mob on the streets. What has been successful is the vote. And that people like me or [playwright] Elfriede Jelinek or [evangelical bishop] Gertraud Knoll get defamatory letters and anonymous telephone calls with threats and verbal assaults [as has Christine Werner]. But there has been no physical danger. Yet.”

An examination of our own institutions, including the NWU and the Academy of American Poets, will have to wait until next time.

For more information, visit the following Web sites:

A nonprofit site devoted to documenting the change in government for the international community. An excellent source of information and links (English): www.reaustria.org

Internet Center for Anti-Racism in Europe (English): www.icare.to

An Austrian arts site, which includes a manifesto in English concerning the new government (German and English): www.lot.at

For Literaturhaus (German only): www.literaturhaus.at

For the IG (German Only): www.literaturhaus.at/IG

For the Schule fuer Dichtung (German and English): www.sfd.at

Another Side of Closure:
Fifteen Sonnets and an Envoi

I

Sunday stultifications make poor poetry;
until it's happening for me
a certain phase of my life might just be over.
All partial demands merge
into a single demand, permanent parabasis
from the standpoint of some particular critical

specialization.

Reintroduction into a particular struggle,
an all-encompassing idea at the whim of the individual
makes Mary's bowl of shells diverse and diffuse.

Embroidered my stipend and put it up;
justified each allusion with an organic form
so compelling, it smacked me across the face and docu-
mented the welt itself with Jen's polaroid.

II

“Transactional knowledge” makes
the two place predicate show up at Bernstein’s birthday
as imagined revenge swells the mind’s miscellany.
Ethical requirements can readily be thought of as commands,
holding the head to the ice and sticking
the res extensa pat.

Pissing on the rails loosens everything up
but passing hours can’t dampen the page.
It’s a reactionary emotion, the mark of a morality in chains,
further foreshortening the frozen cogito aureole.
No discernable difference in musicality,
generationality
destroys the lingering shtetl sheen, references
the best explanation to tighten the latent lugs.

III

Meistersinger grabs the shears,
hiccup at the fraenum.
To tell what he sang would
break the code, force the school of shad
apart from the other
American food fishes,
“the very prop
on which drapery’s purpose
hangs.” Warming up
the cotton with a hot iron,
the soothing,
motivating
muscles
of our arms.

IV

Nice things. Nice things.

Our planet has a big, dead moon like yours,
spots on the sheets, and viscous mailboxes—fa fa
fat blue seedy domes—cararapacesararay,
untraceable source.

Patient analyst,
poem session.

Bee haven, paeanuts,
excreting hornden,
grand gallumpf.

Mope
your way past me into the group grope—
p,t,k
b,d,g.

V

The boozehound laid off the sauce,
got the tattler and the spectator
in cathooks, while I was taken
to Jesse's basement to prepare the astronauts for launch.
The doll got a smart frock; I got permanent vertigo,
heated exchanges in the back of the Bonneville.
Flipping through *Bilious & Frisbee*
I browsed,
I dowsed and quivered,
I was doped, denatured and sprayed.
The nose of the horse tips down as it reaches
the end of an arc. If you don't believe I have a fever
I'll drag it out again. Someone
has to pay for Grandpa's Caprice.

VI

Blent banners hung yellow,
white, breezed in off the shore,
undippable where the surfeit would stick,
sheer and clear, skin-like.
I brought in the buckets of donuts,
coffees light and sweet and light and black and regular,
coffees hot and wedged into the paper tray,
straining out the spills and keeping the containers
still. Children ran in pools. Headscarves and lenses
dotted the periphery, ringed in black pebbly asphalt,
perfect for tocking the asinine ashplant, the little rock
dots marred by repeated contact, whitened at the tips.
Narrow rectangular gardens harbored
stinging bugs the creams kept off.

Can manage the parity,
can
canvas and rubber any
room and wire it up.

VIII

He continued to consult her

for her mutti,
impossibly beautiful

sunlight streaming
snowsuits gleaming
sweet

breath
like pot
and
marigolds

moonrocks
clean washed flowers
sweet

song.

IX

The small swastika on the wall of the bathroom
remains for months, and the bartenders all know
about it, but no one lets it signify so
everyone lets it remain. There's an argument
that would say that even expending the energy
to notice it, get the materials, and paint it over
constitutes a reification, the thing that makes
the sign work. Nothing once the pen is capped
except what is brought to the can.

Axl Rose was just trying to accomodate
Reagan. I'm free—I'm shaving, I'm going to work. Cribbed
means stuck in the house, penned means wrote.
Postrestaurant, it's stopped. The four mil
black plastic won't rip, held and twisted by the arms.

X

It's easier to ask permission
than to ask for forgiveness.
The inability to get one's relationships
'formed' properly, so that energy flows properly,
leads to making or consuming,
pretty one-sided.

The great work is that
that retains its address
in any context. Poke
your head into the cake
shape, leave with flecks
cheeked, brush the mohair.
In slow motion, I fell off the chair.
Managed—

XI

erogenous maturation. In the sixties
we did more with our bodies, enormous
grunting groped idiom mocked
genuflecting, yet reproduced paradigmatic roles.
Now we're out of action,
prone to academia's bloated
Torcello, fragrant
septicemia, lamely inflated gerunds.
(This is not an attack on your favorite MFA.)
Every emigré left at the New School under
robotic control, brought on by failures in reading
that left *Defensive Rapture* out of the account, all charm drained.
This is a motivation for doing neural scans:
people don't want to lose their loved ones.

XII

The cumulative weight of the sheetrock
used to reconfigure DIA's vast interior
is the project, offal dumped in the furrow.
Clytemnestra and the Clydesdales,
chips and sockets, fishing boats,
400 cubic inches of love,
stuffed boots, straw
men, runny rubric. I entered
a period of self-criticism, brokered
some of Don Judd's toy planes.
There's enough work around for all of us,
hooves lined up in la Villette. If you assume other people's
brains aren't as big as yours, you've made a '90s movie.
Half a melon seems impossible, endlessly seeded.

XIII

The way to attract art world money
is to write about the art world.

The nature of encounters will change, as will
the valences of ideas. Instead of attempting
to graft theory onto procedure, or foster
interpretations of concept-based goals or goods,
substitute Godard's complex mourning for women,
la départ de la nourrisse, become obsessed
with the late work (the rektoratsrede for example), and reject
the social as a transcendental category when opposed to labor.
If there is an order of things apart from being, the "completion"
occurs when we propose it as impossible:
someone must always internalize the rules.

We've got pretty good agreement on Baudelaire, but only
in that we've got conventions in the head of which he makes adept muce.

XIV

After the nihilism of modernism
that either crashed and burned in
theological or fascist fervor, or into un-
healthy obsessions with the body's many
manifestations, and after the frustrate ironies,
pop inoculations, bad faith appropriations and scare
quotes that followed in the poetry of Michael Palmer and others,
we are entering a period similar to the Age of Reason, but bereft, depend-
ant on social constructs of our own devising, and on our courage when actually
encountering persons, and not abstract universals. Yet forms had to be invented
to save beauty from language, in order that things not tend toward their definitions.
One should not see bourgeois life as an 'other' toward which it is worth pitching pathos.

XV

The house so enormous,
unturndover in its near transparency, several shades
shaping the light that came up forcefully,
touching little buds of fingers
touching the knob,
pressing tentatively,
while the larch—
rough,
majestic,
insufficient—
emerged from the sodden carpet,
slid languorously down the parapet, and gently brushed,
as if straightening from a near crouch,
the crumbing steps from which the carriage plunged.

ENVOI

At least by just typing it in
I'm not wasting any paper.
Lindenmeyer Munroe a beautiful

ecru and orange,
fantastic
trademark.

Jiggy, allied birds,
weazel, little
chimes mimes.

We responded to it,
loved the *drole*
platter of cold cuts, lay with knees

slightly
bent in the pod
hotel

each dreaming of the other,
like
Kara, Rachel and Damien:

Whitney workers get
blazing paper cuts handling
the incendiary shadows

while assistants cast
the space under Bruce's
clown corral,

then
paint Barbara Gladstone's
nads.

Pieman!
Pierman!
La Pire! That f—ing plowman.

In the bathroom they come and go,
deformed and archipenko.
Tiddly tiddly ooo ooo ooo.

Hundreds of early 20th century
citizens imagine
Isabella Stewart Gardner

in Prada mules,
eyeing the mule,
which cannot reproduce.

Replacing subject
matter with source text—no idea
can sustain faith, yet feathers are strewn in the aviary.

Hits of hash that hadn't
been seen since the early '80s
suddenly condense under the heels of the young.

The baby beautifully
incorporates the pashmina
mouse into its playscheme.

It turns out the Swiss
have been putting gelatin in their yogurt,

and the things you say

can
actually
cause

changes in brain chemistry,
what is meant by *ethos*,
what ... *a way of life*.

Almost Against Archaism

Laden
sodden
beautific
bust-balls
vaulty
bituminous

anguish
 busts the darkened earth,
roves over necessity's
 nestiture,

 while symphonic ideals
wander over the rocks
 in loose groups

 reacting at will, refusing
to take in the resilient materials,
 five hundred parts per million,
colloidal asphyxiates.

Neurasthenic clingings
paradoxically dislodge affection,
 which floats heavily in June humidity,
 sinking in pulvery soft silica
la lune Verdinal.

Passion hasn't swerved to works of weakness,
 except for the time they took
 each other somewhere and breathed
 things at each other, didn't
 say anything, hardly even looked,
 getting colder with each moment clasping
 furiously
 daisy—O,

We must dare to live or doe,
 ambling by grasses, will nuzzle
 the fuzzy numbkin ravine-ward, spill
 the snuffling coil
 down to bang against
 Dover's Dovells, chiming
 indiscriminately.

 So I hold commerce
 with the dead, encountered by chance,
 stuffing the mordant pants
 necessary for the pining
 life's accoutrement,
 exploring only the musts:

 structure,
 acquisition,
 use,
 medium—

but not
another
word.

Now
the king
is in his counting house,
bent lovingly over the sink
lavishing attention on himself;

the rubble dust flies
off each heel as I slide along
the path in shimmering skeins,

bladerly, step-like, describing
a one-in-front-of-the-other thickness,

catching flashes of your countenance
in the wet leaves that reflect my own face,
partial clone.

The failure
is beautiful—

angelic anguish,
soft honesty;

you
punch me repeatedly
where I have stuffed
a pillow.

Two yolks
stare up dumbly,
seem broken up with laughter,
insane guffaws.

False piston
run. Little
never hit
intended men.

No eros in
ideas.

The feeding
was too short
and too little—

this jack,
jerk, poor
goatherd

can't
sandle
the ton-

sil, won't
pash
the inquiry.

Form as patent-holder,
a bedded
infinity;

stubble fields,

dead
cypress,

a marshy
morass.

The Hills Of Dublin And Czernowitz (Now Chernovtsy) As Rendered
In The French And German Of The Authors: Étude De Mains

And so I saw A and C, Gross and Klein, go slowly towards each other,
unconscious of what they were doing,
went and came, quiet, quiet
up there in the mountains, strangers to each other,
les deux pays qui pourraient débattre ensemble des grands défis
qui intéressent la planète.

Problèmes survenus en Extrême-Orient
sans relation
avec les problèmes
traités par l'OTAN,
domaine audiovisuel
en Europe.

Celan's "Conversation in the Mountains" (1959)
some relation to Beckett's *Molloy* (1951),
and both to *The Grand Illusion* (1937);
nationalization
on recognizing A and C,
Gross and Klein.

Hubert Védrine
received his Japanese counterpart,
Yohei Kono, at the Quai d'Orsay, and welcomed Japan's resolve:
"You've come a long way, have come all the way here..."
"I have. I've come, like you."
"I know."

Without seeing them
I felt the first stars

tremble,
and above
one or the other of them,
A or C,

Gross or Klein,
malgré des déséquilibres,
les relations
connaissent
un développement
radical et accéléré.

Excess
has always signified
ambiguously:
beauty,
hidden labor,
waste, abandon, death.

The red poppy itself is a truly French flower,
sauvage mais doux, comme
l'épanouissement de l'arbre qui fait des cerises,
which for the Japanese evokes the shortness and beauty of life.
Ces couleurs, red for Japan and blue for France, imitate
the tricolor, but in reverse.

Une version française
avec deux nouveaux chapitres
sera publiée vers le mois de mars
et j'invite le public francophone à
en prendre
connaissance.

I am interested in your language
as an instrument of liberty.

Do I have to say
Votre langue m'intéresse...
 Can I say: *Je m'intéresse à...*
 votre langue, instrument.

Another medium targeted
 par quelques hauts fonctionnaires are *mangas*,
 the popular Japanese comic strips.
 A number of such authors have been invited to France
 so that the future adventures of their heroes can be set in France
 for example during the Tour de France

in the little-known world of French wine,
 or spent nuclear fuel processing via COGEMA.
 J'aimerais me familiariser avec les langues régionales,
 anything to enter the daily lives of French people:
 "Le Japon, c'est possible."
 France must in fact free itself from constraints

imposed by established values and convey
 a simpler and more approachable set of images.
 The cycle « Agnès B. likes cinema » will feature
The Crime of Monsieur Lange by Jean Renoir (1935)
César by Marcel Pagnol (1936)
Le Plaisir by Max Ophuls (1952)

Bande à part by J.-L. Godard (1964)
The Samurai by J.-P. Melville (1969)
The Last Metro by François Truffaut (1980)
 and *L'Eau froide* by Olivier Assayas (1994).
 On arrival, the city presents only its layered
 synchronous face, looking past Drancy and La Corneuve.

The museum,
the timed
carnival,
unrolls
like punched
piano stock.

The earth folded up here,
folded once
and twice and three times,
opened up in the middle,
the water green,
because I ask you,

for whom is it meant,
the earth, not for you,
I say is it meant,
cat, huitres & the smiling skate
in « La raie » of Chardin,
or the rounded pyramid de pommes

with parrot and Brittany spaniel—
I mean my hand,
what I wish to speak of now,
moved with a kind of longing
indolence which rightly or wrongly
seemed to me expressive.

The little dog followed wretchedly, after the fashion of pomeranians,
turning in slow circles, giving up and then,
a little further on, there they are,
the cousins,
on the left, the turk's-cap lily blooms,
blooms wild.

Rising above the Bay of Tokyo since April 1998,
 this powerful symbol of France's identity,
 which has now become universal,
 will be strengthened
 by the exhibition of the painting by Delacroix
 entitled *Liberty Leading the People*.

Given the size and fragility of the Louvre's loan,
 it has been an exceptional gesture,
 one that required sophisticated logistics.
 To make the most of the symbolism,
 the Japanese Post Office has issued a stamp of Fragonard's
 belle et grand omelette d'enfants;

the pink central knot floats
 with clockwise trails to the northwest and southeast,
 sending out sexual vibes from their uncomfortable menage
 so that they may be born and achieve
 individuality,
 differentiation.

Face à cette nouvelle situation,
 le présence d'un nouveau candidat,
 M. Horst Köhler,
 du B.E.R.D.,
 le Japon a décidé de retirer
 son candidate

avec l'espoir
 d' un leadership
 fort au sein. Techno-
 Impressionism is the last art
 movement of the 20th Century
 and usually involves intellectual defenestration

in the sense of Deleuze and Debord,
thrown by the same force
and immediately taken up,
as when the crews approach
and, according to dictates that hardly signify,
bag remains. Mit den Händen sehen.

Reason as instrument
for numberless small hands;
'Gross' as fully apprehensible by the senses;
humanity a limited bandwidth
with constant capacity,
while the breadth remains to be

defined,
a flag signifying
all beneath—
Étude de mains:
uncommissioned,
sewn.

The people who fell in love
with that particular aspect of France
are now over fifty,
moral authorities for downgraded
positions,
agency

afforded
by small decisions,
the relief of being
listened to,
leaned into
quietly,

ordering food and having it brought,
completely
imaginable,
observers
incredulous,
watching as, at a corner table

outdoors,
the citizen leans forward
and picks up the cigarette,
which had been resting,
and takes a long pull
into the mouth,

the smoke a round pulled
slightly back and prepared
for full exhalation—
a fast thin stream
remaining
insensible,

restrained by
stone buildings
quarried from beneath
beds
long
forgotten.

This time,
then once more I think,
then perhaps a last time,
then I think it'll be over, and with that
the world, like poor lily,
poor corn-salad.

Seen in the city that produced
them, A or C,
Gross or Klein, in relative quiet,
lapine mort
et attirail de chasse,
lièvre mort avec

poire à
poudre et
gibecière.
I see it,
I see it and don't
see it,

le lièvre mort face la lapine morte,
lapine au pierre, lièvre sous bois;
Jean-Bernard Ouvrieu and his wife
opening the doors to their residence
as a point between nations;
me here, stood against a lying word,

a dirty third,
or else finally that here I had
to do with two moons,
both as far
from the new as from the full,
a pile I took and used for my advance.

Irresistible
to project oneself
back to a point
where one
may be alone
with the state;

Irresistible
to imagine
oneself
into being
alone
naturalized.

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