

Body Missing:

1. From the Bar:

Linz taxi-drivers, strangers in town, a remark, the notebook

They used to meet at the bar where I work, two women and a man. One of the women was quite old. Sometimes others joined their table, but it was clear who were the leaders. I didn't mean to listen. At work I concentrate only on getting the orders right. Ask anyone. I never listen on purpose.

It could have been the foreigners in the bar that made them feel at home. Or that they were now almost regulars. Whatever the reason, a few weeks ago there was a change. I could see that the three had begun to let down their guard. Anyone nearby could have heard them talking about their plans.

It's true that I developed a way of calculating their bill very slowly so that conversation would resume while I was still standing there. But that doesn't count. Really I couldn't help overhearing. There were bits and pieces of a story I had never heard before but which nevertheless seemed familiar, about some art works stored near Linz that were missing. I would think about it at night, straining to fill the gaps. Sometimes, for a minute things would make sense, but then they'd fragment again. At the bar, I kept waiting for the man and the two women, to hear more. But they stopped coming.

Another group uses their table now. Today the talk was of the coming elections, the Thursday night screenings at VOEST, the increase in graveyard desecrations. At the counter, Rita, a not-so-young woman in jeans and a black cap was following the conversation. Suddenly she said aloud for everyone to hear: »I am so *tired* of all this. Three *times* in school we had to learn about World War II. Always the War. Nothing before, nothing after. Always the second World War. I don't want to *hear* any more. It's enough!« I cleared the counter in front of her, thinking how difficult it might be to be not-so-young in Linz. Perhaps there is unfinished business, I said, thinking of the three strangers and their plans. But Rita, petulant and a bit defiant, marched off, stamping her clogs.

For a bartender, there is a kind of house rule for such situations: Let us think what we like about each other but say exactly what the occasion permits. The rest can be dealt with off-duty, as I am doing now. Rita is not alone in her desire to forget. But then of course neither am I in my need to remember.

It must be said also that for a young person there is something unsettling and even distasteful about an older woman who is afraid. I understand that. I really do. I mean, if all the mothers panic, who will serve and save us? And it's a fact that I am older than at least half the town, and though I am not afraid, I have begun to think that perhaps I should be. In saying this I know I risk displeasing you. I see the signs of exasperation around your mouth. The past is past, you think. A woman my age, you think, should be worldly, confident, serene, or at the very least should just get on with her job, and leave angst to the young.

At the bar, there is the usual talk of art and other things. To an observer, it might even be considered an enjoyable conversation, moving, as bar conversations do, from the cellars of hidden fantasies, to the attic spaces where these are renamed and disguised as hope. It's always the same. But today with every sentence as the conversation deepens we know that the talk is really of something else. It is an uneasy time. The posturing is no longer playful.

The truth, on the other hand, will come, if it does at all, from the Linz taxi-drivers. I am convinced of that. (It is for this reason almost a disadvantage, I tell you frankly, to own a car in this town.) The drivers know everything: where the meetings are held, at what times, with what attendance, by whom or for how long. The Transit Bar isn't the taxi-drivers' main rendezvous. It's too far from the station. But people say that especially for the foreign drivers, it is their preferred mid-town hang-out.

For a time last spring, on nights when I was alone on duty and the two

women and the man were here at the same time as the cab drivers, I could move across from cryptic references to late-night meetings on one side of the bar to plans for the reconstruction of the lost art destined for the Fuehrermuseum on the other. It all began to seem like part of the same story.

I don't always understand exactly what I am hearing, and the bar gets very busy, but a few months ago I began to keep a special note-book. I try to write down everything just as I hear it. And if, as sometimes happens, a note or a document is left behind, I paste it in.

The notebook is full now and it is time to tell somebody. I have seen you here before, and I have seen what you read. I thought you might be willing to advise me. May I bring you another drink? I'll be off-duty in a few minutes. One more thing: It has taken a very long time to write everything down so carefully. I hope you will excuse me if I remind you that what you are about to read is true.



2. The Story told by the Stranger:

The group and Polly, the Offenes Kulturhaus, what Friedrich sings

As you know, just before the end of the war the Academy became Europe's main training centre for female impersonators. A very good one, too, from all accounts, representing many traditions and attracting students from every continent. There was a long waiting list. Even today there is the occasional inquiry for instruction.

At the time, however, despite the school's main programme, certain art classes on traditional methods were maintained, especially during the summer months. These were listed in the city's tourist brochures with names like **Historical Techniques** or **Ancient Secrets of Mosaic and Fresco** and had a certain popularity.

Pauline Scholl (Polly) was then in her early twenties. Many years later she said in an interview that she had registered for one of these summer courses to see if there was anything more for her to learn since her Lebensborn experience and training. It seems that apart from some arcane techniques requiring slow heat, hard-boiled eggs and the juice of half a lemon, »more suitable for a spy-school than a studio«, Polly said, she learned nothing new. Later she went on to make a brilliant career as a restorer. She must be over seventy now. You can imagine how pleased we were when she phoned from Vienna to say she would join us.

So two weeks ago she arrived in Linz and came directly to the Offenes Kulturhaus to review the master list of missing works. Items from the Hitler collection destined for the Fuehrermuseum and later dispersed were marked on the list in red. She had a coffee, jotted down a few titles and disappeared. Last night we saw Polly's first reconstruction (the Clouet panel referred to in the records as **Feminine Portrait**, 28 x 18 cm). Polly had decided to make it smaller and paler than the original, and had written notes all around the edges listing the sources and materials she'd used. Why the Clouet? I asked. I can paint anything you like, she said, but I thought I'd just begin to work through the list alphabetically, and do what I can in the time I have left. And, in any case, I knew Robert wanted to do the Canalettos.

She had rendered the artist's signature perfectly and, like a good secretary, had placed her own initials beside and just below it. A Polly Scholl Clouet, she said, amused. Robert looked up from the scanner where he was working with some Cranach materials (for **Lukretia**, 57 x 38 cm). Good idea, initials, he said, We should all do that.

Another team-member, Simone, arrived from Paris with whiting, linseed oil, gum tragacanth, her old canvas pliers and gun stapler and great paper bags of vervaine leaves for her tisanes. She stared at the list on my worktable. Do we have to do the kitsch as well? she said. You can if you want to, I told her. We each make our own selection of what we want to reconstruct.

And if two of us want to do the same painting? she persisted. I was tired from inhaling paint fumes all day, and impatient. Then we'll accept two versions of that work, I said. It's not a problem. Shall I show you your workspace? You're on the second floor next to Friedrich. There's water across the hall in the bathroom, — and so on, trying to get her settled. But Friedrich **sings** all the time! she said, and at least three times a day the last time we worked together, I had to hear that Maikäfer song...

3. A digression.

Upstairs at the Offenes Kulturhaus:

Friedrich, painting a Dürer¹, sings:

MAIKÄFER FLIEG!
DEIN VATER IST IM KRIEG!
DIE MUTTER IST IM POMMERLAND,
POMMERLAND IST ABGEBRANNT.
MAIKÄFER FLIEG!²

Simone, painting a Renoir³ sings an 1832 English version:

LADYBIRD, LADYBIRD, FLY AWAY HOME,
YOUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE, YOUR CHILDREN ARE GONE

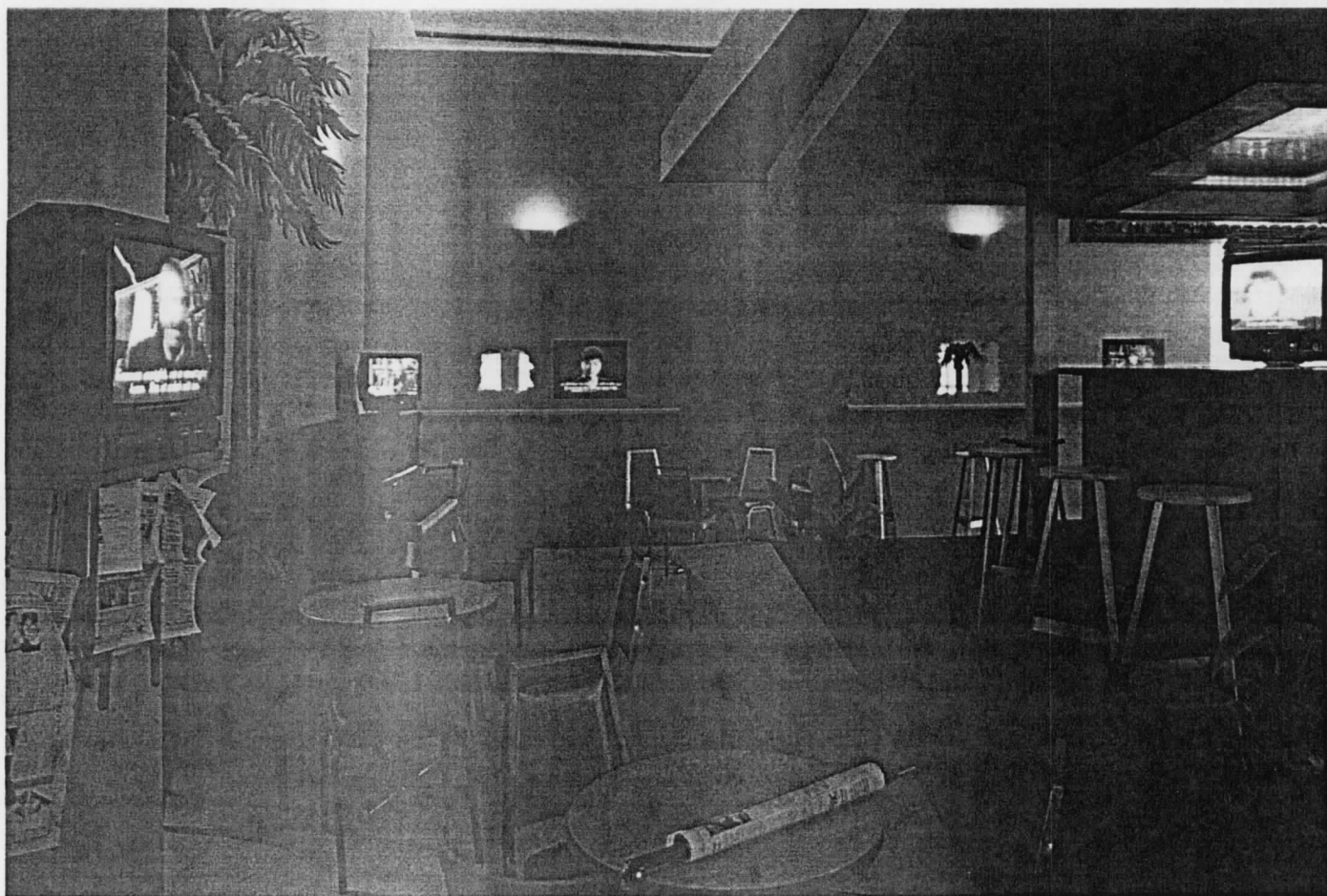
Sometimes the others join in from the other studios and a canon ensues. If you found yourself upstairs by accident you'd think us mad. What on earth are we singing? Hannelore called out suddenly one afternoon. And where *is* Pomerania? Bartered, stolen back again, half destroyed, said Robert, like the paintings. Rostock is there.

(End of digression.)

1 »Bildnis Felicitas Tucher« (Diptychon), Oil on wood. Size unknown

2 »Ladybird fly, Your father's in the war, Your mother is in Pomerania (now Poland), Pomerania is burnt down, Ladybird fly.«

3 »Dame am Fenster« (Madame Choquet) Oil on canvas. 67 x 54 cm



...from the Transit Bar

4. The story (continued)

There were six of us to start with: Hannelore, Simone, Robert, Friedrich, Polly and me. I never did hear from Silvia. Others come and go as they can. Most of us have other jobs and can only do a few hours here or there, with sometimes a longer stretch on a weekend. Still, bit by bit the work continues and the paintings are slowly taking shape. Each of us is doing this for our own reasons. We don't ask questions.

One thing we make sure of is that the reconstructions do not look like copies of the originals. It isn't the art that matters. The art is not mine, not yours, not anyone's. It's gone. Some things may turn up again but we'll never know where most of it got to. We're used to the idea. Think of all the libraries that have burned. It's the absence. Just think of it: First the trains, the mines, the collection points, the steamer trunks, the boats, the trucks; the frontiers; the endless documents, and then, the absence.

We are each making a selection and reconstruction of a small group of missing works, a small opening into the mountain of contradictory claims and accounts. We have each chosen our fraction of the story. Our Rembrandt is no Rembrandt, of course; our Courbet no Courbet, but a mark, a gesture.

It makes sense to begin here in Linz, reviewing the records, reading the interrogation reports, considering the evidence. Like love, art is not enough. But we must start somewhere. The unrealized Fuehrermuseum dream-plan for Linz, the salt mine at Altaussee where the stolen works were hidden, their frantic dispersion or theft, inhabit the separate voids and silences that gather here, under the quiet of the Landstraße at night and the Hauptplatz, when the last Café has closed, the bridge across the river, the roads to the mine and to Vienna.

For the time being, we're hanging the reconstructions - Hannelore calls them embodiments - in whatever spaces are available at the OK. But the body of work is growing and there are renovations coming up in the building. And there's the question of the cost of materials so we can afford to go on. But that's the story so far.

Everything is ready here. The brushes, the crayons, the paper, the canvas, the computer, the scanner, the photographs, the memoirs, the letters, the family accounts, the catalogues, the lists, the lists, the lists, the lists, the lists, and the lists.

5. Thursday

Pasted in the notebook, part of a typed letter or report and a handwritten list of lists:

Dear Anna,

From the documents included with this, you'll see that each art work had an acquisition number, an inventory number, a transport number. Sometimes also an insurance number and an auction or source of sale number. At a certain point, countries, regions, cities and districts were also assigned numbers. And, at the height of the coding fever, all the new collections had numbers, as did the private residences or public museums for which certain works, provenance known or unknown, were destined. If you knew the codes, you could learn from a row of digits the whole history of a work of art, and save yourself the trouble of studying list after list, where the order and placement of each work would change from one document to another. And then there was the fact that many of the lists feature layers of handwritten marks the meanings of which no one today can decipher. The difficulty that remains for us, since the sources are both incomplete and questionable, is that we can't know now, when we look at all the numbers on a painting or a sculpture, or a document, which of several possible histories they describe. It's all wallpaper. And as I said when we met in Vienna, we

(There was no second page.)

6. The lists

From the notebook

- what was collected
- what was stolen
- what was safeguarded
- what was confiscated
- what was transported by train
- what was shipped by truck
- what was hidden
- (list of all the better known hiding places)
- what was sold in Switzerland
- what arrived at the salt mine and on what date
- what left the salt mine and when
- what was borrowed for party offices
- what was given as gifts
- what was insured
- what came from private collections
- what was once another country's treasure
- what the Allies found
- what the Russians took
- what now begins to appear at auction
- what was burned
- what crossed the ocean in strange ways
- what was saved
- what was bought back after the war by previous owners
- what never existed but was longed for
- what can be shown only privately
- what sits in the museums of Europe under new names
- items known to be in North and South America
- (list of vendors and sources)
- (list of the post-war collections, no questions asked)
- inventories of castles
- handwritten original lists
- typewritten collection point lists
- what has been returned and reinstated
- what is »heirless«
- what is still in dispute in the courts
- what was unsuccessfully claimed
- what is still missing