

Part 2: Poetic-political Agency in Art

Kunsthauus Graz

Universalmuseum
Joanneum

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Gries.Graz.2012

A Letter to the Catcher in the Rye

Hu Fang

Dear Catcher in the Rye,

I planned to visit you and the wheat field several times, but I never did. I need to apologize, say how sorry I am. During the July harvest, our friends went on a journey to see you and they carried back some wheat flour. When I smelled the scent of the wheat and I saw a photo of your retreating figure, I suddenly felt released and at peace. I always think that you and only you, such an upright and honest man, would accept our ‘unreasonable request’ to grow an experimental wheat field using only organic fertilizers, despite the fact that everyone around us was mocking it. To be frank, I always feel a bit sorry for bringing you trouble.

As the wheat was becoming fully-grown in your field, I went to the Lungau region in Austria (a mountainous area that belongs to the Salzburg state, the hometown of Mozart) to visit a farmer named Sepp Holzer. In 1962, Holzer took over his parents’ farm on the mountains. He was just 19 years old. Since then, he has been using farming methods he himself invented and which have redefined the ways that humans get along with the land, animals and plants. Through his work over the past 50 years, Holzer’s farm, the *Krameterhof*, has completely changed the way we view agriculture. Because of his unorthodox methods, some people call him the ‘rebel farmer’, yet some also call him the ‘pioneer of permaculture’. And Mr. Holzer remains the same farmer, full

of curiosity and always wanting to try new things. The day after we met he travelled to Kazakhstan, taking with him his wisdom and practical advice on how to improve agricultural practices.

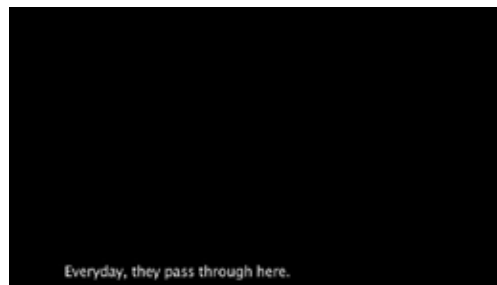
When Holzer was a young man, monoculture and governmental farm subsidies started to become popular in Europe. The farmers in his region destroyed the ancient forest, turning it into a forestry industry with just one breed of plant. Sepp Holzer foresaw that such a practice would bring serious harm to the land and ecology. He was determined to explore a working method that respected nature, and he went about using such methods to maintain, protect and cultivate his own piece of land. As a result, he transformed his 45 hectares of mountain farmland into an enormous forest garden. There are now 70 ponds that he designed and managed meticulously, which nourish the terrace fields. The only people working this huge piece of land are Holzer and his wife, Veronika, yet all the pigs, chickens and even the field mice running about freely are their good helpers. A variety of vegetables, grains and fruit trees have been planted; they grow naturally and take care of themselves. In the places where human hands cannot reach, they grow even more bountifully and healthily. For us Chinese, what this piece of land represents is perhaps a realized version of Lao Tsu’s ‘Doing Nothing’ philosophy:

*Tao abides in non-action,
Yet nothing is left undone.*

The rocks and rotten twigs that were put into the many ponds that Holzer constructed originally served as elements to build up eco-systems for different organisms, but they also created their own unique kind of beauty. This coincides with what Masanobu Fukuoka, the first advocate of natural agriculture in Japan, understood as ‘the art of farming’ (compared to production-oriented agriculture)—Farming not just as a means of producing food, but also as an aesthetic and spiritual approach to life. It ultimately leads to the cultivation of human beings.



under the sun



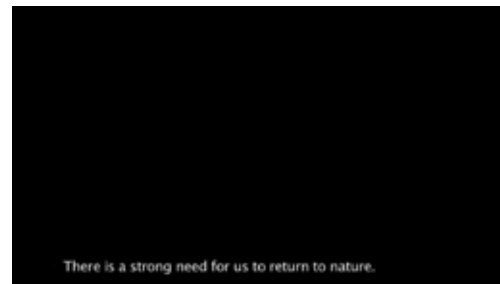
Everyday, they pass through here.



东京 | Tokyo



广州 | Guangzhou



There is a strong need for us to return to nature.



We arrive in Sun Heze's Land



2011 | Sun Heze's Land



奥拉维尔·埃利亚松：通往等待“回忆及爱之展览”的通道，用心亭，2012
Olafur Eliasson: A passage to a quiet room
of waiting for A Friendly Affectionate Sculpture, The Pavilion, 2012



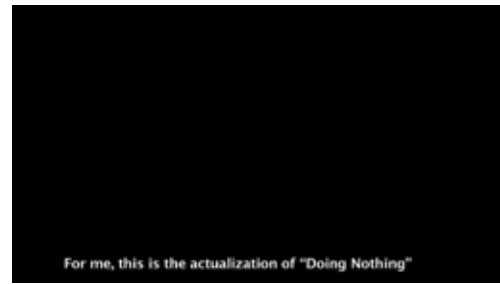
“首届训练营”，流动教室，2011
"Senior Training", Mobile Classroom, 2011



Everyday, they start like this.



So - diversity is a natural fact



For me, this is the actualization of "Doing Nothing"

I looked at that photo of your retreating figure: you were walking towards the distant wheat field and in the background stood a windmill in the open field. I thought it was a beautiful sight, because the wheat field under your feet was growing naturally, and within its healthy colours there was nothing artificial. It was the real look of nature.

Anyone who is loyal to his or her own heart must be a 'Catcher in the Rye'. Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, says something in a monologue that can be compared to the situation of natural farmers today '[...] All these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all.'

We used the wheat flour to make noodles, buns and dumplings. It assimilated its way into our daily lives and into our bodies, bringing peace into our hearts. It made us feel like we could do something to change our lives.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

With my best wishes

H. F.



Pond at Krameterhof, photo: Hu Fang

Searching for Something Edible Gries.Graz.2012

Leo Calice



I like cooking with wild vegetables and wild herbs that I have collected myself. For me there is something poetic about produce harvested with my own hands. However, there is some knowledge required. It is not just a question of recognising edible plants and knowing how to prepare them tastily. What matters above all is to know the right place and the right time for picking the plants.



Searching for something edible: Karlau Prison, 08.11.2012, photo: Leo Calice

Plants have certain requirements concerning where they grow. They often grow in the company of particular plants, and the perfect time for harvesting varies from location to location dependent upon the microclimate, the water supply, the soil, the height above sea level etc. That is why, if someone wishes to gather wild plants and cook with them, time and place determine to a large extent what lands on the plate. I like the thought that what there is to eat is driven by time and place, for this gives one the chance to cook a meal which I describe as the portrait of a place. A meal can be positively charged with the location and with its history. That also describes my way of creating menus. And as a cook, I am always on the lookout for inspiration for a menu.

Recently I went for a walk in Graz along the right hand bank of the River Mur in the direction of Puntigam, to see what kinds of plants grow there. At the Karlauergürtel I then turned off to the right for some reason. Because the traffic was so loud and unpleasant, I immediately went down a street to the left. Quite soon, I could smell it already from a distance, I hit upon a huge slaughterhouse, in and out of which lorries were

continually driving. Meat is for sale there, too. A ‘yard sale’, so to say. The lady behind the long, red-lit counter was very friendly. I didn’t actually want to buy any meat at all. Rather I wanted to meet someone who worked there. Someone who slaughters, chops up and packs meat to be bought in a supermarket. I asked her many questions about the slaughterhouse and its work. She comes from Hungary, like nearly all the abattoir employees. This struck me later when I noticed the cars’ number plates in the company car park. At the end I asked for a recipe for a Hungarian dessert. One that she knew off by heart. She happily wrote one down without being particularly surprised.

Not far from the slaughterhouse, Karlau Prison is located. Prisons have always fascinated me, because they are closed-off locations where other regulations dominate. I walked around the building. Nowhere can one see inside. Just like the slaughterhouse. As I walked past the really high prison walls, I imagined what it is like inside. I was particularly interested in what food was served in a prison, and I rang the entrance bell. I was allowed in as far as the porter. Unfortunately he was unfriendly. But at least he gave me some brief information about that day’s menu. Afterwards I walked through the Triester Estate in the direction of the waste incinerating plant, and when I crossed Herrgottwiesgasse, I noticed a group of houses—buildings without any foundations or storeys, arranged like a small village. Looking from the gate, one can’t see exactly how big it is. A young woman approached me from one of the houses, emergency accommodation offered by Caritas. She was there on a work placement. As I carried on towards the incineration plant, I mused over how the romantic image of a tramp could arise. I then returned to the River Mur, passing by the long-since closed-down Tagger Factory, past the Saubermacher Company, and a Zielpunkt supermarket. It was already dark and I wanted to catch my train home. During the journey I then noted down the following menu:



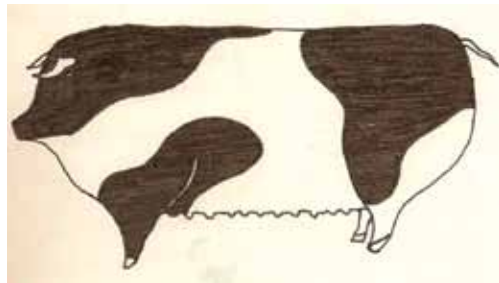
Container soup with carrots, potatoes, pepper and onions from the waste container at Zielpunkt.

xxx

Leberkäse sausage, mashed potatoes, peas, lunch at the Karlau Prison on December 8, 2012

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Beigli, poppy-seed cake, recipe by a worker at the slaughterhouse Marcher



Exploring the foodscape of Graz, 24.09.–29.09.2012, photos: Leo Calice



Exploring the foodscape of Graz, September 2012, photos: Alexander Römer