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Literary Writing at the Workshop for Artistic Professions in Vienna Opportunities and Imponderables of Instruction

For a start I would like to point out the specific situation in Austria. This is a country, which has offered training and further education in the area of writing aimed at prospective authors since the 1990s, a relatively short time.¹

¹ - schule für dichtung in wien (school of poetry in Vienna), since 1991, sieht sich nicht als Ausbildungsort, sondern als eine Stätte der Begegnung. Angeboten werden Kurzmodule, die einzeln – je nach Interesse – gebucht werden können
- Drehbuchforum Wien (Viennese Forum for Script Writing), since 1993: Gegründet um den österreichischen Film mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Drehbuchschaftens zu fördern. Es widmet sich in Weiterbildungsmodulen allen dabei relevanten Teilbereichen.

- Wiener Schreibpädagogik (Viennese Writing Pedagogics), since 1998. Die Sprache selbst wird als Ausgangspunkt gesehen, die Auseinandersetzung mit ihr steht im Vordergrund. Neben Seminaren zur Poetik, zum Erzählen, zu verschiedenen Gattungen werden auch Module, die eher in Richtung therapeutisches Schreiben gehen, angeboten. Ziel der Ausbildung ist die Weiterentwicklung von literarischer, kommunikativer, methodischer und didaktischer Kompetenz, sowie die Fähigkeit, Gruppen und Einzelne in ihrem schöpferischen Prozess zu begleiten und zu fördern, Schreibgruppen und -workshops zu leiten.

- uniT, Verein für Kultur an der Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz/Steiermark (focused on drama writing) gegründet 1998. Gemäß dem Leitmotiv „Kunst ins Leben – Leben in die Kunst“ widmet sich uniT der Aus- und Weiterbildung junger KünstlerInnen vorerst einzig in den Bereichen der Bildenden Kunst; seit 2003 ist es dort auch möglich, sich für einen 2-jährigen Lehrgang in Dramatischem Schreiben (dem sogenannten Drama Forum) zu bewerben, die Altersobergrenze für die Aufnahme liegt bei 30 Jahren. Die Lehrinhalte werden an Wochenenden geblockt angeboten und sind weitgehend kostenfrei.

- Leondinger Akademie für Literatur (Academy of Literature in Leonding/Upper Austria), since 2004. Namhafte AutorInnen leiten diesen einjährigen Lehrgang, der in Wochenendblöcken stattfindet.

- Lehrgang Literarisches Schreiben an der Werkstätte Kunstberufe (program for literary writing at the Workshop for Artistic Professions in Vienna), since spring 2009, auf den ich am Ende dieser Gesamtschau näher eingehen möchte, in order to present this training for the first time to an international professional audience.

- and since fall 2009 the university course “Sprachkunst” (Language Arts) at the Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien (University of Applied Arts Vienna); ein 6-semesteriges Bachelorstudium, bei dem neben klassischen Gattungen auch Wert auf die Auseinandersetzung mit gattungsübergreifenden Arten wie experimentelle, performative und schriftüberschreitende Literatur sowie multi- & transmediale Literatur gelegt wird.

These institutions were chosen, however, because they guarantee a high standard in teaching and are organised on a fairly long-term basis. Besides the chosen

The Workshop for Artistic Professions (abbreviated as WAP), founded in 1999, focused during its first years on events such as event management, rhetoric, fine and performing arts;— training courses like stage design and direction, pantomime, on preparation for university entrance examinations with an emphasis on the arts and – singular in Austria – dramaturgy-training, all of which are still offered.

The program for literary writing (Lehrgang Literarisches Schreiben) was developed from a project of the European Union entitled “Readcom”. From 2005 to 2008 groups in Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Turkey and Austria worked together in the field of promoting literacy and reading skills. At that time I worked for the Viennese School for Adult Education (Volkshochschule – abbreviated as VHS) in the district of Vienna called Donaustadt – but this school didn’t have the capacity for such a comprehensive and high threshold course and so my 2008 change ensued to the WAP, a specialized educational institution within the Viennese Schools for Adult Education.

At the same time I decided to write my dissertation on the topic of “Career Development. Authors between the Salon, the Workshop and Institutional Instruction.”² Within this framework I research, among other things, the findings of other institutes in Europe and the USA active in the area of Creative Writing – knowledge that flowed into the conception of our program for literary writing.

The structure of the Viennese Schools for Adult Education in brief is as follows: founded in 1887,³ it had from the beginning the maxim that

trainings there are more than a dozen of other more or less professional education possibilities for creative writing in Austria.

² „Werdegang. AutorInnen zwischen Salonkultur, freien Gruppen und institutioneller Ausbildung“

³ <http://www.vhs.or.at/65/> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

education should be accessible to all interested.⁴ In the year 2008 a change in the organizational form took place, henceforth the VHS has been a limited liability company,⁵ and the city of Vienna has about a fourth of its shares.⁶ Confirmed by the “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008”⁷ and a new definition of the core task, which is “making available the most comprehensive possible and low threshold education opportunities.”⁸ – this is a promotion of the primary and fundamental education, to work against the exclusion of certain social groups, as well as reasonably priced opportunities for further education in traditional profession-oriented areas. The WAP has a special status within the VHS as a specialized educational establishment in regard to the selection of the educational opportunity (high threshold), to its duration (courses which lasts multiple semesters), the remuneration for instructors (eliminated from obligatory payment recommendations, flat rate payment offer for preparation, paid invitations to guest professors are provided), and the obligatory margin for the realization of the seminars, which is lower.

In March 2009 the new program for literary writing at the Workshop for Artistic Professions started with two groups: module 1 of the program plus the further module Salon, which is especially planned for authors working on an independent, longer book project and wish to be accompanied in the form of a group discussion focusing on the texts.

In this lecture we will focus on the six semester program as the module Salon is an additional opportunity and not technically a part of the program. Here a short overview of the curriculum for this three-year training course: 90 teaching units a year working on texts

⁴ Vgl.: <http://www.vhs.at/10047.html>

⁵ Vgl.: <http://www.vhs.at/ueberuns.html> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

⁶ „Eigentümer [...] sind zu 74,9 % der Verband Wiener Volksbildung und zu 25,1 % die Stadt Wien.“ - <http://www.vhs.at/ueberuns.html> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

⁷ <http://www.vhs.or.at/65/> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

⁸ <http://www.vhs.at/ueberuns.html> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

20 teaching units a year readings & critique

20 teaching units a year literature & history

In addition to this 130 units, 14 Seminars of 10 Units each on specific genres or areas of the literary field, (for example: Art of Translation, Sound Poetry, Children's Fiction, Aesthetics etc.), on philosophical or social justice themes are offered. These seminars change every half-year. By expressing their wishes, the program participants set the respective fields of focus and it is up to the program manager to find suitable instructors. In this structure the three main foundation pillars of writing, reading and background knowledge become apparent.

1. Writing: The acquiring of a skill through theoretical knowledge, which is then attempted in the practical implementation. Detailed and well-founded analysis of texts (written work is submitted in advance over email), constructive feedback supports the individual development as well as the establishing of the inner critic. Authors are invited as guest instructors – with an emphasis on the widest possible range in respect to genres, styles, and poetological positioning.

2. Reading works by other authors, analysis of this from the angle of the writer. Works are selected aligned with the curriculum of the respective module, and in consideration of the suggestions and interests of the participants. (Guest instructors: critics, journalists)

3. Introduction to poetics, fundamental knowledge of literary studies and history, of literary operations, of the philosophy of language, of research techniques etc. (Guest instructors: editors, publishers, agents.)

The didactical and methodical principles comply with internationally accepted standards:

- lecturing tutors are writers, whose function is to accompany participants in the program.
- one-on-one-tutorials are offered
- attempt at avoiding a one-sided influence, by, among other things, offering the widest possible range of instructors.
- elocution lessons
- the option to gain practical experience in a literary operation by the publication of the yearly anthology, entitled “schreibSPUREN” (“writingTRACES”) and by taking part, consecutively, in the reading series “schreibSPUREN – literatur.gespräche” (writingTRACES – literary.conversations)
- realistic look into the situation and way of life of an author (artists insurance, publishing contracts etc. are also included topics)
- raising the awareness of group dynamic processes
- fundamentals and practice in journalistic writing, in the composing of reviews, poetological essays etc.

In contrast to other programs, it is compulsory at the WAP to take part in a four-week internship, be it at a publishing house, with a literary journal or in another area of the literary field such as, for instance, event management. The WAP itself offers three internships, two in the area of event organization, plus another in editing the annual anthology. A further internship in the area of instruction is in development at present: schools are given the opportunity to hold introductory interdisciplinary workshops, which are led by a team of higher semester participants coached by instructors and/or pedagogues.

A new class begins each spring; every third year the new class is offered in the form of Saturday blocks, making participation possible for the employed or those who live outside of Vienna.

Being one of the smaller initiatives in literary writing instruction has its advantages and disadvantages.

The small numbers in classes can clearly be considered an advantage: The WAP for example has an average of nine participants per class, resulting in the active involvement of all participants. In this way, intensive work on texts and the consideration of individual needs is possible – whether it is in reference to genres to be worked through or other special wishes in the choice of works to be read, authors to be invited (workshop conversations, reading series “writingTRACES – literary.conversations”, tandem reading.) This educational contract has no age limits,⁹ which can also be seen as a further advantage. The group is primarily composed of the passion for writing and the interest in literature.

This creates, among other things, a heterogeneous group in reference to lingual origins (provided that the language used for writing is sufficiently mastered by all), age, education and profession, which can equally be seen as a positive factor for the individuals as it broadens the world view and in this way contributes to the worldliness of their texts.

The minor size of the classes and the temporal and intensive cooperation results in close contact among the learners as well as between the instructors and learners. The process of group dynamics, which can be observed generally in any learning environment, are intensified here – there is a great identification among the participants with the program location.

⁹ *Manuskriptum: 28 Jahre* - Vgl.: Ziegler, Edda: Im Sprachlabor: *Manuskriptum – Münchner Kurse für Kreatives Schreiben* zum zehnten Geburtstag. In: Federwelt. Zeitschrift für Autorinnen und Autoren. Nr. 79, Dezember 2009/Jänner 2010. S. 20. - uniT: 20-30 Jahre - http://un001dm5.edis.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=89&Itemid=97 - - Zuletzt eingesehen am 04.11.2010. - oder auch etwas vage: LCB: „jüngere Autoren, die bereits ihre literarische Befähigung haben erkennen lassen“ - <http://www.lcb.de/autoren/werkstatt/richtlinien.htm> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 04.11.2010.

By responding to anonymous questionnaires, a majority of the participants emphasize how difficult it is to combine university studies with gainful employment, which explains why especially the young academics prefer a further training program in block modules, arranged independently from a curriculum.

In addition, an expectation is demonstrated with above average frequency that a training program beyond the university should be practice-oriented. Especially the monthly readings, in respect to the WAP, which are autonomously organized, designed and advertised in a tandem of lower and higher semester participants, are named as a substantial component of the seminar.

Another advantage is being able to decide whether to have a grade system or not. If one tends to be cynical, this attitude, otherwise unusual in Austria (a country characterized by its obsession with titles and degrees), can be considered a luxury. The program Literary Writing at the WAP has consciously chosen to not issue certificates, but builds on the hopefully already present awareness, that realizations and experiences may be more relevant than a piece of paper with the word “successfully completed” for the briefcase or document file.

Other institutes expand their circle of instructors with scholars of German or rather editors of renown publishing houses,¹⁰ and suggest a prospective added value to their participants, beyond the holistic insight into the value chain, which was mainly confirmed in the interviews I conducted with graduates – in part, however, critically noted that some students were given

¹⁰ Vgl.: Manuskriptum: Gegründet 1999, studienbegleitend, 2-semesterig, interdisziplinäre Ausrichtung. Vgl.: Ziegler, Edda: Im Sprachlabor: *Manuskriptum – Münchner Kurse für Kreatives Schreiben* zum zehnten Geburtstag. In: Federwelt. Zeitschrift für Autorinnen und Autoren. Nr. 79, Dezember 2009/Jänner 2010. S. 19.

preferential treatment. Dr. Edda Ziegler, director of *Manuskriptum* (courses in Munich for creative writing) from 1999 until 2007¹¹ termed it in an interview as an “ideal case”¹² if the shifting instructors were “[...] an author and an editor, both of whom experienced literary practitioners [...]”¹³ – but I regard this view skeptically. Whether this teamwork is successful would depend on the division of work.

Critics like to argue that this would include the danger of writing according to the criteria of the market instead of according to the artistic consideration. I would like to object to this statement along with reminding of the freedom of choice of the individual author. It makes sense to consider a realistic view of the literary market. And a teaching team¹⁴ made up of editors increases the chance of a debut far from the small publishing house. Networks with editors have always existed even if it is not a part of the cause, or as was pondered in an interview in the Austrian newspaper “Standard” with one team member of the institute of “language art” (“*Sprachkunst*”)¹⁵ -- this unconcealed cooperation represents a newer tendency in the German-speaking world.

Creative Writing, and let’s not beat around the bush, is likewise a market. A roll it has to have especially for smaller providers in the educational sector. To be able to maintain oneself, creativity is needed. This is why I keep to the maxim that other initiatives are not to be seen primarily as competition, with whom one runs against in a race to for potential participants and who should then be ousted – rather it is central to endeavor with the knowledge

¹¹ Vgl.: <http://www.eddaziegler.de/>

¹² Ziegler, Edda: Im Sprachlabor: *Manuskriptum – Münchner Kurse für Kreatives Schreiben* zum zehnten Geburtstag. In: Federwelt. Zeitschrift für Autorinnen und Autoren. Nr. 79, Dezember 2009/Jänner 2010. S. 19.

¹³ Ziegler, Edda: Im Sprachlabor: *Manuskriptum – Münchner Kurse für Kreatives Schreiben* zum zehnten Geburtstag. In: Federwelt. Zeitschrift für Autorinnen und Autoren. Nr. 79, Dezember 2009/Jänner 2010. S. 20.

¹⁴ Vgl.: *Manuskripte*, Literarisches Colloquium Berlin

¹⁵ Vgl.: Eidlhuber, Mia; Gmünder, Stefan: Erfolg ist niemals planbar. Interview mit Robert Schindel. In: der Standard. Album, 18. September 2010, A 3.

of one's own educational opportunity and that of the others for cooperation. In the course of my dissertation research I have ascertained that in the German-speaking world there are frequent occurrences of institutions using other educational opportunities to distinguish themselves, without having exact information, and thereby emphasizing the more professional opportunity of their own instruction.

To my eyes this shows clearly, for one thing, the competitive situation in Austria and, for the other, the necessity for research and the flow of information and, along with the active participation in the international European Network of Creative Writing Programmes, the imperative of the founding of a national, or rather, of a network adapted to the lingual divide. For many it can be observed that in responding to a horizontal cooperation or co-opetition, a win-win situation for both partners is created – especially with learning modules,¹⁶ maybe within the framework of a reciprocal guest instructor commitment,¹⁷ seminars with a consciously set international focus¹⁸ as well as with individual events of a larger format and cost.¹⁹

¹⁶ schreibwerkstätten langschlag/seminare zum literarischen schreiben für beginnende und fortgeschrittene/von 15. bis 18. april 2010, wurzelhof / waldviertel; veranstaltet vom kulturverein wurzelhof in kooperation mit schule für dichtung und kolik - Vgl.: Newsletter datiert mit 24. März 2010. Sowie: 12. bis 14. april 2010, eisenstadt / rosa pock und peter rosei: klassen zu lyrik & prosa / die pädagogischen hochschule burgenland organisiert in kooperation mit der sfd ein seminar mit rosa pock und peter rosei. – Klassen in Kooperation mit einem universitären Institut: sfd-sprachkunst - Vgl.: Newsletter datiert mit 21. Oktober 2009.

¹⁷ Wurzelhof-Sprachkunst-sfd; Wiener Schreibpädagogik-WAP-Sprachkunst;

¹⁸ For example: "urban storytelling", torino / organisiert von scuola holden, torino, in kooperation mit schule für dichtung – vienna poetry school, asociacion cultural antonio villalba & escuela de escritores, madrid, deutsches literaturinstitut leipzig; gefördert durch das youth in action programme der euVgl.: <http://sfd.at/newsflash/201curban-storytelling201d-torino> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

¹⁹ For example: Das Literarische Colloquium Berlin (Germany) lädt seit 2004 gemeinsam mit der Robert Bosch Stiftung zu Internationalen Übersetzer-Treffen ein; in Kooperation mit dem Goethe-Institut, der S. Fischer Stiftung und Traduki wird im Jahr 2011 ein Treffen unter dem Titel "Tauben fliegen auf" mit bis zu 40 TeilnehmerInnen aus aller Welt veranstaltet. - Vgl.: <http://www.lcb.de/news/> - Sowie: <http://www.lcb.de/uebersetzer/werkstatt-international/uebersetzertreffen2011.htm> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

The “Viennese Writing Pedagogics” arranged another form of cooperation. The Viennese Academy for Life Counseling (*Wiener Lebensberater-Akademie*) offers graduates of the aforementioned training program the possibility to participate or enter into the program and graduate in half the time instead of the normal three-year period.²⁰ The WAP adopted the path to a synergy by inviting those responsible for other instructional program opportunities to its own discussion series “literary. conversations” (or “*literature.gespräche*”) and in doing so to establish itself as a communication center.

Cooperation, which strives beyond the instructional opportunity-cooperation, would be a variation to consider and well worth it: Setting main points of focus in instruction, allowability, providing the possibility of student teaching for training and further education of instructors etc. instead of stewing in ones own juices.

There are no advantages without disadvantages: at the WAP they are found mainly in the area of financial resources. In contrast to the program in language arts at the University for Applied Art, participants at the WAP must pay tuition, which make it difficult for some to enter the program in a country, in which education is still mainly free of costs, and is met with skepticism.

On an organizational level, the WAP team is made up of a part-time program manager and a secretary. There is unfortunately no position provided for meaningful Public Relations work.²¹ Logic tells us that the lower the level of familiarity an institution has, the less renown it is. This is admittedly cynical, but the financial hardships and its consequences can be

²⁰ Vgl.: <http://www.schreibpaedagogik.com/ausbildung.htm> - Zuletzt eingesehen am 03.11.2010.

²¹ Die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit für alle Standorte der VHS wird zentral getätigt; PR-Texte sollen seitens des WAP vorgeschlagen und entworfen werden, was sich angesichts der geringen Wochenstunden durchwegs als Schwierigkeit erweist.

subsumed in the training of authors, creating a realistic view into the life of the artist and can in this way be seen as positive.

To make up for some of the weaknesses of the system, we have tried from the beginning, to develop ideas and take up concepts from other international institutes. In this way an association was founded to enable the remuneration of all participants of the “*schreibSPUREN*” (“writing.TRACES”) reading series and to pay royalties for every contribution made to the anthology. Internship positions in all relevant work areas, henceforth, in the life of an author were established: PR, event organization, research, project proposals, instruction etc. European Union projects, i.e. in the form of learning partnerships, are in preparation.

This lecture can also be understood as a call for cooperation – on a regional, national and international level: internationally it could be considered meaningful to think about a differentiated organizational scaling of the financial contributions to the European Network of Creative Writing Programmes, so smaller training programs are allowed the possibility to contribute to the common network.

Contrary to the more or less worldwide standard a national network of Creative Writing Institutes or programs such as the AWP or The Finnish Society of Creative Writing Programs do not yet exist in Austria. To found a network of this kind, to promote exchange, to promote cooperation as well as research – especially comparative research in the area of instruction – to promote the flow of information regarding possible opportunities, to promote training and further education would be urgently necessary, even appearing collectively in the outside world, to provide some publicity (though “educational work” might be the better term.) To demonstrate the lack of understanding Austrian society has for its authors I would like to tell

this short anecdote: a work market advisor speaks to an unemployed university professor and author: “You are a freelance author and cannot live from this – so why don’t you apply for a job with a publisher and find employment as a writer?”)