

Joerg Fauser, Raw Material (Rohstoff, 1982). Excerpts.

one

In Istanbul, I lived most of the time in the Cağaloğlu district, a little north of the Blue Mosque. The hotel was an old five-storey building in a side street. Next to it was a school, and in the morning all the grades lined up in the schoolyard to sing the national anthem. The Turkish national anthem is really very long, and, like the anthem, Istanbul itself was like a collage with intersecting lines blurring into infinity.

Not raking in enough dough with their five storeys, the owners of the hotel had built another structure on the roof. The view was breathtaking, so was the heat in the summer, the cold in winter, too. Nonetheless – for around two marks a day, one got the same view for which normal tourists had to pay twenty to fifty times that sum. And as for us, we had credit.

Winter came, and Ede and I moved into a small room on the roof. When the wind from Russia blew through the gaps and snow was trickling through the unplastered ceiling, it was definitely more practical to be a twosome. One poured some gasoline on the stone floor and lit it, and as long as the flames were giving off some warmth, the other looked for a vein. We took everything we could get, primarily it was raw opium, which we cooked, Nembutal for dozing off and all sorts of uppers to get going. When we were going, we had to get more dope and everything else we needed – we lived predominantly on tea and sweets – and then we lay there, wrapped in our blankets, played with the cat and worked. Ede painted, and I wrote.

Ede was a powerfully built guy from Stuttgart, whom the addiction was slowly burning out from within – the bone structure was stable yet, but all the tissue, fat, muscles were reduced to the bare essentials. At first I watched it, fascinated, then I gave up. With addiction, you retreat into yourself, only when your metabolism rings the alarm bells do you find yourself confronted with your surroundings, which can easily cause you to panic. That's why you have to have something to do so that the time in-between was still there, in case you need it (time, the dope we can never get enough of), and Ede had discovered that, for him, this was painting. Almost all the money we made on occasion was spent on canvas and paints. Ede had what you might call an unjaded style, he virtually heaved his color values on the canvas and after he'd abandoned his initial, abstract phase, he went to figures and landscapes. They probably were all pretty amateurish pictures, but I liked them. The bleaker the winter along with our prospects

became, the more colorful the paintings were that Ede produced. A psychiatrist would have been delighted with the two of us.

Because I wrote. The Turks sold these very solidly-made bound notebooks covered in oilcloth, in every imaginable shape, and I discovered the merits of the “rapidograph” – its fine line along with the durability and classiness of real ink. What persuaded me immediately in terms of writing was its relative cheapness compared to what Ede had to spend for his materials. I had to admit he risked a lot for it. Maybe he was a natural-born painter.

There was one neighborhood into which hardly any foreigners ventured: Tophane. There were as many opium addicts living there per square foot as there were in Harlem and Hong Kong. Rumor had it that it wasn't hazard-free in Tophane, and sometimes you actually saw a dead body lying there, but nothing worse happened to me than somebody ripping me off while shopping. When bigger sums were involved and the customers who had been conned returned, the place changed within a couple hours, as though the whole seedy quarter had become a film set – and where there had just been an overcrowded tea house awhile ago, now the doors were boarded up, ancient-looking dust covered its windows; the movie theater on the corner was showing a romantic film, instead of the Hun flick; the shack where you'd just been swindled was a carpenter's shop now, and in lieu of the dead body lying under the bush at the corner, a mechanic was tinkering with an old Ford taxi. The dealers you'd been looking for had been swallowed by the earth. Were these the same houses? You rubbed your eyes, but that didn't help much. When the hallucination had all the prosaicness of a cigarette, the doors of perception, like perception itself, were made of stuff more elusory than smoke.

And when the borders of perception blurred, other norms lost their validity too. Ede and I developed our own shtick. It consisted of picking up one of the clueless young foreigners who were invading the city in ever growing numbers to cop themselves a kilo of hash before getting back on their PanAm or Quantas planes, playing the experienced globetrotter and traveler in the matter of hashish once they got back to some campus in the Midwest or New South Wales. You met them everywhere in the pudding shops and tea houses all around the Blue Mosque, blond, tanned boys and girls, always in a good mood, on a trip through Europe, perched together in their hotel rooms, playing guitar and singing protest songs and swearing never to go to Vietnam to kill. Ede and I and a handful of other German permanent residents on the Bosphorus always felt like ancient Asians then, imbued with the merciless philosophy of opium: When you had something, it'll be taken away from you. When you've got nothing, you die. And like all philosophers, we believed it only just and fair to impart our knowledge to the congregation – and that meant before they listened to others. Suitable victims were easily

found. When you lived on the borders, you learned how to size up the travelers' baggage. So one of us sidled up to the boy or the couple – naturally only those came in question who made a totally non-violent and somewhat intellectual impression – and brought them to the hotel. The room was decorated accordingly. The easel with the covered painting was especially effective, and from there you looked involuntarily toward the corner, with the entire oeuvre. In the other corner, well-thumbed paperbacks and my pile of notebooks caught the eye, along with the carefully folded air mail editions of the London Times. Then when the joint got passed around, it got really *beat*, and ever since Kerouac, *beat* has been the key to the souls of these young Americans.

The deal was always closed rather quickly. Beats are definitely cool people without any time for idle chatter. One of us left with the dough – naturally, all the dough, since for all intents and purposes we were helping with the deal practically as a matter of courtesy – and the other one sat there with this schmuck in the beatnik hangout, with its view of the Blue Mosque and the sea, and rolled the joints. Twilight came, and the contours of the mosques blurred, sea gulls flew arabesques around the minarets. The music from the tea houses helped it along. Conversation trickled. Peace.

“Shouldn't he be back soon?”

“Huh? Yeah, I guess so.”

“I mean, it's getting late ...”

“They've got to wait till dark sometimes.”

“Oh.”

Then you handed them a couple of pills, a little speed to pep them up, and they got that harried look promptly when the connecting door to the roof creaked. They got quick and began talking and the more they talked, the better you had them under control. You can't tell a stranger how terrible it was when your girlfriend ran off with that Hell's Angel, and the next moment tell him straight to his face he's a crook and a double crosser, a member of a gang of Turkish-German hardened criminals. Not if you're really cool. There was the other type too, but Ede could deal with them pretty smoothly. He could look rather dangerous when he rolled up his sleeves, revealing his arms wasted by addiction, attacking his canvases with razor blades. Everybody had heard about van Gogh. Ultimately, they clung to any glimmer of hope, and since you were getting restless yourself by now, you took them along to Tophane. They only had to set their eyes on the deserted, nearly unlit square at the main thoroughfare, the drunken Gypsies, the mangy dogs, the beggars in rags, the whores slurring words toothlessly and the men in dark suits, who suddenly popped out of the darkness and peered at them with cold eyes – and they were struck with panic. But you still took them along to one of the tea houses, where the opium addicts, clad in rags, were waiting for the dealer, lips drooling, while huge cockroaches plopped down from the ceiling into their tea glasses – not that they fell, but

the schmuck saw them falling – and you started talking to the hunchback – “You okay? Me okay, too” – until the message was crystal clear: Run for your life.

When I got to the hotel where Ede had booked a room, it already reeked of turpentine and oil paint, and Ede had already managed to get his bed filthy.

“Well, how’d it go?”

“How should it’ve gone?”

“Will we be seeing that guy again?”

“You’d never recognize him anyway.”

A chunk of opium sat on the bedside table. All around, the whores were yelling. I hardly ever wanted any sex. I lay down and opened the notebook to the chapter I was writing at the time. The rapidograph had been refilled. A new scam, a new painting, a new chapter. What did Faulkner say? “I’d steal from my own grandmother if it helped me writing.” Though I didn’t exactly know what he meant by that (you never exactly knew what these people meant), one thing was sure, though: I was writing.

twenty-one

William S. Burroughs welcomed me at three in the afternoon in his sparsely furnished apartment on Duke Street, not far from Piccadilly Circus. He was wearing a black, three-piece suit that reminded me of the suits my grandfather, a primary school headmaster, used to wear, a white shirt and a black tie. I was wearing my pinstriped suit again, a white shirt and tie. Burroughs was tall and gaunt and walked slightly stooped. His temples were white, his mouth a thin, bloodless streak.

“Coffee or tea?”

“Coffee.”

“With cream or black?”

“Cream, please.”

We each took a cup of instant coffee and sat down at a brightly polished table. Burroughs was sitting with his back to the window. He fixed his gaze at me through his glasses. His eyes were blue and radiated the unwavering authority of a high judge who had come up against every kind of corruption and found them all together too cheap.

“What sort of a magazine do you work for?”

I sputtered a couple words about *twen*. My English wasn't especially fluid anyway, and now my thick German accent annoyed me to no end. Burroughs didn't seem to mind it. Maybe he harbored some kind of perverse sympathy for Germans.

“And the article you mentioned?”

Twen had commissioned me to write a report on hard drugs. Lou Schneider had made the contact with Burroughs. *Twen* had paid for my flight to London and given me a liberal advance on expenses. I had it made, and how. Your roving junk reporter. I tried explaining to Burroughs how I'd been a junkie myself four years long and wanted to write in the report about the possibilities of getting the monkey off your back. Burroughs had done it with apomorphine. Back where I came from, apomorphine was unknown. So that's why I was here. He lit another cigarette. He smoked filterless Senior Service cigarettes. Chain smoked.

“What kind of stuff did you take?”

“Oh, opium mainly.”

“What – raw opium? You didn't mainline, intravenously?”

“Yup.”

“Young man,” Burroughs said with the hint of a smile. “You must have been completely off your rocker.”

He gave me a short lecture on the effects of raw opium. What he said was more or less right, even though he didn't know it from his own experience. He'd always used the clean

stuff himself but had been around when the opium fans puked out their livers. It was getting dark in the room, but he didn't switch on the light. He briefly told me what he knew about apomorphine, which had helped him conquer the metabolic disease called "addiction" after fifteen years under supervision of an English doctor, whose name was Dent. "Too bad, but the good doctor is no longer among the living," Burroughs said, standing up and making a fresh cup of instant coffee, "but his two nurses are still practicing. If you like, I'll give you their addresses. And then there's another doctor in France who does the apomorphine cure, and one in Switzerland."

He pulled out the addresses for me and noticed how I was gazing at the sole picture in the room, fairly intrigued. At first glance, it looked like a wild color composition around some lettering, but if you looked a bit longer, you discovered odd rhythms and structures there, all of them varying the lettering.

"That's by Brion Gysin, the painter and cut-up collaborator," Burroughs explained. "You ought to look at it after you've taken a psychedelic drug – although I'd have to advise some people against it. For some folks, it's a lot better if the doors stay closed."

"So you wouldn't recommend cut-up to everybody either?"

He flashed me a spare, wolfish smile again.

"Well, young man, some can stand a spoonful of raw opium, and others will just keel over if they're being inoculated for smallpox. Are you a writer? I don't want to be indiscreet, but you don't look much like a reporter to me."

I explained to him I was hoping to be published soon by the publisher for whom Lou Schneider worked.

"That so? Interesting."

He disappeared into the next room, came back a second later and handed me a magazine-sized brochure wrapped in brown paper: William S. Burroughs: APO-33 Bulletin. The subtitle read: A Report on the Synthesis of the Apomorphine Formula.

"You can keep it," he said. "My small contribution to healthcare," and laughed; his choppy ha-ha-ha came from rather shadowy regions. "The apomorphine formula," he said and sat down, "is a contribution to the cleansing and detoxification of the planet.

Detoxification from what? From illness, addiction, ignorance, prejudice and stupidity.

The question is: Are the people now in power interested in this detoxification? You know, young man, what the answer is to that."

He talked until his face was entirely hidden in shadow. Clouds of smoke drifted through the apartment; I thought I heard a clock ticking somewhere, but it stopped. Burroughs' voice was raspy, cold and absolutely precise, a well-oiled part of a machine, and it suited to a tee his raspy, cold and absolutely precise sentences, sentences reminding me of Dashiell Hammett. I stared at him through the clouds of smoke; suddenly, I thought I was listening to an ancient, opiate-sated Chinaman in a Hong Kong slum, the boss of a triad

who, interrupted by chopped, guttural laughter, is telling about the latest internal butcheries. Then I was sitting opposite a Texas marshal informing me that on his deathbed, Wyatt Earp had confided in him the whereabouts of the hidden treasure of the Sierra Madre; and ultimately I realized William Burroughs was the reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes – a Sherlock Holmes who now had to dedicate his time to creeping through the sewers of our consciousness and the garbage dumps of the powerful to solve his last great case, the case of the Naked Lunch, the naked, infested bite on a rusty fork. Whodunit?

Finally, after it had become completely dark in the room, Burroughs cleared his throat. “Don’t forget to send me the article.”

The interview was over.

The girl’s name was Bärbel. She wanted to work for *twen*, too, and the editor, being somewhat at a loss, had sent her to Hamburg to meet with me. Bärbel had a pretty face with a turned-up nose, was from Mannheim and told stories that were completely confused. I wanted to go to bed with Bärbel, instantaneously, my dick had to forget Sarah, even though my head couldn’t, but Bärbel sat in this dark, perfumed, cramped apartment belonging to a photographer somewhere in Eppendorf, annoying me with her stories. Then she showed me a gun. A revolver with a mother of pearl handle. Looked more like a play gun, like a ladies gun, probably good for blank cartridges. I spun the barrel, smelled it. Nothing. Came over well, the thing, even so. Later, when the others had forgotten about it, I maneuvered the revolver into my overnight bag.

I couldn’t stand it more than one day, then I went to the train station with Bärbel. The train to Munich stopped in Göttingen late in the evening, I got out with Bärbel, we took a cab, knocked on Sarah’s door at midnight and got her out of bed, way out by the country road covered in snow. Sarah opened the door wearing a long bathrobe and offered us homemade bread, apparently didn’t live from anything else, the stuff was hard as a rock, the oven was cold, the three of us went to bed together, I was lying between the two girls, who were soon snoring gently, the full moon hung in the window. I tried to fondle the girls awake, they snored a little softer, moaned some in their sleep, I sensed their dreams but also sensed I wasn’t making an appearance in them. The shadow on the moon looked like Burroughs.

The article came out and was displayed at every kiosk. Although my name wasn’t on the cover, the title the editors had come up with for my report was pretty shrill, and a cute blonde drew in the mass audience. I wandered through the cafés of downtown Frankfurt. They were reading *Spiegel*, *Stern*, *Quick*, Jesus, what a drag, things like *Autoillustrierte* or *Pardon*, where was *twen*? There, in the Café Schwille, I discovered a reader, long hair,

gold-rimmed glasses, a clear case. I sneaked closer, peeping over his shoulder. He was browsing through the magazine, bored, stopped a second for the blonde, stopped again for the farmhouses in Tuscany, put the magazine down, picked up the culture section of the *Rundschau*. Well, who gives a shit about readers like him, what counted was the insiders. *Spiegel* and *Stern* had to follow up the thing like they always did, and it was totally obvious they wouldn't be able to ignore me, I could already see the interviews, *A Contribution to the Detoxification of the Planet*, I wouldn't have any objections to throwing in an essay on my own, a news report, albeit I would naturally remain loyal to my paper ...

Spiegel and *Stern* didn't get in touch with me. The circulation of *twen*, it was rumored, was down dramatically; two months later they actually did close down. And Gutowsky's publisher was facing bankruptcy.

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□

thirty-six

“Lights!” shouted the director.

“Camera!” shouted the cameraman.

“Action!” shouted the director.

At that moment, one of the junkies pushed his way in front of the camera and said to me:

“Hey, I know you, what’re you doing here?”

“See for yourself,” I said, “we’re shooting a film.”

“Oh, shit, man, and I thought you had a fix for me.”

The other junkies and pot-heads in the gambling arcade at the *Haschwiese* weren’t exactly happy either, but Niko had absolutely insisted on shooting here counter to my objections, and, though it was I who’d written the film script, he was the director, the guy in command. Beside that, he allegedly really understood something about film. I’d met Niko through Dimitri at the time. Dimitri was from Athens, about my age, and worked as an assistant cameraman for the Hessische Rundfunk, whence he’d borrowed the camera. Operating the camera was a Yugoslav colleague, also in charge of the lights. Niko’s girlfriend Anette was supposed to take care of sound, but in the gambling arcade it was better if we shot everything without audio. The camera was bad enough, but with a tape running, the extras would have refused to go along, and we needed them for the scene. Half of them were wanted by the cops, and the other half weren’t wanted for the sole reason that the cops already knew where to find them. Pish. A bulb had burst. Who cares. The Hessische Rundfunk had enough of them. The junkie still didn’t realized he was standing in our way. He had red hair, blue glasses and a rat’s smile.

“Hey, what kind of a racket is this? You in film now? Just like Charles Bronson, eh?”

“Would you step out of the camera.”

“Come on, buy me a cup of coffee. I always gave you clean stuff, didn’t I? Say, what’s it all gonna be when it’s finished?”

“Two coffees,” I said to the manager of the place. “With lots of sugar. Well, see, it’s just an attempt to get something going. If it all turns out all right, we’re going to shoot a feature.”

“That so? And what’re you doing in this thing, a cable puller or somethin’?”

“I wrote the script, I write, you know.”

“Well, I didn’t know. Hey, I don’t want to say anything, but you’ve gotten really fat, pretty bloated. You didn’t stop, did you?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Course, that figures, it just doesn’t make sense to stop. You look really sick, you know. Hey, do you think there’s a job here for me? I could get you Berlin tincture, a little of the real stuff, just for you to get back in shape, old man ... ”

“I just told you I quit that crap.”

I left him standing there with his rat’s smile and Dracula fangs. It wasn’t even the junk, it was sugar that did them in. Now several lights gave out all at once. Short circuit. The Yugoslav grimaced. He didn’t like any of it, and in the end the most he’d get was a *schnitzel* and a beer for his efforts. But he was a friend of Niko, and then again, maybe it was a change from the village community centers, dedications of freeway sections and drunken local politicians that he had to shoot for the *Hessenschau*.

“I think we could do without this scene,” I said to Niko.

“It’s your script,” he said, stroking his beard. “I do find it important that the audience immediately sees what the milieu is like where our hero lives without us having to explain much.”

“Yes, but look yourself, it won’t work here. These guys are doing nothing but annoying us. I can come up with something else to replace this scene.”

Niko, with his mountain of hair and big eyes, shook his head doubtfully.

“We’re professionals, we’re not going to be annoyed so easily by anybody. But it’s up to you, if you want something else ...”

“Just look, Niko,” said Anette, “both our actors are pretty nervous, too.”

The two “actors” were Bramstein, my co-worker at the *Zero* newspaper, and a friend who looked even wilder than he did.

“Please don’t meddle,” Niko snarled at his girlfriend, “what do you understand about actors, if I may ask? Actors are always nervous, all they have to do is act and keep their mouths shut, don’t you know what Hitchcock said about actors? Okay, please, let’s do the scene again. Lights!”

I tried to keep a low profile and stay in the background but I knew the junkie was already whispering to the others. Guys stopping taking stuff was something that happened. But that they went and shot a film in the very spot where only yesterday they’d been pleading for a fix, that was truly a new way of getting your kicks.

The short film was meant to be a homage to Melville’s gangster films, a completely stylized sequence in a number of loosely connected scenes, a collage of rituals – the meet, the delivery, the mysterious lady, the fatal shot – a harmless play of light and shadow and dreams, that’s what I thought. Something that was fun. The writing had been lots of fun. And it hadn’t been hard. I had a penchant for atmosphere, and Niko would take care of the rest.

But Niko broke into a whirlwind of activity, suddenly everything had to be

“professional,” just like he finally wanted to know, to show his friends in television he

was a real filmmaker, that was my suspicion, to show it to the scorned young German filmmakers, this guy Wenders, Wyborny and all the rest. He couldn't have cared less about the script he was using, I got the impression he would've shot without one, and most of my subtle, portentous dialogue seemed to have been dropped anyhow. And all this, without the least hope of being paid. These people all had a job or were studying, had a house or a doctorate, I was the only one who didn't have anything, not even a temporary job. I had logged out with Germania. At the age of 28, you couldn't just give away your nights. And that *Stamboul Blues* would make the literary world prick up its ears this coming fall, that was something even the publisher didn't believe. He had limited the edition to 500 copies and wanted to do the typescript and printing on his own. I was living with my parents again. The situation was tense. I never did like going to school, but at the time, things were definitely looking rosier.

"Action!" Niko yelled. Bramstein's girlfriend was posted on the roadside, lifted her arms and waved, and we heard Bramstein's old jalopy start rattling away. Then she came around the corner into the courtyard, and at the same moment the boys who were playing soccer next door kicked the ball over the fence. It spun in front of the car, and Bramstein braked violently.

"Time out!" Niko shouted, snatched the ball and threw it to the boys. He laughed. That was the fifteenth time we were shooting this take, but as long as Niko had film, he'd go on shooting.

"You have to drive much more precisely in the curve," he said to Bramstein, who was dressed up as a gangster – dark hat, dark coat, dark glasses – and showed him how.

"Look, the camera angle is like this, and if you go out for only a couple feet there, you'll disappear from the picture, like that – but when I pan to over there, I've got that idiotic background with the playground, no way ..."

"Why's that?" Bramstein apparently felt that his vocation was to be a filmmaker as well.

"The playground as a background would have a really symbolic character, it would provide the scene with an entirely new kind of ambivalence, don't you think?"

Anette was signaling to me urgently, but there was no stopping Niko anymore. He clenched his fists.

"Well, are you going to do it the way we discussed, or what? You're taking over directing, huh? And you also wrote the script, right? It's your film, am I seeing it right?"

He looked like he would be lunging at Bramstein any second now, but the native from the Palatinate wasn't about to be intimidated that easily.

"Nothing like that at all, Niko," he said, "but I think with that kind of film everybody should be allowed to bring in his own ideas, I mean, you don't have to pull off such an authoritarian show here, not like it's a big-money blockbuster or something, and then Hitchcock and Melville, hey, we're all friends here, right?"

„Friends?” That didn’t go down so great with Niko, not by a long shot. “Let me tell you something, you don’t know the first thing about film ...”

“Let it be now, Niko,” Anette shouted, “let’s get going, it’ll be raining any second now.”

“You be quiet!” Niko thundered. “In film, it’s absolutely irrelevant if it lasts five minutes or five hours, there’s a name written up there, that’s the director, and he has the responsibility for it, and that means he decides how every second of the film is going to look, do you understand – every inch belongs to him, only him, can you get that into your thick skull?”

“But, Niko,” Bramstein was saying, who could be as pigheaded as a smoked sausage from the Palatinate, “Buñuel and Dalí ...”

“Are you crazy? What are you bringing up Buñuel for?” Bit by bit, Niko was completely losing it. “Buñuel is a god, what’re you talking about God for, what are you up to? Who are you even to be allowed to speak his name aloud? You’re playing a part here, you’re here just as an actor, or should I say rather as a performer, you have no right to speak of Buñuel, to start discussing things, either you’re going to follow my instructions or you can leave!”

“Niko,” I said, “that’s not necessary, come on. It’s ludicrous to pick such a quarrel now, Buñuel, Dalí, Jesus, we’re shooting a little amateur film and if we’re lucky, it’ll be shown at one-thirty in the morning in some movie festival for short films ...”

“That so? If you think that, go make your film yourself, if you don’t mind.” Niko spit out the words together with some tobacco crumbs and threw us both a look that would ban us forever from the hallowed halls of the Art of Cinema. I basically agreed with him, naturally. It wouldn’t have hurt Bramstein to have kept his trap shut. Now this too had come to nothing. Anyway, it was about time I stopped all this nonsense and started looking for a job. Maybe there was some mouse hole in the culture industry where I could slip through. Anything at a third or fourth radio channel, there were people around who had been doing farming broadcasts for 25 years now, church broadcasts, wouldn’t they need somebody to write a couple of hot new sentences on the situation of the turnip harvest, or about female applicants for mission work in Melanesia? Niko was already dismantling the camera. The Yugoslav was on the road somewhere with the *Hessenschau*, a feature on church bells in the Vogelsberg region. Suddenly, a window was opened somewhere in the rear building and someone yelled:

“They caught Baader!”

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