

# Berlin FKK: An Introduction

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J: Did you even bring a swimsuit Andy?

A: I'm not sure I own one. I have, if you remember, purple trunks I bought at a Salvation Army. But I cut the built-in-lining and now they don't stay on anymore. So I brought shorts my grandpa gave me, and then my Diadoras, and a pair of jeans.

J: And did you pack any shorts today?

A: No I have them all in this bag, along...

J: Oh you're kidding me. You brought four...

A: Do you see this goose, this female goose and I can't tell if—I mean duck, with what could be a male or female...

A and J: swan...

A: heading toward us simultaneously?

J: Yes that's correct. They may...

A: [*Muffled*] right for us.

J: still smell thunfisch pizza on our fingers. Thanks for stopping to eat.

A: Thanks for a slice.

J: Though though we've pointed at both birds they keep walking...

A: I think I'll...

J: towards us.

A: scare them a bit if that's ok. [*Pause*] No that didn't work at all.

J: You taunted the swan.

A: Have you ever seen a swan's beak this close up?

J: I feel...

A: More orange...

J: in the States...

A: Would they be different?

J: swans' beaks don't turn quite so orange.

A: The duck's feet look distinctly old.

J: And...

A: This swan keeps tilting its head back and forth to stare at us sideways.

J: Or as though it might hiss.

A: Did you just watch a feather sail down the beach?

J: Yes. Yeah I watched the swan's feather as I listened to gentle waves approach Wannsee Beach.

A: And you saw the (it looks like) Capri-Sun package somersault beyond triangular dunes?

J: Right, it made me recall Mary Ann Caws's transcription of water therapy. Or Wayne Koestenbaum's effort to map Rome's fountains, and what he calls "the rectangular squares of Rome."

A: Do you see the um the only other young couple on the far side of that willow tree?

J: That's the FKK beach's private stretch. We chose...

A: Hmm.

J: some sand in the public part. Couples generally cross to the other willows' [Wind]. This is my fourth visit. We came last summer, if you remember, but not to this particular section. We swam in the clothed domain, where I nearly drown.

A: Do you want to to explain to everybody? I don't want to be the one...

J: Or we could discuss Clayton Eshleman's French cave transcription, and Marta Werner's...

A: Marta's great. But just going along with Clayton E's account: transcription stimulates assimilation—how, as you describe Clayton Eshleman's caves, I spot those covered beach-benches, and notice the erratic numbers (atypical...

J: Yes.

A: for Germany, that beside 158 you find 382). Should we suppose...

J: Followed by 211.

A: Yeah did someone insult the FKK crowd? Do all broken seats get moved here? If these...what I'm describing are wicker seats, shaped like for a horse and buggy. The benches look designed for couples. Their striped fabric encourages sitting side-by-side. But so as soon as you mentioned Clayton Eshleman's caves, I thought each chair individually worth exploring.

J: You may find paintings within some. If I mention Susan Bee's Mogao Cave-based images, or Zarina Hashmi's "Home is a Foreign Place" woodcuts, do you make associations to the present scene?

A: Well the second time the "a" sound appeared, light reflected off passing boats. Opening your eyes if they've been closed on a beach makes everything so well focused.

J: Yes. Yeah. Will you swim today?

A: Not sure, because it's cold, and the fact that we're sitting nude on a beach at 5 p.m. makes me want to take better care of my...

J: Exposing flesh to the elements can only help. Or do you distrust FKK philosophy?

A: We could keep...

J: Do do you feel sun on a certain part of your body now?

A: Sure—what did Leonard Schwartz give us?

J: He transcribed a conversation with Michael Hardt. He asks if conversation's become a radical political act in the twenty-first century.

A: [*Muffled*] claim...

J: And Ammiel Alcalay sent a dialogue recorded at Kelly Writers House.

A: Wouldn't you love to devote an entire issue to couples? I mean we're sitting pretty close right now.

J: With talk...

A: But what about Richard and Sally Price?

J: Yeah, well their anthropological contribution fits nicely with Dennis Tedlock's. In fact their piece discusses Dennis' transcription method. They address difficulties we face as transcribers: how to convey, for example, changes in tone and bodily gesture, or dance movements, pauses, silences.

A: See Roland Barthes's "From Speech to Writing."

J: These issues come to the fore in their work. It's crucial for the Prices to figure out (since they deal with different Samaracan languages) when to include foreign expressions. When do we forego translating words, words that don't have English equivalents?

A: Still to me transcription seems easy. I think if you want to transcribe...to to transcribe means to have decided you don't need to prove that you know what you're doing. Your credentials have to get taken for granted. But then you find an infinite number of recordings.

J: I'm speaking in particular about translating performance. Though even right now, when we transcribe this talk, it might be difficult to capture the precise setting and all our vocal modulations. Something Dennis...

A: Again part part of what I like about transcription is that you can't capture events precisely. Plus there's a sense you're getting away with something—you don't fully commit yourself, which means concentration but not exhaustive focus, and the space cleared through this gesture...

J: Yeah.

A: of being cord coordinated and yet retaining a reserve: a bit withheld, something left...

J: Deliberate...

A: But not...

J: It reminds me of Reva Wolf's piece, in which she talks about Ted Berrigan's transcription—or appropriation, as she says—of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara and um Kenneth Koch, and Berrigan's pranksterish use of their poems; he often copied texts and replaced a single word. Um...

A: Well, isn't sitting naked in public about working...

J: We're composing the editors' introduction to our to...

A: *Interval(le)s*.

J: Fall 2008.

A: But we don't immerse ourselves in either enterprise, and that's what hopefully allows [*Wind*] elements to fuse.

J: I know I'm focused on my stiffening lower back, sitting on this towel. I may lie...

A: Go ahead and I'll probably join you.

J: So there does seem to be distinct effort involved. I mean Steve Benson, for example, gave us a piece in which he tried to transcribe both what he spoke and what audiences could see on an overhead projector. He confronted peculiar difficulties. And Donato Mancini...

A: Who signs most emails with funny...

J: for some reason, in the year 2000, lived alone on an island, and says his sole companion was late-night local radio, which played Cantonese pop songs. Donato does not speak Cantonese, and found it difficult to transcribe these lyrics.

A: With Steve's poem I appreciate the implied effort to put it all together...

J: Yes.

A: absent any measurement of if he succeeds. Remember...

J: Exactly.

A: on our way here today, as you described a bratwurst (and maybe we can come back to...

J: Checkpoint Currie.

A: but as you said "bratwurst" on the Friedrichstrasse platform, a guy hurried past with kleenex up one nostril. This enhanced my sense of indexicality.

J: Ok.

A: And now it's interesting...

J: Do you think...

A: to see different accessories people put on as the afternoon turns cooler.

J: Does this heightened sense of indexicality apply to David Antin's talk-piece, or to the sixty-second lecture Charles Bernstein gave us?

A: The freedom from imaginative creation, from perfect receptions of...

J: Yeah. Yeah, but even though perfect reception's impossible I have to say: when looking over Lewis Warsh's "Conga Line" I felt myself bump against furniture.

A: Hmm. Eileen Myles—you know, I'm curious what she sends. She...

J: She mentioned recording poems while...

A: Without...

J: (but not knowing what to call them) driving through Los Angeles.

A: She writes in *Chelsea Girls* that a sloppy look always seems good to her, and I consider transcription inherently sloppy. I mean the meticulous itself gets messy—as soon as it becomes obsessional.

J: Well flipping through the these finished pieces I came across many typos. [Pause] We may have to proofread everything.

A: Last night I'd planned to email people late with submissions, but Rebecca (Reilly) rode over and we listened to James Schuyler on PennSound.

J: Schuyler himself transcribed the natural world.

A: [Muffled] almanacs.

J: And I'm pleased with Rae Armantrout's and Susan Stewart's poems, in which they closely attune to animate things. Rae's statement says that one of her poems amounts to how nature would transcribe itself. She writes about a bubble skimming the surface the way that, in Susan Stewart's piece, the natural world comes alive: bullfrogs, beetles...

A: What about Lynne Tillman? Whenever I hear the name Lynne Tillman I picture dazzling Warholian silver.

J: Lynne has published on Warhol, as I'm sure people know. Her piece fits nicely with the Nature Theater of Oklahoma's. It's a dialogue between I and YOU, and one stays silent through the whole thing, and the other tries to console this character whose father just died.

A: Feel free to continue but I should interject: there's all this new liquid on my stomach.

J: Really?

A: Moisture, yeah—but um, but do you find Germans born transcribers? As we rode out here I noticed lots of campers parked, and near the train tracks huts set with plastic chairs, or cars with hatchback doors propped open. It made me think of Berliners as inclined to transcription. I mean they've got a history. There's the Soviet, the invading Soviet Army graffiti preserved in the Reichstag, which I believe says Fuck your mother. And art-historian Emily Pugh had planned to write a piece about the wall itself. I guess that when the culture divides...if there's a prominent wall you write on it. But on the ride out today, as we moved close to Wannsee, I watched graffiti get cleaner and more bubbly on buildings and felt us leave the world capital of transcription. [Silence] If you noticed, light just dimmed.

J: Though don't you think this the perfect setting to compose our editorial statement for *Interval(le)s*?

A: I love this fence partially splitting the FKK...

J: Yeah.

A: from the family site. How the beaches do not separate. There's just a folding screen. When people step towards water...

J: Once I got too too hot lying in the sand but didn't want to go swimming. So I found a shower to refresh myself and soon a family came over from the clothed domain, and all of us showered together without unnecessary self-consciousness.

A: Hmm.

J: You see the remains of the um sand castle to our right. Who knows when that got built.

A: People decorated sand castles along the Bundestag. Did you...

J: Yes, I think world monuments. And I saw some sand-volleyball courts set up.

A: I love the Berlin rhythm as you push farther out: from willows to yellow plaster to gates.

J: That's nice.

A: Or the man eating Thai food on our train—you smelled it?

J: I sensed it while recalling Bruce Andrews' interview on "The O'Reilly Factor."

A: [*Muffled*] elegant take-out box. And when he put down the container nothing spilled. Everything hummed. I wish we had more sound files.

J: Yeah Mary Reid Kelley just sent a sound file of herself reading aloud the first love letter she received.

A: I can't imagine, with when receiving your first love letter, having the consciousness to keep it.

J: You're right, and Dennis gave us a piece recorded at Zuni back in 1965. Perhaps if we think about Dennis' long relationship to this particular piece ("The Boy and the Deer": he recorded it in '65, he published a translation in '72, and he still returns to the tape and revises the script)—Dennis says there's always more to hear, and perhaps his comment addresses what you call the messiness, or inherent incompleteness of any...

A: I'll add my transition later on, but do...I notice so many fewer cigarette butts here. Do you, is that part of what you meant about FKK being healthy? Is the naked population just much smaller? Or are people more meticulous on the nude side of the beach?



J: Well during the weekend this area's packed. Last time a man came with his daughter, and smoked ten cigarettes while lying on his stomach.

A: Wow.

J: He didn't switch postures or anything. They...

A: Maybe he'd built a good sand-lay beneath him.

J: It could be.

A: Which makes all the difference.

J: No I have to say: I didn't bring suntan lotion, since it was 22 degrees celsius when we left, still my...

A: Wait. Wait I think um 78.4, but we should check.

J: Very good. How did you convert so rapidly?

A: Well what is it it—what did you say?

J: 22.

A: So nine-fifths. So I'm off. But it would...one-fifth is 4.4; so we're at  $39.6 + 32$ ; so 71.6.

J: Tremendous work. Yeah, and because my computer's not nearly as advanced as your brain the fahrenheit reading said 72.

A: Hmm.

J: But as um a consequence I didn't pack sunblock.

A: Though that is, we've talked about your irrational belief that some relation exists between UV rays and temperature.

J: Do you care to explain that to...

A: I think it's self-...

J: the the audience, because some readers may commit my fallacy?

A: Part of transcription's the art of withholding.

J: Ok. But I'm feeling sun on a body part that's most often shielded, so I think I might have to adjust my legs.

A: Oh is our...

J: Do you feel accumulated...

A: Well I feel a glowing. Sometimes if I think think "I don't have a bad back; I have a *strong* back," then for a moment my body feels buoyant liquid inside it. I'm sensing something similar now, behind...

J: And so there's a purple mark, Andy?

A: Yeah, I've got a birthmark. I guess fifteen people in the world know about it and probably nine have forgotten. But most women I've dated said it means I'm special.

J: Yes I've heard the same about this birthmark on my lip. It's not something you see on most people. Do you believe the birthmark makes you special, Andy?

A: It only could if I don't remember it much.

J: Did I remind you?

A: No today I've been conscious. I've never sat nude in public before. If...

J: Really?

A: I've spent too much time working on my dissertation. But I wanted...

J: [*Muffled*] my dissertation nude.

A: to get a bratwurst.

J: You can walk right up to that café naked.

A: And buy...

J: And eat, yes. Yes that happens. At this café it's perfectly legitimate to eat...

A: I don't think I'm that advanced.

J: Oh there's not FKK hierarchy. You're just as advanced as other people.

A: You know what I'm into? I've tried not to look. But I'm getting into the way skin curves around a body.

J: From...

A: Does that make sense? How smooth skin looks when it's left to curve around. And who else puts a huge four-faced clock—who mounts a four-faced clock in the middle of the beach?

J: You see this small army of crossing ducks...

A: Should we take the a stroll?

J: We could if you want. Should I carry this mic? Oh I'd forgotten my back's incredibly stiff.

A: Won't...

J: So we're walking on sand.

A: I forgot even children here stop and listen to P.A. announcements.

J: Yes, yeah the crowd falls silent, as though crucial words are being uttered. One reason I want to study German is just to translate what the lifeguard says. He he's, what would you guess, fifty meters into...

A: Right maybe our expensive one-day passes pay for that immense um termina...tower or something? It looks like an air-traffic control tower. You know, walking naked for the first time, I want my feet to wedge a bit more (point outwards more), and I've hunched a little; that's my natural center of gravity.

J: Uh-huh. We could look at this boat.

A: Can you translate Wasserwacht? Water...

J: Water-patrol may...

A: Watch. Water-watch? Lifeguard?

J: I'm guessing.

A: Just as the the sun dropped down tree leaves became so carefully delineated.

J: The sand's dark and cool under willow trees. Willows make me think of the Public Gardens. Though we'd be immediately put in jail for taking this walk through Boston. That woman's hair has nice orange color.

A: So are we going to hit the waterslide, or do you want...

J: I'm not swimming out to that waterslide.

A: Or how about describing...

J: I got completely disoriented.

A: We're back we're back revisiting a scene: coming back. We've been to this beach together before—July first, two-thousand and [Wind] pretty traumatic day for one of us. Do you want to give some background? I mean let me give the background.

J: Sure.

A: It started...

J: I'd say around 5 p.m.

A: Later, because guards...

J: No they closed down...

A: Ok.

J: [*Muffled*] storm, the immanent storm.

A: Ok: I picture a day like this one—I wouldn't want to be here on a bright blue day—but a storm was blowing in, and a relatively long line bobbed below the waterslide. And as we swam out we saw most people swimming back. The guards began to talk more and people got more attentive, but we couldn't understand anything (I kept listening for Verboten). We continued towards the slide. We had to jostle with some guys fifteen years younger than us about who'd climb up next. By then it seemed clear not all of us could slide down before it became Verboten.

J: Already my limbs felt exhausted.

A: I lunged ahead, swirled down, and landed awkward in water. I mean maybe it was just because I'd been swirling, but the waters seemed to swirl.

J: Yes.

A: Perhaps the experience resembled...

J: Stormy...

A: thul thalasso therapy beside Mary Ann Caws; then you came down. Should you take over? You came down behind me.

J: Discombobulated. The swim out had been beyond my range. I agreed to go down the waterslide only because Kristin (Andy's girlfriend) wanted to watch both...

A: [*Muffled*] forgotten you'd set on a diagonal path, and smashed a couple...

J: Yes.

A: and just kept on going.

J: Yeah yes, because...

A: You wore goggles.

J: I was wearing goggles, and I brought the goggles today for my forthcoming swim, and I kept swimming after colliding against that couple because we'd already passed beyond my range. Were I to put my feet down I would not have touched. So I couldn't waste time. I can't tread water.

A: We walked until the last twenty meters, though though I have to admit I never like when Americans start using "meters" in Europe.

J: Well I was—that was out of courtesy for our Belgian readers.

A: Just go.

J: I mean if I were speaking with you...

A: We should move...

J: Sure. I came down with no idea where I was. I plunged deep into water. I exerted some effort to rise and began to swim in the wrong direction—far away from shore.

A: By this point all guards had begun to say Get out of the water.

J: Yes; I realized I'd been swimming the wrong way. I spun around to swim directly to shore, but once again swam a highly inefficient diagonal. And I went under. I swallowed water. I broke through the surface and screamed your name.

A: Right I remembered the lesson I'd learned in swimming class: rarely help a drowning man...

J: I went back under...

A: since he might take you with him.

J: and with my mouth full surfaced again and screamed Andy. Um, I tried finding Kristin. I saw...

A: Kids kept looking back confused as they swam in.

J: Yet the guards ignored my call for help.

A: No no what happened was they assumed, given where we were—they sensed a prank. I could tell. I couldn't see faces, because I don't have good vision. But I could tell from postures that people were assessing whether this situation merited a response.

J: Really? So they could hear me.

A: Sure I think because you thought you'd die everything seemed desperate, but we'd never left the family part...

J: I felt totally abandoned.

A: [*Muffled*] five feet of water, and occurred, we should say, in half a second.

J: [*Pause*] Oh I'd say closer to fifteen seconds.

A: Of course it seemed slow to you.

J: Yes. But before sinking a third time I heard you shout back "Put your feet down." I put down my feet and stood on tiptoe. And a week later we received a message from Michel Delville and his *Interval(le)s* staff.

A: And...

J: And we wouldn't be talking for these thirty minutes today if Michel hadn't pledged to collaborate with us. So before the this tape runs out I want to thank...

A: And also Kenny Goldsmith at Ubu.

J: Right.