Repetitions
Scott Abbott & Žarko Radaković

The man waiting for him was a translator from a foreign country who for some days had been tracing the itineraries of a book set in the region and now wished to ask the author a few questions.
—Peter Handke, The Afternoon of a Writer

Repetition, Peter Handke’s novel about a young Austrian’s trip to Slovenia to find traces of his lost brother, is a remarkable exploration of the ways our languages structure experience. Radaković’s and Abbott’s Repetitions is about language as well. Structured as a travel narrative, the book pits the Serbo-Croatian perspective of a man who grew up in Communist Yugoslavia against the English perspective of a man who grew up Mormon in the American West. The two authors are both foreigners in this story, for they must communicate in the only language they have in common, German. They follow Handke’s narrator into Slovenia and then visit Handke’s own formative landscapes in Austria. The possibility of narration in two voices, complicated by the third voice that is Peter Handke’s own narrator, is the question that guides the traveling and the reading and the writing.

Repetitions was published in Serbo-Croatian in Belgrade in 1994. In 2008 Abbott and Radaković and Abbott published a second book in Belgrade: Vampires & A Reasonable Dictionary—also available in English with punctum books. The two books bracket a horrendous period in the history of the former Yugoslavia. The authors changed during that period as well—divorces, new partners, new jobs. Peter Handke, while metamorphosing into the bête noire of the press after his attacks on media portrayals of the Yugoslav wars, became the authors’ friend and entered their second text as a fellow traveler.