

The Art of Contestation
Performative practices in the 1960s
and 1970s in Slovakia

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Bratislava 2019

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Cover: Lubomír Ďurček, Analytical study of relations.
Man and his world, 1978, SNG, Bratislava (cut-out)
Cover back photo: Thorsten Weihrauch

First English edition
216 pages
Bratislava 2019

Published by Comenius University in Bratislava

Published with the support of the VEGA 1/0841/16 and DFG programmes
and the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University

ISBN 978-80-223-4698-6



*“Now, more than ever before, the streets and house walls belong to us (...)
No one has been able to shatter art, its immeasurable force, which separates us from the animal
kingdom. Dictators have fallen, dogmas have been destroyed, and centuries have passed,
but humankind has persisted in its love, dreams, and hopes.”*

(Alex Mlynárčik/Erik Dietmann)

Dedicated to Tomáš Štraus with gratitude for inspiring conversations

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Acknowledgements

This book is based on my long-term research in the field of performance art in the former Czechoslovakia. It builds on research I initiated when working on my PhD thesis, entitled *Action Art in Slovakia in the 1960s: The Actions of Alex Mlynárčik*, which was published in German in 2009. The current volume elaborates on the theoretical framework and expands the empirical scope significantly to provide a complex assessment of action art in Slovakia. Considering the importance and relevance of the sociological and political context, I have recently been intensely focusing on the social aspects and conditions in which the performative projects in question emerged and developed as well as on the processes and mechanisms of their incorporation into the given social environment. In my employment as the assistant curator at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, I had the opportunity to work for two years in the Sohm Archive, one of the world's largest collections of intermedia art forms. It was from there that I generated two exhibitions, both involved with performances, happenings, and event-based art.¹ My engagement at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart allowed me to have an insight into archival work and it brought me the possibility to get immediately acquainted with topics such as forms of archiving and self-archiving as well as processes of constructing and reconstructing art history. Last but not least, I had to deal with a whole complexity of questions concerning the museumification and archivization of ephemeral performative projects and gestures.

1 The *Wiener Aktionismus* and *Von Grillen und Ameisen* exhibitions took place at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

All of this has led my research towards an interdisciplinary mode of work and cooperation with experts from various related fields such as art history, sociology, political science, history, theatre, film, and literature studies. The methodology of my research basically mirrors the nature of performance art itself, since the latter is also based on an interdisciplinary approach.

My research, which has resulted in this book, has received fundamental support from two key sources: the *Action Art Beyond the Iron Curtain* project funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft,² and funding from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic within its VEGA³ programme, which enabled the translation of this book into English and its publication.

Within the framework of the *Action Art Beyond the Iron Curtain* project, a network focused on research in archives, I had the possibility to investigate important sites such as the Forschungsstelle Osteuropa in Bremen, the Artpool in Budapest, the Tomislav Gotovac Archive and Mladen Stilinovic Archive in Zagreb, the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, the Archive of the Research Centre at the Academy of Fine Arts, and Libri Prohibiti in Prague. It was also thanks to this network that I had the possibility to meet and consult with experts, artists, and collectors like Vlasta Delimar, Tomáš Glanc, Klaus Groh, Jiří Gruntorád, Dóra Halási, Júlia Klaniczay, Milan Knížák, Branka Stipančić, and others. This was possible only thanks to the generous support and sponsorship of the DFG, to whom I would like to express my gratitude. I would also like to express my special thanks to my colleagues who have been involved in the DFG project: Adam Czihak, Katalin Cseh-Varga, Barbara Gronau,

² See www.aktionskunst-jenseits.de.

³ VEGA project No. 1/0841/16.

Beata Hock, Andrej Mircev, Angelika Richter, and Judith Bodor for their inspiring thoughts and discussions. I am particularly grateful to Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak for contributing to my texts by giving me insightful comments. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Comenius University Press in Bratislava.

I would especially like to thank Viera Gažová and Zuzana Slušná. My gratitude belongs to Amy Bryzgel, Ľubomír Ďurček, Lucia Gregorová Stachová, Mira Keratová, Alex Mlynárčik, Pavlína Morganová, Petra Stegman, Jan Ságl, Tomáš Štraus and Jana Želibská. Many thanks also go to František Hříbal for the cover design and to Peter Rybár for the layout of this book. Anna Antalová and Balás Rapczák both translated this book into English. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for supporting me.

This book builds on studies conducted in recent years and, in part, published in various scholarly journals and various languages (see Bibliography). Here, an attempt is undertaken at building a broader conceptual basis and engaging in a complex assessment of the findings.

This book is dedicated to my twins Isabell and Daniel, who both give me much joy in the performance called life.

1. Preface

This book is concerned with performative art projects and strategies in the former Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the 1980s. I especially focus on action art in Slovakia, which formed a part of Czechoslovakia until 1993.¹ The chapters of this book shed light on the complex nexus between art and politics in the Central and Eastern European context.

The title of the book, *The Art of Contestation*, builds on the concept of the art of contestation as used by the Slovak art critic Tomáš Štraus in his text *Umenie kontestácie a kontestácia umenia* (The art of contestation and the contestation of art), meaning the exploration of the possibilities and limits of an individual artist's environment and the positioning of oneself within it.² In this text, Štraus analyses the activities of *Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania* (A temporary society of intensive experience) among other things. He uses this phrase to describe the new generation's experimental exploration and critical questioning of its environment and their positioning within it. The art of contestation represents the significance of their activities. According to Štraus, the primary aim of these confrontational public actions was not the publication of artistic material created beforehand but rather the creation of a new quality standard: "action as creation or even the meaning of creation".³

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- 1 In the post-war period, Slovakia was a part of the Czecho-Slovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR). The Slovak Republic was established on 1 January 1993. Throughout this book, I will use the term "Slovakia" to demonstrate that the analysed artistic activities took part in this part of the former Czechoslovakia.
 - 2 Tomáš Štraus. *Umenie kontestácie a kontestácia umenia* (The art of contestation and the contestation of art). In: *Výtvarný život*. 35. No. 9. 1990. 17-26.
 - 3 *Ibid.* 20.

It is a fact that the period of real socialism in the former Czechoslovakia was an era which was paradoxical and contradictory in its nature. There were extensive discrepancies between what was real and how things were supposed to be. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the endeavour to re-establish the dogmatic system and indoctrinate the ideology of socialist realism, which happened violently and continued throughout the 1970s. After the relatively free developments in culture in the 1960s, the subsequent throwback to doctrinal rules in the arts, similar to those in the 1950s, was a utopian undertaking. Artists in Slovakia were confronted not only with the rules imposed from above by the Communist Party; they were also challenged by the fact that they had to take a position in the prevailing system, including the related transformation of social order and their own position in it. In his analysis of the role of socialist realism, Miroslav Kusý argued that the greater the contradiction between the ideal and the reality, the more the ideal must be pruned and cut back while the reality must be the more idealized. “The role of this ideology is to bridge the gap between the ideal and reality by holding up a false mirror, in which reality is seen only as it wants to be seen and where it is shown to be as close as possible to the ideal: it is the mirror of false self-awareness.”⁴ Kusý later noticed that once we begin with this idealization, it is necessary to go on in the process and at the same time it is not recommended to focus only on a few selected spheres of life because this kind of Potemkin village could only function as a complex and general solution.⁵ The studied art projects in this book provide characteristics of alternative and unofficial art practices, their (in)dependence from the socio-political context, and their (in)dependence from the official institutional cultural apparatus.

4 Miroslav Kusý. “Chartism and ‘Real Socialism’”. In: Václav Havel et al. *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. New York: Palach Press. 1985, 157-158.

5 Ibid.

As we have already mentioned, the spheres of official and unofficial culture in Czechoslovakia were overlapping. As Václav Havel wrote, no matter how developed a lifestyle is within the parallel structures, and whether or not it is at the ripest state of the “parallel polis”⁶, in post-totalitarian conditions it can only co-exist with the official (first) public sphere. In fact, this means that artists interacted with traditional and accustomed social practices and daily situations and actively shaped what Havel called the “panorama of everyday life” by using its surroundings as a backdrop, a platform, and a spring-board to realize their individual activities. Through their ideas and projects, they questioned the prevailing social structures, ruling conventions, standards, and codes of the dominant public sphere.

The chapters investigate how the changes in political climate, from the liberalization of “socialism with a human face” in the second half of the 1960s to “normalization” or “real socialism” in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s influenced culture and gave rise to alternative or unofficial artistic strategies of expression and exhibition practice. In a study entitled “Exhibitions as (Un)political Media: II Permanent Manifestations and Danuvius ’68 (Alternative Art in Slovakia in the 1960s)”, I came across two exhibitions of a completely different nature, dimension, and size. “II Permanent Manifestations” and “Danuvius ’68” actually demonstrate two cultural model situations. On the one hand, we can see expressions of liberalization within culture in the second half of the 1960s as well as expressions of the aftermath of the occupation by the armies of the Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968. On the other hand, the chosen exhibition examples mirror the poly-dimensional character of this era. These exhibitions became sites of reflection and points of ref-

6 Václav Benda. *Paralelní polis. 1978* (samizdat)

erence, providing us with a better understanding of the transformation of the cultural apparatus between the 1960s and the 1970s. The involved processes include the misuse by communist propaganda of the “II Permanent Manifestations” as an example of decadence in the process of normalization starting in 1968.

One of the objectives of my research was to identify the meeting points between the first and the second public spheres. The case studies and chapters “Outside by Being Inside: Unofficial Artistic Strategies in the 1970s and 1980s in the Former Czechoslovakia”, and “‘Please Turn Me in the Right Direction, Please’: The Art of Contestation – Unofficial Performative Practices in 1970s Slovakia” demonstrate these points of reference and reflect the relationships between them. Crossing points between the two spheres emerge and they thus seem to be more like two interconnected systems rather than two separate and contradictory entities. As Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirák pointed out, the second public sphere is an umbrella term for various unofficial activities and strategies in Eastern and Central Europe, the relevance and manifestations of which change according to the different stages of the late socialist era. “The second public sphere is a (pseudo)autonomous arena of communication and opinion sharing, a network, and also the cultural production of individuals and groups which coexisted and was interconnected with the dominant public sphere. It needs to be stressed out that the second public sphere has an extremely fluid structure which eludes institutionalisation or static integration into a dogmatic system.”⁷ In numerous artistic projects as well as in ordinary life during real socialism, both exclusion from and identification with the masses was crucial. In performative practice,

7 *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere. Event-based Art in Late Socialist Europe*, Katalin Cseh-Varga, Adam Czirák (eds.). London: Routledge. 2018, 7-8.

we can find numerous examples of using the masses and publicity as a platform for interventions in public space.

In “The Possibility of Revealing. Notes on an Installation by Jana Želibská,” I investigated that artist’s outstanding installation created in 1967, where I focused on the topography of voyeurism and performative interactive space. As for the topography of voyeurism, the issues of viewpoint in the light of theories of desire and that of a hidden subject (constructions of subject) are analysed. From a formal point of view, the installation has been based upon two central motifs, which are also considered the main motifs within the history of imaging and voyeurism, i.e., the curtain (veil) and the keyhole (or a hole in “general”). I further on analysed the analogies between this installation and pre-cinematographic devices and Marcel Duchamp’s work *Étant donné*s (1946–66).

The study “Celebration, Festivals, and Holidays in the Former Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 1970s as Art Forms for Alternative and Non-official Art” focuses on the connection between performative strategies and the time culture of a certain era. One of the outstanding projects of its time was *Happsoc I. (Sociologický happening)* (Happsoc I: a social happening) (1965) by Alex Mlynářčík, Stano Filko, and Zita Kostrová, which took place between two political holidays in Czechoslovakia: namely, 1 and 9 May. Political propaganda as well as recreational culture (Labour Day was the biggest holiday of socialist and totalitarian society) was linked to the artistic intentions of the project, and therefore the project reflected its social and political context. Notions of celebration, festival, holiday, ceremony, and ritual regarding the sociological and anthropological aspects and theories on celebration of Odo Marquard, Michael Maurer, and Josef Pieper, and the theories by Erika Fischer-Lichte

on the aesthetics of performativity (performance art and its constituent factors) will be discussed later on.

One of the theses stated in my last study, entitled “Please Turn Me into the Right Direction, Please: The Art of Contestation – Unofficial Performative Practices in 1970s Slovakia”, shows us the paradox that there would be no unofficial art scene without the official one. At the same time, the “unintended underground”, characterized by Štraus as an aesthetics “pulled out of its relations and out of the institutionalized context”⁸, is slightly irritating. In reality we could often talk about polarizing the “intended overground”. The communist system, through excluding these projects from the artistic scene, sheds light on and opens up a critical view on itself, and principally through this rejection it gets critical of itself. Without the intention of the authors, the underground is underground only metaphorically, as it happens actually “above ground” in quite a visible manner. In the following chapters, I would like to elaborate on what kind of visibility, whose responsibility, in what referential frames and kind of contexts we need to deal with when investigating the (un)official performative artistic strategies in the former Czechoslovakia.

8 Tomáš Štraus. *Slovenský variant modern* (Slovak variation of modernity). Bratislava: Pallas. 1992, 105.



2. Celebration, Festivals, and Holidays in the Former Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 1970s as Art Forms for Alternative and Non-Official Art

“Should art regain its lost meaning in the life of the individual, it will have to return to things among which and with which the individual lives.”¹

(Jindřich Chalupecký, 1940)

Celebration as a form of artistic expression appeared in Slovak and Czech action art in the 1960s and 1970s.² In this chapter, I will clarify the development and occurrence of the phenomenon of happenings in the form of celebration, which was the ultimate expression of action art in the former Czechoslovakia (ČSSR) and Central Europe. The objective of this study is not just a comprehensive documentation of the actions (celebrations in the former ČSSR) but also includes exceptional projects of key importance for this topic as well as for the artistic approaches which used celebration, including the sociological phenomena of festivals, holidays, ceremonies, and rituals, as sources of action art in the former Czechoslovakia. The *Happsoc I. (Sociologický happening)* (Happsoc I, social happening) (1965) project by Alex Mlynářčík, Stano Filko, and Zita Kostrová stands out in this re-

1 Jindřich Chalupecký. *Svět v němž žijeme* (The world we live in), 1940. Cited after *České umění 1938 – 1989; programy, kritické texty, dokumenty* (Czech art 1938 – 1989: programmes, critical texts, documents). Jiří Ševčík, Pavlína Morganová, Dagmar Dušková (eds.). Prague: Academia. 2001, 37.

2 Despite relative liberalization in the second half of the 1960s, the cultural sphere in Czechoslovakia was still dominated by the official doctrine of socialist realism. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968, the conditions for free artistic expression were severed and the process of “normalization” led to harsh censorship and the prosecution of artists. Alternative styles turned into unofficial arts.

gard. Thanks to its conceptual and action position, this project became a specific type of “idea happening”: this is important for us because it took place between two political holidays in Czechoslovakia – 1 and 9 May. I will attempt to show how recreational culture (Labour Day was the biggest holiday of socialist and totalitarian society) was linked to the artistic intentions of the project and how it reflected its social and political context. Notions of celebration, festival, holiday, ceremony, and ritual regarding the sociological and anthropological aspects and theories on celebration from Odo Marquard, Michael Maurer, and Josef Pieper, and the theories by Erika Fischer-Lichte on the aesthetics of performativity (performance art and its constituent factors) will be discussed. Also included is a detailed discussion of social and political conditions in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, which contributed to the reception as well as to the relationship between the author (artist), actors, and audience as well as the selection of the specific place and time of the performance of the actions. In addition, the formation of celebration as an *organigram* and structure (or hierarchy) in calendar time and performance space, which constitute essential elements of this art form, will be addressed.

It is possible to envision celebrations as specific forms of happenings in the ČSSR which are grounded in tradition and as positively attuned activities that include a moment of “consent to life”, a concept Josef Pieper considered to be the core of any festivity.³ There are many, sometimes contradictory, definitions of celebration, but all of them have in common the notion that celebration is inherently the opposite of everydayness. Scholars have examined celebration as a social and anthropologic phenomenon, above all in regard to its origin as well as at the level of its

3 Josef Pieper. *Über das Phänomen des Festes* (About the celebration phenomenon). Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963, 12.

genesis in prehistoric cultic rituals, medieval fairs, pilgrimages, and carnival, alongside its use on political occasions. Odo Marquard characterized celebration as the “moratorium of everydayness”, and he has viewed it as an anthropological constant or “Anthropinon”.⁴ In his famous work “Totem and Taboo”⁵, Sigmund Freud pointed out the fact that celebrations lighten reality and have a therapeutic function.

In connection with the concept of celebration and its expression in art, the process during which ordinary things and ordinary happenings become a celebration and art at the same time will be briefly addressed. Erika Fischer-Lichte calls this process the “re-enchantment of the world”: “When the ordinary becomes striking, when contrasts fail and things change into their opposite, the viewer experiences reality as ‘enchanted’. And it is this enchantment which transports him to a state of liminality, and which transforms him.”⁶ Pieper’s concept of “time off work” expresses the difference between a holiday and a festivity. As in old rituals, the sacrificial animal was selected from a huge herd in the same way, according to Pieper, that a sequence is selected from “used” time, which is subsequently deprived of its “use” and is offered to the gods.⁷

Artists use rituals related to a time-specific culture, as in *Happsoc I* in creating their actions. However, the mimesis of ritual is expanded to a further dimension. Artists create not only mimic rituals, but by an act of simulation they also stage them, thereby putting them into new and unusual contexts and within the context of art. The artists use the individual components of a traditional system, which they rearrange. The

4 Lars Deile. “Feste - eine Definition” (Celebration - a definition). In: *Das Fest* (A celebration). Michael Maurer (ed.), Cologne: Böhlau. 2004, 4.

5 Sigmund Freud. *Totem und Tabu* (Totem and taboo). Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer. 1972, 157.

6 Erika Fischer-Lichte. *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Esthetics of performativity). Frankfurt a. M.: edition suhrkamp. 2004, 314.

7 Pieper. Work cited in note 3. 8.

dimension of time is inherent to a festivity; however, only a few artists have dealt with the dimension of space. Maurer suggests that both adequate clothing and an adequate space belong to a festivity, and he discusses the fact that “holy time” comes together with “holy place”.⁸

However, this cultural analysis is not a treatise on the theme of the dichotomy of everydayness and festivity. It is an examination of the genesis and topography of the development of this artistic form in the field of Slovak and Czech action art in the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, I will discuss the spectacular happenings (so-called “celebrations”) *Deň radosti* (Day of joy) and *Evína svadba* (Eva’s wedding) by Alex Mlynárčik, *Snúbenie jari* (The engagement of spring) by Jana Želibská, and *Vďakyvzdanie* (Thanksgiving) by Eugen Brikcus. I will also focus attention on the happenings of Zorka Ságlová, which in their more intimate nature are closer to ceremonies and rituals for a select circle of friends. Her *Pocta Gustavu Obermanovi* (A tribute to Gustav Oberman) and *Kladení plín u Sudoměři* (Laying diapers near Sudoměř) happenings (both in 1970) are closely linked to a specific historical context with an emphasis on *genius loci*. When analysing the celebrations by Alex Mlynárčik, it is impossible to avoid mentioning the relationship with the other art form he often used in his artwork, in particular his actions and the principle of homage. The joint project of a gallery in the countryside, *Prvý festival snehu* (The first festival of snow), held in 1970 by Mlynárčik, Urbásek, Adamčiak, and Cyprich, stands out from the series of celebrations, ceremonies, and rituals. I pay special attention to the *Happsoc I* project, carried out by Mlynárčik, Stano Filko, and Zita Kostrová in May 1965, as a separate form, which in itself was not a celebration but was rather related to specific calendar holidays; these holidays in socialist society were some of the main strategies for the demonstra-

8 Michael Maurer. “*Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des Festes*” (Prolegomena to the theory of celebration). In: the work cited in note 4. 53.

tion of political power. In this study, celebrations by Mlynářčik (who in his art programmatically developed notions of celebration and holiday) and by the artists Želibská, Ságlová, and Brikcius (who used the art form of “celebration” within their activities rather exceptionally) also manage to create unique works in the field of action art.

Alex Mlynářčik: celebrations, holidays, and festivals

The Slovak artist Alex Mlynářčik (b. 1934), who lives alternately in Žilina and Paris, has applied and developed the notion of celebration in his art. Several hundred people have participated in his action art productions, including other artists, theatre companies, and ordinary people living in the area where the action took place.

Mlynářčik’s journey toward the realization of his spectacular happenings, which he referred to as “celebrations”, began in 1964 in Paris, where he had the opportunity to meet Pierre Restany, who was the French critic of Nouveau Réalisme, and the artists of the New Realism group. At the first exhibition entitled *Permanent Manifestations*⁹ (1966) in the Raymonde Cazenave Gallery in Paris, organized with help from Restany, Mlynářčik exhibited “epitaphs”, which were interactive sculptures made using a combined technique which viewers could manipulate by writing messages on them or opening and closing them as if they were cabinets. The fundamental component of the sculpture was a torso of a female mannequin called “Lola”, which corresponded to the pop-art representation of the female body as an object of desire. The sculptures were complemented by different *objets trouvés*, such as wigs and bras. “Lola” acted in the capacity of an icon, cult figure, deity, and Venus. Another motif of the

9 Pierre Restany. *Manifestations permanentes* (Permanent manifestations). Galerie Raymonde Cazenave. Paris. 1966.

“Epitaphs” was a “found object”, a clock, or rather its individual parts, such as its face and hands. Fragments of entire clocks – in antique cabinets, without hands, and with faces that became only circles with digits and pendulums with no driving engines, indicate how deeply the author considered the notion of time and transience. As an exhibition of epitaphs, *Permanent Manifestations* was described in the press as “the wittiest, the most moving and most poetic thing we have seen in Paris”¹⁰ and was not only a playful game for the spectators but also a record of their opinions and current feelings in the form of inscriptions, while the assemblages referred to other artistic media and genres such as music (jukeboxes) or the tradition of medieval reliquaries and tabernacula (candlelight, golden colour, and movable wings commonly found on gothic altars). This exhibition was Mlynářčík’s first step toward liberation from a static medium to one of interactivity and the involvement of spectators as co-creators of the artwork,¹¹ and it predicts his later happenings at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.¹²

Happsoc I

After returning from Paris in 1965, Mlynářčík, together with Stano Filko and Zita Kostrová, formulated *Happsoc I*. The project consisted of three components: (1) a manifesto in which the authors declared the entire

10 Jean-Jacques Leveque. *Happenings pour objets* (Happenings for objects). Art Loisirs. 6.7.1966, 65.

11 Important projects were interactive environments. *La Tentation. A. Mlynářčík et M. Urbásek* (Temptation. A Mlynářčík and M. Urbásek). Galerie Raymonde Cazenave. Paris. 1967. *Superlund. Un panorama du présent. Une philosophie du futur* (Panorama of today: philosophy of tomorrow). Pierre Restany (ed.). Lunds Konsthall. Lund. 1967.

12 For more on this, see Andrea Bátorová. *Aktionskunst in der Slowakei in den 1960er Jahren. Aktionen von Alex Mlynářčík* (Action art in Slovakia in the 1960s: the actions of Alex Mlynářčík). Berlin and Münster: LIT 2009, 164–178. Zora Rusinová. *Umenie akcie 1965–1989* (Action Art 1965–1989). Bratislava: SNG. 2001. 22–26. Tomáš Štraus. *Slovenský variant moderny* (A Slovak variation of modernity). Bratislava: Pallas. 1992, 102–105.

Slovak capital of Bratislava to be an artwork between 1 and 9 May and invited people to participate in the project; (2) a list of twenty-three objects and subjects which also included exact numbers from the records of the Municipal Office (e.g., women – 138,936, dogs – 49,991, apartments – 4,735, Danube – 1, and so on); and (3) a portfolio with documentary photographs of the celebrations of 1 and 9 May (pictures of the May Day march and military parade). The manifesto, declaration, and list were delivered to the citizens of Bratislava.

When considering the notion of holidays, which are closely linked to celebrations, I am primarily interested in linking the “happen society” project to the time culture of that era. In 1965 the liberalization of culture had just begun. However, change came gradually, and the official doctrine of socialist realism was promoted by the ruling totalitarian regime. The authors of *Happsoc I* referred to their traditional time-specific cultural structure when creating a new form within the structure, and in this way they managed to change it. *Happsoc* as a “ready-made process” was a unique artistic achievement and not only in the context of Slovak art. It included everything that took place at a selected time and place. “Unlike a happening”, the authors wrote in their manifesto, “Happsoc is non-stylized reality, which is not, in its original form, influenced by any intervention.”¹³

The selected framework for *Happsoc I* was created by two political holidays, which in their essence were closely connected to celebration in socialist society. Labour Day on 1 May and the Day of Victory over Fascism on 9 May were the biggest holidays of the Communist state. The selection of these dates is contradictory to a certain extent, especially when compared to the continuation of *Happsoc I* in the *Happsoc II* project (be-

13 Pierre Restany. *Inde* (Elsewhere). Bratislava: SNG. 1996, 27.

tween 1965 and 1966). The authors (without Kostrová) decided to select a different type of recreational culture practised in that era, the period between Christmas and the New Year. The artists specifically selected these two timeframes irrespective of whether or not they were loyal to the Communist party or the Catholic church. Situating their first project in May and their second in December suggests that the authors' choice was subjected to the calendar rather than to a political agenda. *Happsoc I* and *Happsoc II* were defined by two holidays which were “habitual” in the period included in the calendar regardless of their political or religious character. Although the authors could not avoid the assumption of political or religious links in their selections of these holidays, these were only external links to the artists, and did not affect their decisions or the character of the period. As Václav Havel stated in his essay *The Power of the Powerless* in a post-totalitarian regime each free act becomes “a politicum par excellence”.¹⁴ The authors selected political holidays just as they selected Christmas and the New Year – as “natural” demarcations within the existing structure. They selected the dates of the holidays without intending to imply primary political or religious affinities.

An important topic is the relationship between this experimental project of a “happening society” and the governing political power. Another challenging aspect is the very meaning of political holidays to the people and the impact of such holidays on social behaviour in communist Czechoslovakia. As Michael Maurer has stated, totalitarian regimes tend to subordinate individuals in their holidays, concentrating them in teams, wiping out personal differences, and suppressing group interests – in other words, regulating by power.¹⁵ According

14 Václav Havel. *Moc bezmocných* (The power of the powerless). Prague: Archy. 1990, 25. Havel's term post-totality means that the totalitarian regime of the 1970s and 1980s in former Czechoslovakia had a different character than totalitarian regime in the 1950s.

15 Maurer. Work cited in note 8. 45.

to Pieper, the probability of celebrating these totalitarian holidays is proportional to the decrease in religious cult celebrations.¹⁶ This aspect of the holiday is important to consider in connection with the harsh persecution of religious belief by the totalitarian regime, which in the ČSSR occurred most strongly after 1948. Pieper also draws attention to the power of political propaganda, which has the power to preserve the holiday so that “powerful politicians command and control ‘spontaneous joy’”.¹⁷ He built his theory on the analysis of the process of secularization and holidays that were organized as a result of the French Revolution and which explicitly replaced cult holidays. In November 1793, the Paris Commune banned all cult religious activities. One year later, Robespierre announced the creation of thirty-six new national holidays, which were intended to be “the most powerful means of rebirth”; the most important one was the “Festival of the Supreme Being”.¹⁸ However, the new type of holiday was not a spontaneous one; it followed the slogan: “The one who does not participate begins to look suspicious”. An element of political enforcement and propagandistic intimidation was present in artificially created holidays.¹⁹ The prescribed forms of celebration were published the day before a holiday so that people were informed about what, where, and above all how they should celebrate.

In communist Czechoslovakia, the celebrations of the holidays on 1 and 9 May lost their original meaning for the majority of population. These holidays were now perceived as artificially constituted and staged events, reflecting the pseudo-character of various social structures. While 9 May had a meaning for many as

16 Pieper. Work cited in note 3. 24.

17 Ibid. 20.

18 Ibid. 23.

19 Ibid. 21.

the day of the end of the Second World War in Europe and the day of victory over fascism, people were discouraged from expressing a festive mood, especially by the prescribed rules concerning personal deportment during this holiday. As a result, only a few considered these political holidays in the socialist state in a serious manner, essentially turning them into ordinary days off. If there was any special behaviour or activity ordered on a holiday, it became a day of public camouflage and pretence. Many people carried banners in the May Day parade. Participation, however, was not from conviction but because it was ordered “from above”. If people did not participate in the event, they would have violated what Havel called a “panorama”, which he defined as “an entire environment that contributed to living a lie”.²⁰ Regardless of the media used – wall-newspapers, flags, slogans, or empty words – the “panorama” would be created by people who pretended compliance with certain rules and recognized certain values so that they might “have peace” and avoid confrontation. Failure to attend a May Day parade was an expression of disagreement with the ruling regime. The holiday also had different significations for different groups of citizens. For example, for children, the May Day parade meant having a nice flag or a ribbon wand they could play with. (I remember how in elementary school we practised the May Day march before an empty tribune that had been built on a housing estate. The teachers encouraged us to wave the flags and smile.) Michael Maurer called the effective ordering and enforcement of political holidays the sign of dictatorship.²¹

²⁰ Havel. Work cited in note 14.

²¹ Maurer. Work cited in note 8. 50.

The First Festival of Snow

The First Festival of Snow took place in 1970 on the occasion of the World Championships in skiing in the Slovak High Tatras and was initiated by the Slovak artists Mlynárčik, Urbásek, Cyprich, and Adamčiak, who invited other alternative artists to participate. It was conceived as a one-time project of outdoor presentations and was based on the idea of dematerializing art and making it available outside conventional exhibitions and established institutional structures. In June 1969, Mlynárčik and Urbásek formulated the “Manifesto of Interpretation in Fine Art”, a declaration that became inspirational for the concept of the *The First Festival of Snow*, which included interpretations of original works of international artists presented by Adamčiak, Cyprich, Mlynárčik, and Urbásek (Figs. 1 - 2).²² According to the authors of the manifesto, the festival was “the first manifestation of *interpretation* in fine art, executed as the expression of a new dimension of thinking and practice.”²³ In the “Winter Gallery of the Tatras”, the artists proclaimed independence from commerce and the transience of artworks that originate and then become extinct as well as the conscious continuation of the noble-mindedness of the Greek Olympic Games in which the harmony of body and soul excelled. Over a period of several days, artists carried out a number of tributes and interpretations of artworks in the open air. For example, Urbásek built and colourfully painted snowmen in the style of the so-called *Nanas* by Niki de Saint Phalle; in one of the streets of the ski village, Mlynárčik hung up a table with the sign *Boulevard Erik Dietmann*, thus

22 The artworks of the following artists were interpreted: Arman, Bill, Boccioni, Brueghel, Brusse, Brüning, Christo, Dias, Dietmann, Delvaux, Dobeš, Duchamp, Genoves, Klein, Kounellis, Lichtenstein, Magritte, Malevich, de Maria, Miralda, Mlynárčik, Nagasawa, Nitlaf, Oldenburg, Piene, la Pietra, Raysse, de Saint-Phalle, Sanejouand, Segal, Tobas, Uecker, Urbásek, da Vinci, and Wesselmann.

23 Restany. Work cited in note 13. 78.

appropriating the events in the street and paying a tribute to his fellow artist from Sweden, Erik Dietmann. Cyprich skied in a cross-country style for ten kilometres, leaving behind him a parallel trail in the snow as a tribute to the American artist Walter de Maria.

Before examining the features typical for Mlynářčík and his happenings/“celebrations”, I will analyse his activities and the performative and ritual practices in two of his actions in relation to sociological theories of celebrations and as social phenomena. These actions, *Day of Joy* (1971) and *Eva’s Wedding* (1972), are briefly described.

Day of Joy

The *Day of Joy* happening took place on 12 June 1971 in the village of Zakamenné in the north of Slovakia (Figs. 3 - 14). Mlynářčík planned a ride on a small mountain railway as a spectacular event, in which several hundred people took part. The realization of the happening was preceded by extensive preparation and planning. Mlynářčík invited other artists to contribute to the action either with a proposal how to “decorate” one of the cars of the little train or how to recreate the stations where the train was scheduled to stop. Each train car had its own “designer”: Miloš Urbásek painted the locomotive black, Antoni Miralda (with Dorothee Selz) served pink-coloured meals in the dining car, Robert Cyprich created a “post wagon” in which he transported live pigeons, and Jana Želibská handed out hand-painted toilet paper. The individual stations, which had been given names just for this day, were also considered to be works of art or places where events would be carried out; Viliam Jakubík and Vladimír Kordoš buried bottles with straws in the forest so that blind-folded participants could taste but not see

what kind of drink was inside the bottle. Adamčiak and Cyprich also gave a concert. The day passed in a very good mood and culminated with everybody eating goulash in a forest meadow.²⁴

How did Mlynárčik actually get the idea to execute this action? He decided to organize this festival at the moment he learned that the short old railway was to be closed down. He thought of organizing a farewell party in the form of a celebration of the train's last ride. The key point behind the *Day of Joy* was actually a “funeral” for the little railway, which was undergoing a transition from an active state to a state of being closed down, or “death”. One can therefore talk about a “rite de passage”, which is one of the essential concepts of the theory of rituals and celebrations. Although this happening was a funeral, it was joyful, playful, and unique.

Eva's Wedding

The culmination of Mlynárčik's celebrations was the *Eva's Wedding* happening, which took place on 23 September 1972 in Žilina and nearby. The event was the real wedding of a young couple who received a proposal from the artist to make their day a truly special one (Figs. 16-28). This happening was preceded by several months of preparation which Mlynárčik worked on with the organizing team. Invitations were sent out before the ceremony in Slovak and French, and in them the author declared the upcoming event to be “in both its content and form a natural gesture” and “a celebration of life and joy, hope, and love”.²⁵ The happening was conceived as homage to Ľudovít Fulla, one of the founders of Slovak modern

²⁴ Ibid. 127.

²⁵ Ibid. 136.

art, who was celebrating his seventieth birthday that year. Mlynárčik used Fulla's oil painting *Svadba* (The wedding) (Fig. 15) from 1946 as a model. The picture depicts a wedding coach with the newlyweds, musicians, and frolicking children. The joyful nature of the event is complemented by the vivid spectrum of Fulla's colours. A similar but larger tapestry by Fulla, *A Village Wedding* (Fig. 17), was displayed in the Wedding Hall of the Town Hall in Žilina, where the ceremony was held. The tapestry depicts a large wedding procession with musicians and, unlike the neutral background of the 1946 painting, it is set in the Slovak countryside. The continuation of the folk tradition played a decisive role in Fulla's modern interpretation. Mlynárčik adopted the folklore character and atmosphere as the basis of his concept for this happening, building on the tradition of folk and Old Slavic weddings.

Mlynárčik claimed in the invitation that he designed *Eva's Wedding* as a "live play in two acts (eight scenes) with a prologue and an epilogue." The happening consisted of three major parts: the ceremony at the Town Hall in Žilina, the procession through the town, and the wedding banquet in the Kysuca chalet near Žilina. The whole event was planned in an organized programme that was composed of ceremonies and rituals. When the newlyweds walked out of the Town Hall, a helicopter flew over the square and scattered white paper hearts on them. The entire company then rode through the streets of the town in decorated hay wagons accompanied by music, and passers-by were invited to join and take part in various activities together with the newlyweds, while food and alcoholic drinks were served to all. The hay-wagon of the newlyweds pulled a so-called "Rudôlko" or "Pánča" – a two-metre-long tank filled with borovička, a Slovak alcoholic beverage. The "Pánča" is a continuation of a folk tradition in

which one of the wedding guests carried a small figure, usually concealed, with an oversized penis filled with alcohol. The bride had to drink from it first, and then she offered it to the other wedding guests. This act was intended to ensure fertility and many children for the couple. Other rituals included eating honey, which was meant to strengthen the couple's happiness and satisfaction, and a ransom the bridegroom had to pay for the "kidnapped" bride. Passers-by and inhabitants of the town participated in all of these rituals, and thus the celebration was joined in by several hundred people.

In addition to the family members, many invited guests, such as the Czech art critic Jindřich Chalupický and Pierre Restany, participated in *Eva's Wedding*. The folk atmosphere was enhanced by the performance of the *Radošinské naivné divadlo* (Naive Theatre of Radošina) and *Stavbár Žilina*.²⁶ The participation of nineteen domestic and foreign artists was also important. Many of them donated their own artworks as wedding presents to the newlyweds or agreed to carry out one of the rituals.²⁷

***Actions designed by Alex Mlynárčik:
notions of celebration, festival, and holiday***

Mlynárčik developed the idea and the organization of his "celebrations" programmatically. According to Marquard's theories, he understood celebrations as differentiations from everydayness. Mlynárčik explained this by using the example of a peasant who puts his working clothes aside on a Sunday, dons a white shirt, and goes to church,

²⁶ Slovak director Dušan Hanák shot a short film of this happening.

²⁷ Róbert Cyprich, Viliam Jakubík, Imre Bak, Mimmo Rotella, Erik Dietmann, Gyula Kosice, Gianni Bertini, Egenio Carmi, Frank Lincoln, Shintaro Tanaka, Antoni Miralda/Dorothee Selz, and Hervé Fischer.

which, he observes, is a festive ritual.²⁸ The extraordinary, different, added value – that is, the dimension outside reality – became the basis for his artistic concepts. Mlynářčík described several of his spectacular happenings as “celebrations”: their essential component was to “get the creative mechanism of his collaborators going”, as he declared in the manifesto for *Eva’s Wedding* in 1972. *Juniáles* (1970), *Pax et Gaudium* (1970, in cooperation with Adamčík), *Záhrady rozjímania* (The gardens of meditation) (1970, in cooperation with Cyprich), *Sviatočné body* (A festive feast) (1971), *Memoriál Edgara Degasa* (The memorial of Edgar Degas) (1971) (Figs. 29 - 30), and *Hommage et Gloire à Rousseau* (1978) also belong to this group.²⁹

What role did Mlynářčík play during the celebration? Mlynářčík was neither a director of the events nor a “master of ceremonies”. Instead, he was simply present in the background during the entire event as the organizer and designer of the entire action. Unlike a “master of ceremonies”, he was not interested in whether the rules, acts, or their sequence were observed. Although the activities had been planned, they were always conceived freely as artworks in which participants could freely intervene, following the concept of an “open work” by Umberto Eco.³⁰ The participants could interpret and recreate the events with some free will and within the framework which was created by the artist. *Eva’s Wedding* was a traditional repetitive ceremony – a rite – which had its precedent in the established structure of a wedding ceremony before an authority: it was a cyclical and repetitive “model”. The ceremony, however, took the form of an exceptional event because Mlynářčík’s concept made it special and gave it an artistic context. A wedding represents

28 Bátorová. Work cited in note 12. 303.

29 Ibid. 200–212.

30 Umberto Eco. *Offenes Kunstwerk* (The open work). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp. 1998, 42.

a *rite de passage* – a transitional rite. *Eva's Wedding* was a transition to a state of matrimony, as the *Day of Joy* was a transition from life to a state of non-functioning or death (i.e., the last ride).

Mlynárčik's actions are typical of their essential positive creative principle. They were prepared for a broad public, and his primary goal was not to make everything happen according to a rigid plan but to achieve a shared experience of something exceptional and joyful. In this sense, Mlynárčik's creative principle corresponds to the "consent to the world", which Josef Pieper viewed as the essential precondition and contribution to the phenomenon of celebration.³¹ This endeavour by the artist to generate positive emotions was not a natural thing in action art of the 1960s and 1970s; many actions from this era intentionally conveyed the very opposite to the participants, and are, as I have defined elsewhere, essential features of the principles of anti-art and destruction in art in opposition to each other.³² They are often present in action art, and for the most part they have an irritating effect on people, unlike the positive emotions and "consent to the world" which are, as I outline here, the characteristic signs of Slovak action art.³³ Mlynárčik's happenings/celebrations – *Day of Joy* and *Eva's Wedding* – communicate joy and positive energy on a transcendental level, since they include meanings that point beyond the particular day or activity attended by the participants. One can apply Maurer's theory to them: by means of these celebrations, people give "meaning" to their lives.³⁴ Mlynárčik's happenings are called "celebrations" by their designer, but they are also celebrations in their actual execution. The actions analysed in this study contain the essential signs and forms of celebration as a human event which occurs in a society within living memory.

31 Deile. Work cited in note 4. 8.

32 Bátorová. Work cited in note 12. 219–225.

33 Ibid. 110–116.

34 Deile. Work cited in note 4. 9.

With regard to these two of Mlynářčik's happenings, I will turn firstly to the dichotomy of everydayness – celebration (feast) and secondly to the connection with the concept of *rite de passage*:

1. The dichotomy of everydayness – feast is, according to Marquard, who considered celebration to be a “moratorium of everydayness”, one of the characteristic signs of festivities. In the *Day of Joy* action, Mlynářčik located the opposition between a “festive day” and a “work day” to a specific place. The last ride of the train represented a reversed process: it was not a festivity which “disturbs” everydayness but something in which the normal and ordinary become, under certain circumstances, a celebration. Thus, the train journey copies its usual day-to-day function, in other words, its “work day.” However, what is regular becomes festive due to the following shifts in meaning: (1) the fact that it is the last ride; (2) the artistic representation of the cars and stops, which express the exceptionality of this ride; (3) the fact that in its final journey the train does not serve its usual function – the transportation of wood – but is a dynamic place of celebration; and (4) the participation of the people, their energy, and their creative participation in the action. In this celebration, Mlynářčik recreated something found in reality: a train which he modified and made outstanding and by which he gave birth to a creative process and platform for various artistic activities. He also used this strategy of appropriating reality and reshaping it as art in his *II Permanentné manifestácie* (II permanent manifestations) (1966), in which he selected a public toilet and altered the found and real place while still preserving the function of the toilet, unlike Duchamp's malfunctioning urinal.³⁵

35 Bátorová. Work cited in note 12. 165–169. See also Chapter 4 of this book.

Mlynářčik's direct and immediate relationship to reality corresponds to the concept of Chalupecký's "ordinary man". Chalupecký was the artist's close friend for many years. "Should art regain its lost meaning in the life of individuals", Chalupecký stated, "art will have to return to things among which and with which individuals live."³⁶ Chalupecký examined Mlynářčik's "permanent and intensive relationship to concrete reality" and his intention "to affect people who do not seek modern art, they don't even know about it".³⁷ We may agree with Chalupecký, who saw in this artistic attitude one of the main reasons why Mlynářčik rarely located his works in galleries. His own environment "has become the street, a public urinal, the country, a sports campus, a folk feast".³⁸

2. The question is: what is the connection between Mlynářčik's happenings and one of the classic concepts of anthropology – the *rite de passage*? Funerals and weddings (the former found in the *Day of Joy* action and the latter in *Eva's Wedding*) are elementary and immemorial "transitional rites": the former celebrates the transition from life to death and the latter the transformation from a single status to the state of marriage. What is the relationship between the *rites de passage* and action art? *Rites de passage*, as described in 1909 by the French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, take place in three stages: Firstly there is the singling out, in which the person undergoing transformation is taken out of his everyday life and estranged from his social milieu. Secondly there is a transformation in which the person transformed goes through different interim stages which enable him to have various experiences. Thirdly there is a reacceptance of the person and his new social identity by society. The British anthropologist Victor Turner called the

36 Chalupecký. Work cited in note 1.

37 Jindřich Chalupecký. *Umění mě umění* (Art through art). Samizdat. 1974. Cited after Restany. Work cited in note 13. 261.

38 Ibid.

state of the interim stage the “liminal phase” (*limen*, or “threshold”, can be translated as a “state of being on the threshold of something”). Turner described this labile and in-between existence as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony”.³⁹ What is the interconnection between the actions of *Day of Joy* and *Eva’s Wedding*, which are also “transient rites” and artistic forms? How do they interact with each other, and what role does this connection, or rather the overlap or burden from the double implication of the same event, play?

Based on Turner’s basic definition, each “transitional rite” results in a transformation of the individual’s social position as well as that of his entire social environment. Let us take as an example Mlynárčik’s *Eva’s Wedding*. It involves an event in which on the one hand the social status of the bride and groom changes (as well as society’s perception of them as a married couple). On the other hand, the whole event is conceived as an artistic action: a happening. Within the artistic form of the happening – as it has been defined by the American artist Allan Kaprow in 1958 – artists provide participants with many possibilities for the interpretation of different activities, exercises, experiences, experiments, and modifications of consciousness and perception.⁴⁰ The participants usually have a place prepared for them: an arranged environment where the activities take place. In only a few happenings is there a real change in the social position of the participants (at least not such a radical change as marriage). This combination of real events – of a particular social importance and its impact with the artistic form of the happening – is characteristic of Mlynárčik’s creative approach and marks his specific

39 Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. 95. Cited after Erika Fischer-Lichte. Work cited in note 6. 305–306.

40 Allan Kaprow. *Legacy of Jackson Pollock*, Art News. 57. October 1958.

way of working with the medium of action as an event which is based on reality and real events and on the actual social process and its meaning. Society and its environment – the anonymous partner – have become an “indispensable part of the work, the results of which are affected by the course of the objective life.”⁴¹

Erika Fischer-Lichte highlighted the opposition between the “threshold experience” during the ritual, which entails a change in social status, and the aesthetic experience of the art performance.⁴² At this point, it should be noted that I do not consider Mlynářčik’s happenings to be performances only for the reasons outlined above (for their real impact on the existence of those participating) but also for their basic concept of an activity which is a “superstructure” of a real event and which should stem out of the essentially positive attitude of the celebrating people. People participate primarily in a ceremony and only secondarily in an artistic action, by which they meet the basic requirement for a festival; they share joy, positive energy flows, and a surplus is enjoyed. In short, there is a “consent with the world”.

In addition, in *Eva’s Wedding* there is a double mimesis: the first concerns a homage to Ľudovít Fulla – a classic painter of Slovak modernism – whose picture Mlynářčik paid tribute to by paraphrasing it; the second relates to the ceremony of an Old Slavic wedding – that is, a collection of ritual practices which have their own specific importance in the distant, ancestral past, upon which the artist builds and develops. A quotation from the history of art is a standard strategy of postmodern art. There is a creative appropriation of a precedent – Fulla’s painting – from the past. The double appropriation of an Old

41 The manifesto was written and published in 1972 for “Eva’s Wedding”. For the full text of the manifesto, see the Restany catalogue. Work cited in note 13. 136.

42 Fischer-Lichte. Work cited in note 6. 307.

Slavic rite and of the reference to Fulla's work contains twice as strong a link to tradition, which gives Mlynárčik's festivities multiple dimensions and multiple interpretive frameworks. In addition, Mlynárčik crosses the borders between the disciplines and creates an inter-medial work, which makes the static image a dynamic "live play" or "tableau vivant". This live picture is truly alive as it takes place and progresses in real time and space, with the events having a direct impact on the lives of the participants.

Jana Želibská, Zorka Ságlová, and Eugen Brikcius

The second part of this study examines and analyses actions that took the form of a celebration and which have a rather unique position within the oeuvre of their authors: *The Engagement of Spring* by Jana Želibská, *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman* and *Laying Diapers near Sodoměř* by Zorka Ságlová, and *Thanksgiving* by Eugen Brikcius.

Jana Želibská

The multi-media work of the Slovak artist Jana Želibská (b. 1941) examines the female aspects of reality. The work is considered to be a parallel to American Pop Art as well as to French New Realism, and it has recently been rediscovered due to the attention it has received from gender studies. With regard to festivities and festivals, her happening called *The Engagement of Spring* stands out from all her other works. On 13 June 1970 Jana Želibská organized a celebration in the open countryside of a meadow near Dolné Orešany in western Slovakia which was accompanied by ceremonial and ritual practices.⁴³ She

43 For more on this, see Rusinová. Work cited in note 12. 42. Daniela Čarná. *Z mesta von/Out of the City*.

invited several artists and the inhabitants of a nearby village to participate. The happening was not designed as a carefully planned set of events but rather as a free outdoor entertainment and picnic. Since ancient times, the passage from spring to summer has been one of the most important holidays and has been accompanied by various rituals and customs. Želibská conceived *The Engagement of Spring* as an action which continued the tradition of folk festivities that have their roots in ancient pagan ceremonies celebrating the cycle of Nature. The artist, together with the other participants, decorated trees in the meadow with white ribbons, similar to traditional folk decoration.

As I have already noted, her happenings had a team character: at Dolné Orešany Milan Adamčiak gave a concert of compositions by Vivaldi and Debussy (Fig. 31); Alex Mlynárčik organized a small aircraft flying above the participants showering them with white ribbons; Miloš Urbásek painted a red-and-blue geometric “target” on a large canvas to make the orientation of the aircraft easier; and Ľuba Velecká gave out flowers and myrtle to the participants, which they braided into their hair. The folk and ancient atmosphere of the event was enhanced by girls who danced in white archaic clothing with wreaths in their hair, evoking Old Slavic ritual ceremonies. The participants of *The Engagement of Spring* concluded the idyllic gathering with a joint celebration in honour of the arrival of summer. At the closure of the event they left the “decorated” nature behind them. In the context of contemporary art, the happening was (along with Mlynárčik’s happenings/celebrations) an exceptional and unique project, because in her subsequent work the author turned her attention to inter-media works, such as installations, photography, and video.

Zorka Ságlová

Within the context of Czech alternative art, the actions of the Czech artist Zorka Ságlová (1942–2003) creatively built on the history of specific sites in the broader context of the countryside.⁴⁴ In her 1970 work, *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman*, Ságlová and her friends laid out bags filled with jute and petrol in a circle on a snowy meadow near Bransoudov near Humpolec.⁴⁵ At twilight they lit the bags to create a symbolic ephemeral sculpture: the participants recalled the impressive experience of twenty-one flaming objects on a plain covered with snow (Fig. 32 - 33). The original intention of the author was to make a trip to a place she liked and light fires in the countryside. However, she learned of a legend from that area about a shoemaker called Gustav Oberman, who during World War II used to walk on the grasslands and spit fire for fun, an act for which the police caught and beat him. In his memory, she named her event after him. Moreover, during the preparations Ságlová found out that the meadow was in ancient times a site of pagan rituals which were mentioned by Pope Honorius III in the 13th century.⁴⁶

Just as in *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman*, Ságlová followed the tradition of a specific site in her action titled *Laying Diapers near Sudoměř* in 1970. Sudoměř was the scene of a great battle in 1420 between the Hussites, led by the legendary Jan Žižka, and imperial troops. It was the first battle which the Hussites won, despite being significantly outnumbered, thanks to the tactics of a so-called “wagon wall”. There is another legend saying that the Hussite women covered the

44 A reflection on the actions appeared relatively soon in a Western context in Klaus Groh. *Aktuelle Kunst aus Osteuropa* (Current Art of Eastern Europe). Cologne: DuMont. 1972. Later on also in Geneviève Bénamou. *L'art aujourd'hui en Tchécoslovaquie* (Art today in Czechoslovakia). Paris. 1979.

45 Pavlína Morganová. *Umění akce* (Action art). Olomouc: Votobia. 1999, 65.

46 Zorka Ságlová 1965–1995. Milena Lamarová (ed.). *Galerie výtvarného umění in Litoměřice*. Prague. 1995.

battlefield with diapers, and the horses of the imperial cavalry became entangled in them, which helped the Hussites win the battle. Building on the legend, Ságlová and her friends, put 700 cotton diapers on the meadow arranged in the shape of a large triangle, and left them to their fate (Fig. 34 - 35). In this way, Ságlová introduced a new dimension into Czech art, connecting historically important places that have a special *genius loci* to a modern strategy of intervening in the landscape. The connection of exterior and interior, of the meaning of a ritual place in the past and in the present, as well as the contrast of city and village, are the elementary coordinates of the creative processes she also uses in her interactive projects.⁴⁷ In relation to the topic of rituals, the connection between the specific places in the countryside with mythical or historical significance, together with the artist's continuation of her personal interpretations is of interest. Ságlová's activity may be linked to womanhood and motherhood, as putting diapers on the site of a bloody battle (although victorious for the Hussites) can be interpreted as a tribute to the Hussite women (they quite often took part in the battles) and mothers (who lost their sons, husbands, brothers, and so on). The white canvas can also be seen as a sheet for corpses, covering the "dormant" soldiers of both warring parties with its innocent white.⁴⁸

Ságlová's actions, which are grounded in the history of specific sites, cause the following questions to be raised: How were they designed in relation to the found landscape? How were they linked to the historical tradition, and how did they respond to the *genius loci*?

47 For example, Ságlová's famous environment 'Hey Straw', which was exhibited 1969 in Václav Špála Gallery in Prague. She assembled hay bales and straw, brought crickets from the meadow, and created a "natural environment" in the gallery. People could also do agrarian activities, like moving the grass from one place to another as they would in the fields in the countryside.

48 Morganová. Work cited in note 45.

Which topographical and constitutional elements did they use? In searching for answers to these questions we cannot ignore the formal layout of the actions and their arrangement in space. Referring to Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of spatiality, it can be assumed that spatiality is temporal and transient. Although Fischer-Lichte deals mainly with media, such as the theatre and performance art, her theoretical notions can also be applied to happenings, even in cases in which the artistic form does not have a clear scenario and is not a traditionally understood performance with a clear division between the actors and the audience. Spatiality, according to Fischer-Lichte, is not identical with space, but arises and ceases along with the performance.⁴⁹ According to her, the space in which a certain performance takes place can be seen either as a geometric space or as a performative space. The geometric space already exists before a performance takes place in it: it is stable, has a certain height, width, depth, and so on. The performative space is unstable and, unlike the geometric one, occurs only during a performance and opens up the possibilities for both the viewers and the actors by the movement and perception which it organizes and structures. The spatiality of a performance occurs in the performative area and is created by it.

In the two actions discussed above, Ságlová not only defines the space in which to carry out her event but also creates the actions within geometric shapes. Her decision to arrange objects (bags and diapers) into elementary geometrical shapes such as a circle (in *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman*) and a triangle (in *Laying Diapers near Sodoměř*) is related to her affinity with constructivism. Some of her early works are in the constructivist style, occurring just before her

49 Fischer-Lichte. Work cited in note 6. 187.

first environmental work in 1969, entitled *Seno – Sláma* (Hay – Straw), and her paintings include reduced abstract structures in which she used primary structures and geometrical forms.⁵⁰

Apart from her geometric distribution of elements in an open countryside, her selection of a site is worth noting. In *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman*, Ságlová chose a location which had been one of the sites of a fire system set up in the Middle Ages in the surrounding mountains, where it served as a communications system. The indication of the boundaries of this legendary place, in the form of a circle created by twenty-one fires, was a symbolic delimitation and appropriation of a certain area during the action. Referring to Düding's theory, Maurer suggests that the control of the area and the optical link it achieved by means of the fires was one of the essential elements of national festivities in the 19th century.⁵¹ However, in this case it can be stated that Ságlová used a much older local tradition which went much further back into the past.

The planned geometric deployment in space and the strong visual aspect of the action are, according to Ságlová, at the same hierarchical level as the experience of the participants; the spatial development enhances and enables the experience. The more interesting the visual representation of the action is, the stronger and more impressive is the experience. However, the experience was not Ságlová's priority; instead she sought a synthesis of artistic intervention, transformation of the landscape, sensitive perception of the *genius loci*, and visual sensation. In *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman*, the action is based on the act of creating space and in converting a geometric space into a performative space;

50 Milan Knížák, *Zorka Ságlová*. Národní galerie, Prague 2006. 10. In her work "Hay – Straw" she also used geometric elements – packages of straw in the shape of blocks.

51 Maurer. Work cited in note 8. 53.

the action is acquired in the process of transforming the meadow and the experience of igniting fires. In *Laying Diapers near Sudoměř*, there is also a procession experience in the activity of deploying the diapers in the area and in the final transformation of the specific site.

Eugen Brikcius

One of the most prominent Czech action artists of the 1960s and 1970s was Eugen Brikcius (b. 1942). He emigrated to Austria at the beginning of the 1980s, where he wrote lyrics and created visual poetry. In addition to numerous small events dedicated to day-to-day activities (e.g., drinking beer, walking, and picnicking), which he carried out in the 1960s as a member of the “The Order of the Crusaders of Pure Humour Without Banter”, his spectacularly staged action, *Ďikwzdání* (Thanksgiving), was carried out, on 21 July 1967.⁵² This happening was held at various locations in the centre of Prague: approximately eighty people gathered in the neighbourhood of Motol, from where they took various means of transport to Újezd and Střelecký Island, where the dress rehearsal of the action took place. Each of the participants had a loaf of bread, which they carried up the stairs of the Ladeburská Garden close by Prague Castle. At the top of the stairs was a woman on a throne – an allegory of the goddess Podchleba – under a stone arch. The participants placed the loaves of bread at her feet in the shape of a pyramid. The happening was violently interrupted by the police, and Brikcius was accused of vandalism and disparaging the symbols of working people. The action

52 For more on “The Order of the Crusaders of Pure Humour Without Banter” see: *České umění 1938 – 1989; programy, kritické texty, dokumenty* (Czech art 1938–1989: programmes, critical texts, documents). Jiří Ševčík, Pavlína Morganová, Dagmar Dušková (eds.). Prague: Academia. 2001, 346–348 Morganová, Pavlína. *Procházka akční Prahou. Akce, performance, happeniny 1949 – 1989* (Walk through action Prague. Actions, performances, happenings 1949 – 1989). Prague: VVP AVU, 2014.

had its sequel in court; however, Brikcius declared the lawsuit to be a part of the happening, and thus created a second act to the action.

Brikcius differed from the other artists (Želibská, Mlynářčik, and Ságlová) discussed in this chapter by having an exact plan for this action and its development which he based directly on his visions. In this sense, the artist followed the concept of the first happenings by Allan Kaprow, in which the author functioned as a director or even as a “coach”.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I raised the question of the review and analysis of the concepts of celebration, holiday, and festival as forms of artistic expression in Slovak and Czech action art in the 1960s and 1970s. As a form of expression in the organization of happenings, ceremony contains a direct link to old folk rituals, including Old Slavic pagan rites (Mlynářčik, Želibská, and Brikcius) and those of the Hussites (Ságlová). There is a direct link to tradition and history in the work of each of the artists discussed here. Folk narratives and atmosphere are typical features of Mlynářčik’s actions, while in *Eva’s Wedding* he incorporated the Old Slavic pagan symbolism of fertility and maternity into the modern ceremony and combined it with a modern form of wedding as a happening. The mapping of a particular place and the sensitivity for its *genius loci* were manifested in particular in the artwork of Zorka Ságlová.

What is the relationship between the artists and happenings to the site of their action? During the festivities, the site is not only decorated but is also appropriated. During a ceremony, holy places may be made profane (as in the case of saturnalia, *fêtes de fous*); places that

have had no significance before can be consecrated and given a certain importance or a symbolic purpose. My analysis of the significance of the sites of happenings has shown that their selection appears to be of key importance and a factor significantly contributing to the overall visual experience. Želibská in *The Engagement of Spring*, Mlynářčik in *Day of Joy*, and Ságlová in *A Tribute to Gustav Oberman* and *Laying Diapers near Sudomeř* chose remote places in the open countryside, which they temporarily turned into a venue for their events. In the case of Ságlová, there is the added dimension of historically important archaic ritual places. On the contrary, in *Thanksgiving* by Brikcius and *Eva's Wedding* by Mlynářčik the key role was played by an urban space complemented by a folk atmosphere and a traditional pagan ritual practice. While in events by Mlynářčik, Želibská, and Brikcius, the preparation of the setting served as the background or stage decoration, with Ságlová an important role in the visual experience was given to the rearrangement and transformation of the landscape. The experiences of the participants of Ságlová's two actions were a result of how the items (bags and diapers) were laid out in the countryside and of their appearance, not of an activity which took place in a prepared and transformed space. The essence of the ceremonies and the cult practices is the "consent to life". According to Pieper, at its essential core a festivity is the expression of such a consent.⁵³ In the pursuit of his argumentation we can state that a precondition of any festivity is a positive attitude to the experience. In the case of the happenings discussed in this study, this assumption was met by both the artists and by those participating. For example, in the manifesto to *Eva's Wedding*, Mlynářčik formulated the following: "Eva's Wedding is...a natural social ges-

53 Pieper. Work cited in note 3. 12.

ture. It is a celebration of life, joy, hope, and love. The ideological core of the ritual is optimistic – to have the mission of maintaining and developing the human race. It becomes a turning point in the existence of an individual – a manifestation of maturity, the onset of the summer of life.” The same pleasure and positive energy were contained in the happenings by Jana Želibská and Eugen Brikcius.

The active continuation of local traditions is very significant for all of these artists and it is also characteristic of almost all of their events and activities examined here. In the first place, it is a conscious continuation of values that could be called “traditional”, such as happiness, love, and joy, and also of values that were rather unpopular at a time of revolutionary efforts to expand the concept of art in the 1960s and 1970s. Art as a tool of joy and a gateway to traditional values was not so much interesting, for example, to neo-avant-garde Western artists. It can be therefore concluded that the artists of Slovak and Czech experimental forms of art discussed here, not only liked using these methods but developed and innovated their ideas through them. We must also recall Maurer’s statement that in the atheistic and totalitarian states of the 20th century (he referred to the Third Reich and the GDR) pagan rites and ceremonies connected to the cycles of Nature were adopted after religious ceremonies were suppressed and prohibited to be replaced by folk culture.⁵⁴ However, informal art in the form of celebrations/happenings was not compensation for missing religious acts but rather a recollection of the original culture of the given location, which also included the magic of reconnecting with ancient history (*genius loci*) and the abundant traditions of ancestral poetry and rites.

54 Maurer. *Zur Systematik des Festes*. (About the systematics of celebration). In: Work cited in note 4. 71.



1. Alex Mlynárčik, 1st Snow Festival, Bld. Dietmann: Hommage an Erik Dietmann, High Tatras 1970



2. Alex Mlynárčik, 1st Snow Festival, Miloš Urbásek, Nanas: Hommage en Niki de Saint-Phale, High Tatras 1970



3. Alex Mlynářčik, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



4. Alex Mlynářčik, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



5. Alex Mlynárčik,
A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971

6. Alex Mlynárčik,
A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971





7. Alex Mlynářčík,
A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971



8. Alex Mlynářčík,
A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971



9. Alex Mlynářčik, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



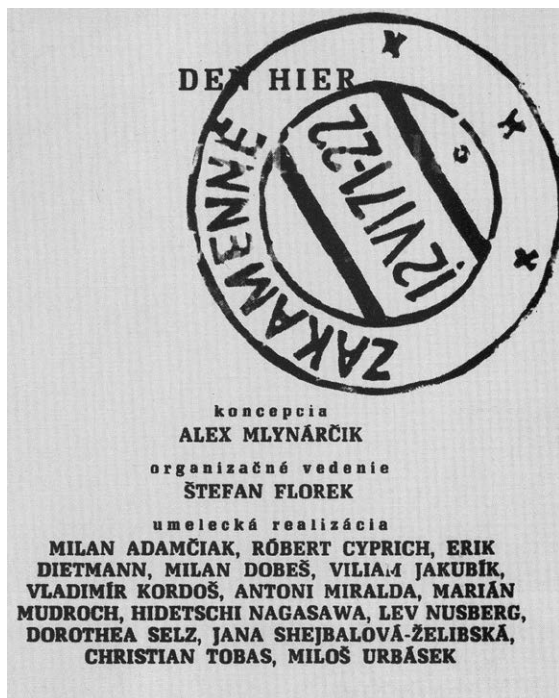
10. Alex Mlynářčik, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



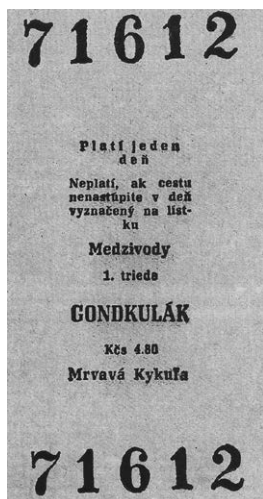
11. Alex Mlynářčík, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



12. Alex Mlynářčík, A Day of Joy, Zakamenné 1971



13. Alex Mlynárčik,
Programme – A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971



14. Alex Mlynárčik,
Ticket – A Day of Joy,
Zakamenné 1971



15. Ľudovít Fulla, A Village Wedding, 1946



16. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



17. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



18. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972

19. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's
Wedding, Žilina 1972

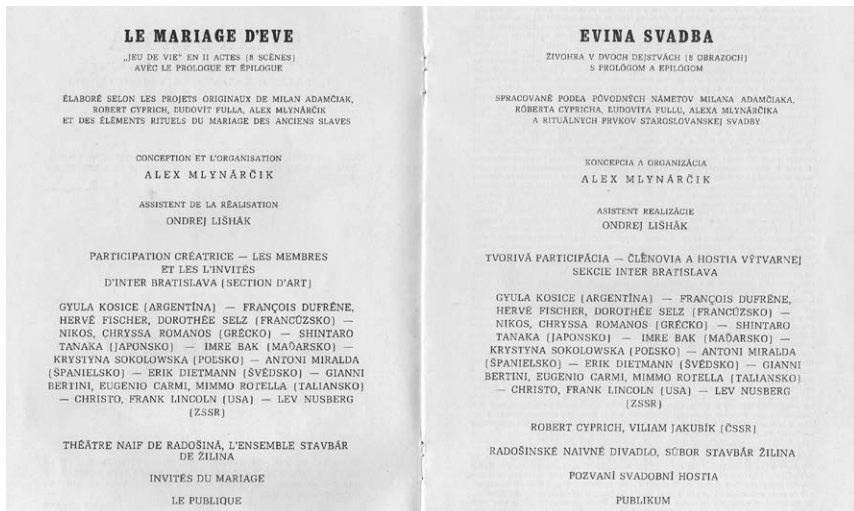




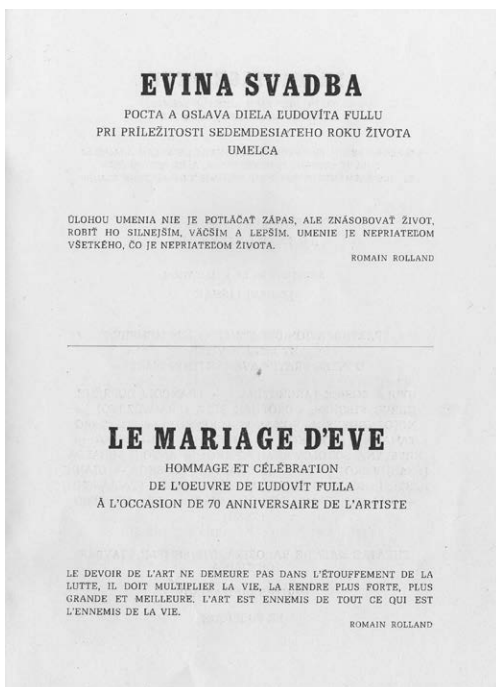
20. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



21. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



22. Alex Mlynárčik, Leaflet –
Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



23. Alex Mlynárčik, Leaflet –
Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



24. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



25. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



26. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



27. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972



28. Alex Mlynárčik, Eva's Wedding, Žilina 1972

29. Alex Mlynárčik,
Memorial for Edgar
Degas, Liptovský
Mikuláš 1971



MEMORIAL EDGARA DEGASA XV. VEĽKÁ CENA LIPTOVA - JAZDECKÉ PRETEKY

Cena **CESAR** • Cena **MIRALDA - SELZ** • Cena **DUFRENE** • Cena **SANEJOUAND** • Cena **BERTINI**
• Cena **ROTELLA** • Cena **NIKI DE SAINT-PHALLE** • Cena **KOSICE** • Cena **JAKUBÍK**

CENA ÚTECHY
KORDOŠ - MUDROCH

CENA NAJKRAJŠIEMU KOŇOVI
SHEJBALOVÁ-ŽELIBSKÁ

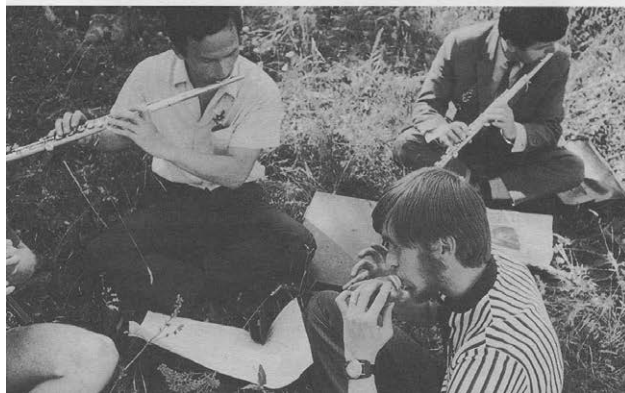
CENA NAJLEPŠIEMU KOŇOVI
URBÁSEK

30. Alex Mlynárčik,
Memorial for Edgar
Degas, Liptovský
Mikuláš 1971





31. Jana Želíbská,
The Engagement of
Spring, Dolné Orešany
1970





32. Zorka Ságlová, A Tribute to Gustav Obermann, 1970



33. Zorka Ságlová, A Tribute to Gustav Obermann, 1970



34. Zorka Ságlová, Laying Diapers near Sudoměř, 1970



35. Zorka Ságlová, Laying Diapers near Sudoměř, 1970



3. The Possibility of Revealing: Notes on an Installation by Jana Želibská

“*Gnóthi seautón*”

(*inscription on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi*)

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the installation by Jana Želibská¹ entitled *Možnosť odkryvania* (The possibility of revealing) (1967) consisting of the following elements: *Toilette I*, *Toilette II* (1966), *Striptease (Ear)* (1966), *Striptease (Head)* (1967), *Hair* (diptych, 1967), *Breasts* (diptych, 1967), *Nose* (diptych, 1967), *Object I* (1967), *Venus* (1967), *Object II* (1967), *Relief I-III* (1967), and *She* (1967)² (Figs. 1 - 5). These particular components may be regarded as autonomous artworks and, together in a certain constellation and deliberate connection with the artist, they create an environment, the individual parts of which are not related to each other in terms of their formal physical relationships or

1 The exhibition lasted from 6 to 31 December 1967. For more about the work of Jana Želibská, see Radislav Matuščík, *Výstava Jana Želibská: Výber z rokov 1966-1996* (The Jana Želibská exhibitions: a selection from 1966 to 1996). Žilina: PGU, 1996. *Zákaž dotyku. Jana Želibská* (No touching: Jana Želibská). Vladimíra Büngerová, Lucia Gregorová (eds.). Bratislava: SNG. 2012.

2 According to the leaflet for the exhibition of Jana Shejbalová-Želibská in the Cyprián Majerník Gallery in Bratislava in 1967. The title of the exhibition, *The Possibility of Revealing*, does not appear on the leaflet, but it does appear on the poster and in the catalogue. The installation was presented in a partially reconstructed form at Želibská's monographic exhibition entitled *No touching* in the Slovak National Gallery in 2012 and 2013. Unlike the original, this installation was adapted to the given spatial conditions. The original distance between its parts and the layout were not observed, and not all works that had originally been designed as diptychs were installed as diptychs (e.g., in 1967, *Hair I* and *Hair II* were arranged one above the other and in 2012 next to each other; “Toilet I” and “Toilet II” were originally not next to each other as a diptych but in 2012 they were). It is worth mentioning that in the past, the individual works have also been presented separately: e.g., *Venus* at the “Gender Check” exhibition at MUMOK in Vienna in 2009 and 2010. It is also interesting that different parts of the installation can be found in different collections.

structures but rather in terms of their content, iconography, and stylistic affinity. The installation was the first independent exhibition of the then 26-year-old artist and triggered numerous responses from the audience as well as the professional press. Its dominant theme is the human (mostly female) body or its fragments, whereby in some compositions, the artist uses *objet trouvé* and a mirror. *The Possibility of Revealing* made a scenic impression, because Želibská combined the components of the environment as a setting in the scene. The individual objects were located in the space like the scenery and props of a theatrical performance and were lit by spot lights.³ Thus, the entire space became reminiscent of a stage in a theatre, which was further enhanced by the lights and the presence of curtains (being part of the gallery), which the artist used as a space-constructing element.

The following section will focus on *The Possibility of Revealing* from two aspects: Firstly, we will review the installation with regard to the topography of voyeurism and discuss the issue of viewpoint in the light of theories of desire and the hidden subject (constructions of subject) by J. Lacan along with the reflections of J. P. Sartre on looking through a keyhole, where, under certain circumstances, the moment of “observed observer” may occur. From a formal point of view, the installation has been based upon two central motifs, which are also considered the main motifs of the history of imaging and voyeurism, i.e., the cur-

3 An interesting aspect is how the components have been installed. Even those designed to be hung on the wall were put on racks, so Želibská moved them intentionally to a 3D space with regard to the layout and to conditions of the gallery having windows almost all along one side. Therefore, some of the artworks had a reversal face – they were painted black at the bottom and there was a rhombic form painted on Venus (at the place of the vagina in the front). Also, two transparent plastic openings were made (nipples in the front). The following story refers to the analogy of Želibská’s environments to stage characters: In 1974 Želibská had an exhibition entitled *Le goût du paradis* (A taste of paradise) in the Galerie Jean-Gilbert Jozon in Paris which was curated by Pierre Restany. As the political situation did not allow her to exhibit in France, the artist “smuggled” the installation by car as coulisses for a theatre performance.

tain (veil) and the keyhole (or a hole in “general”). With regards to the *topos* of the hole repeatedly occurring in the installation, we examined two historical lines, particularly in relation to *Object I*. Firstly, there is a comparison with the reception mechanisms of pre-cinematographic apparatuses such as the so-called peepshow, developed as optical instruments in the Renaissance and spread throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Secondly, we make a closer review of analogies of the famous last work by Marcel Duchamp *Étant donnés* (1946–66). In her installation, Želibská (just like Duchamp’s often analysed work) abolishes customary stereotypes of art perception and principally affects the conventions of looking at an artwork as such. The peepshow and Duchamp’s last work were considered innovative for their time. While the peepshow represented a transition between the disoriented vision and the isolated, autonomous subject of the observer and the privatization of the aesthetic⁴, *Étant donnés* was considered a developed principle of diorama in discourse within modern art of the early 20th century.

The second reviewed aspect includes issues relating to the constellation of *The Possibility of Revealing* and to its specific elements with a special focus on spatial structure and dispositions. We examine the concept of space and perception as defined by Michel de Certeau. M. de Certeau has attributed to sensual perception the ability to create space and constitute reality. In the fundamental kinesthetic meaning, movement, its perception, and sensual perception are interrelated and interdependent.⁵ The implementation of actions carried out by historical entities constitutes a core element of the concept of performative space. The implementation of the act has a key position,

4 Jonathan Crary. *Techniken des Betrachters. Sehen und Moderne im 19. Jahrhundert* (Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century). Dresden and Basel: Verlag der Kunst. 1996.

5 *Paragrana. Praktiken des Performativen*. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Christoph Wulf (eds.). Berlin: Akademie Verlag. 2004, 27.

e.g., speaking and walking are settings carried out in specific situations, dynamically and between the agitating person and the audience, which is directly involved in the setting and actively contributing to it. We also refer to the theories of vision and visibility by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

We analyse the space of the installation as a performative, illusory space and examine its space-specific dimensions along with its theatrical and narrative aspects. Interesting aspects can be disclosed in an attempt to explore the *topos* of the installation and its components applying the model of a cinematographic paradigm. Consideration about the interconnection and interrelationship of the cinematograph dispositive to the logic and the strategies of making an installation could become a productive model of examination, because the cinematographic dispositive represents space in motion, which approximates it to the subjective perception developing in time. The logic of the installation presumes the fluctuation between different planes of images and space coordinates.⁶ The *movens* of the installation's logic is the movement of the viewer, which principally influences the reception. It animates the spatial dramaturgy of variously arranged visual elements and increases their inconsistency, which Gilles Deleuze identified and referred to as "creation of interspace" and fragmentary spaces of a movie, which even in their time dimension have an expansive effect on the aesthetics of perception and a moving effect in every direction.⁷

In the following part, we purposely avoid the modernist discourse celebrating masculine (active) individualism associated with the patri-

6 Ursula Frohne. *Moving Image Space – Konvergenzen innerer und äußerer Prozesse in kinematographischen Szenarien*. In: *Kinematographische Räume. Installationsästhetik in Film und Kunst* (Cinematographic spaces: aesthetics of installation in film and art). Lilian Haberer, Ursula Frohne (eds.). Munich: Wilhelm Fink. 2012, 451.

7 Ibid.

archal phallogocentric social order.⁸ We touch on relating issues of the male view and the representation of women in art associated with power and manipulation (as analysed in feminist papers by Laura Mulvey and Griselda Pollock) mainly in the sense of taking a strong position against theories that have not been (considering the gender-specific iconography symptomatic for Želibská) applied adequately as a source when characterizing particular mechanisms of the functioning of the concerned environment.

We point to the fact that Želibská's view is not concentrated around the binary axis of the already obsolete model of the male's active view and the female's passive existence for being viewed (the look-at-ness). The artist focuses on a much broader spectrum and makes probes into archetypal and taboo themes, yet is still open to all sorts of perspectives, stimuli, and emotional motives of both genders, while the main role is played by curiosity and delight from watching as such.

The analysis of the installation is based on the following definition of the medium by Juliane Rebentisch: "Installations are context-sensitive not only with regards to the interior or exterior they are exhibited in, but also with regards to the framing social conditions that affect the reception of art in general."⁹ We examine *The Possibility of Revealing* in terms of how the installation functions within gallery premises and we also discuss the relationships within its structure, which has several levels in a space. While the installation constitutes a space within a space, some of its components (e.g., the abovementioned *Object I*) create space in the installation space. The exhibition has been constituted as a performa-

8 Želibská is held in very high regard by her generation. She dealt with topics that were unconventional at the time in the domestic environment, and she was also the only woman participating in a number of alternative and informal art projects in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

9 Juliane Rebentisch. *Ästhetik der Installation* (Aesthetics of installation). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp. 2003, 232.

tive space and an open performative structure. Without a doubt, *The Possibility of Revealing* was one of the first exhibitions in Slovakia which was a dramatically structured and performative medium. The exhibition itself was a performative event, the space and dramaturgic concept of which provoked the viewers to take action. On the domestic scene, Želibská has marked the path to liberation from the static medium, similarly to the contemporary Slovak artists Alex Mlynářčík in *Permanent Manifestations I and II*, Stano Filko in his *Universal Environments*, and Juraj Meliš in his environments. Following the artistic strategy of shifting the centre of gravity away from artwork towards the event and from the resulting object to the process, Želibská extended the borders of art and of artistic discourse. Her attempts were in compliance with Allan Kaprow's concept of environment of the late 1950s and with Arnold Bode's concept of the "transformation of a tabular image to space image" presented in 1964 at *Documenta 3* on three paintings by E. W. Nay hung diagonally in space over the heads of the viewers, thus disrupting the conventional approach to the reception of paintings and the one-dimensional confrontation with an artwork. Using the medium of installation, Želibská placed her works both in space and time, thus creating room for performativity. In accordance with the delimitation of fine arts, she attempted to restructure and redefine the space around the object, which resulted in occupying the surrounding space and its rhythmizing. The given structure revives the entire space, since it focuses on sensual reception and is associated with the movement of the viewers; at the same time, it creates new links between the concepts of inside and outside depending on how it is received and the mobility of the visitors. Being given an active role, the viewer is called upon to perceive with their entire body and all senses and is motivated to engage in both a motor and perceptual manner.

While the installation, which was extraordinary unconventional in the domestic context, was inspired by the consumer culture of Western European pop-art and the philosophy of new realism, the artist managed to express her own position and a creative principle. Želibská staged the dramatic structure of the exhibition and created room for tension between the visitors and objects distributed in space. At the time, she was influenced by Western European artistic practice and inspired by experimental fine art and the dramatic and musical environment of Prague. Her scholarship in Paris in 1968 also significantly affected her future artistic work.

*A review of the installation with regard
to the topography of voyeurism from
the perspective of two central themes:
the (key)hole and the curtain*

The statement of Theodor Adorno that “curiosity, the principle of the delight of thought” can be paraphrased as “curiosity, the principle of the delight of the eye”¹⁰ refers to the interweaving of knowledge obtained through thoughts and through the Eros. Knowledge and Eros can be considered as fundamental aspects of *The Possibility of Revealing*, being present in the typology of representation and in the individual experience of the recipient on whom the installation focuses. The movement of the recipient within the installation not only means a change of perspective and the resulting possibility of various views but also the activation of his other senses besides vision. In his analyses of vision and visibility, M. Merleau-Ponty noted that the human body is seeing and being seen as well: “The body that perceives all

10 Peter Springer. *Voyeurismus in der Kunst* (Voyeurism in art). Berlin: Reimer. 2008, 21.

things can also observe itself; and what it actually sees makes it recognize ‘a different side’ of its ability of seeing.”¹¹ In *The Possibility of Revealing*, the physical-kinetic aspect overlaps with the emotional-psychological one. In the following section we discuss the two central themes inextricably linked with the topography of voyeurism¹²: the curtain and the hole (the ordinary and keyhole). In the installation, we repeatedly come across these themes on several levels. *Curiositas* (curiosity), or the urge to see what is hidden, undisclosed, or somehow removed from view, is the main driving force behind Želíbská’s installation.

In his lectures on theory, J. Lacan discussed the view as a form of desire and differentiated it from vision as such.¹³ He considered hiding as the basic sign of voyeurism, i.e., the fact that the voyeur should be hidden. Lacan followed the theories on view by J. P. Sartre and M. Merleau-Ponty; however, he partially criticized them. He pointed out that the dialectics of the eye and the view is not ruled by coincidence but by lure (Fr. *leurre*), and that “the view triumphs over the eye”.¹⁴ A voyeur is basically looking for an object that can satisfy them. For the voyeur, satisfaction means seeing something undisclosed to others: The voyeur does not know what they want to see, and perhaps that is exactly what makes them excited and keeps them in suspense. Lacan also commented on Sartre’s example of the voyeur caught in the act and noted that the primary point of importance is the presence of someone else. He also pointed to the pre-existence of the view: “I can see only from one point, but my existence is being seen from everywhere.”¹⁵

11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Das Auge und der Geist* (The eye and the spirit). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwolt. 1967, 16.

12 Matušík. Work cited in note 1.

13 Jacques Lacan. *Die vier Grundbegriffe der Psychoanalyse. Das Seminar, Buch XI (1964)* (Four basic concepts of psychoanalysis). Olten/Freiburg i. Br.: Walter. 1978, 77–126.

14 Ibid. 109.

15 Ibid. 78.

The (key)hole

From the numerous components of the installation we selected three exemplary objects – *Object I*, *Toilet II*, and *Striptease (Ear)* – to demonstrate the basic principles and strategies the artist applied in the representation of the above mentioned two central themes: the hole and the curtain. *Object I* (Fig. 6) is a black foursquare object with a larger than life-size which is reminiscent of a booth and is situated in a space which is accessible from all sides. There are small openings (holes) in its walls, making it possible to look inside. The interior is illuminated; when looking through the peepholes, we can see contours of a naked female body on the opposite walls. While the object represents a multi-level challenge for the eyes of the viewer and their tactile senses, the physical-kinetic and emotional-psychological aspects are complementary. The presence of the viewer in the space and their looking inside creates several possible perspectives. The fact that the “booth” can be accessed from all four sides enables at least four different views of its insides at the same time. Želibská’s dramaturgy of the installation and its components intentionally relies on the concepts of the hidden and the mysterious. When the viewer bends to the (very small) hole to take a look inside, they can no longer see the object or the external environment. At the same time, when they look at the inner wall in front of them, they cannot see the paintings on the other three walls. The entire visual content can only be seen if moving around the object and looking repeatedly into the holes and combining the seen images; thus, a kind of complexity may only be achieved through the decomposition and subsequent mental reconstruction of the whole. If we analyse the installation and *Object I* in terms of cinematographic constellations of the directed view, we can talk about perspectives similar to those created with a camera. As Sotirios Bahtsetzis noted, if

we follow the logic of framing, the original installation would be a continuum of heterogeneous axes of views subjectively perceived by the viewer, a sorted sequence of views and perspectives determined by the artist; thus, it could be understood as a kind of movie.¹⁶ The exhibition space is the space of the viewer as well. The arrangement of the space was guided by the attempt to predetermine, to the highest degree, the movement, views, and perspectives of the viewers. Bahtsetzis applied the perceptual master view to hard parkour and tried to understand the installation through a structure specific to movies, i.e., analogies to the mechanism such as framing (*cadre*) or the moment *off* and *suture* (a concept by J. Lacan).¹⁷ Following his theory of the cinematographic dispositive, *Object I* could be identified as something that was based on looking to its inside and that is accompanied by the permanent presence of something that we could refer to as the so-called *off space* or *hors champs* in the sense as understood by André Bazin and in its dual sense: with regard to the installation and with regard to other components of the interior. The representation of the unseen and suggestion of the recipient play a central role in our considerations. The semantic of the scenic fiction is also symptomatic to *Object I*.

Let us go back again to the interior of the booth, which is also interesting with regard to its relatedness to pre-cinematographic apparatuses. The paintings of female bodies on its inner walls are reduced to a black line outlining the abstracted contours of the female anatomy, highlighting the simplicity and reduction typical for Želibská. The appearance and structure of *Object I*, and last but not least the way it was

¹⁶ Sotirios Bahtsetzis. *Installation als meta-kinematographisches Dispositiv* (Installations as a meta-cinematographic dispositive). Work cited in note 6. 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 70.

used, refers to optical experiments and exposes the conditions of presentation and reception of the optical instruments: watch boxes (peepshow). The paintings in the inside are monoscopic, and the intention of the artist is intensified by the fact that the viewer can always look into one hole at a time and with one eye, which disrupts the common stereoscopic vision. The usage of boxes, which are in Germany referred to as *Guckkasten*, in Italy as *mondo nuovo*, and in France as *boîte d'optique*, were widespread as early as in the 15th century and reached its peak in the period between the late 18th and late 19th centuries.¹⁸ They were not only used as fairground attractions but also privately in the homes of the growing class of bourgeoisie, which often used larger-size booths and considered them to be a piece of furniture that became part of their private interior. Today we can hardly imagine what effect these instruments had on ordinary people, who never knew mass media or the magic of moving pictures such as television or cinema. The most common representations included vedute; scenes of natural or other disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and fires; and biblical scenes and sceneries. People were fascinated not only by unprecedented themes but above all by the 3D effect the optical device was able to produce. From the sociological point of view, the travelling carnies that showed and commented on the “booths” were also quite interesting, because they travelled from place to place all the time and became a kind of messenger, legend, and storyteller.

Central to the issue of the peepshow is the question of outside and inside, which is directly linked to the issue of private and public, accessible and inaccessible, accessible only to some, or accessible only

18 Ulrike Hick. *Geschichte der optischen Medien* (History of the optical media). Munich: Wilhelm Fink. 1999, 216–235.

with the consent of someone, with unauthorized access, or looking at something. The peepshow can be characterized with its generally available exterior, which is in most cases of traditional operation generally accessible at public places such as markets or fairs (in our context the public space of a gallery); however, its interior is accessible only to those willing to pay for the content (i.e., it requires active volition). In addition to the abovementioned classic repertoire, erotic contents could be provided as well upon special request. There were such booths which were larger than life-size with real women inside in seductive poses. In the first half of the 19th century, erotic pictures were screened and referred to as *pièces curieuses*.¹⁹

With regard to the context in which *Object I* was created, the application of the principle of a watch box differs since it anticipates the viewer having a quite different optical experience than his predecessors. At the time when photography, movies, and various cinematographic experiments were known, the 3D picture was so common that Želibská deconstructed it in her surface painting. At the time of the emergence of new media experiments, Želibská returned to the traditional purely analogue method of artwork, creating monoscopic images with reference to the mechanism of stereoscopic instruments, thus distorting the illusiveness of the classic perspective and traditional painting as well. Contrary to contemporary trends towards serial production, industrialization, and the mechanization of artwork, the artist created a unique work of art, further augmented by the fact that it is hidden behind a barrier as a sacrilege and must be actively explored. In a certain sense, the interior is a sanctuary, the place of representation, and demonstration of the female principle. Želibská developed this idea in her next installation, *Kandarya Mahade-*

19 Springer. Work cited in note 10. 192.

na (1969), the central object of which is a square illuminated object of a larger than life-size covered with a plenitude of female bodies referring to an Indian temple of the same name, the exterior of which is decorated by numerous reliefs representing, inter alia, female deities. However, the analogy is rather the interior of the Indian temple concealing a sanctuary of the male principle (lingam).

New connotations arise when we look at how the viewer perceives and experiences the given object on both a physical and mental level. Let us first focus on the purely geometric structure of the artwork in relation to the space in which the observer is forced to bend down and look through the small hole into the interior. Most of the classic peepshows had a larger hole for both eyes, which gave the viewer the possibility to move their head and see a much wider slice of the theme. In the case of single miniature pinholes, the viewers could always look with one eye only, which anchored the head in a fixed position and, at the same time, it also truncated the observer by enabling them to see only a certain segment. Thus, the artist determined the exact boundary of how far the voyeur could look, thus directing them, i.e., the perspective of the viewer is, in principle, directed and controlled.

Yet another level of exploration is the fact that Želibská created the potential to transform the interior to exterior and vice versa, because she created the possibility of a parallel view for four people. Inside the booth, the views of the viewers “cross”. If the viewer looks at the opposite wall, they can see its surface and look out through the hole in it – thus their view goes through the interior out to the exterior, which makes them only perceive the interior peripherally, while the exterior becomes a potential part of what they see.²⁰ At the same time,

20 It is relevant to mention that the openings are all not at the same level.

the exterior of the booth continues to be the interior of the installation. In the event there is another voyeur on the other side, the first voyeur can see their eye, which (unintentionally) becomes part of the female body, because the holes were partly situated anatomically (belly button). In this case, we come across the issue of the “observed observer” on two different levels. The first is the observation by the viewer standing opposite, who is potentially becoming part of my visual experience from the artwork; the second is the observer who is probably located in the installation space and can see me looking into the object. For them, I become part of their visual experience from the installation. Sartre referred to the view as a go-between and dealt with the question of what it means to be seen.²¹ According to him, my basic relationship to the other one is the foundation of any theory on the other. The other is, in principle, the one who is watching me. The eye is not understood as a sensory organ of vision but as the carrier of the view. When we are looking at someone who is looking at us, the eyes get filled up, i.e., the view of the other “hid his eyes, as if he stood in front of them”.²² Thus, the disclosure of my existence as an object for others can grasp the presence of my existence as a subject.

Let us stay on the theme of the view and observation. The rendering of the interior of *Object I* has undergone a small but significant change over time. In the new upgraded version exhibited during the monographic exhibition in 2012, the female head had no face.²³ If we look at the images from the original installation from 1967, on at least one

21 Jean-Paul Sartre. *Das Sein und das Nichts. Versuch einer phänomenologischen Ontologie* (Being and nothing: an attempt for phenomenological ontology). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt. 1991, 463.

22 Ibid.

23 The reasons for this fundamental change are unknown. There is also no explanation to find in the recent comprehensive catalogue published for the exhibition in 2012.

painting we can see a face with dominant open eyes (Fig. 7). The view flanked with a fan of long eyelashes is captivating and directed steadfastly towards the viewer. Thus, the view of the two aforementioned potential observers of the observer in the original installation was extended by a potentially permanently present view of the women represented on the opposite side. The viewer is looking at her, but she is looking at the viewer as well. Although it is a simulacrum, the resulting effect is as if she was real. The view of the woman can also be interpreted in the context of the topography of voyeurism as the “on-looking person”: in the history of representation that referred to characters who (often engaged in sexual activities) looked from the picture directly to the observer (e.g., the actors of the Pompeii scenes or the servants standing beside them). If I understand the view, says Sartre, I stop seeing the eyes. Sartre primarily referred to the view arching over a certain distance and described it as a fact that the view of the other obscures his eyes as if he was walking in front of him. By looking into the booth, the viewer can experience one view “obscuring” his eyes (the viewer on the other side, i.e., a woman), and the other view, which only simulates that (I do not see the view, but I do see the eyes, whereby – according to Sartre’s theory – they are not destructed and remain in my field of perception as a presentation). The simulated view is the permanent one. The “real one” is the go-between – the eye – which I cannot see when looking. The question to be answered is how Sartre’s theory transforms if it is not (as in *Object I*) a complex view (with both eyes) but if the viewer sees (with only one eye) just one eye isolated from the rest of the face – a situation which produces a fragmentary vision on both sides.

The view of the voyeur, which we – whether or not we want to – experience in Želibská’s installation, is closely associated with the

dialectic of the “close – distant”. Since the voyeur is engaged visually, his participation is usually distant, without a touching and tactile experience. In the case of erotic contents, the voyeur is often identified with visual penetration. “The desire to take a look into steady or closed spaces”, says Springer, “is another form of desire to see the hidden or enshrouded in spite of the resistance of what is hiding or enshrouding it.”²⁴ Further on, Springer, with reference to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical topoi noted that in the case of visual penetration, the metaphoric eye might be the equivalent of a phallus. Thus, the visual intrusion and penetration differ, inter alia, in the intensity of the view. Since the female figures inside the booth are naked and hidden, and they can only be accessed by “overcoming” a barrier, the interior is highly erotic. Želibská’s *Object I* might be analogical to *chambre close*, i.e., intimate cabins in the *maison close* in a brothel and sex chambers typical for nearby Vienna (intended for “chamber sex”). Characteristic of them is immediate proximity along with the impossibility of touching which is substituted by watching. As a form of appropriation of reality by overcoming a distance, watching functions as tool replacing immediate contact.²⁵ The pleasure from seeing then compensates for the distance. The view of the voyeur expecting to see but not being seen is “reflected” in the eyes of the women, while the voyeur also becomes a potential object of penetration across the interior (by another voyeur). The inside of the booth seems to be closed, so the voyeur might feel like they are standing outside; but in fact they are in the centre of everything, particularly in the middle of other views. The visitor of the exhibition might feel as if they were the designator and originator of the views,

24 Springer. Work cited in note 10. 271.

25 Ibid. 251.

but in fact they are their primary target. The perception of sexuality as presented by Želibská does not glide on the surface, says Vladimíra Büngerová, but rather finds expression in several referential frameworks: the anthropological, psychological, cultural, and cosmological. The artist purposely uses commoner symbols excluded from the social consciousness to draw attention – by a direct stab at touchy topics – to the issues of contemporary society subject to censorship and prejudices. From the very beginning, she demonstrated a radical attitude, which obviously had not found a supportive background, as the artists set up a mirror to prudery and babbler.²⁶

This study does not aim to analyse the installation from feminist aspects or discuss the issue within gender discourse. With regard to the category of view, however, we would like to mention its contemporary interpretations. Referencing a concept by Laura Mulvey outlined in her essay “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Film*”²⁷ (1975), the interpretation of the view in question as a reference to the anxiety of castration in its relation to Medusa was also noted in a study by Jana Oravcová.²⁸ As noted by L. Mulvey, in patriarchal culture a woman represented a signifier of the male otherness constricted by a symbolic order in which men can experience their fantasies and obsessions by controlling speech. They impose them on the silent image of a woman, who has “an assigned role as a carrier of meaning rather than its producer”.²⁹ Oravcová, extending Mulvey’s idea that a man is

26 Vladimíra Büngerová. Sex, příroda a video (Sex, nature, and video). In: *Zákaž dotyku. Jana Želibská, Vladimíra Büngerová, Lucia Gregorová* (eds.). Bratislava: SNG. 2012, 38.

27 Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. In: *Screen* Volume 16, Number 3, 1975. See also Laura Mulvey, *Visuelle Lust und narratives Kino*. In: *Frauen in der Kunst*, Gisliind Nabakowski, Helke Sander, Peter Gorsen (eds.), Band I. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp. 1980, 30–46. *Texte zur Theorie des Films*. Franz-Josef Albersmeier (ed.). Stuttgart: Reclam. 2003, 389–408.

28 Jana Oravcová, *Ekonomie tela v umeleckohistorických a teoretických diskurzoch* (The economy of the body in artistic and theoretical discourses). Bratislava: Slovart. 2011, 102.

29 Mulvey. Work cited in note 27. 390.

(actively) watching a (passive) woman as an object which gives him sexual stimulation, noted that the facial detail is “monstrous” and that the female nudes Želibská presented to the viewers do not connote pleasure and joy from watching but primarily the fear of failure. We can agree with this interpretation only partially. As noted by Kaja Silverman, all subjects are part of a certain field of vision. Artworks are not only made for male viewers but also for female viewers, and the assumption that the one who is watching automatically subdues what they see is seen by Silverman as a blunder.³⁰ In this sense, any truncation to a male and female view is only conditionally productive. In our opinion, Želibská offers her installation and experience (potential pleasure, fantasies) to both male and female audiences. As the producer of the artwork, she herself is a prehistoric voyeur who prepared the concerned constellation upon a certain concept, dramaturgy, and purpose. After all, what is important in this regard is the representation of a female voyeur in *Toilet I* gazing at another woman, turning the logic of L. Mulvey, about an active man and passive woman, inside out. Although female figures in sexualized positions represent people “existing to be looked at” (the to-be-looked-at-ness concept by L. Mulvey), the voyeur experiencing stimulation could be females as well as males. As noted by Lacan in his analysis of perception, before actually seeing something there must be something to be seen (*un donné-à-voir*).³¹ Due to its rich gender iconography, sexualized motifs, and erotic tension, Želibská’s installation tends to interpretations and considerations of who is watching whom (and who controls whom) so typical for feminist studies. However, we think that Želibská is ahead

30 Martina Pachmanová. *Rozhovor Martiny Pachmanovej s Kajou Silverman. Svět po nás touží*. (Interview of Martina Pachmanová with Kaja Silverman: The world desires us). In: *Věrnost v polyby* (Loyalty in movement). Prague: One Woman Press. 2001, 57–58. It is known that Laura Mulvey revised her opinions in later years.

31 Lacan. Work cited in note 13. 80.

of her time by showing pleasure and its options across the sexes, because she liberates herself and permeates Mulvey's horizon of dividing the audiences into male and female. As stated by Margaret Olin, "the power of the view extends beyond the frame of the struggle between genders".³² Who satisfies whom and how, and who is afraid of whom, is secondary in *The Possibility of Revealing*, or rather it is a question for further interpretation that can be defined/restricted by theoretical frames and by focusing on the sexual policy of seeing. We share the opinion of Vladimíra Büngerová, who noted that since her appearance on the art scene, Želibská has negated or rather subversively disproved the thesis that only a man can control the look at the female body as a passive object.³³ *The Possibility of Revealing* was the initial impulse to Želibská's way to a critical examination of the relationship between female and male principles in their flowing identity and concept. In the following years, she deconstructed the customary patterns of thinking by using a different media and introduced an alternative approach to the categories of body and identity.

The moment of human curiosity and desire to disclose a secret when looking through a keyhole continues to be topical. Here we arrive at the next substantial correlation of *Object I* – its analogy to the famous *Étant donnés* (1946–66) installation by Marcel Duchamp. According to Herbert Molderings, it was the artist's response to the status of avant-garde art after the Second World War and to the consequent changes in the relationship between the artist, art, and the audience.³⁴ Duchamp's last work is emblazoned by various speculations and inter-

32 Margaret Olin. Gaze. Robert S. Nelson, Richard Shiff (eds.). *Critical Terms of Art History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago. 2003, 318–330.

33 Büngerová. Work cited in note 26. 37.

34 Herbert Molderings. *Die nackte Wahrheit. Zum spätwerk von Marcel Duchamp* (The naked truth: about the late work of Marcel Duchamp). Munich: Carl Hanser. 2012, 33.

pretations. However, most of them agree that Duchamp thematized the role of the voyeur and their position in the space. *Étant donnés* has been designed as a perspective space built according to the classic principles of the central perspective and is inspired by the medium of the so-called folding images.³⁵ In essence it is a diorama, i.e., an installation which can be experienced in a single possible way – by looking through two holes in an old door that functions as a fixed point from which the observer can see the work. F. Lyotard (who Duchamp used to visit and in whose home he probably had the opportunity to see the original of the *Origin of the World* by Gustave Courbet painted exactly a hundred years before completing the installation and which served as its master) noted that behind the door “there is nothing to see but a female pubic area and thus also a shameless observer.”³⁶ In spite of this simplification, Lyotard, like many others, associated the scene inside with all kinds of meanings, including the assumption that the given torso is half-female and half-male, which corresponds to Duchamp’s own androgynies and his duality expressed by creating his alter-ego Rose Sélavy. Molderings says that Duchamp intensively studied the old masters and tractates dealing with the perspective (e.g., Dürer’s of 1538), while he dealt with the issue of penetrating vision. Molderings discussed *Étant donnés* from a culturally critical point of view and explained how Duchamp carried on the tradition of Baudelaire’s essay “*Photography and the Modern Audience*”, when he referred to the stereoscope that resulted in the mass and public culture of voyeurism.³⁷ In this sense, *Étant donnés* can be understood as coping with the fundamental constructive principles of the modern Western image.³⁸

35 Springer. Work cited in note 10. 192.

36 Jean-François Lyotard. *Die TRANSformatoren DUCHAMP*. Stuttgart: Edition Schwarz. 1987, 6.

37 Molderings. Work cited in note 34. 48–49.

38 Molderings. Work cited in note 34. 39. Molderings’s observation about the friendship and cooperation between M. Duchamp and D. Kiesler, who practiced experiments with pre-cinematographic

Our goal is to analyse the shared and referential points between Duchamp's last work and *The Possibility of Revealing* installation by Želibská. In *Étant donnés*, Duchamp, by looking as if through the keyhole, created a controlled and purposely fragmentary view. The field of view is stereoscopically narrowed as in an optical instrument. The restricted view evokes the feeling of frustration in the voyeur, instigating their desire see more; however, it is not possible, because not only are they limited by the openings in the door but also by a "hole" in the brick wall nearby the door. With this intended double restriction of the view, Duchamp not only limited the view to the inside of the installation but had also drawn the way for a tunnel vision, resulting in a more pronounced 3D effect with regards to the depth. Unlike Duchamp, Želibská has not attempted to create an illusion of depth; she remained with the restriction of the view by the hole (holes). Her pictures inside the booth are (similarly to other paintings included in the installation) surface paintings reduced to lines and simple colouring. However, Želibská's object contains some shared points with Duchamp's installation in particular with regards to its formal side in the following two aspects: (1) she was inspired by pre-cinematographic optical devices, and (2) she represented naked (female) bodies in seductive poses in the "hidden" interior. Particularly essential for our drawing analogies is the content and the aspect of the psychological reception of the works. Both artists thematize voyeurism and put the viewer in a situation in which they become a voyeur. They mechanically as well as mentally connect the mechanisms specific for voyeurism with the control of reception and perception. They subject the viewer to the manipulation of their body and view and particularly of their mind. Similarly, they connect the given situation – the loco-mo-

machines in his *Laboratory for Design Correlation*, is further relevant.

tor and mental disposition of the observer – to the space of the installation in which they develop different possibilities for the transformation of the subject to an object of observation and vice versa.

The common starting point is curiosity arising in the viewer at the moment when they stand in front of Duchamp's door or Želibská's booth. Both artists thus follow up on the medium of the aforementioned peep show as well as on the more advanced principles of the abovementioned optical devices which were, in the early 19th century, used to screen the so-called *pièces curieuses*.³⁹ The awakening of curiosity stimulating the observer to take some action in the space (i.e., look into the holes made by the artist) turns into the un/voluntary transformation of the viewer into a voyeur, which automatically awakens their desire to disclose the secret hidden inside the installation/object. However, this desire goes hand in hand with frustration (from the unseen) and the potential erotic experience. While the first aspect dominates in Duchamp, the others are rather typical for Želibská, as was obvious from the beginning where she represented the (female) sexual theme expressed by the surface painting. At the same time, her style is playful, coquettish, and graceful, which enhances the "scenic" nature of the representation as well as the difference between the representation and real body. Duchamp used the medium of a mannequin (a torso of a female body made of genuine pigskin) seen from an unusual perspective (directly between the legs) and complemented by a found object (a gas lamp and a picturesque landscape), which in many visitors evokes discomfort as if they were looking at a cadaver, which is further enhanced by the flickering light evoking the other world. In Duchamp, the surreal synthesis of multiple objects into a single mysterious unit gives the impression of something dis-

39 Springer. Work cited in note 10. 192.

turbing and illegal, which turns the viewer into a witness of something he was not supposed to see. Unlike Duchamp, Želibská constructed a space within a space, i.e. she designed the architecture in a way that it makes it possible to look inside from all sides. This represents the principle of a multi-perspective, providing more possibilities for variations in terms of spatial disposition and mental reception. The illusion is mixed with reality. Even when we think we are alone, we might be watched by someone else; the view of the voyeur meets with another opposing curious eye. Thus, the eye and perception of another viewer become part of the installation, whereby they enter it as a random and real element from the external environment. The “booth”, subtle and mysterious from the outside, changes into a miraculous world of experience.

The curtain

The central theme of Želibská’s installation is the curtain. Its main role – from a historical and anthropological point of view – was to prevent seeing something forbidden. As the materialization of this prohibition, the curtain had two roles: on the one hand to enshroud and on the other to conceal the continual possibility of disclosing.⁴⁰ The curtain served, as any other optic-spatial device, to maintain distance, and it was not only to separate but always be associated with the possibility of overcoming it by ignoring the prohibition.⁴¹ The possibility of getting behind it and seeing what was behind was restricted to a narrow circle of insiders. In Želibská’s installations, the “selected ones” are the spectators. The artist created a sacral space of art in the

40 Matušík. Work cited in note 1.

41 Springer. Work cited in note 10. 38.

gallery in which spectators can discover and uncover secrets. Unlike the heroes of ancient myths, Želibská used a veil to uncover rather than cover. The veil is usually slightly drawn aside and translucent, which partly negates its very function. In some of her works – *Toilet I*, *Toilet II*, *Hair*, *Striptease (Ear)*, *Nose I* and *II* (Fig. 8), *She* (Fig. 9), and *Object II* – there is sometimes a veil, in some there is not, and sometimes it is a decoration; sometimes it invites the viewers to interact. In essence, any shift of the curtain/veil means the revealing of some part of the picture and the hiding of another. It does not separate; it is rather a refined materialization evoking the presence of a visual taboo (a naked female body) and in particular turning the attention to sensual perception, including, in addition to sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. Through the senses, we perceive sexual impulses and discover the world around us. In Christianity, overcoming the curtain had already been associated with knowledge, and as a genesis it was referred to as a *revelatio veritatis*. The desire to learn something and sexual desire are closely connected.⁴²

In the following part, we will exemplarily deal with the diptych *Toilet I* and *Toilet II* (Figs. 10 - 11). In *Toilet II* there are two characters, but we can only see their fragments, as if the artist had cut away the edges of the larger scene. On the right, there is a female figure in underwear: old fashioned long panties and an undershirt. The position of her left hand indicates that she is turning back to the viewer. We can only see a fragment of the head without a face, a trace of the profile. An interesting detail is the lace at the bottom line of the panties incorporated as an *objet trouvé*: a strip of fabric trimming the thighs. The picture is in soft pastel tones, and the raised hands evoke a movement as if the woman was undressing. The background is indifferent; both charac-

42 Ibid. 40.

ters are placed in an unknown space. The female figure on the left is indicated only by greyish-brown contours. She is probably depicted from the back leaning forward with one hand propped against her thigh; her bending forward evokes the position of a voyeur looking through the keyhole at the other woman. In the current version of *Toilet II*, there is one small but rather significant and semantically important detail missing. On the top left of the original version (exhibited in Cyprián Majerník Gallery in 1967), there was another objet trouvé: a lock with a keyhole (without a handle). (Fig. 12) It was not an ordinary one but rather a special antique forged (probably brass) lock trimmed with a soft ornament and narrowing downwards. Instead of a handle, it had a rounded decorated protrusion. While its design evoked a vagina, the protrusion could be identified as the clitoris. The black colour underneath the lock, strongly contrasting with the delicate colour of the rest of the picture, may be understood as an indication of the door; but it is primarily a symbol of mystery, the revelation of which may be pleasurable as well as painful. Sartre noted that a keyhole is a tool and the barrier at the same time, which, in the case of the door, separate two spaces.⁴³ Unlike the peephole, it serves to both lock and unlock. There is also a curtain in the picture, the meaning of which we have already discussed. The curtain in the original version was much more decorative and opaque than the new version. In *Toilet II* from 1967, the curtain (depending on how much it was wrinkled or spread) created a barrier varying from a fine transparent layer with geometric patterns to almost an opaque tier when densely wrinkled. The more we wrinkle the curtain, the better we can see the uncovered part of the picture, and at the same time the less we can see the covered part. In the original version, the curtain enhanced

43 Sartre. Work cited in note 21. 468.

the vagueness and difficulty of identifying the position of the represented characters and the scene. We can see vague contours of the bodies, and at the first moment it is difficult to identify whether they are male or female characters. The ambiguity compels the viewer to interact by pulling the curtain aside or otherwise changing its position to get a better view. Želibská applied a three-dimensional facet within the painting. The keyhole evoked depth (behind the picture), the characters (with an added *objet trouvé*) represent the second level, and the curtain functions as the “third wall”. Thus, she transcended, with tools reduced to a minimum, the classical disposition of painting and left behind its stereotyped conventional concept. Moreover, there is a fourth level to it, represented by the objects of the installation. Behind the hidden, there is another level of the hidden that cannot be seen; in the keyhole there is nothing but also everything in a psychological sense. Originally the installation had included three small-size paintings that can be seen in the contemporary photograph from the side-view.⁴⁴ There was a peephole mounted on one of them (which has not been preserved) encouraging the viewer, like a keyhole, to get closer, as if there were something behind the picture. The tension between the parts of the installation leading somewhere (*Object I*) and parts not leading anywhere, being only blind dummies or props (*Toilet I*), revives the entire space of the environment, playing with the expectations and stereotyped perceptions of the audience.

The installation’s centre of gravity based on sensual perception is also reflected in the representation of the sensory organs. Christoph Wulf noted that senses form the borderline between the body and the world, inside and outside and represent “inter-corporeality”. While sight and hearing are distant senses, smell, taste, and touch are close

44 Today only the work *Relief I* (1967) exists, which is an assemblage with a found object: a hair roller.

senses.⁴⁵ In her concept of “the bodily ego”⁴⁶ Kaja Silverman referred to Paul Schilder, an Austrian psychoanalyst and neurologist, in claiming that the human body is not a mere product of physical contact but is substantially shaped by the desire of others and the values implanted in it by touch. Following Henry Head, Schilder applied the so-called postural model of the body to define the bodily Self, which included tactile, epidermal, and kinesthetic sensations.⁴⁷ Through them as coordinates, humans perceive their body as unique and having a specific position in space. As the postural model of the body does not have any fixed coordinates, it constantly forms and transforms. The epidermal sensations that are essential to this model would not have developed without social contact, and thus they can only be defined through the relationship between the body and the world of objects. According to Schilder, the sensual Self is the product of the relationship between the body and its cultural environment. We can only sense the surface of the body if we get in touch with other surfaces. We do not perceive the contours of the skin as a smooth and solid surface. Its contours are abolished, and there are no sharp boundaries between the outer world and the body. Thus, the touch and interest of others in different parts of our body is essential to the postural model of the body.

The Possibility of Revealing is a performative space, and its central elements include the kinesthetic multi-sensorial perception and trans-temporal perception as a way of action.⁴⁸ While the visitors walk

45 Christoph Wulf. *Das gefährdete Auge. Ein Kaleidoskop der Geschichte des Sehens* (The vulnerable eye: a kaleidoscope of the history of seeing). In: *Das Schwinden der Sinne* (Disappearance of the senses). Dietmar Kamper, Christoph Wulf (eds.). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp. 1984, 21.

46 Kaja Silverman. *The Threshold of the visible World*. London: Routledge 1996, 11.

47 Paul Schilder, *Das Körperschema: Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewusstsein des eigenen Körpers* (The scheme of the body). Berlin: Springer. 1923.

48 *Paragrana. Praktiken des Performativen*. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Christoph Wulf (eds.). Berlin: Akademie

around, they can see, hear, and smell. The sounds and smells surround them and create their own spaces. Their view shapes the space and at the same time is controlled by its arrangement. Walking is also associated by M. de Certeau with the “style of tactile perception”. While walking, things are at your fingertips. The psychology of perception indicated that with regard to space, tactile perception is the most crucial thing. Spatial vision is based on the early touching of bodies, forms, layout, and position. We can refer to an excessive concept of perception that can be described as a perceptual cycle containing all senses and resulting from the interplay of perception and movement. The process cannot be divided into stages and indicates that any current perception is connected to past experience and has an anticipative nature.⁴⁹

Striptease (Ear) (Figs. 13 - 14) is a first-level reference to hearing demonstrated by its main organ – the ear – which becomes for the viewer a means of realizing their own possibilities and physical abilities. The double representation of the *Nose* creating a diptych refers to the sense of smell and its multi-layer perception. Freud referred to the desire to see (scopophilia) and desire to hear as sexual instincts that are, compared to other instincts, characterized by insufficiency or absence. Both the ear and the eye require a certain distance to the object of desire. Freud referred to the relationship between looking and listening and objects as “more or less unsatisfactory”, because while other senses require direct contact, sight and hearing function from a distance. Lacan noted that already in his *Triebe und Triebsschicksale*, Freud had singled out the so-called *Schautrieb* and pointed out that it is not homologous to other instincts, because it completely

Verlag, 2004, 28.

49 Ibid. 25–28.

avoids the concept of castration.⁵⁰ Central to Schilder's postural model of the body are the body openings, because through them we establish contacts with the immediate world and therefore they are the basis of physical desire. Želibská's installation is crowded by real holes: a keyhole, peephole, nipples,⁵¹ and belly button; the openings in *Object I* including representations of the ear and nose. The picture of the ear is, roughly at the place where there is usually an earring, complemented with lace frilled around the ring on a dark background with an ornate round antique brooch in the middle. The ear threads, generally known as highly erogenous along with the frilled fine fabric, can be understood as, or directly connected to, external sexual organs. According to Schilder, the erogenous zone is more than a mere component of sexuality; it is also a feature of the bodily Self. According to him, to understand ourselves we not only need stimuli from the visuals but also some physical sensations that are determined socially rather than physically.

While noses and ears can belong to a male or a female,⁵² the other pictures represent a clearly feminine physiognomy (e.g., *Breasts*, *Venus*, *Toilet I*, and *Toilet II*). What remains unclear is the picture *Striptease (Head)* (Figs. 15 - 16), which represents a head, but it cannot be determined whether it is a female or male one, even if we see it from the front or from the rear. The lace (a found object trimming the edge of the collar) could indicate a female, but that is only an assumption. In the middle of the head there are underpants flanged with (real) lace, and in place of the lap there is a small heart with a decoration: a little winged character standing on a console with outstretched legs and

50 Lacan. Work cited in note 13. 84.

51 In "Venus" there are plastic cups replacing the nipples, which are transparent so that the visitor can look through them.

52 Previous texts postulate that the sensual organs are female ones.

hands crossed in the lap. Another interesting detail is the *objet trouvé*: a garter clip. The image in the middle of the head may be an allegory of a dream and power of thoughts as well as a reference to the fact that erotica takes place primarily in the imagination. The symbolic opening and closing of the dark purple curtain is an indication, as if the viewer could reveal or shroud the thoughts of the character.

Another dimension of Želibská's programmatic application of the usually white curtain is its transparency, reminiscent of a bride's veil. The veil had always hidden something precious, sacred, and exceptional, which made it a symbol of honour, and it had also separated the Deity and enhanced its aura. The curtain and the veil are ambivalent; they are tools of enshrouding and disclosure. They serve to prevent and prohibit the view while at the same time operating as a boundary between the freely visible and invisible, and the hidden and inaccessible. The artist used the iconography of the curtain purposely to represent the moment of the so-called *transitional rites* and marginal phenomena on multiple levels.⁵³ They function as a threshold and passage, combining the action of the visitor with the sexual charge of her works. Želibská created a field of action: a *concupiscentia* – the space of the installation as a labyrinth of desire, lightness, pleasure, awareness, self-reflexivity, and a potential perdition.

The last aspect we want to address is the concept of the mirror by Lacan⁵⁴, referring to which we analyse *Venus* (Fig. 17) and *Object II*⁵⁵ (Fig. 18) – the placement of the mirror in the lap of the female char-

53 The curtain in different colours plays a key role also in other works by the author, such as in the paintings *Slovenská nevesta* (Slovak bride, 1967) and *Bez názvu (Ležiaci muž)* (Untitled [lying man], 1967).

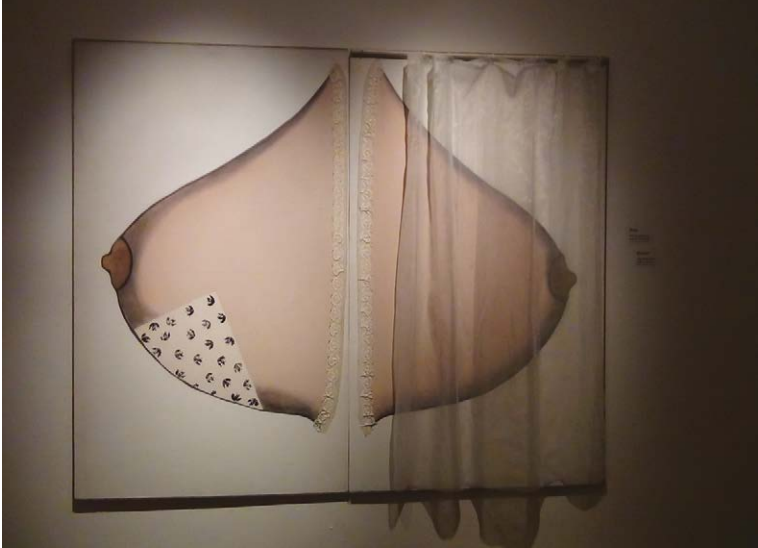
54 Jacques Lacan. *Das Spiegelstadium als Bildner der Ichfunktion*. In: Jacques Lacan, *Schriften I*. Frankfurt a. Main: Walter. 1973, 61–70.

55 *Object II* is a companion piece to *Object I*: a cabin with three wooden walls and a transparent curtain on the front side. At the back there were outlines of a female body without a head, and in the place of the vagina there was an oval mirror.

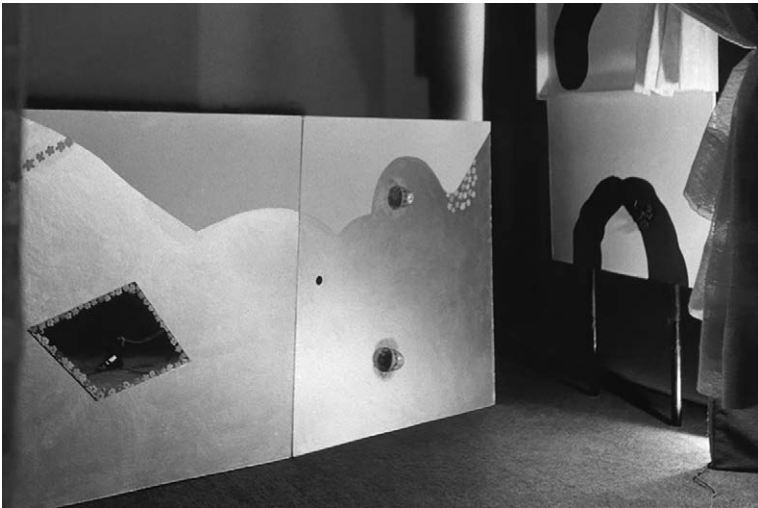
acters in Želibská's artwork in general.⁵⁶ Since it is one of the most cited theories of mirror, the connotation of Želibská's artwork with Lacan's concept have already been mentioned in earlier studies, although they have not been instantiated in any way. Lacan's theory refers to a fundamental shortfall of the subject, as it is a carrier of insatiable desire that begins at the moment of birth. The moment when a child can recognize itself in the mirror is a moment of alienation; from that moment, the subject is incomplete and eager for completeness, trying to fill in the shortage they feel with objects. We would like to point out an omitted but significant aspect of Želibská's application of the mirror based on Lacan's theories. While, according to Lacan, a child seeing itself in the mirror loses its former fragmentary vision and can see itself in its completeness, spectators could, in small rhombic and oval forms, only always see a small part. The ideal Self, according to Lacan, becomes a matrix based on which the subject orientates their Self. A direct look by a spectator in the mirror can therefore be identified with the situation of the birth of the subject. It is no coincidence that Želibská has placed the act of the "birth of subject" in the actual place of physical birth. In this sense, the mirrors are the symbol of the moment of birth of any human – women and men. Thus, in a way it is an (unconscious) return to the state free from the feeling of incompleteness, although confronted with the experience of the adult subject. With insight into the womb, instead of exclusively anticipating the sexual desire felt by a man or a woman towards the representation of a woman, the artist has anticipated on an elementary level the ancient cult of fertility in its infinite form, which,

56 Želibská replaces the vagina with mirrors programmatically in numerous works. See also Zora Rusinová. "Očami ženy alebo 'večná nevesta jari'" (Through the eyes of a woman or 'eternal bride of a spring'). In: *Zákaz dotyku. Jana Želibská* (No touching: Jana Želibská). Vladimíra Büngerová, Lucia Gregorová (eds.). Bratislava: SNG, 6-7.

by reflecting its presence, constantly acquires new and different forms according to the disposition of the voyeur in a state which might be called a “permanent moment”. The pleasure from filling up the holes analysed by Schilder has been celebrated here as a constantly transforming, never-ending, and renewing cycle which has become the driving engine of the world.



1. Jana Želibská, Breasts, 1967



2. Jana Želibská, The Possibility of Revealing, 1967



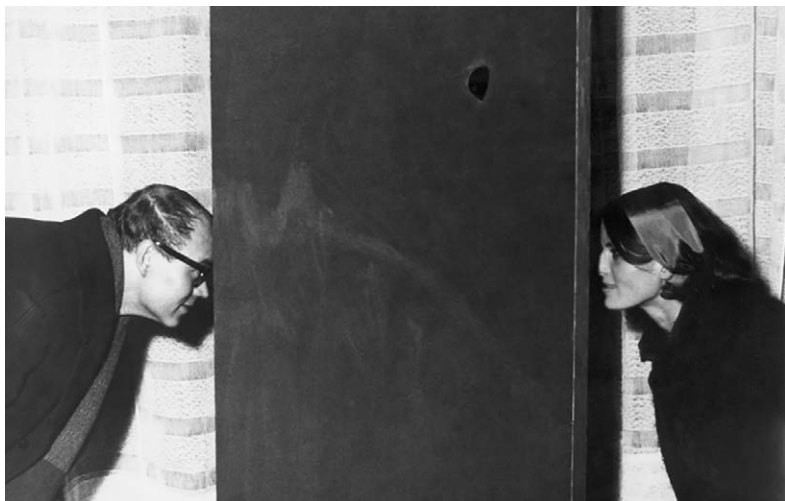
3. Jana Želibská, The Possibility of Revealing, 1967



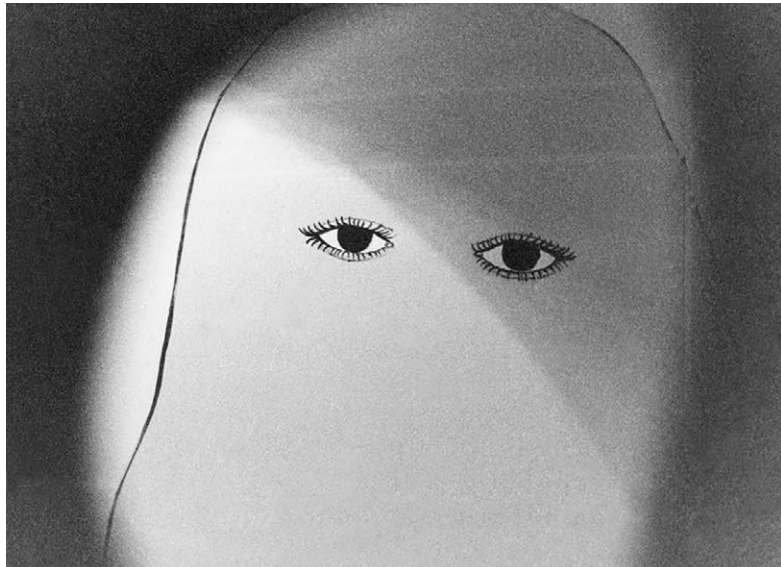
4. Jana Želibská, Opening – The Possibility of Revealing, 1967



5. Jana Želibská, The Possibility of Revealing, 1967



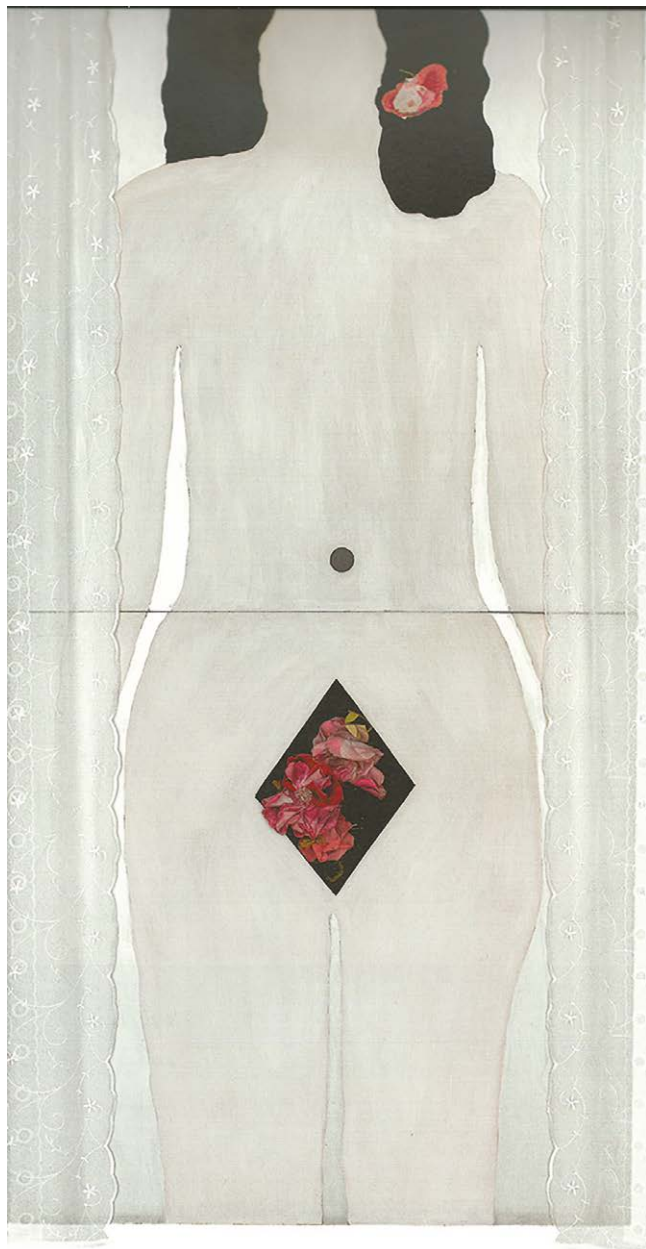
6. Jana Želibská, Object I, 1967



7. Jana Želibská, Object I (detail), 1967



8. Jana Želibská, Nose I, Nose II, 1967



9. Jana Želibská,
She, 1967

10. Jana Želibská,
Toilet I, 1966



11. Jana Želibská,
Toilet II, 1966





12. Jana Želíbská, Toilet II, 1966

13. Jana Želibská,
Striptease (Ear), 1966



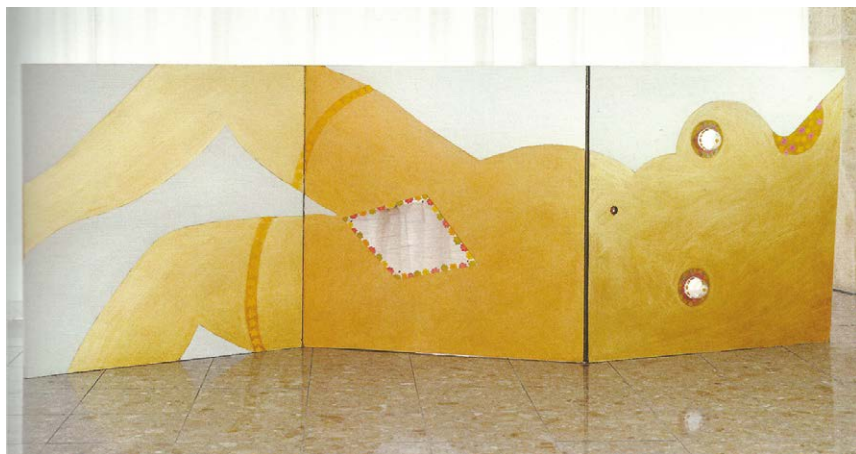
14. Jana Želibská,
Striptease (Ear) (detail), 1966



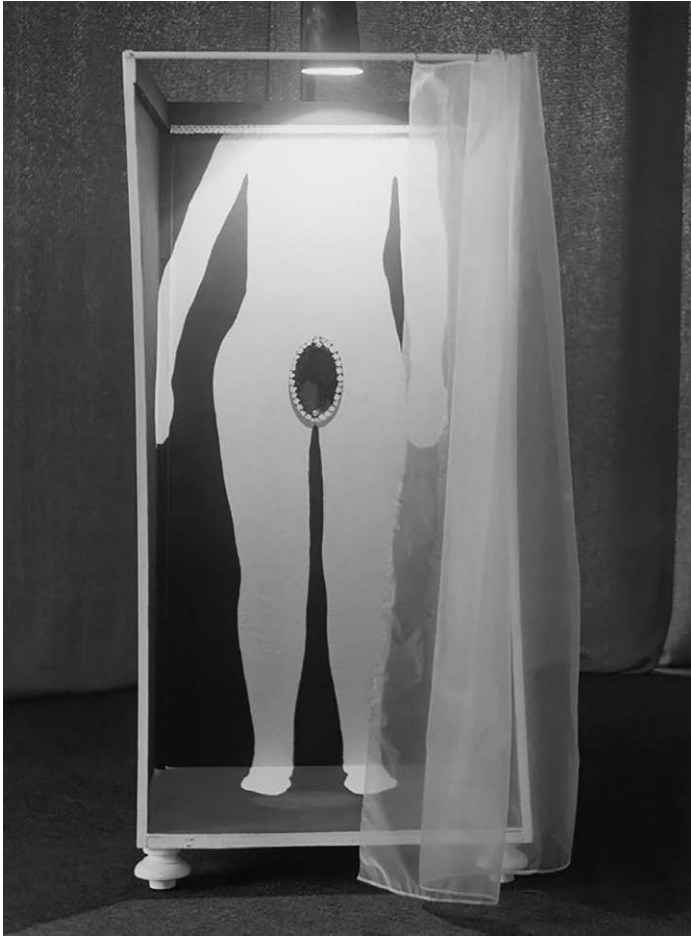
15. Jana Želíbská, *Striptease (Head)*, 1966



16. Jana Želibská, Striptease (Head) (detail), 1966



17. Jana Želibská, Venus, 1967



18. Jana Želibská, Object II, 1967



4. Exhibitions as (Un)political Media: II Permanent Manifestations and Danuvius '68 (Alternative Art in Slovakia in the 1960s)

*“But what would happen if this ghostly world left
the stage and infiltrated the audience?”¹*

(Jindřich Chalupecký, 1967)

This chapter is concerned with two exhibitions, *II Permanentné manifestácie* (II Permanent Manifestations) and *Danuvius '68*, which both exemplify and shed light on the complex nexus between art and politics in a Central and Eastern European context and can provide insight for a general study of exhibition practice in Slovakia. Despite a few important publications since 1989, the question of exhibiting alternative and unofficial art in Slovakia in the 1960s and 1970s remains an understudied subject. The period was characterized by immense sociopolitical changes that had a direct impact on culture and the arts scene in the former Czechoslovakia.

Before going into a discussion of *II Permanent Manifestations* and *Danuvius '68*, I would like to briefly describe the situation in the cultural field of the former Czechoslovakia, which is key for understanding the significance of these exhibitions. Although developments in Slovakia during the 1960s did not follow a linear pattern,

1 Jindřich Chalupecký. *Umění, šílenství, zločin* (Art, craziness, and crime). In: *Sešity pro mladou literaturu* 11, 1967, 47.

this period can be schematically divided into three stages.² The first phase was between 1957 and 1963, in which the foundations for the development of new trends were established. The second phase lasted from about 1964 to 1967 and was characterized by the emergence of new artistic movements, such as action art, land art, concept art, and their various combinations. Elisabeth Jappe described the interchangeability of media and forms of expression as media nomadism.³ It is precisely this strategy of artistic freedom that we can detect in the 1960s, a period that witnessed the emergence of a plurality of movements. At the same time, we can observe the advancement of “socialism with a human face”. The third phase, between 1968 and 1972, saw the culmination of this development, which is a kind of paradox given that in August 1968 Czechoslovakia was invaded by Warsaw Pact forces and the process of “normalization” began, which entailed the gradual suppression of all alternative forms of artistic expression. The symptoms and effects of this paradox will be further discussed in the following pages.

Above all else, we must remember that the official and institutionally dominant artistic style during the 1960s was the dogmatic doctrine of socialist realism. The culture industry was entirely governed by centralized state power. The exhibitions coordinated by the Communist Party became a point of reference for and a medium of representations of the continued success of the development of the socialist state.

2 Andrea Bátorová. *Aktionskunst in der Slowakei in den 1960er Jahren* (Action art in Slovakia in the 1960s). Berlin and Münster: LIT. 2009, 39–52.

3 Elisabeth Jappe. *Performance. Ritual. Prozess*. Munich: Prestel. 1993, 67.

II Permanent Manifestations

In a cultural field controlled by communist dictatorship, Alex Mlynárčik's exhibition *II Permanent Manifestations* hit like a meteorite.⁴ The project, a site-specific installation as well as one of the first happenings in Slovakia, took place in a public toilet in one of the main squares of Bratislava. *II Permanent Manifestations* was produced against the backdrop of the World Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), which took place in Czechoslovakia between 2 and 4 October 1966. The congress was accompanied by a number of large-scale exhibition projects in Prague and Bratislava. The *Contemporary Slovak Art* exhibition in Bratislava only featured artists who were regular members of the Association of Visual Artists, and thus represented a "cautious compromise resembling official shows" as Miroslav Lamač reported in a review.⁵ The artists featured were already established and had participated in many exhibitions. Young artists, on the other hand, had the opportunity to display their works at the *Exhibition of Young Art* in Brno. At this show, 160 artists under the age of 35 presented more than 400 works. Originally, Alex Mlynárčik was also supposed to participate. According to his personal account, he withdrew because he was against the idea that young progressive art, which was said to be at the forefront of the AICA congress, should be banished to the periphery in Brno and that in the centres of the country (Prague and Bratislava) only official and established artists should present their works. The first four days of the congress took place in Prague, and the last two days were in Bratislava. Due to the busy programme, it was quite likely that the participants would not travel to Brno, and thus only

4 For Alex Mlynárčik, see Pierre Restany. *INDE/Ailleurs* (Elsewhere). Bratislava: SNG. 1996; Bátorová. Work cited in note 2.

5 Miroslav Lamač. *Z Prahy do Brna a Bratislavy* (From Prague to Brno and Bratislava). Literární noviny, No. 42. 15. 10.1966, 5.

a small section of the professional audience would see the exhibition there. During the congress, Mlynárčik decided to create an autonomous project and organized *II Permanent Manifestations*.⁶ Invitations were mainly sent to the participants of the congress.

Between 2 and 4 October, Mlynárčik redesigned a public toilet. It was in a central square where the Cyprián Majerník Gallery was located, a gallery that housed many young artists' exhibitions⁷ (Figs. 1 - 3). The toilet was in the basement and had a round shape with a kind of groove that went along the walls. In it, the artist installed seven large mirrors that had the names of philosophers or artists written on them, such as Hl. Antonius, Hieronymus Bosch, Gérard Chevallier, Godot, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Stano Filko.⁸ In addition to these, the chemical formula for uric acid was also displayed. The performance was announced on four posters on the outside railing. Each of them showed an arrow pointing downwards to the basement.

During the entire day, visitors, including many critics from the AICA congress such as Pierre Restany, Michel Ragon, Jindřich Chaloupecký, and Umberto Appolonio, were asked to leave a message on the walls, on the sheets of paper provided, or in one of the visitors' books. A tape recorder operated by the lavatory attendant kept playing the same melody: the "Radetzky March".⁹

6 *Permanent Manifestations* was a series of four projects of different characters (*Permanent Manifestations I-IV*).

7 The Cyprián Majerník Gallery was one of the most progressive exhibition spaces of its time. Young and not so well-known artists, who played a significant role in the development of non-conformist trends in the second half of the 1960s, often had their exhibitions in this gallery.

8 Unfortunately, there is no photographic documentation of the event. The only mementos are photos of the entries left behind in the visitors' book. The project has been described by Restany 1996, 24f (see footnote 3) from the participant's point of view. Alex Mlynárčik has also described the circumstances that accompanied the project, see *Jindřich Chaloupecký/Alex Mlynárčik/Příběh Alexa Mlynárčika, P.S. Zápisky z cesty A.M.* Samizdat 2011, 97–105.

9 In his autobiography, Mlynárčik describes how he approached the head of the capital's department of technical services; he told him his ideas and asked for his consent to "rent" the public toilet, subsequently receiving official permission to do so. Cf. Mlynárčik. Work cited in note 8. 98.

An anonymous message appearing somewhere in public space is one of the main motifs in Mlynárčik's work. Already in his early work and in his first exhibition in Paris, *I Permanent Manifestations* (1966), the interactive environments *Pokušenie* (Temptation) and *Villa dei misteri* (both 1967), and *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* (1969), he showed a great interest in messages without authors. He asked visitors to write something on the objects displayed or on parts of the installations. Conventional and non-artistic activity in the public space thus became a matter of art, while the artwork took on the task of providing a platform for communication and serving as its medium.

According to his own account, Mlynárčik's fascination with anonymous messages left behind on the walls of a city, in toilets, or on trees, can be traced back to his time in prison in 1951.¹⁰ At the age of 16, he had been arrested in the Soviet zone of Austria and sentenced to one year in prison for illegally crossing the borders of Czechoslovakia with a friend. He spent part of his sentence in a solitary confinement cell, where he meticulously studied the scribbles left by previous inmates. This formative experience is reflected in his work and his understanding of art as a place of social encounter. In a conversation, he said:

“I don't know if you can imagine a solitary confinement cell. You are simply alone, locked up between four walls, and somewhere above you there is a small, tiny little barred window. The cell (...) was empty apart from a bucket for bodily needs and a straw mat that had to stay on the wall all day long. I had no choice but to stand or pace back and forth, five steps in each direction. (...) The only 'contact with civilization' consisted of the walls, which were covered with little inscriptions, messages, and mainly marks counting the days spent in

10 Bátorová. Work cited in note 2. 282.

the cell. These graffiti were not written but carved using nails. They constituted a book, a bible, if you will, full of various communications, the causes of suffering and hope. I read all of them hundreds of times and I know very well that a message of an anonymous person to another anonymous person can be an affectionate note that can cheer you up and make the hopelessness of our solitude more bearable. This is where my relationship with graffiti originates; for me it's a message from Someone to Someone."¹¹

Let us now return to *II Permanent Manifestations* and the question of how the socialist apparatus reacted to such artistic activity. While the project was still running, the artist was questioned by police officers. He testified that he wanted to conduct a psychological study, a kind of experiment.¹² Anton Sitár published an extensive negative review of the event in the daily newspaper *Práca*, which became the site of a one-sided ideological battle.¹³ While there are no existing photographs of the installation, the introduction of this review, somewhat paradoxically contained a precise description of its layout as well as of the preparations and the event itself; it was an account more detailed than any other text written about the installation. Sitár describes the reactions of the visitors:

11 Ibid.

12 "I was concerned with the theoretical and practical study of inscriptions in public space (...) When doing the experiment, I wanted to follow the principle of anonymity. I paid for everything: the posters, the mirrors, the pens, and the paper, out of my own pocket. (...) I installed the mirrors in order to shock and provoke the visitors of the toilet so that the men would write all kinds of smut and other messages on them. The whole study was about anonymous expression by the audience. (...) The intimacy of the toilet has far-reaching consequences. Writing on toilet walls is very common and extremely interesting from an artistic point of view. People draw and write amazing things, sometimes quite serious poems too. Preventing that is highly problematic. Therefore, I recommended that we install a toilet in Bratislava in which people can write and draw all sorts of things as a kind of opinion poll." Quoted in: Anton Sitár, „Výskum“ na čudnom mieste (“Research” in a strange place). *Práca*. No. 250. 18. 10.1966, 4.

13 Ibid.

“Some of those who went to the toilet were baffled by the whole thing, others laughed, and there were some who got angry and reported it immediately. The police dismantled everything and started to inquire about the originator of the idea. But there were hardly any clues. In the end, the producer of the mirrors could tell the police who had ordered them.”¹⁴

In addition, Sitár provided the reader with expert opinions on the project by a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a sexologist, and a sociologist, who, however, remained anonymous. The psychologist criticized the justification given by the artists and took him to task for not having any specific purpose with the project. As for the argument for anonymity, the psychologist described it as “mistaken”, claiming that a psychological study is incompatible with any kind of anonymity. To achieve an objective result, he argued, artists should scrutinize the doer of the action as well as his or her motivation in addition to the activity itself. Furthermore, he was of the opinion that to ensure objectivity one should not change the real environment as the artistic transformation of the space manipulates the activities carried out in the room. While the psychologist had fairly logical arguments, the three other critics (the psychiatrist, the sexologist, and the sociologist) made their aversion to the artist very clear and accused him of being unprofessional, extravagant, mentally deranged, and sexually abnormal:

“We should examine the mental state of these people to find out whether they are hysterics, people with pathological moods, (...) or schizophrenics. For we should know whether to punish these people, provided that they are healthy; or, if they cannot be held responsible for their deeds, we should try and cure them... That fact that they chose a public toilet as the venue for their study and created conditions under which

14 Ibid.

men could see themselves while urinating indicates that we are dealing with a form of sexual deviance. (...) We can place the phenomenon in a broader context. We are aware that these art forms are becoming frequent; but we are not going to be able to understand their emergence, for the phenomenon is nothing but an import from the West. (...) Believe me, it has nothing to do with art or science.”¹⁵

Four days after the publication of the article, the same newspaper printed a reaction entitled *How to Assess the New Art* by Eudo Petrán-sky.¹⁶ The author, who had written a number of articles about alternative and young art around that time, directly challenged Sitár in his introduction: “When someone has the courage to break with the conventions, he will often be misunderstood.”¹⁷ Drawing on Pierre Restany’s and Raoul-Jean Moulin’s texts about Mlynárčik’s work, Petrán-sky sought to shed some light on the idea behind *II Permanent Manifestations* as a call for participatory behaviour in the urban environment. He also pointed out that there were no art critics or theorists invited to give their expert opinion on the happening. He cleverly refuted some of the reviewers’ points of criticism. Jindřich Chalupecký published another reaction to Anton Sitár’s review entitled *Art, Madness, Crime*.¹⁸ Making reference to the misinterpretation of Mlynárčik’s *II Permanent Manifestations*, he attempted to make a case for such “unorthodox” activities and for happenings in general:

“Art should and must have the courage to enter all spheres of life, especially the forbidden ones: darkness, vice, crime, hopelessness,

15 Ibid.

16 Eudo Petrán-sky. *Ako hodnotiť nové umenie (K reportážii: „Výskum“ na čudnom mieste)* (How to value contemporary art). No. 254. *Práca*. 22. 10. 1966, 3.

17 Ibid.

18 Jindřich Chalupecký. *Umění, šílenství, zločin* (Art, craziness, and crime). In: *Sešity pro mladou literaturu* 11, 1967, 47.

shame. Tragedy is its proper realm. ‘You are going to hear about sins, murders, deviant perversions, the killings of the blind, accidental destinies, executions brought about by lies (...),’ Horaz recites, and we are calmly looking on. But what would happen if this ghostly world left the stage and infiltrated the audience?’¹⁹

Sitár’s review typifies a whole period in which nonconformist art forms had to struggle for their recognition as art, which was extremely difficult in a culture governed by the official doctrines and dogmatism of socialist realism. In addition, we could witness the confluence of new art forms and a new conception of art and academic ideas about art advocated by the conservatives and the traditionalists. In his autobiography, Mlynárčik, who during *II Permanent Manifestations* was an assistant at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, describes a professors’ meeting and the *About Art* conference organized by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia and held on the occasion of the “toilet incident”. In his account, Mlynárčik records the condemnation of himself and his activities.²⁰

In addition to the event itself, the confrontation with political power in the form of a review, and the ensuing polemic in the media, it is also interesting to see how the confrontation resumed in 1970. This continuation demonstrates the manipulative nature of the era’s cultural politics and throws light on the difference between the two phases that took place between 1966 and 1972 as well as on the extent of the changes that occurred in the area of cultural politics. *II Permanent Manifestations* was instrumentalized as a symbol of decadent art created under the influence of the West and was therefore worthy of condemnation.

19 Ibid.

20 Mlynárčik. Work cited in note 8. 102.

From 1970 onwards, as normalization began to make itself felt in the cultural field as a consequence of the country's occupation by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968, the relatively liberal developments in the arts during the second half of the 1960s were retroactively labelled as “years of crisis”. In 1970, after the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the party collected a range of materials to demonstrate the development of crisis in the party as well as in society and draw lessons from them.²¹ The resolution, accompanied by a number of other papers from congresses held later, was published in 1974 under the title “For socialist art: materials from the meetings of the artistic association”.²² This collection of heavily ideological documents became the main guide and reference point for the development of culture during the 1970s, which, during the process of “normalization”, was supposed to rediscover its sacred task true to the tenets of socialist realism. Mlynárčik described the “yellow book” as the “directives of the Communist inquisition”. In the 1972 resolution of the 2nd Congress of the Association of Slovak Visual Artists, which was published in “For socialist art: materials from the meetings of the artistic association (May–November 1972)”, the *II Permanent Manifestations* project was seen as a dangerous precedent and a typical example of the decadent and bourgeois trends coming “from the West”. During the 1972 purge, Mlynárčik was expelled from the Association of Slovak Visual Artists and became an unofficial artist.

II Permanent Manifestations is significant because it was undertaken outside of the institutional framework and served as a critique of the

21 *Pomôcnie z krízového vývoja v strane a spoločnosti po XIII. zjazde KSČ: rezolúcia o aktuálnych otázkach strany: schválené na plenárnom zasadaní ÚV KSČ v decembri 1970* (Learning from crisis developments in the party and in society after the 13th communist party Congress: a resolution about current issues of the party). Bratislava: Pravda. 1975.

22 *Za socialistické umenie. Materiály zo zjazdov umeleckých zväzov (máj – november 1972)* (For socialist art: materials from the meetings of the artistic association [May–November 1972]). Bratislava: SPP. 1974.

exhibition practices and cultural politics of the time. It was both a critique of the authoritarianism of the communist regime and the official doctrine of socialist realism as well as of cultural politics as a compromise, as demonstrated by the AICA world congress, which paradoxically saw itself as a progressive event.

Danuvius '68

The exhibition *Danuvius '68*, held between 18 October and 24 November 1968, is a further example of an event that led to a confrontation with political reality and its direct effects on cultural politics and exhibition practices. *Danuvius '68*, which was conceived as the kick-off show of a biennale and curated by Lubomír Kára, was supposed to take place in September 1968 and represent young art and the most recent trends on an international level. The age limit for the artists was set at 35.²³ *Danuvius '68* can be characterized as a progressive event that reflected the ongoing liberalization in Czechoslovakia and was a result of the advancement of “socialism with a human face”. In addition to the show itself, which was held in the House of Art, the organizers placed importance on the accompanying programme, which included experimental and unconventional concerts and film projections.

In the exhibition guidelines, which were published in the catalogue and in the press, the organizers explained that they intended to present art that had been produced in the last two years which represented “a broad range of contemporary opinions and trends with an emphasis on progressive approaches to the artistic questions

23 Ultimately 120 artists were invited, 49 of whom came from abroad. Some of the artists were asked to submit their works, while others had to apply for participation.

and general issues of our time”.²⁴ (Fig. 4) They also announced that the exhibition was going to be judged by an international jury that would award five prizes: a grand prize and four smaller prizes. The winner of the grand prize would have the opportunity to have a solo exhibition at the next biennale. The jury was supposed to consist of Jindřich Chalupecký, Werner Hofmann, Pierre Restany, Milan Városov, Lukáš Vaculík, and Zoran Kržišnik. It was also decided that the exhibition would take place every second year in the form of an international biennale in Bratislava.²⁵

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968 put an end to cultural liberalization and led to the Iron Curtain and isolation for the following twenty years. The invasion happened at a time when the preparations for the exhibition, which was to be opened in September, were running at full speed. What were the consequences of this huge political upheaval for the content and form of the exhibition? The first direct effect of the new situation was that the show had to be postponed. On 3 September 1968, about two weeks after the invasion, the organization committee met for a crisis meeting where they discussed the most recent developments in the cultural field. They decided to postpone the opening of the exhibition from September to 18 October. As is recorded in the meeting minutes, the exhibition was supposed to take place according to the original plan. According to the strategy developed at the time, “The selection of the (new, A.B.) jury should follow a personal consultation with members of the AICA in Bordeaux, France, and take the new situation into account.”²⁶ At the meeting, the organization committee had to discuss another issue as well. Immedi-

24 *Danuvius 68*. Dom umenia. Bratislava. 1968, 10.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

ately after the invasion, Alex Mlynárčik, together with the Swedish artist Erik Dietmann, wrote a letter of protest against violence and aggression which was also signed by other artists (some of them signed it personally). The letter was sent to the organizers and reads as follows:

“To the participants of the international biennale of young art DANUVIUS '68; to all progressive artists and theorists!

Dear friends and colleagues, the international biennale of young artists, *Danuvius '68*, was supposed to open in the following days in Bratislava. (...) We thought that our exhibition would be all the more splendid because it would take place in a place without dictatorship. Time has surprised and overwhelmed us in the most staggering way. We can say that today all we can do is keep our faith and do everything we can for a brighter future of humanity. In this vision of the future, there is no place for violence. We are witnessing a terrible struggle for liberation. The whole world, including the artist, is faced with unforgivable injustice and suffering: genocide in Vietnam and Biafra. The advocates of progressive politics, the Kennedy brothers, and Dr Martin Luther King, are dying before our very eyes. In the streets of Paris, Nobel laureates are joining forces with thousands of young people to defend the ideas of the new Sorbonne. (...) Dear colleagues, our weapons are not tanks, machine guns, fire, or death. Our weapons are free ideas that we realize so that they give us hope and make us feel joy in existence. Take the stance that your conscience and dignity urges you to. Let us make *Danuvius '68* a monument to the struggle against violence! Take your works, which you created with the highest degree of professional responsibility and in the free spirit of the artist, and cover them with a black cloth. Leave the walls without pictures – but with your name plates. Perhaps *Danuvius '68* will not take place, but then you will know where your place is. Now, more than ever before, the streets and house

walls belong to us (...) No one has been able to shatter art, its immeasurable force, which separates us from the animal kingdom. Dictators have fallen, dogmas have been destroyed, centuries have passed, but humankind has persisted in its love, dreams, and hopes.”²⁷

In addition to their appeal, Mlynárčik and Dietmann sent along multiple *Zem, ktorá zostala* (The earth that remained), small bags filled with earth and sand from Bratislava and Paris, to their friends and acquaintances around the world (Fig. 5). So, what happened to this collective protest? The letter was delivered to the organization committee of *Danuvius '68* and became one of the most important topics of the above-mentioned meeting held on 3 September 1968. According to the meeting minutes, the withdrawal of Alex Mlynárčik, Karol Lacko, and Jana Shejbalová-Želibská from the exhibition was accepted. Erik Dietmann cancelled his participation at the show as well. Nonetheless, their project plans were published in the catalogue. The artists who endorsed the protest, and on behalf of whom Mlynárčik and Dietmann signed the letter but who did not sign it personally, continued to be regarded as participants, as there was no officially signed document requesting their withdrawal.

On 18 October, Ľubomír Kára opened the exhibition at the House of Art in Bratislava with the following words:

“We have prepared the exhibition *Danuvius '68* under the circumstances before August. We were supposed to open the exhibition on 4 September. We were just starting with the construction when the tanks arrived. That is why we had to postpone the event. The current realization of the exhibition is not to be taken as an obituary of the Czechoslovakian Spring that lasted half a year or an epilogue to our uplift and our hopes,

²⁷ Quoted in: Restany. Work cited in note 4. 67.

but as a prologue to a new and relentless struggle. The exhibition is meant to be an expression of a struggle for a programme for our society and culture that was born in January 1968. This is why we decided to go through with our original plans. It is supposed to be an expression of the striving, the imagination, the will, and the ideals of the socialist path taken by Czechoslovakia and of the freedom of art in a free life.”²⁸

On the whole, the exhibition was well-attended and well-liked by the audience (Fig. 6). The grand prize was awarded to Jozef Jankovič for his sculptures (Fig. 7). The jury recommended the purchase of a couple of artworks, including drawings by Christo. There were a few critical voices in the press, such as that of Ivan Jirous, who reproached the curator for placing the emphasis on post-surrealistic “epigones”.²⁹ At the same time, Jirous praises the presentation of works with constructivist tendencies (Getulio Alviani and Frank Stella), of new figuration, and a few works that incorporated audience participation such as the *Univerzálny environment* (Universal environment) by Stanislav Filko (Fig. 8), the interactive sculpture (a kind of “punchbag”) by Bruno Gironcoli (Fig. 9), and the “opti-tertiar stabiloid” by Ivan Štěpán. As is often the case with such large-scale shows, the overall reaction to the exhibition was rather varied. According to Ľubor Kára, the governing idea of the installation of the artworks was “the tendency to maximum tension and to contrast”, which, he claimed, reflected the worldview of the time.³⁰ Thus, artworks by Jozef Jankovič, Frank Stella, and Andrej Rudavský were presented together, which, according to Jirous, was not necessarily coherent (Fig. 10). Thanks to the diversity embraced by the organizers, the exhibition featured artists that later achieved an international reputation, such as the above-men-

28 *Z otvorenia výstavy*. *Výtvarný život*. 14. 1969, 71.

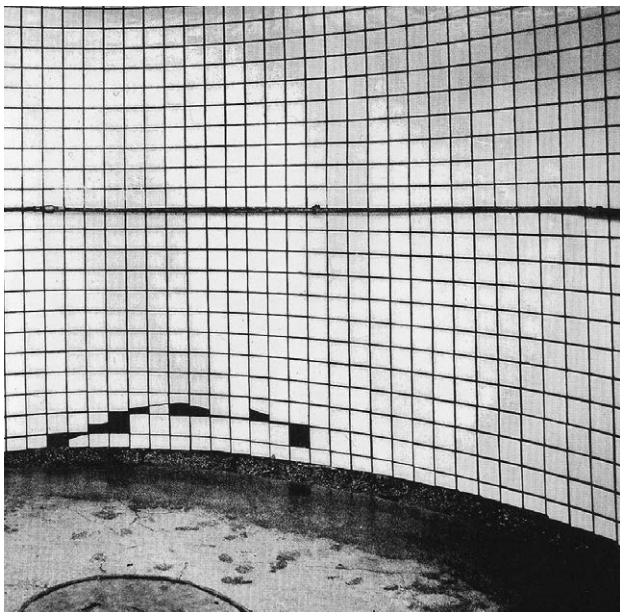
29 Ivan Jirous. *Otvorené možnosti* (Opened possibilities). *Výtvarná práce* 22–23, 1968, 6.

30 *Ibid.*

tioned Christo. *Danuvius '68*, conceived as a biennale, was supposed to take place every second year. Due to the political developments of the following years, however, the show was not continued. Nevertheless, it became an important reference point – a historical threshold that demonstrates how political changes directly affect the cultural situation.

I have described two different exhibition formats, two cultural model situations in fact, which at the same time were two significant events in the alternative art scene of Slovakia in the second half of the 1960s. The differences between the contexts of the two exhibitions are not only due to the different political climates of 1966 and 1968 but were also shaped by the completely different formats of the exhibitions. *II Permanent Manifestations* and *Danuvius '68* became platforms for protest against authority and the dominant hierarchy. On the one hand, we saw a small solo exhibition in an off-space separated from the art scene, outside of established exhibition spaces and the conventional ways of creating art, and even outside of the official programme of the AICA congress dedicated to progressive art: something held in a public toilet which was taken as an act of provocation for which the artist was declared to be asocial and deviant. On the other hand, we also saw a large-scale international show that was meant to be a flagship of cultural liberalization and a symbol of openness, plurality, and tolerance as well as a step away from the dogmas of socialist realism in the second half of the 1960s, whose preparations were disrupted by a political event that was so impactful that it challenged the whole concept of an exhibition that could only be realized with the utmost caution and strategic planning. *Danuvius '68* also turned into a platform for free expression due to certain artists' refusal to participate in the show as a form of protest against the occupation by the armies of the Warsaw Pact.

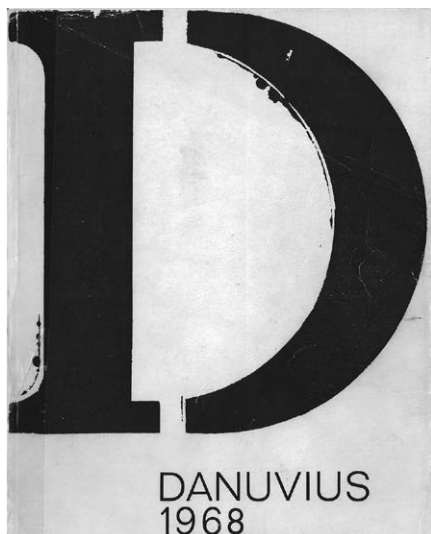
1. Alex Mlynárčik, Invitation – Permanente Manifestationen II, Bratislava October 1966



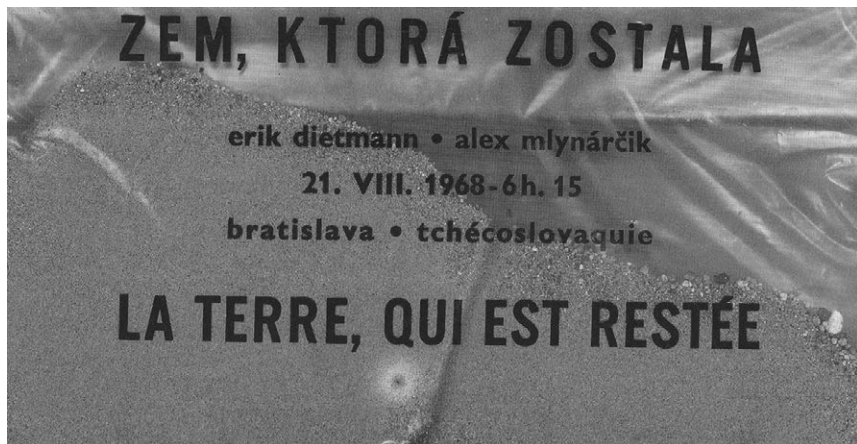
2. Alex Mlynárčik, Permanente Manifestationen II, Bratislava October 1966



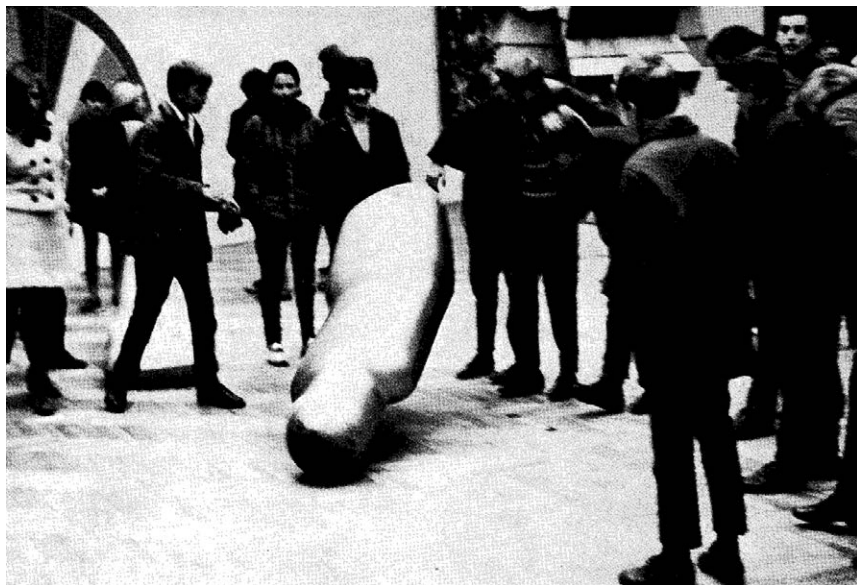
3. Alex Mlynárčik,
Permanente Manifestationen II,
Bratislava October 1966



4. Danuvius '68,
Exhibition catalogue, 1968



5. Alex Mlynárčik, Erik Dietman, The Earth that Reminded, Bratislava/Paris 1968



6. Danuvius '68, Opening, 1968



7. Jozef Jankovič, Great Fall, 1968



8. Stano Filko, Universal Environment, 1967



9. Bruno Gironcoli,
Object, 1967

10. Danuvius '68,
Exhibition view, 1968





5. “Please Turn me in the Right Direction, Please”: The Art of Contestation in Unofficial Performative Practices in 1970s Slovakia

“Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, are the system.”¹

(Václav Havel, 1978)

“This space is not a gallery, this space is not a studio; it is an in-between space. Where from and where to? The time spent in it is not yours, the time spent in it is not mine, it is a moment of eternity. (Dimensions: 390x495x330 cm).” In 1981 the artist Ľubomír Ďurček typed these lines out on a piece of paper and hung it on the inside of his apartment door.² (Fig. 1) Since he saw no way to officially present his works and ideas to the public, he created an alternative exhibition space and meeting place in his parents’ apartment where he was living at the time.

1 Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. New York: Palach Press. 1985, 31.

2 Zuzana Bartošová. *Napriek totalite* (Despite totality). Bratislava: Kalligram. 2011, 214. It should be noted that the slip was removed in 1991. However, when the author of this book visited the artist in September 2017, it was on the door again.

The key topic of this chapter is the open and public criticism of the “post-totalitarian system”³ through performative artistic strategies. I examine and analyse the performative activities of Slovak artists carried out in the sphere of unofficial art in the 1970s and 1980s, arguing that these activities can be considered inherently critical due to the fact that their subversive strategies and events undermined the centralized regime, while critically questioning the official doctrine of socialist realism which was declared to be the only “correct” way to do art. These activities were disturbances in a state apparatus that functioned according to strict rules which the citizens were expected to blindly follow.

In what follows, I will examine the projects of the *Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania (DSIP)* (Temporary society of intensive experience – DSIP) and Ľubomír Ďurček which were not meant to be explicitly critical to begin with, but to which the authorities attributed criticism. In addition, I will also look at certain activities of Ľubomír Ďurček that can be described as intentional criticism of the system.

The term “the art of contestation” was first used by Tomáš Štraus in his text *Umenie kontestácie a kontestácia umenia* (The art of contestation and the contestation of art), in which he analyses the activities of the DSIP, among other things. He uses the phrase to describe the new generation’s experimental exploration and critical questioning of its environment and the way young individuals position themselves in relation to that environment. The art of contestation is the significance of their activities. According to Tomáš Štraus, the purpose of these confrontational public activities was not to present an artistic

3 The concept of “post-totality” was formulated by Václav Havel to show that the totalitarian system of the former Czechoslovakia had a different character in the 1970s and 1980s than the totalitarian structures of the 1950s and 1960s. The prefix “post-” is meant to indicate that that system reflected a fundamentally different form of totalitarianism. Václav Havel. *Moc bezmocných* (The power of the powerless). Prague: Archa. 1990, 5f.

material created beforehand but rather the creation of a new quality: ”an action as creative act or even the sense of the creation on itself.⁴

If we accept Václav Havel’s thesis which he formulated in his essay *Moc bezmocných* (The power of the powerless), in post-totalitarianism every free act is a political issue par excellence.⁵ Thus, irrespective of the intention of their authors and performers, unofficial artistic practices became political by taking place in public – that is, official – space. Consequently, they are subversive because of the socio-political situation of socialist realism and not because their content represents an emphatic form of ideology critique. Against this background, the performances that I am going to discuss reveal a paradox: it is the system that projects a kind of *criticism* onto these activities, and by considering these actions critical the *system* opens a critical perspective on itself. In short, criticism does not necessarily arise on the part of the artists but rather on the part of the authorities.

I will focus on the tensions inherent in the “critical”, which emerge in the interaction between two polarities – the official and unofficial power structures – and which create a conflictual interplay between what is officially allowed and what is forbidden. Due to the socio-political situation in Czechoslovakia, the activities of performance artists were left out of both the classical canon of art history and that of socialist realism and existed in a kind of grey area outside the institutional framework of art. Artistic activities that were not embedded in the canon were considered non-art by the communist party and its ideology; they were perceived as a degenerate import or the imitation of Western “decadent” art.

4 Tomáš Štraus, *Umenie kontestácie a kontestácia umenia* (The art of contestation and the contestation of art). In: *Výtvarný život*. 35. No. 9. 1990. 20.

5 Havel. Work cited in note 3. 25. See also p. 26.

While in the 1950s the doctrine of socialist realism had a strictly normative character and was to be followed without deviation, the situation changed significantly in the 1960s. The process of cultural liberalization as part of the programme of “socialism with a human face”, led by the communist party’s general secretary Alexander Dubček, followed the “witch hunt”⁶ of the 1950s and resulted in the flourishing and relatively free development of art during what has been called the “golden 1960s”.⁷ After this process of liberalization ended it was politically possible to return to the doctrine of socialist realism, but the temporary relaxation of rules left its traces in the cultural production of the subsequent period.⁸ Thus, every directive from above represented a forced attempt to reinstate the “impossible”. After the developments of the 1960s, the supposed success and functionality of socialist realism in the 1970s and 1980s were the expression of a disenchanting turn in communist propaganda that necessarily led to the formation of alternative spaces of creation and action, which were called “unofficial art scenes”.

6 The term “witch hunt” was used by the Slovak artist Alex Mlynárčik to characterize the persecution of artists during the 1950s.

7 While socialist realism remained the official aesthetic doctrine during the 1960s, after 1964 the cultural sphere became relatively open to new artistic movements, including neo-avantgarde tendencies. This liberal development was disrupted by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968.

8 One example of this is Alex Mlynárčik’s *II Permanent Manifestations* action. After its performance, the artist was questioned by the police and the action was attacked in the press as early as in 1966. This is a clear indication of the continued liberalization that the incident turned into a debate: the Slovak critic Ľudo Petránsky and his Czech colleague Jindřich Chaloupecký reacted to the attack by advocating the autonomy of art. In the most important resolution of the ongoing normalization, which appeared under the title *Za socialistické umenie. Materiály zo zjazdov umeleckých zväzov (máj – november 1972)* (For socialist art: materials from the meetings of the artistic association [May–November 1972]. Bratislava: SPP, 1974) in 1972, the action was condemned again as “a typical example of decadent, bourgeois trends ‘from the West’”. Cf. Andrea Bátorová. *Ausstellungen als (un)politische Medien, II. Permanente Manifestationen und Danuvius 68 (Zur alternativen und inoffiziellen Kunst in den 1960er Jahren)*. In: Verena Krieger (ed.). *When Exhibitions Become Politics*. Cologne: Böhlau. 2017, 169–170. See also Chapter 4.

As I have already mentioned, through the exclusion of non-conforming artistic projects and gestures, the cultural-political apparatus effectively created a productive environment for alternative developments which were allowed to unfold in the public sphere since they were not recognized as art. As Tomáš Štraus puts it, there emerged “an unintended underground”,⁹ a kind of aesthetic removed from its context and institutional framework. The DSIP and the Slovak artist Ľubomír Ďurček appealed to their fellow citizens emphatically within the urban reality of Bratislava and attempted to exert a direct effect on everyday actions.

Activities “outside the ball” - Temporary society of intensive experience

What happens when performative articulations that deviate from the normative “order”, or even directly disturb it, suddenly appear in public space? The DSIP, a group consisting of young people, held meetings from 1974 and regularly organized get-togethers in private apartments. The central figure of the group was Ján Budaj.¹⁰ The DSIP was the successor to the *Degenerovaná skupina* (Degenerate group), which was a collective of poets, and the Labyrinth Theatre¹¹, an amateur theatre group that also played pantomimes. Like-minded friends and acquaintances who regularly participated in the activities joined the group as well. The DSIP organized six gatherings. In addition, it brought out samizdat publications every now and then: three collections of texts and statements altogether.

9 Tomáš Štraus. *Slovenský variant moderny*. Bratislava: Pallas, 1992, 105.

10 Ibid.198. At the age of 21, Jan Budaj tried to emigrate but was arrested during his ‘escape attempt’ and worked as a stoker until 1989.

11 The Labyrinth Theatre was a student theatre housed in the *V-Klub*, an alternative student club in the centre of Bratislava, and existed between 1975 and 1980.

Initially, the activities of the DSIP followed the principle of destruction; the proclaimed aim of the gatherings was “to undermine all forms of production”. A film projection was coupled with readings from texts which made the event clamorous and prompted some to leave the rooms while others complained. “These events were conceived with the aim to create an atmosphere that the group found adequate for the time. The point was to create an effect of non-authenticity, boredom, disinterest, and stereotyping.”¹² The aim of the group was to “(re)create a mood that made it possible to lay claim to an alternative perspective”. The performances were intended to appear as amateurish, trivial, awry, and incomplete, conveying a feeling of awkwardness, disappointment, and dissatisfaction.¹³

In the second half of the 1970s, especially in 1978 and 1979, the group changed the nature of its activities. They gave up the principle of destruction and started to focus on probing the social environment and carrying out interventions in the public space. Collaborating with the amateur pantomime group *Divadlo Labyrint* (Labyrinth theatre), they developed a series of projects that directly intervened in the urban reality of Bratislava. As Tomáš Štraus notes, these young people did not find an answer to the question of who they were and what they could achieve and how, be it at school or in the sphere of institutional art. Thus, they saw themselves “compelled”¹⁴ to break the silence around them through contestation.

The *Týždeň fiktívnej kultúry* (The Week of fictive culture) art project took place in the streets of Bratislava between 22 January and 2 February 1979. The group put up posters in the city centre an-

12 Štraus. Work cited in note 9. 198-199.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid. 120.

nouncing five fictitious events that never actually happened. The first poster, which was put up in a city park, announced Ingmar Bergman’s film *Bolest’. Problém homosexuality v modernej spoločnosti* (Pain: the problem of homosexuality in modern society), which dealt with the topic of homosexuality. The second poster advertised an exhibition of Salvador Dalí’s work at the Slovak National Gallery, while the third poster invited audiences to Eugene Ionesco’s theatre play *Oko* (The eye) in the National Theatre. The fourth poster promised an exhibition by René Magritte in the Primate’s Palace, and a fifth one announced a concert by Bob Dylan and ABBA in the PKO culture park. The group then observed the reactions given to these announcements. The “lifespans” of the posters varied. While the poster for Dalí’s exhibition was removed after just one day, the one for Eugene Ionesco’s play was there for two weeks in one of the main squares in the historic part of Bratislava without irritating anyone. “The participants of this non-reality actually took part in something,” writes Budaj, “They took a stance towards the announcement and spent some time thinking about these cultural events.”¹⁵ He goes on to report that weeks after the poster campaign there were still rumours going around claiming that these events would actually take place. The concert by Dylan and ABBA was particularly popular.

As Budaj points out, *The Week of Fictive Culture* reflected the group’s interest in initiating dialogue in the public space and in urban media as well as in provoking reactions. At the same time, it was an attempt to reveal a deficiency in the cultural apparatus, the lack of polyphonic, and the schizophrenia of the official culture of real socialism.

15 Ibid. 202.

The *Týždeň divadla na ulici* (The Week of street theatre), another public action, was organized by the DSIP and a number of amateur groups and artist friends in Bratislava in May 1979. The Department of Culture and Education (MDKO, Mestský dom kultúry a osvety) gave permission and approved the performance.¹⁶ *The Week of Street Theatre*, however, employed a strategy that was markedly different from the usual intervention techniques of the DSIP. During the first public actions in 1978, the members of the group had white make-up on and appeared as mimes, which embedded the performances in a logical pantomime, even if they took place in the old part of Bratislava. The 1978 performances already featured the mime Pepo¹⁷, whose character of Valentín was well-known from the popular children's programme *Slniečko na rukavičke* (The sun on the glove). In one of the main squares, Pepo imitated passers-by, their way of walking, and their gestures and facial expressions. The photographic documentation of this action shows how much attention Pepo received as pedestrians stopped and looked on with fascination.

In any event, these small events in public remained without any critical potential. The reason for this was also because passers-by had identified the mime artist with his make-up as belonging to the world of theatre and children. Some of them recognized the popular character of the famous TV show for children and perceived his performance as a harmless variation of theatre in the street.¹⁸

16 As Lubomír Ďurček remembers, there was an official at the department who appreciated alternative artistic expressions, and she was the one who granted permission. The artist took part in many DSIP activities but was not a member of the group. (Source: a personal conversation between the artist and the author of this book, September 2017).

17 His real name was Jozef Tichý, and he was a member of the amateur Labyrinth Theatre while studying pharmacy.

18 In a letter written by Ján Budaj to Tomáš Štraus in 1979, Budaj wrote that the members of the DSIP

The *Karneval* (Carnival), which was one of the first actions during *The Week of Street Theatre*, had subversive effects in public space. The members of the DSIP parked an ornate coach with horses at the old market hall in the centre of Bratislava. An amateur actor, who was announced to be an “enemy”, had his role written on the back of his white t-shirt. The “enemy” was handcuffed and chained to the rear end of the coach. Simultaneously, another man, the so-called “official”, who was wearing a police-like or military-style hat with the word “Zriadeneč” written on it, maintained “order”. (Figs. 2-4) The “enemy” played the role of the prisoner, falling to the ground or crying for help. The happening provoked various reactions from the observers. A woman from the DSIP gave him a glass of water, while the other members verbally abused him or poured water on him. *The Carnival* took shape as a procession through the old town of Bratislava¹⁹ which was led by two puppets, followed by a horse, the coach, and the crowd. (Fig. 6) The oversized figures at the head of the procession – a woman and a man – looked in the window of the “Národný výbor”²⁰, knocked on the window of a well-known milk bar, and communicated with the people sitting inside. According to Ľubomír Ďurček, two participants carried a red banner, which while without any inscription still bore an allusion to the ubiquitous banners showing communist slogans.²¹ (Fig. 5) The monochrome red surface evoked “external signs” of how these kinds of components of communist propaganda were named by Milan Šimeč-

asked passers-by during these performances if they thought that what they saw was art and if they perceived it as something illegal. Their answers were recorded on audio tape. The answers to the first questions were very different. However, everybody saw the performance as a legal one. Budaj noted that “It looks like the mask (the make-up) of the great (established) art played a role in deciding that. I presume that a direct intervention into life would provoke a more aggressive reaction.” Štraus. Work cited in note 9. 120.

19 The route went from the Old Market Hall (National Uprising Square) to Hviezdoslav Square.

20 Today the Národný výbor (municipality office) building is the home of the new town hall.

21 From a personal conversation between Ľubomír Ďurček and the author of this book in September 2017.

ka. According to him, external signs were necessary for the system to maintain political order.²² On the one hand, the red plain provoked the missing communist slogan which would have had the exclusive right to be written on this kind of banner. On the other hand, through the empty surface it was possible to compose any slogan which could be imaginarily placed on it. The banner became a zone of projection of any possible statement. Simultaneously it could function as a reference to the existing ignorance of the significance of symbols of the ruling communist party by citizens in public spaces during real socialism. Ignorance occurred more or less volitionally by overlooking such components as banners, posters, flags, and so on, as these became a part of everyday life. The participants in the *Carnival* demonstrated that they were walking through the streets freely and under their own flag. The red banner could be identified as representative of freedom, which in the case of censorship could be declared to be just a piece of red fabric. It could also be interpreted as a point of opening a critical view on the mechanism of the post-totalitarian apparatus. An empty space for projection – meaning something abstract – was a not requested phenomenon in arts and in public spaces as it provided a space for adding something to it. This did not suit the needs of the regime at all. The more the ideology was empty, Šimečka wrote, or even the less this one was lived in reality, the more the external signs had to be kept.²³ In Czechoslovakia the point was reached in 1979 where society moved continuously toward collapse. This lasted about six to seven years until the process of perestroika gradually influenced society and finally led to the fall of communist power and the change in political system in the process of the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

22 Milan Šimečka. *Nastolení pořádku* (The restoration of order). London: Edice Rozmluvy. 1984, 17–18.

23 Ibid.

The procession ended in Hviezdoslav Square, where they performed a small theatrical etude about a ship in the open sea; the water surface was marked by a heap of cobblestone under a tree. A random selection of people was wrapped in toilet paper like mummies and then freed again. The “official” communicated with the observers through a loudspeaker, reading out the answers that interviewees gave to questions and trying to start a “public conversation”. In the end, the “enemy” was freed by the people standing around and a couple of children at play.

In the mentioned performances, the motif of being a captive or victim often appears: the captive in the *Carnival*, who was tortured as well as rescued by the masses, an anonymous prisoner bound to the ground on one of the main squares, who was delivered to the happenstance, the mime Pepo, who integrated the scenes of being a prisoner behind the iron bars of the fence into his comic events. (Fig. 7) As a part of *The Week of Street Theatre*, the poet Vladimír Archleb (called Rachel) tied himself to the grid which was at the entrance of the publishing house of political literature right in the centre of the Old Town. This event was interrupted by the police.²⁴ A human being bound, not free and limited in his movement, and in his whole being surrounded by the masses, opened up once again a possible critical perspective on the ruling political system. The confrontation with the bondage, with the deprivation of liberty in the street could evoke the recipients’ own sense of limited freedom and encourage them to call the regime to account. The articulation of the bondage in public put a possible mirror for the individual and the masses in a post-totalitarian society. During the mime, Pepo could be clearly distinguished as playing a role through wearing make-up, whereas the other mentioned participants just looked like or-

24 See also note 39.

dinary civilians. The subversive potential functioned here with a reciprocal effect and interaction with an accidental counterpart. If the event found its resonance with passers-by, then it developed into an impulse for a critical contest with reality. The members of the DSIP focused their attention particularly on this kind of personal interplay.

The aim of the group was to carry out a direct corporeal intervention in the social reality of the city. The *Ulička* (Small street) action was an extreme example of this.²⁵ (Figs. 8-10) In a small street of the old town's pedestrian area, they obstructed the passage of passers-by. The participants lied down or sat down on the ground, so that the pedestrians who wanted to pass had to either swerve or step over them. Halfway through the street, the passage was blocked by a ladder covered in paper. For a while, there were people lying along the ladder as well as around it, so the passers-by had to jump over them, which can be seen in the recording of the action.²⁶ There were other obstacles too, such as glasses filled with water and arranged on a paper reel. Most people stayed still for a while, forming two small groups of observers at both ends of the street. Some of them, however, decided to walk down the street, treading on the people and the ladder, as evidenced by the paper which was torn to pieces by the end.²⁷ The living blockage, which was characterized by passivity (sitting, lying down, or staying still), non-action, and the lack of interaction with the people

25 Ján Budaj. *Info DSIP*. Samizdat. Bratislava 1981, n.p.

26 The action was filmed by Vladimír Havrilla from a nearby house, while Eubomír Ďurček, who was in the street, took photos of it.

27 In 1976 a similar "action in the street" was performed by the Czech artist Lumír Hladík under the title *Nevinný papír – nevinní lidé* (Innocent paper – innocent people). The artist unrolled a paper reel across the pavement. The fate of the paper was left to the pedestrians, who sidestepped it, trod on it, or jumped over it. "To step on clean paper would not only mean staining its purity but would also mean that one would leave footprints on the paper and thereby lose the anonymity that everyone in communist society so desired. The important thing was not to get involved or mixed up in anything." Quoted in Pavlína Morganová. *Czech action art*. Prague: Karolinum Press. 2014, 193; *Lumír*

around, can be understood as an appeal to the apathy and indifference of passers-by in the real socialist public sphere. In 1983, when remembering the situation in Czechoslovakia, Timothy Garton Ash stressed the fact that he had never seen a country in which the people showed so little interest in public life and politics.²⁸ Pavlína Morganová notes in a similar manner that the main concern of the citizens of Czechoslovakia at the time was “not to get involved”.²⁹ The reason for this kind of passivity is to be found in the socio-political developments towards the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s. As a result of the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, the so-called process of normalization began, which was described by the Czech dissident Milan Šimečka as “the restoring of order” and which in the sphere of art meant a strict return to the doctrine of socialist realism.³⁰ Due to a series of measurements strengthening censorship and surveillance, many artists were excluded from the association of visual artists, which included an exhibition ban.³¹ The artistic activities that deviated from socialist realism were all classified by the authorities as “decadent”.³² Moreover, during the 1970s, the entire society submitted to a kind of self-censorship. Šimečka compared the state of society to a house: “In the house of real socialism, everybody knows where each door leads, who is in charge of what, what schedule is valid, and how to behave in order to get a bigger chunk of meat for dinner.”³³ This order

Hladík. Pavlína Morganová (ed.) Prague: Galerie SVIT. 2011, 56.

28 Timothy Garton Ash. *Středoevropsan volbou* (Central-European by Choice). Prague: I.S.E. 1992, 59. See also p. 179.

29 Pavlína Morganová. Work cited in note 27.

30 See also Chapter 6.

31 Zora Rusinová. *Problém koexistence kultur* (The problem of the co-existence of the cultures). In: *Slovenské vizuálne umenie 1970-1985* (Slovak visual art 1970–1985). Aurel Hrabušický (ed.) Catalogue. Bratislava: SNG. 2002, 23.

32 *Za socialistické umenie. Materiály zo zjazdov umeleckých zväzov (máj – november 1972)* (For Socialist Art. Materials from the Meetings of artistic Association (May – November 1972). Bratislava: SPP. 1974.

33 Milan Šimečka, *Nastolení pořádku*, London: Edice Rozmluvy, 1984, 16.

was purely formal, but it seemed all the more important to obey it. The greatest crime against the political order was to doubt it, even if it was in the name of an even "better" order. This formal order was governed by a matrix of extrinsic signs, a kind of facade, and it was the unchangeability of these signs that expressed the hegemony of the existing order. Šimečka described the process of "normalization" as an exercise of "civilized violence", since the persecutions and trials that took place in the framework of reforms proceeded in a relatively non-violent way.³⁴ Directors shook hands with their employees when firing them. If someone expressed something that was not allowed, it was accompanied by a look of self-criticism on their face. Most police trials did not resort to physical brutality, and even interrogations took place during the day and not at 4 am. As a consequence of this "civilized violence", one either had to confront the regime, or, as in the case of the Czechoslovakian intelligentsia, behave as the party expected: "The civilized violence destroyed the courage to think, the interest in criticism, and the conviction to stand behind the truth."³⁵

In contrast to their first actions in 1978, during this intervention, which had no official name at the time but is now known as *Small Street*, the members of the group had civilian clothes on and did not wear make-up on their faces. As a result, they were indistinguishable from other pedestrians who, by entering the street and possibly even directly engaging with the group, became participants in the event. The group resembled a crowd in its appearance and was only different by virtue of its activity: its passive actions and the decision to stay still in a motionless position such as by lying down on the ground. They appealed to the passers-by and provoked a reaction precisely by doing nothing. Accord-

34 Ibid.78–85.

35 Ibid. 85.

ing to Tomáš Štraus, the focus of this action was the experience of both the passers-by and the participants, the feeling of a person who lies lifeless on the street, thereby articulating “self-sacrifice as knowledge and self-knowledge”.³⁶ Thus, the pedestrians found themselves caught in a situation that was in fact a “trap”³⁷ set up by the group. Whether they wanted it or not, they became active participants in the event, while their reactions, such as going into another street or the decision to make a detour, contributed to the activities.³⁸ The remains of the *Small Street* action were visible after the event: the bodies of those lying down had been outlined with white chalk. Thus, the silhouettes remained there as silent traces in the asphalt, reminding one of a crime scene.

Lubomír Ďurček

As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the decision by Lubomír Ďurček to declare a space in his private apartment to be reserved for artistic articulation was in itself a criticism of the socio-political situation in 1970s Czechoslovakia. His act demonstrated an open criticism of the absence of institutions for the presentation of alternative art as well as the presence of strict censorship. The withdrawal into private spaces was therefore necessary.

In the framework of *The Week of Street Theatre* (1979), Lubomír Ďurček planned to perform *Prosím obrát'ťe ma správnym smerom prosím* (Please Turn Me in the Right Direction, Please) as an action. (Fig. 11) In the

36 Štraus. Work cited in note 9. 123.

37 Míra Keratová, Ján Budaj a Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania/pracovná pamäť (Ján Budaj and Temporary society of intense experience/working memory), leaflet - exhibition in Transit gallery (10. 6.–16. 7. 2015), Bratislava.

38 Within the framework of *Small Street*, Robert Cyprich realized an event that was not discussed with Ján Budaj beforehand and was unannounced. He put up a sign in the street with the inscription “Reservé/pour/ Róbert Cyprich – Antoni Miralda/et leurs amis” and placed his cocker spaniel next to it.

end, it did not take place for “reasons of security”.³⁹ There is, however, an outline and a draft that provide information about its course. According to the artist’s plans, four actors were supposed to walk around in “boxes” (measuring 55 cm by 55 cm by 105 cm) for about thirty minutes in one of the main squares of Bratislava. The boxes were meant to be painted in skin colour on the outside and covered with newspapers on the inside. Ďurček’s idea was to let the actors appear in two ways at the same time: in the middle of a bustling street but also isolated in a closed space. The action was heavily dependent on random passers-by, as the actors could not see where they were going (the box was supposed to be closed at the top and open at the bottom to allow for leg movement). This lack of orientation was meant to be coupled with dependence on the decision of others who could either help or confuse the actors. Thus, the spatial isolation engendered both alienation and proximity as well as the necessity to communicate. The title *Please Turn Me in the Right Direction, Please* had complex political overtones, since nobody actually knew which direction was supposed to be the “right” one.

The concept relies on establishing anonymous relationships. The performer, who is hidden in a box, is unrecognizable and faceless. The object – the box – which plays an ambivalent role here, hides the actor. Due to the loss of vision, it also allows people to communicate with one another and ask each other for help. The limitation is related to the necessity to communicate. The tightness of the box and the search for the “right direction” can be understood as a reference to the uniformity of everyday life as well as a sym-

39 On the previous day, Vladimír Archleb (called Rachel), a member of the DSIP, tied himself with a rope to the bars on the entrance of a publisher of political literature. After that, someone called the police. Since the police took notice of the activities that were going on in the Old Town, the artist decided not to perform his action planned for the following day.

bol for the narrow horizon or the difficulties of communication, and consequently as a form of political criticism. As Ján Kralovič notes, it can also be seen in relation to Jozef Jankovič's 1972 illustration *Projekt konsolidačného priestoru* (Project of consolidating space)⁴⁰, which develops a metaphor for the fact that each ideology entails some form of limitation. (Fig. 12) In this picture we see an arrangement, a space, and an apparatus for the de/formation of people, divided into tight little compartments that do not allow much movement and action. The only task of those who found themselves in "box-spaces" was to stay closed, listen, and be present in passivity without expressing themselves.

The concept of *Rezonancie* (Resonances, 1979), which was actually implemented during *The Week of Street Theatre*, was also developed by Ľubomír Ďurček. It contains a draft of fifteen models showing different geometrical figures: spatial arrangements of people and constellations.⁴¹ (Fig. 13) These constellations, which Ďurček divided into stat-

40 Ján Kralovič. *Teritórium ulica* (Territory street). Bratislava: Slovart. 2014, 118.

41 (1) "Aureola" is conceived dynamically, and the form respects the path of the passer-by; (2) "Torch" is also a dynamic formation in which, however, the form does not respect the path of the passer-by; (3) "Passageway – Mussel" is a dynamic composition, consisting of (a) a passage or (b) a passage that is closed on one side; (4) "Idol" is a dynamic choreography whose course and orientation is determined by the passer-by without their knowledge; (5) "Knot" is a dynamic constellation consisting of (a) a free passage and (b) a passage closed on both sides; (6) "Monument" is a static formation in which the street is blocked, while the participants, divided into even and uneven numbers, have either a nice or angry look on their faces while always looking in the opposite direction; (7) "Continent" is a static arrangement encircling multiple passers-by; (8) "Dune" is, once again, dynamic, blocking the path of the passer-by repeatedly; (9) "Basin/Valley" is a static formation in which a pedestrian standing around gets encircled by people facing him; (10) "Exile" is a static arrangement of people in which a pedestrian gets encircled by people facing the other way; (11) "Phantom" is a dynamic choreography in which the attempt of the passer-by to get out of the circle formed by the crowd of people running around them is futile, but this should be done without the use of force; (12) "Temple" develops a static constellation in which everyone faces the centre of the circle marking off a space; (13) "Blizzard" is a dynamic form rotating with increasing speed; (14) "Pavilion" is a static formation in which the participants mark off a space by facing the surrounding buildings but leave the entrance open; (15) "Avalanche" is a dynamic sequence of movements in which the participants spontaneously stand in the way of passers-by.

ic and dynamic ones, create psychological and social situations which take place in two phases. In the first step, the participants are supposed to separate themselves from the crowd; then in the second step they identify with the crowd. However, they are not supposed to engage in any verbal communication and, if anything, only smile slightly. Ďurček intended to create a temporary artwork from the reality available to him without any additional material.⁴²

Out of the fifteen models, only three were performed during *The Week of Street Theatre*: *Aureola*, *Monument* and *Fantóm* (Phantom). A collective of about twenty participants (DSIP) in everyday clothing created three situations in a bustling pedestrian zone.⁴³ In *Aureola*, they encircled a passer-by and followed him around in the street without restricting him in his movement. (Figs. 14) In the main square, the group encircled a man who was eating an ice cream, accompanying him for a while.⁴⁴ At first the man tried to communicate with the group, but since he did not get a response he simply hurried on. As the artist recounts the event, at an intersection the man met a colleague who waved at him in bewilderment. Then he walked around in a circle until he decided to quicken his steps. As a result, he came closer to the group members and the distance between them fell to less than fifty centimetres. The performers were given the instruction to break the formation as soon as the "captive" violates the official private sphere of fifty centimetres. Almost all resonances included the instruction to avoid direct physical contact unless it was caused by the passer-by. The one who was surrounded was

42 From the personal conversation between Ľubomír Ďurček and the author of this book in September 2017.

43 The artist reports that two short films were shot, and the actions were recorded. One of them is a colour documentation by Vladimír Havrilla which lasts about one and a half minutes. In this recording, we see *Aureola* and *Monument* in a longer shot and very briefly the constellation *Phantom* too. The film is in the possession of the artist and is also to be found in the archive of the Stredoslovenská galéria Banská Bystrica.

44 Originally the participants were not supposed to hold hands; they did it of their own accord.

meant to respect the formation, but not be afraid of it and under no circumstances feel coerced. Already when preparing and discussing the performance, Ďurček pointed out that the participants of *Aureola* should not hold hands so that the passer-by would not feel trapped. All forms of violence or aggressiveness were prohibited or declared to be undesirable by the artist. When the surrounded man approached the fifty-centimetre limit, Ďurček gave a signal to the participants to break the formation and disperse in all directions. The man then paused in surprise, turned around, and walked away in the opposite direction. In the second performance of *Aureola*, it was not one person but three people (a couple and a woman walking on her own) that were surrounded. As a reaction to this sudden situation, the three people started to converse with one another. The circle accompanied them to the car park where it then dispersed among the cars.

When performing the *Monument* static formation, Ďurček instructed the participants to block the street by forming a line of people holding hands. (Figs. 15) Every second person was to have a happy expression on their face, while the others were to appear angry. The group obstructed one of the busiest points in the middle of the old town. As a result, it did not take long until quite a lot of people were forced to stop. Some of them made a detour, while others tried to break through the “wall”. Since it was a static formation, the participants were not supposed to react in any way: neither moving away nor preventing people from passing by. They were only supposed to stay still like a “monument”. As the artist explains, the exact place in the pedestrian area was chosen carefully; the milk bar mentioned above was next door and it had two entrances, thus offering a way out for those who decided not to confront the “monument”. This way out was important for Ďurček as he wanted to create situations that required

people to act spontaneously but which did not convey a sense of threat. The third situation, which was dynamic, was called *Phantom*. The participants chose a woman standing alone at a tram stop in the main square and created a tumult around her. The film recordings show sudden chaos emerging out of nothing and the woman looking around in astonishment. A few seconds later, the participants walked away in different directions. Everyone who was randomly chosen to participate in the resonances was subsequently given a card with the note: "You have participated in one of the situations of the week of street activities". (Fig. 16)

Conclusion

These analyses suggest that, by excluding and not recognizing actions as art, the real socialist system fell into its own trap. The activities were carried out outside any institutional framework in everyday reality and had more subversive potential than if someone had directly and openly criticized communism in the street. Such troublemaking would have been easy to identify and condemn; the police would have intervened, arresting and imprisoning the person responsible, and thus demonstrated its power. Such behaviour would have also been condemned by the people in the street, as they would have been convinced that the person must be insane.

However, when the members of the DSIP and Ľubomír Ďurček simply set out to appeal to the sensibility of the people who had become apathetic – attempting to shake them up, galvanize them, and ultimately change their way of thinking and their views of the reality around them, prompting them to have new experiences, find their own way of negotiating reality, and be creative – then that entailed

a genuinely critical perspective on society. These actions gave birth to precisely what was considered the least desirable, namely the questioning of what is given, or in other words, the citizen's creative way of engaging with reality under real socialism.

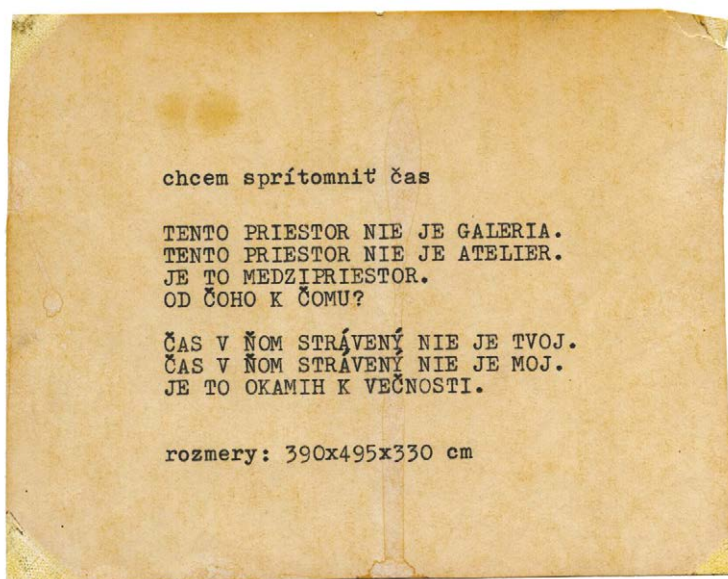
As Havel wrote: "Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves towards plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, towards the fulfilment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline. While life ever strives to create new and 'improbable' structures, the post-totalitarian system contrives to force life into its most probable states... this system serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it. Anything beyond this, that is to say, anything which leads people to overstep their predetermined roles, is regarded by the system as an attack upon itself."⁴⁵ The lack of active engagement was a direct consequence of the homogenization which resulted from the normalization process of the 1970s and which practically created an uncreative society. As P. Morganová argues, indifference became the essence of the public space in totalitarian reality.⁴⁶

The pivotal point of our discussion is arguably the double movement of separation from and identification with the crowd that Ľubomír Ďurček formulated in *Resonances*. This becomes the crucial point in a society of uncreativity. Ďurček's *Resonances* represents a conscious process performed statically or dynamically by a collective. In his draft of the performance, the artist outlines the basic criterion for integration into and separation from society or the crowd. While, on the one

45 Havel. Work cited in note 1. 30.

46 Morganová. Work cited in note 27. 193.

hand, leaving or standing out from the crowd is a free act, it is also regulated from the outside by the political power. The performative projects described represented a kind of “probing” of everyday life in the streets, aiming to remind people of certain aspects of life that were consistently obscured in real socialism. The pretence of uniformity and collectivism were the measure of the correct attitude. The art of contestation created the opportunity to break out of these and open up new critical perspectives.



1. Ľubomír Ďurček, In-Between Space, 1981–1991, Bratislava



2. The week of street theatre, Carnival (The enemy), Bratislava 1979, digitalized slide nr. 31



3. The week of street theatre, Carnival (The enemy), Bratislava 1979, digitalized slide nr. 32



4. The week of street theatre, Carnival (The official), Bratislava 1979, digitalized slide nr. 1



5. The week of street theatre, Carnival (The banner), Bratislava 1979



6. The week of street theatre, Carnival, Bratislava 1979



7. The week of street theatre, Carnival (Mime Pepo), Bratislava 1979



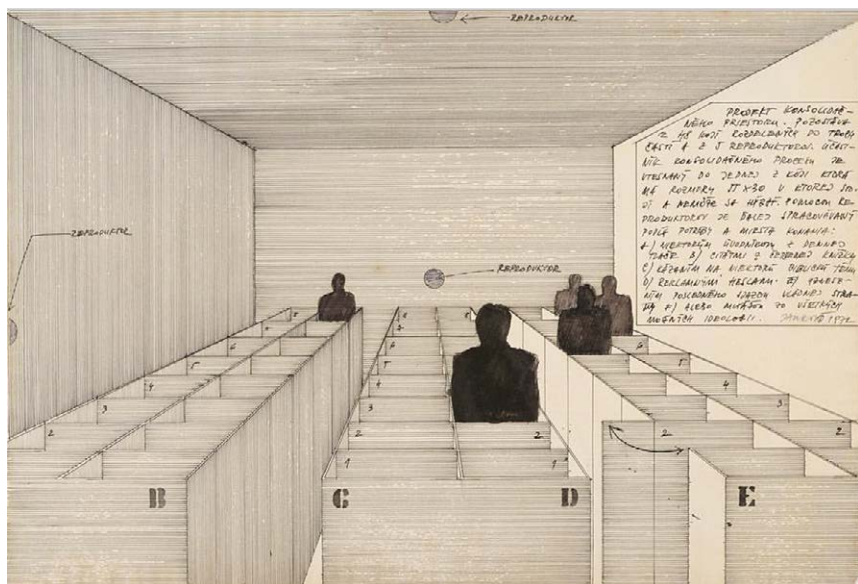
8. The week of street theatre, The Temporary Society of Intensive Experience, Small Street, Bratislava 1979



9. The week of street theatre, The Temporary Society of Intensive Experience, Small Street, Bratislava 1979



11. Ľubomír Ďurček, Please Turn Me in the Right Direction, Please, bw Xerox (21x29,7 cm), 1979



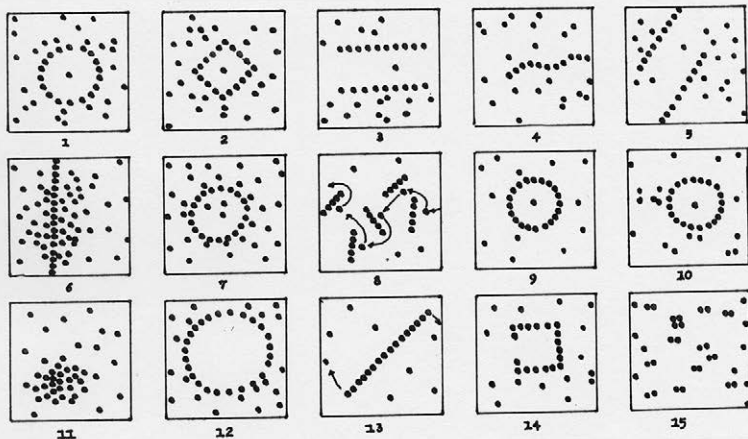
12. Jozef Jankovič, Project of Consolidating Space, 1972

R E S O N A N C E S

A group of about twenty people /not specially dressed/ will be acting on a delimited part of the city for several hours. The group will create psychological - social situations. Every situation will periodically change from one phase to another: the first phase - THE IDENTIFICATION with the mass of pedestrians
the second phase - THE SEPARATION from the mass /creating one of "the geometrical figures" means creating a concrete situation/

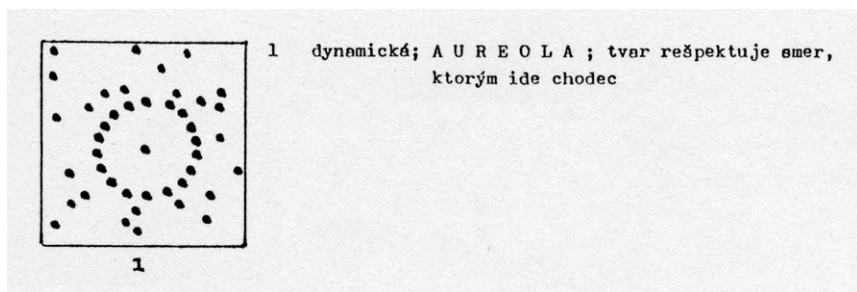
The time of creating "the geometrical figure" should be as short as possible.

Every pedestrian taking part in the creating of the situations will get a card with partial information.

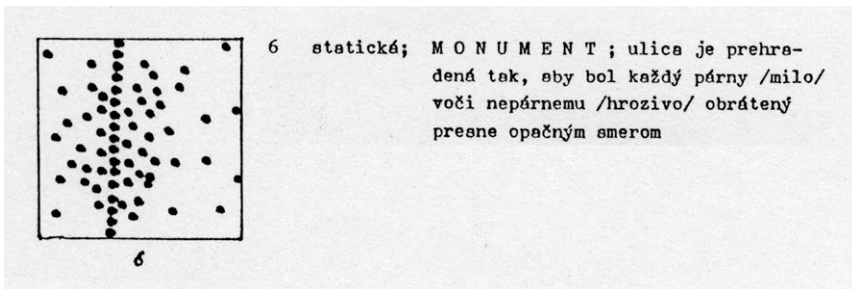


- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 dynamic; AUREOLA; the form respects the way of the pedestrian</p> <p>2 dynamic; TORCH; the form does not respect the way of the pedestrian</p> <p>3 dynamic; PASSAGE - SHELL; a/the passage is free b/the passage is closed on one side</p> <p>4 dynamic; IDOL; the pedestrian unknowingly determines the way</p> <p>5 dynamic; KNOT; a/the passage is free b/the passage is closed on both sides</p> <p>6 static; MONUMENT; the street is divided by the line of people where every even member is facing kindly on the opposite side as the odd members who are facing threateningly</p> <p>7 static; CONTINENT; several pedestrians are surrounded</p> <p>8 dynamic; DUNE; manifold crossing of the pedestrian's way</p> | <p>9 static; BASIN; a standing pedestrian is surrounded by the group</p> <p>10 static; EXILE; a standing pedestrian is surrounded by the backs of the members of the group</p> <p>11 dynamic; PHANTOM; the pedestrian tries to get off the crowd but is not successful /without violence/</p> <p>12 static; TEMPLE; the group delimitates the space facing the centre of the circle</p> <p>13 dynamic; BLIZZARD; the figure is rotating with the increasing speed</p> <p>14 static; GARDEN HOUSE; the group delimitates the space leaving the entrance free and facing the surrounding buildings</p> <p>15 dynamic; AVALANCHE; members of the group spontaneously get against the way of the pedestrians</p> |
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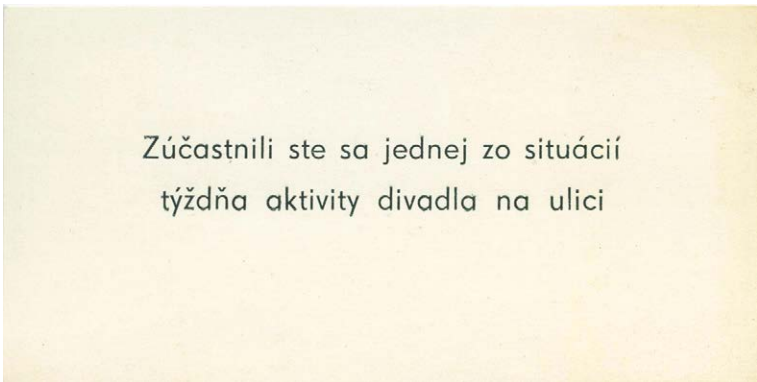
13. Ľubomír Ďurček, Resonances - Score, Bratislava 1979



14. Ľubomír Ďurček, Resonances - Aureola, Bratislava 1979



15. Eubomír Ďurček, Resonances - Monument, Bratislava 1979



16. The week of street theatre, Card, 1979



6. Outside by Being Inside: Unofficial Artistic Strategies in the 1970s and 1980s in the Former Czechoslovakia – Notes on Representations of “Islands of Positive Deviation”¹

“Whether censorship is total or non-existent, art and power are not natural enemies. Art flourishes, even within totalitarian regimes. Is more proof needed to support the official theory of freedom? Further, the change in institutions and people’s minds is irreversible. Our new culture is made up neither of forced labour nor of a cunning fight for freedom, with secret pieces of “real” art characterized by intellectual sabotage and far-sighted compliance. The institutions and the people belong to each other. True, artistic inspiration is not free from constraints, but is it free anywhere?”²

(Miklós Haraszti, 1987)

In 1958 Hannah Arendt wrote the following on the topic of the public sphere: “For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality.”³ In this chapter, I am going to investigate the question of what public space meant in the era of centralized supervision in the cultural field and social life during the former Czechoslovakia’s “normalization”. In

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- 1 Soňa Szomolányi. *Je sociálna zmena mimo nás?* (Is social transformation apart of us?). Literárny týždenník, 2, 1989, No. 11, 10.
 - 2 Miklos Haraszti. *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism*. London: I. B. Tauris. 1988, 12.
 - 3 Hannah Arendt. *The Public Realm: The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1958, 50–53.

which way did unofficial artistic interventions in public space constitute reality? Can we speak of a public space at all?

Before answering this latter question, it is important to outline the context of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies on 21 August 1968, affecting culture and causing the renewal of the dominance of the doctrine of socialist realism.⁴ According to Milan Šimečka, Czechoslovakia turned in the 1960s into a planet which had lost its trajectory and which, through the process of consolidation, had to be led back to it.⁵ The process of normalization had begun. This was considered by Šimečka as a “restoration of order” which happened by focusing all attention on centralizing the ruling principles of the Communist Party. A small circle of people (the political elite) took on the role of rulers, while ordinary members functioned purely as receivers of instructions and ideological directives, so that the centre of power could have the illusion of having a popular foundation.⁶ This centralization of power was executed through inspections directed against “enemies” of the regime to be expelled from the party. In his book of essays *Nastolení pořádku* (The Restoration of Order, 1978) Šimečka analysed the mechanisms of inspection on all levels of society with a special focus on the exclusion of certain types of people: those who were active, had a conceptual way of thinking, and were able to think independently.⁷ By restoring order, the ruling party of real existing socialism became an avant-garde of mediocrity, obedience, and fear.⁸

4 See also p. 128.

5 Milan Šimečka. *Nastolení pořádku* (The restoration of order). London: Edice Rozmluvy. 1984, 7.

6 Ibid. 34.

7 Ibid. 39.

8 Ibid. 42.

Václav Havel reflects on this situation in his essay *Průběh a totalita* (Story and totality, 1987) when describing the first half of the 1970s in Czechoslovakia as the age when “history stopped” because the “story was destroyed”, meaning there was a logical interruption in a storyline, the lack of the plurality of truth, and the betrayal of existing attitudes, ideas, and traditions. Havel argued that the basic pillar of the totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia was the existence of one central monopolist subject which includes every truth and power and naturally becomes the only subject of social events. Havel states that in such a social system everything is calculable: “... the property of the complex truth means that we know everything in advance. And when you know everything in advance, no story can emerge.”⁹ This predictability and uniformity had demobilized citizens’ engagement, causing mass apathy. After visiting Czechoslovakia in 1983, Timothy Garton Ash wrote “Czechoslovakia nowadays could be compared to a lake which is permanently covered by a strong layer of ice. On the surface nothing moves. But under the ice among philosopher-workers, journalist-window cleaners, and members of order-night watchmen, everything is in motion.”¹⁰ The paradox of a still surface and an “underground” in motion turns our attention towards the complexity of public spheres as well as to how political circumstances shaped the cultural field. For the present essay,

9 http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky & val=77_clanky.html & typ=HTML (3 November 2015). Havel argues that the base of each story is an event, which means the intervention of one “logic” in the world of another logic. This process leads to the foundation of how each story develops: to a situation, relationships, and conflict. A story has its own logic; particularly a logic of dialogue and confrontation and the influence of different kinds of truth, attitudes, ideas, and traditions. Put simply, it is a logic of autonomous powers which do not determine themselves in advance. Havel argues an elementary precondition of a story is therefore the plurality of truth, logic, and acting.

10 Timothy Garton Ash. *Existuje Střední Evropa?* (Does Central Europe exist?). In: *Středoevropan volbou*, Prague: I.S.E. 1992, 59.

the most important aspect is the question of what consequences these two aspects had for the artistic freedom of utterance in the “second public sphere”.¹¹

As a result of political and cultural constraints, an unofficial art scene emerged “under the surface” in the 1970s. The common denominator of unofficial activities was a deviation from the mainstream of socialist realism,¹² whereupon social normalization and consolidation was equal to establishing political (post-)totalitarianism.¹³ But what was it which had to become normal again? The political repression of art rejecting the ideas of socialist realism turned out to be impossible, especially after the liberalization of the 1960s, as it would inevitably have caused resistance among certain circles of artists who did not comply with the changes and transgressed the boundaries violently and artificially. The ascendant culture with the doctrine of socialist realism appeared to be fully absurd. As Miroslav Kusý argues, the process of normalization had no future, which was something obvious to both the representatives of power and the powerless (e.g., within the “Chartist movement”¹⁴).¹⁵ Both non-conformism in relation to the ruling ideology of totalitarian socialism and the functional mechanisms of official state-sponsored art were highly problematic as they generated resistance even among artists who were not so popular or were even official. All of socialist society became schizophren-

11 For the term “second public sphere”, see *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere. Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe*, Katalin Cseh-Varga, Adam Czirak (eds.). London: Routledge. 2018, 4–14.

12 Zora Rusinová. *Solidarity Born of Despair: Action Art in Slovakia During the Totalitarian Regime, 1970 – 1989*. Centropa, Vol. 14. No. 1. 2014, 100.

13 See also p. 26.

14 Kusý is referring here to the Charta 77 (Charter 77) movement – an informal civic initiative fighting for human rights in communist Czechoslovakia from 1976 to 1992; it was named after the Charter 77 document from January 1977.

15 Miroslav Kusý. *Chartism and “Real Socialism”*. In: Václav Havel et al. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. New York: Palach Press. 1985, 152.

ic.¹⁶ The “as if-ideology”,¹⁷ a term used by Kusý when describing social conditions, created a parallel and alternative existence of an “as if-loyalty”, which resulted in a situation where only a few people really identified themselves with the ideals of socialist realism.

The consequence of the cultural shift in the former Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1970s was that many alternative artists were excluded from the Association of Slovak Visual Artists and gained their unofficial status unwillingly. Some of them retained their membership in the association but kept their alternative activities in secret, living the schizophrenic life as described by Kusý. The unofficial activities took place either in privacy (studios, homes, and the countryside), meaning outside of the cultural apparatus’s view, or at some alternative platforms within the system. The limited popularity of such places, their gallery-like character, and their position on the margins of the official cultural field or beyond spaces defined by artistic institutions set the framework for several unofficial artists exhibiting semi-officially during that decade. The underground could appear above the ground because of ruptures in the system making their existence possible.¹⁸

I attempt to analyse three performative strategies of confrontation in public spaces. In order to understand their essence, it is important to link them to the phenomena of ritual and panorama. These terms are extracted from Havel’s famous essay “The Power of the Powerless”. In this paper, Havel referred to the idea of “parallel structures” (in line with Václav Benda’s “parallel polis”¹⁹) and the “second cul-

16 Ibid. 158.

17 Ibid. 163.

18 See Zuzana Bartošová, *Napriek totalite* (Despite totality). Bratislava: Kalligram. 2011. See also this statement by Ján Budaj: “As was later characterized by the institutions which were involved in the investigation of 3SD, there was a ‘hole’ in the organizational structure of the club activities. This means that somehow there existed some space for an informal initiative – a space without total control.”

19 Václav Benda. *Paralelní polis*. 1978 (samizdat).

ture” by Ivan Jirous. Culture, as Havel argued, is a field in which it is possible to find parallel structures at their highest level of development.²⁰ To him they represent the most articulated level of “living in truth”.²¹ Havel explains the phenomenon of ritual and panorama by telling the story of the greengrocer who hung out the slogan “Workers of the world, unite!” in his shop window.²² This slogan is a symbol for an opinion the greengrocer did not truly identify with. He only put it in the window of his shop to demonstrate his silent acceptance of the ruling regime.²³ Ideology functioned, in this case, as a main instrument of ritualized communication within the authoritarian system.²⁴ The slogan captures what Havel calls the “panorama of everyday life”; it is not only the greengrocer who takes the slogan to be an empty decoration. Passers-by who are also looking at the window may not have any in-depth thoughts about the slogan’s true meaning. It is even possible that they overlook it entirely.²⁵

The spheres of official and unofficial culture in 1970s Czechoslovakia were overlapping. Havel says that no matter how developed a lifestyle within the parallel structures is and whether it is the ripest stadium of the “parallel polis”, in the post-totalitarian condition they only *co-exist* with the official (first) public sphere. When considering public space,

20 Václav Havel. *Versuch, in der Wahrheit zu leben. Von der Macht der Ohnmächtigen* (An attempt to live in truth: from the power of the powerless). Hamburg: Rowohlt. 1980, 71.

21 Havel’s term “living in truth“ means an individual living in the post-totalitarian state without hiding what they really believe or desire. In communist Czechoslovakia, an individual had to live a lie. For Havel, “living in truth” is the best way to resist the oppressions of the regime. The power of the state functions only as long as people are willing to submit it. By “living in truth”, Havel sees the potential to overcome the ruling post-totalitarian system in creating an independent social life.

22 Václav Havel et al. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. New York: Palach Press. 1985. 27–29.

23 Ibid. 31.

24 Cf. Ibid. 31. “It begins (ideology, A. B.) to function as the principal instrument of ritual communication *within* the system of power.”

25 Ibid. 35.

the important point is that this space is publicly accessible and in particular that within it a certain social order is being constituted that represents a specific system of functioning. In our case, this is the order of the late socialist state. When talking about public space, I refer to the area which was considered by society as an “as-if-public” area. This emerged through self-censorship in public life, meaning that citizens acted as if they were free while knowing what kind of behaviour was expected of them. The real public, as a discursive field of free dialogue defined by Jürgen Habermas, was non-existent.

Unofficial and alternative artists positioned their activities often directly in socialist everyday life, although their participation frequently remained either invisible or not obviously “deviant”. Artists interacted with traditional, accustomed social practices and daily situations; they actively shaped Havel’s “panorama of everyday life” by using its surroundings as a backdrop and platform or springboard to realize their individual activities.²⁶ Through their ideas and projects, they interrogated the prevailing social structures, ruling conventions, standards, and codes of the dominant public sphere.

Out of this the following questions arise: What kind of public spaces were used by unofficial artists for their activities? Which strategies and tactics did they apply to behave “a-normally” within the process of “normalization”? How did unofficial activities relate to the surrounding space and the prevailing social and political order? In the following, I will focus on the performances of Slovak unofficial artists who confronted the surrounding reality by (1) maintaining, (2) partially disturbing, and (3) disrupting the prescribed ritual and the panorama.

26 “It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it.” Henri Lefebvre. *Clearing the Ground*. In: *The Everyday*. S. Johnstone (ed.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2008, 26–33.

These three categories should not suggest a strict differentiation between the categories of the private and public but should help us understand the relationship between official and unofficial scenes; they should primarily allow us to grasp the status of unofficial activity in an official context and a pseudo-public space.

Affirmative practices: maintaining the prescribed ritual and the panorama

The strategies I will describe in this chapter consist of mimicry creation, camouflage, and situations open to ambiguous interpretation. The most important aspect is the overlapping of one space, activity, and process with multiple possible layers of meaning. Michel de Certeau argued that our everyday actions can multiply space and add meaning to them.²⁷ How can one capture artistic strategies in the first public sphere that are seemingly identical with expected actions but are simultaneously confronting the ruling system? As Inka Arns and Sylvia Sasse stated, since the early 1970s affirmative elements have been present in all areas of unofficial art in the former Eastern Bloc. These strategies, initially emerging out of necessity, were later chosen deliberately, leading to a special “art of critique” and what could be called a subversive affirmation: “Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social or economic discourses and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them.”²⁸

27 Michel de Certeau. “Spaces” and “Places”: *L'invention du quotidien*. In: *Situation*. Claire Doherty (ed.). London: Whitechapel Art Gallery. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2009, 120.

28 Inka Arns and Sylvia Sasse. *Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance*. In: Irwin (ed.). *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*. London: Afterall Books. 2006, 444–455. I. Arns and S. Sasse describe the term in the context of Moscow conceptualism and particularly the texts of Vladimir Sorokin.

We could theoretically identify the maintenance of the prescribed ritual/panorama with the phenomenon of subversive affirmation. The ideal manifestations of active participation in creating ritual and panorama were state holidays and ceremonies. As Kusý argues, in real existing socialism nobody relied on spontaneous expressions of socialist consciousness, because they were generated by tight monitoring and heavy legal sanctions.²⁹ As primary expressions of citizens' political engagement, holidays and ceremonies were the testing ground of their conviction and loyalty. In a society ruled by ideology and controlled by the state apparatus, the 1 May parade was seen as *the* major possibility for a mass demonstration of common values, shared ideals, and a happy life in the socialist state.³⁰ Belonging to the Communist Party should be shown publicly as should the consensus of the nation in expressing its collective homage to the representatives of political power sitting on the tribune. Against this historical background, it was not a surprise that these kinds of mass activities opened the stage for artists and their subversive interventions in public space.

In 1980 Vladimír Kordoš gave his *Jánošík* performance by participating in the 1 May parade as an incarnation of Juraj Jánošík (a Slovak national hero of the 18th century). Photographs of the performance (Fig. 1) show the artist in traditional costume with a hat and a shepherd's axe (*valaška*) in interaction with other (mostly unknown) participants in the parade. The people are singing, drinking, and taking photos with the "Jánošík" attraction, posing in front of a bank and tribune full of banners containing the famous communist slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" Kordoš's participation in the parade appears to be ironic, because he embodies a historical person known to the masses while simul-

29 Kusý. Work cited in note 15. 12.

30 See also Chapter 2.

taneously being an alienating element in the crowd who was subverting the official occasion for his own ludic purposes.

A different strategy of subverting the 1 May parade was Lubomír Ďurček's project *Mechanické pohľady 1. máj 1980* (Mechanical views – 1 May 1980) (Figs. 2–6). As art historian Richard Gregor writes, this project addressed marginalities, hidden issues of everyday life, and things that cannot be captured in any statistics.³¹ Ďurček participated in the parade “as if” he was like every other citizen, but he fixed a camera to his hand and walked for an hour through the crowd taking random photos at regular intervals. The collection of 28 images is completely free of any directed gaze; they are instead “directed” by the movement of a human arm. The scale of the views ranges from photos of legs and of asphalt shot from a “child-position” to images of an old wall. The photos of the project were mixed after production and presented as a slide show. Ďurček broke with the logic of a regulated demonstration by using it as a platform for an impersonal mechanical act of creation; he contrasted the dynamics of controlled behaviour with uncontrolled creative production.

Partially disturbing the prescribed ritual and panorama

A rash of other performative practices partially disturbed the prescribed ritual and the panorama of everyday life through being ambiguous and affirming the mechanisms of the state apparatus by overstepping it in many ways. This included the creation of extraordinary events, experiences, and situations under the cover of official, institutionalized activities. Compared to the mentioned maintenance of the

31 Richard Gregor. *Ten kto zostal v meste* (The one who stayed in the city). Jazdec 2, 2014, 3.

panorama, these actions were significant through a specific surplus of activities, forms of expression, and their appearance.

Evína svadba (Eva's wedding) (Figs. 16 - 28 in Chapter 2), organized by Alex Mlynářčík in September 1972 in Žilina, is one of the most spectacular happenings in the country. It was built around a real wedding with hundreds of participants which was turned by Mlynářčík into an artistic action. After the wedding in the town hall, there was a procession through the streets of the city centre which included stops for the performance of Old Slavic folkloristic customs and rituals. This allowed many passers-by to also participate in the happening by chance.³² The last stop of the whole cavalcade was a restaurant situated outside of the city where the celebration went on.³³

Paradoxically, despite the prevailing censorship, the whole happening was authorized after Mlynářčík had asked for different permissions at the town hall in advance of the celebration. The artist had to ensure that the procession would follow traffic rules and that no interruption or misuse occurred beyond Mlynářčík's planned procedure. Police officers accompanied the whole celebrating mass and made sure only invited guests could attend the ceremony itself. Ironically, police officers functioned as assistants of the happening who ensured its course of action. The representatives of the socialist state took on the double role of constitutive participants and potential harassers.

A similar tactic was adapted by Ľubomír Ďurček in his *Návštevník [Päť návštev]* (Visitor [Five visits] 1980, Fig. 7) performance that took place in Bratislava. The artist rang the doorbells of his friends and stayed

32 Andrea Euringer-Bátorová. *Celebration, Festival, and Holiday in Former Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and in the 1970s as Art Forms for Alternative and Non-Official Art*. Centropa. Vol. 1. 2012, 81–86.

33 An interesting thing was that art theorists like Pierre Restany and Jindřich Chalupecký participated in the happening as well. Also see Chapter 2.

for about twenty seconds in front of the door with his mouth open saying nothing. In his mouth, he had scrunched up a piece of paper with the word *pravda* (truth) written on it.³⁴ Sensitively criticizing the fact that *Pravda* was the leading newspaper of the Communist Party with highly ideological content, he pointed out the relativity of everyday propaganda. In his analysis of the socialist state, Jozef Vohryzek indicated a total vacuum of civic will, a *perpetuum silentium*, passivity, and quiescence; the silence stood for “a quiet agreement – one of the pillars of totalitarian power”³⁵ that secured the smooth existence of social resignation. In this sense, the dimension of articulating the relativity of truth with mentioned connotations appears to be important in Ďurček’s performance alongside the fact that he remained silent during the action. The materialization of a “quiet agreement” with the enforced opinion was put into the mouth of someone who was completely silent, because we should remember that any citizen who opened their mouth to talk had to adjust their speech to the “truth” of the Party.³⁶ Another interesting fact is that the artist intentionally did not enter the homes of the people, meaning he performed the event in a semi-public space, just on the border to the private sphere, where he could (perhaps) act or talk more freely.³⁷

Disrupting the prescribed ritual and panorama

The third group of artistic interventions in the public space were activities which obviously and directly confronted common reality through inserting unusual situations immediately into the heart of so-

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- 34 Míra Keratová. *Situational Models of Communication*. In: Ľubomír Ďurček. Bratislava: SNG. 2013, 51.
35 Jozef Vohryzek. *Thoughts inside a Tightly-Corked Bottle*. In: Václav Havel et al. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. New York: Palach Press. 1985, 200.
36 Ďurček also reflected the topic of “truth” in other projects, such as in “The Writing of Truth (Počúvadlo Event)” in 1984, where he wrote the word “truth” on the water of the lake.
37 Zuzana Bartošová. *Napriek totalite* (Despite totality). Bratislava: Kalligram. 2011, 214.

ciety masked as street events in the centre of Bratislava. The confrontation was direct, obvious, open, intentionally “different”, atypical, attacking, and therefore dangerous to the totalitarian regime. Young people like the members of the *Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania – DSIP* (Temporary society of intensive experience – DSIP) did not aim to act like harassers, but, as Ján Budaj argues, they also did not want to live with compromises and wished to experience individual freedom.³⁸ Their attitude had the roots in the desire for intellectual autonomy as described by the writer and journalist Miklós Haraszti: “They seem to be heretics against the new consensus; however, their place is defined less by their political ideals than by their refusal to relinquish their intellectual autonomy. (...) This attitude automatically excludes them from the new culture and is the negation of the ethos that informs and sustains state socialism.”³⁹ The positioning of this kind of activity was clearly beyond the regime’s limits of acceptance. Miroslav Kusý points to the same direction when stating that “anyone who is atypical, and yet exists, is an ‘evil’ reality and has no place in real socialism. Anyone who is not a socialist man, therefore, can only be a residue of the past, an agent of imperialism, a dissident. In any case, he or she is a foreign element.”⁴⁰

The DSIP was a group of young people who were not satisfied with life in a socialist state and turned therefore into “foreign elements”.

38 Ján Budaj. *35D*. Catalogue. Samizdat. [no date], n.p.

39 Haraszti. Work cited in note 1. 10. “Naturally, under totalitarian socialism, as in any ascendant culture, anachronistic characters can be found. They rebel against prevalent values, or they look for a nook in the institutional shadows where they can indulge their ideals. Only when the state criticizes or punishes them do they achieve a certain fame. But even that recognition cannot be seized; it is only awarded. Publicity given to resistance is usually decided by those in power for pedagogical purposes. If we get to know these people, it is not because our controlled culture is too weak to digest them thoroughly. They can be born, survive, and be known to us because there are two civilizations – one of the West and one of the East.”

40 Kusý. Work cited in note 15. 158.

They created actions, events, and situations to be experienced “authentically” that would lead to an individual transformation. Their programme recalled the *Manifesto of the Situationist International*: “Moments constructed into ‘situations’ might be thought of as moments of rupture, of acceleration, revolutions in individual everyday life.”⁴¹ The DSIP created several interventions in which passers-by were confronted with unusual situations. An example of their significant projects was building a living barrier in one of the narrow streets in Bratislava’s Old Town during *The Week of Street Theatre* (1979).⁴² The participants belonging to the Labyrinth, Faust, Pegasník, and Pomimo theatre companies lay down on the pavement and blocked the way of passers-by so that they were forced to interact in this unusual situation with the “actors”. According to Tomáš Štraus, the purpose of the activities of the DSIP was not to present a ready-made art piece produced in the past but rather the evocation of a new quality.⁴³ The intention of the DSIP was to reveal the citizens’ routine and accustomed manners through acting directly in the public space, getting the attention of passers-by randomly and on the level of everyday life.

In December 1979, the citizens of the Kútiky housing estate in Bratislava witnessed the following scene: a group of young people sat down around a small table in front of one of the buildings, ate lunch, and invited passers-by to join in and enjoy their meal. Ján Budaj, one of the initiators, described the action, entitled *Obed II. (Lunch II)* (Fig. 8) as follows: “On a small place surrounded by buildings a ‘Sunday

41 Situationist International (unsigned). “The Theory of Moments and Construction of Situations”, *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 4 (Paris, June 1960), 10–11. In: Claire Doherty (ed.), *Situation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2009, 114. “Moments constructed into ‘situations’ might be thought of as moments of rupture, of acceleration, revolutions in individual everyday life.”

42 Also see Chapter 5.

43 Tomáš Štraus. *Slovenskej variant modernity* (The Slovak variation of modernity). Bratislava: Pallas. 1992, 120. See also p. 145.

lunch' took place. The same situation happening simultaneously in all the flats around us became the topic of a performance in the street. Viewers could look at it from their windows or balconies during, before, and after their own lunch. An electric amplifier broadcast sounds that were familiar to them: the jingle of the cutlery, the serving of the soup, common conversations. The microphones also transmitted a Sunday radio programme which was broadcast from a radio placed near the table and which could be heard simultaneously from many windows and open balcony doors".⁴⁴

Lunch II represented a typical strategy of intervening in public space by the DSIP whereby they would create a certain situation out of an ordinary activity while breaking convention by adapting it with a slight difference. Placing the privacy of the family lunch in front of the building, and directly into the focus of the public, generated an unconventional moment. This was an unusual situation for both viewers and participants and functioned as a starting point for a dialogue between observers and participants. In a socialist state, any unconventional activity and any free expression was automatically suspicious. In this context, an ordinary lunch relocated to public space could acquire a political dimension.

This action was the continuation of a similar event, *Obed I.* (Lunch I), which took place a year earlier in November 1978. The DSIP transferred it directly to the street in one of Bratislava's central spots. In contrast to the second lunch event, the first one worked with the moment of anonymity: passers-by were not neighbours but nameless citizens. One of the main differences between these two events was in how participants interacted in and with space. In *Lunch I* they placed the table on the street without any physical demarcation, whereas in

44 Ján Budaj. *3SD*. Catalogue. Samizdat. 1981, n.p.

Lunch II they rolled paper around the place and visually separated the “scene” of the event from the rest of the environment and generated a stage situation. However, the events both broke with classical rules and the limits of the (first) public sphere. This happened by occupying this area through an estranging activity that appropriated and privatized the public space.

Conclusion

In the present study, I described and analysed different artist strategies that confronted state socialism’s social reality by creatively seeking a position of being both outside and inside Czechoslovak society. As far as the questions about public spheres and public space posed at the beginning of the essay are concerned, it is important to mention that the meaning of these phenomena transform in relation to the political regime and its social practices. It is highly relevant to point out that in former Czechoslovakia, along with other socialist countries, there was no public space in the sense of Jürgen Habermas’s or Bruce Ackerman’s⁴⁵ definitions, which belong to Western capitalism’s liberal tradition.⁴⁶ Therefore, we have to be aware of the fact that in the era of Czechoslovakia’s normalization, there was no existence of the public as a sphere of discourse and free dialogue. For this reason, it would make more sense to talk about *pseudo-publics* in this particular context. In my understanding, pseudo-publics refer to the non-existent space for free decisions and actions in communist rhetoric. Officially

45 Seyla Benhabib. *Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas*. In: *Habermas and the Public Space*. Craig Calhoun (ed.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1992, 73–98.

46 Peter Uwe Hohendahl. *The Public Space: Models and Boundaries*. In: *Habermas and the Public Space*, Craig Calhoun (ed.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1992, 105.

there was a public sphere, but practically there was none. Real publicness as a space of freedom existed more or less invisibly. It was invisible in small circles' privacy of common-minded friends and visible in acting in the terrain of a pseudo-public as performative strategies reaching from unremarkable actions to subversive and indirect confrontation with the system.

The Communist Party in Czechoslovakia wanted to be considered democratic from the outside, and official rhetoric emphasized this appearance. At the same time, there were less obvious directives about which social and cultural behaviour the authorities expected from the people. Establishing soft power mechanisms on how to influence people without direct orders and prohibitions led to fear and self-censorship.⁴⁷ The space of the pseudo-public was constructed by a formal order expressed through an extensive system of visible political slogans, and people in real existing socialism knew how to "read" them.⁴⁸ In essence, what Šimečka describes can be seen as an equivalent to Havel's panorama of everyday life.

Non-official art activities emerged and unfolded in an "alternative public sphere" which existed practically within and parallel to the system of late socialism, sometimes even occupying official venues. Such art popped up also in private houses of a closed circle of people meeting regularly for readings and discussions. The visibility of these activities was dependent on the form of presentation and was relational to dimension of confrontation with the prevailing system. The parallel polis had the potential to

47 Milan Šimečka. Work cited in note 5. 93. There were plenty of instruments to influence the behaviour of people, including not letting their children study at university or paying them a smaller salary.

48 Ibid. 16.

undermine totalitarianism. The performative projects discussed herein had one thing in common as they appeared and disappeared out of the parallel polis. In Havel's analysis on parallel structures, he argues that those who decided to "live in truth" began to create the "independent life of society" and structure and stretch this "second" life. Its agents created elementary organizations such as samizdat editions and magazines, private theatre performances, and concerts.⁴⁹ Havel's assumption was, however, that this second life would also need a kind of institutionalism resulting in the rise of a parallel political life, potentially leading to the end of the post-totalitarian monopoly.⁵⁰

Timothy Garton Ash argues that the history of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1970s can be characterized as the history of the fight for a civic society.⁵¹ In his essay *Does Central Europe Exist?* he analysed the writings of Václav Havel, György Konrád, and Adam Michnik. Ash pointed out that all three authors express that moral changes could influence politics, meaning that consciousness determines being and that the key to the future does not lie in external conditions but rather in the internal conditions of an individual. Staying outside of state and party structures, people who "live in truth" could unite by constituting a "society of citizens" (*občanská společnost*). The aim is not the reformation of the state but rather the reconstruction and enlivening of society and culture through citizens' independent activities beyond official structures. Havel, Konrád, and Michnik optimistically believed that if this strategy was successful, the party and state would be forced to adapt to these new circumstances.⁵²

49 Havel. Work cited in note 15. 70.

50 Ibid. 71.

51 Ash. Work cited in note 10. 18.

52 Ibid. Ash reminds us as well of the fact that a dissident acts like a "thinking root" and that his at-

In this sense, the parallel culture of Czechoslovakia was similar to the understanding of public space in the Arendtian sense as an “as-sociational space” that emerges whenever and wherever people “act in concert”.⁵³ This model of public space is the one “where freedom can appear”. As political scientist Seyla Benhabib argued, it is neither a topographical nor an institutional space: “But a private dining room in which people gather to hear a *samizdat* or in which dissidents meet with foreigners become public spaces; just as a field or a forest can also become public spaces if it is the object and location of an action in concert... These diverse topographical locations become public spaces in that they become the sites of power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion”.⁵⁴ The parallel polis had a dynamic character and was moving from one geopolitical place to another. The case studies presented herein were sites of the parallel polis and articulations of portable “islands of positive deviation” appearing and disappearing real existing socialism’s sea of social and cultural life.

tempt to live in truth is worthwhile on its own, regardless of the fact of whether it has any effect on the social or political sphere.

53 Benhabib. Work cited in note 45. 78.

54 Ibid.



1. Vladimír Kordoš,
Jánošík, 1 May 1980,
Bratislava



2. Lubomír Ďurček,
Mechanical Views. 1 May
1980, Bratislava, digitalized
slide nr. 0



3. Lubomír Ďurček, Mechanical Views. 1 May 1980, Bratislava, digitalized slide nr. 2



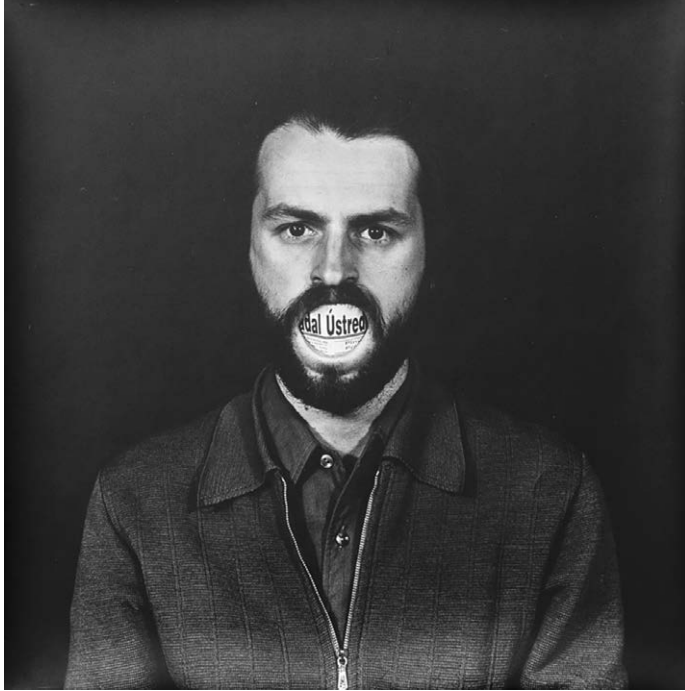
4. Lubomír Ďurček, Mechanical Views. 1 May 1980, Bratislava, digitalized slide nr. 4



5. Lubomír Ďurček, Mechanical Views. 1
May 1980, Bratislava, digitalized slide nr. 23



6. Lubomír Ďurček, Mechanical Views. 1
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7. Ľubomír Ďurček, Visitor (Five Visits), Bratislava 1980



8. The Temporary Society of Intensive Experience, Lunch II, Bratislava 1979

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“Please Turn Me in the Right Direction, Please”.

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