

Creativity Exercises, Fantasy Developing Exercises (FAFEJ) and Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking (InDiGo). Miklós Erdély's art pedagogical activity, 1975–1986  
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Miklós Erdély (1928-1986), architect, artist, writer, poet, theorist, filmmaker, was an important catalyst on the unofficial Hungarian art scene during the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Hailed as “the father of the new Hungarian avantgarde”, Erdély was a charismatic personality, always provocative and often irritating, especially to the authorities.<sup>1</sup> From 1975 until his death he ran three conceptionally and methodically related courses in art – *Creativity Exercises, Fantasy Developing Exercises* (FAFEJ) and *Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking* (Indigo) – which were conceived as experimental teaching studios or workshops drawing on avantgarde artistic processes, new theories of creativity, educational methods influenced by Eastern philosophical traditions and many other sources. The Indigo Group grew out of

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\* Published as summary in: *Kreativitási gyakorlatok, FAFEJ, INDIGO. Erdély Miklós művészetpedagógiai tevékenysége 1975–1986*. Compiled by Sándor Hornyik and Annamária Szőke. Edited by Annamária Szőke. MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet [Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] – Gondolat Kiadó [Gondolat Publishing House] – 2B Alapítvány [2B Foundation] – Erdély Miklós Alapítvány [Miklós Erdély Foundation], Budapest, 2008. pp. 497–523. Translated by Ágnes Csonka, using the earlier translations of Dániel Bíró and Györgyi Zala.

<sup>1</sup> On Miklós Erdély in foreign languages: Beke, László: Miklós Erdély's Activities. A chrono-logical sketch with pictures up to 1985.; Peternák Miklós: Where shall I start?; Szőke Annamária: On the Painting of Miklós Erdély. In *Erdély Miklós kiállítása. Katalógus*. [Exhibition of Miklós Erdély. Catalogue]. Óbuda Galéria [Óbuda Gallery], Budapest, 1986, pp. 2–38.; Hoberman, J.: Welcome to My Nightmare. Dream Reconstructions. Millennium, January 31. *The Village Voice*, February 4, 1986, p. 60.; Strauss, Thomas: Unerfüllter Traum von der Gemeinschaft. Erdély Miklós und die verlorene Avantgarde Ungarns. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 130, 9. Juni 1986, p. 28.; Beke, László: Film on Moebius Strip. On Miklós Erdély's Activities. In *Free Worlds: Metaphors and Realities in Contemporary Hungarian Art*. Exhibition and Catalogue: Roald Nasgaard, Clara Hargittay. Art Gallery of Ontario / Musée des Beaux-Arts de l'Ontario, Toronto, 1991, pp. 59–68.; Perneckzy, Géza: Miklós Erdély and His Work: Deconstructive Tautology. In *Erdély Miklós (1928–1986)*. Exhibition Catalogue. Az István Király Múzeum Közleményei [Bulletin of the King Stephen Museum], Serie D., No. 207, Székesfehérvár, 1991, pp. 5–24.; Beke, László: Die Alternative in der ost- und mitteleuropäischen Kunst der sechziger und siebziger Jahre. Ungarische Beispiele: Miklós Erdély und Tibor Hajas. In *DAgegen. Verbotene Ostkunst 1948–1989*. Eine Ausstellung des Ostfonds des Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und Kunst, Wien, 1991, pp. 97–102, 154.; McCagg, William: The Non-Jewish Jew in Modern Hungary: Bourgeois Radicals. Atom Scientists. Miklós Erdély. In *A Measure of the Jewish Response to Magyar Anti-Semitism. Paper to be read at the colloquium Hungarian-Jewish coexistence 1848–1991*. Batthyány Társaság [Batthyány Society], Budapest, 12-13. October 1991.; Miklós Erdély Filme. Protagonist des Avantgarde. In *Grenzenlos. Kulturelle Begegnung: Budapest-Berlin*. September 1991–März 1992.; Beke, László: Das Lebenswerk Miklós Erdély's / Miklós Erdély – a Life's Work.; Hegyi, Lóránd: Gesamtkunswerk zwischen dadaistischem Erbe und poetisierter Geschichte / The Total Art Work between Dadaistic Legacy and Poeticized History. In *GedächtnisRaume. Hommage für Miklós Erdély. Filme, Installationen, Performances, Vorträge*. Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 1992, pp. 10–20.; Babarczy, Eszter: Border Crossing. Miklós Erdély (an attempt at interpretation). *Új Művészet* [New Art], No. 4. 1992, pp. 12-14. and 74-75.; Szőke, Annamária: Miklós Erdély: „Snows of Yesteryear”, 1970. In *See You Again! Marcel Duchamp's Influence in Hungary*. Budapest Galéria [Budapest Gallery], Budapest, 1996–2000, pp. 57-58.; Szőke, Annamária: Erdély, Miklós. In *The Dictionary of Art*. Ed. by Jane Turne. Vol. 10., Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1996, sub voce; Szőke, Annamária: „Die Gegenwart der Zukunft: ein Rätsel”. Wissenschaft innerhalb der Kunst im Werk von Miklós Erdély. *Acta Historiae Artium*, Tomus 39, 1997, pp. 197–221., a shorter version of the text in *Jenseits von Kunst*. Hrsg. von Peter Weibel. Passagen Verlag, Wien, 1997, pp. 609-613.; Peternák, Miklós: Interdisziplinarität und neue Medien in der ungarischen Kunst der vergangenen drei Jahrzehnte, oder: Auf wen hatte Miklós Erdély Einfluss und auf wen nicht? In *Die zweite Öffentlichkeit. Kunst in Ungarn im 20. Jahrhundert*. Hrsg. von Hans Knoll. Verlag der Kunst, Dresden, 1999, pp. 234-255.; Tranberg, Dan: Budapest Rising. Part One: The emergence of experimental art in Hungary. *angle. A Journal of Arts + Culture*. Vol. 1. No. 11. Jan./Febr. 2004, pp. 14–15.; and see the next note, too.

the third course, “which also meant a personal solution for Erdély to create and maintain an intellectual discourse”<sup>2</sup> with young artists, who were interested in questions concerning the functions and possibilities of art and considered these inseparable from creative thinking in society and life alike.

Through his art pedagogical activity, Miklós Erdély exerted a significant influence on several generations of artists as well as on those who eventually did not dedicate themselves to art.<sup>3</sup> In our publication we attempt to present Erdély’s activity, which he conducted parallel to his independent creative work but which is inseparable from that in several respects by publishing all the available sources and documents. The interest in Miklós Erdély’s art pedagogical activity grew intense in the 1990s in the wake of the exhibitions and research presenting his oeuvre. In order to catalogue his oeuvre, to preserve his estate and to make it accessible to the public, members of his family established the Miklós Erdély Foundation in 1992, which provided a formal framework for the work of the art historians managing the estate after the death of the artist. The 1992 Erdély exhibition at the István Király Museum in Székesfehérvár and at the Csók István Gallery, the “Year of Miklós Erdély” organized at the Artpool Art Research Center ([www.artpool.hu](http://www.artpool.hu)) in 1994, the exhibition entitled *The Hungarian Art of the Eighties (A 80-as évek)* at the Ernst Museum in Budapest in the same year, and the 1998 Miklós Erdély retrospective at the Műcsarnok in Budapest all provided occasions for interviews about Erdély’s courses and for collecting data and documents. The 1998 exhibition was organized by the managers of the estate, László Beke, Miklós Peternák and Annamária Szőke, and presented Erdély’s art pedagogical activity for the first time in a separate room. Sándor Hornyik

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<sup>2</sup> Sugár, János: Miklós Erdély. In *East Art Map. Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*. Edited by IRWIN. Published by Afterall–Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design–University of the Arts London, Distribution by The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> The names of some of the participants of the courses may sound familiar to foreign readers as well, but we do not wish to provide a “selection” for foreigners or some kind of a “V.I.P. list”, so we merely list the names of all the people who, to our knowledge, have appeared at the courses: László Algol • Erzsébet Ambrus • Tamás Ascher • Ádám Bálint • László Beke • Rozi Békés • Viktor Benkő • Péter Berényi • Zsuzsa Berényi • Ákos Birkás • Dániel Bíró • Bálint Bori • András Böröcz • Andrea Bősze • Mária Czákó • Tibor Csikós • Rita Dés • Gábor Dobos • Barnabás Dukai • György Durszt • Ildikó Enyedi • Dániel Erdély • György Erdély • Miklós Erdély • Alajos Eszik • György Fazekas • Béla Fieber • András Forgács • Zsuzsa Forgács • Péter Futó • Áron Gábor • György Galántai • Zoltán Gazsi • Judit Geskó • Ágnes Gyetvai • István Halas • András Halász • Arisztid Halász • Iván Halász • Gusztáv Hámos • Ágnes Háy • Péter Hegedüs • András Herencsár • Ágnes Horváth • Iván Horváth • Judit Horváth • Mari Horváth • Zoltán Jeney • Tamás Jónás • Judit Juhász • „Kalogány” • Dezső Kiss • András Koncz • Kinga Korényi • Ildikó Kovács • György Kozma • Éva Körner • Kati Lábán • Zoltán Lábás • Miklós Laczkovich • Anka Lakatos • András Lányi • Péter Legéndy • Katalin Kovács („Lidércke”) • Erzsébet Lovász • Dóra Maurer • Louise McCagg • William McCagg • Lóránt Méhes • Klára Mentényi • Ferenc Mérei • Eszter Mikesi • Irén Molnár • Klári Monus • Péter Mújdricza • Sándor Murányi • András Nagy • Tivadar Nemesi • Miklós Orosz • Edit Pachner • Gábor Palotai • Tamás Papp • Gábor Pataki • Gyula Pauer • István Perczel • Miklós Peternák • András Rác • Péter Rác • Margit Rajczi • Krisztina Rényi • László L. Révész • Gábor Roskó • Judit Ruppenthal • László Sántha • Borbála Sarkadi • László Sály • Erika Sebestyén • György Somogyi • Tibor Sósuti • János Sugár • Judit Szabó • (Bp.) György Szabó • Albert Szamosfalvi • Gyula Száva • Anikó Szécsényi • Gábor Szerényi • Kamilla Szijj • János Szirtes • András Szilávik • Gábor Szörényi • Gábor Thurza • Péter Ulrich • Mária Varga • Péter Végh • Júlia Veres • János Vető • László Vidovszky • András Wilhelm • János Xantus.

participated in the organization of the exhibition as a university student and “Indigo assistant”. In 1997 Hornyik wrote his thesis about Indigo (*Creativity and Fine Arts: The Activity of the Indigo Group, 1978–86*) and presented it in 1998 at the Art History Department of ELTE University. In the following year, the thesis was prepared for publication in the form of a book with the support of the Miklós Erdély Foundation, the National Cultural Fund and the Soros Foundation, but for various reasons the project failed. At the end of 2004, after the successful intervention of János Sugár, Erdély’s former disciple, a lecturer at the Intermedia Institute of the University of Fine Arts in Budapest (which is, by the way, an heir to Erdély’s art pedagogical “technique” in several respects) the publishing house Gondolat decided to publish the book. Meanwhile, the 2B Foundation, which was founded by another Erdély disciple, András Böröcz and his brother László, offered its financial and organizational support. The managers of the Erdély estate regarded the book as a supplementary volume of Erdély’s oeuvre catalogue in the making, so in 2005–2006 new research was launched in order to present Erdély’s three courses in a comprehensive way. During the philological work and the fact-checking process numerous details were clarified, previously ignored events came to light and former participants provided previously unknown documents, film and video footage and sound recordings. The email correspondence with the active members of the Indigo Group currently living in different countries facilitated the research process and pointed to new directions. The emails, which serve as source material and constitute a new method of the documentation of data collection and historical research, are stored in archives of the Erdély estate. Due to the rising costs of publication and the art historical importance of the book the Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences became its co-publisher. The director of the institute, László Beke used to attend Erdély’s courses and interpret them. New York-based artist Louise McCagg, a friend of Miklós Erdély and his family, supported the publication through the non-profit organization Alma On Dobbin INC ([www.almaondobbin.org](http://www.almaondobbin.org)), and also appears in the book as a one-time participant.

In the book, contemporary writings, documents, sources, transcripts of sound recordings, photographs, film stills and commentaries of certain groups of works follow each other in chronological order, and a short historical introduction precedes each chapter about a given course. In addition, the book contains two chronological overviews and a bibliography section. The English-language summary is also broken down by courses, and beside outlining the most important facts we have attempted to publish the – partly contemporary – translation of as many important texts as possible.

The historical overview is introduced by the theoretical section of Sándor Hornyik’s thesis, in which he analyses Erdély’s concept of creativity within the context of his theory of art, the similar

attempts of contemporary artist-thinkers, and the work of various scholars of creativity. It discusses the concept of interdisciplinarity, which was of central importance in both Erdély's art and pedagogical work, in a separate section. Authors, scientists and artists also well-known outside Hungary like Erika Landau<sup>4</sup>, Paul Watzlawick<sup>5</sup>, Arthur Koestler<sup>6</sup>, Joseph Beuys<sup>7</sup> and Robert Filliou<sup>8</sup> provide a broader context for the interpretation of Erdély's art pedagogical activity. The matrix of interpretation spans from the psychology of creativity to Zen Buddhism. It is not only the notion of creativity and interdisciplinary thinking that connects the authors listed above, but the propagation of the holistic approach as well, which Erdély considered to be of utmost importance. Of the possible layers of the meaning of the holistic approach, in case of Miklós Erdély it is the examination of the borderlines between science and art that merits attention.

For the foreign reader, Erdély's thoughts on creativity are summarized in his essay *Creativity and Fantasy Developing Exercises* (Kreatív és fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok) in the appendix of the Summary, written in 1976–1978 and published in English for the first time.<sup>9</sup>

### **Creativity Exercises**

The Visual Artists' Group of Józsefváros (District 8 of Budapest), which held its meetings in the Ganz-MÁVAG (Hungarian State Rail Carriage Factory) Cultural Center in Budapest, consisted of a drawing, a sculpture, and a photo "study group" or course. In the spring of 1975 Tamás Papp, the organizer of public education at the cultural center invited Dóra Maurer to lead the drawing course and – half a year later – Miklós Erdély to lead the sculpture course. From September 1975, the new leaders radically changed the traditional approach of the existing courses that primarily prepared participants for the entrance exam of the College of Fine Arts. In close cooperation with the photo course lead by Gábor Dobos, they then elaborated a new program encompassing all artistic media, which, although based on pre-formulated exercises or assignments, took into account the suggestions of the participants, operated in a democratic way and was open to experimentation and new artistic trends. The courses were supplemented by various other programs (lecture series focusing on certain themes, problems or media, lectures, reports, talks, exhibitions), which, along with the cultural events organized by Tamás Papp,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Psychology of Creativity*, see note No. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Watzlawick – John H. Weakland – Richard Fisch: *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution*. WW Norton, New York, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> Koestler, Arthur: *The Act of Creation*. Laurel, New York, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> First of all Beuys as the founder of the *Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research* (Freie Internationale Hochschule für Kreativität und Interdisziplinäre Forschung).

<sup>8</sup> Filliou, Robert: *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*. Gebr. König, Köln–New York, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> See also note 21.

have changed the operation of the cultural center considerably. From the fall of 1975 the “Ganz” became one of the most important avantgarde art centers in Budapest.

The new leaders of the courses of the Visual Artists’ Group – Dóra Maurer, who partly lived in Austria from the second half of the sixties and Miklós Erdély, who was ten years her senior and an architect by training – were the representatives of the Hungarian avantgarde open to and interested in several genres and techniques of art in the mid-seventies, and played an active part on the alternative art scene not only as artists but as organizers of art programs and exhibitions as well. The fact that they had known each other for several years, the analytical, conceptual approach to the traditional tools of fine art, their shared interest in photography, film and the creative process and their joint exhibitions have all inspired them to work out a joint program to reform the work of the Visual Artists’ Group in September 1975. One of the main inspirations for the first ideas of the program was the creative course held by composer Maurizio Kagel they both attended in the spring of 1971, when they participated at the Munich art fair *Kunstzone*. ”Here, one of the exercises was about every participant making a certain move, which was repeated by the next person in line, who then added his own movement” – Maurer recalls the event.<sup>10</sup> Upon Maurer’s suggestion, the new course connecting motion planning with the “traditional artist-and-model situation” (Miklós Erdély) and with drawing received the name “Motion Planning and Execution Actions” (Mozgástervezési és Kivitelezési Akciók). The name of the course was changed to Creativity Exercise (Kreativitási gyakorlat) in late February 1976. The new theoretical orientation underlying the change is indicated by the fact that on the invitation to the March 11 “collective activity” Erika Landau’s book *The Psychology of Creativity (A kreativitás pszichológiája)* is listed as recommended reading,<sup>11</sup> which became the most important reference material of the Creativity Exercises lead by Erdély alone from December 16, 1976.

The exercises were held bi-weekly in one of the rooms at the Cultural Center. Maurer’s drawing course was held in the same room on a weekly basis, and the two mutually influenced each other. Maurer summarized the relationship of the two courses in the following way: “Creativity Exercises are teaching a general creative disposition, while the role of the drawing course is to specify this disposition: to provide occasions for the development of creativity in the visual domain.”<sup>12</sup> Feedback was evident in the fact that Erdély was inspired by the objects and studies left by the drawing course in

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<sup>10</sup> Egy valódi mester. Havas Fanny interjúja Maurer Dórával. [A True Master. Fanny Havas’s interview with Dóra Maurer]. In *A senki földjén* [On No Man’s Land]. Supplement of the journal *Beszélő* on Miklós Erdély, New Series, Vol. II. No. 43. 26. October 1991, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> The book was published in Hungarian in 1974. Its original title is: *Die Psychologie der Kreativität*, published by Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, München-Basel, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> In *Kreativitás és vizualitás. A kiállítás a Józsefvárosi Képzőművész Kör munkáját dokumentálja* [Creativity and Visuality. The exhibition documents the work of the Fine Art Circle of Józsefváros]. Catalogue. Ed. by Tamás Papp. Józsefvárosi Kiállítóterem [Józsefváros Exhibition Hall], Budapest, 29 May–20 June 1976, p. 11.



the room. It was usually Maurer who started the Creativity Exercises by initiating a certain assignment, and Erdély developed its variations.<sup>13</sup> Maurer delivered the visual idea, to which Erdély attached series of movements, transforming them into action. From March 1976 György Galántai, who was Maurer's assistant at the drawing course, participated several times in the exercises as a co-leader.

The exercises created new, surprising and inspiring situations in the processes of perception and drawing, and prompted the participants to think creatively. The individual exercises helped to surpass the built-in stereotypes of perception and representation. The exercises reflected on the key issues of the avantgarde art of the 60s and 70s: original and copy, identity and similarity, repetition and sequences with minor changes, the representation of motion, action as a medium of fine art. In line with contemporary tendencies they used the instruments of other branches of art during the exercises: music, theatre, film and photography, in order to renew a traditional medium of fine art – drawing. Along with the photo and film course they even organized joint events; the film recording of certain exercises and the exercises developed specifically for camera took place in the second term (e. g.: *Reaction to the Camera, Drawing to Music, Object Animation on Film*). From February 1977 Maurer began to use video in the drawing course; and in the spring semester of the same year Erdély held several Creativity Exercises dealing exclusively with the possibilities of the video technique, especially of the “tunnel-effect” and the “video-mirror”. The video exercises taking place at the “Ganz” were among the first in Hungary where the new image-recording device was used for artistic purposes. In April 1977 the Visual Artists' Group at the “Ganz” organized an international video art presentation from the collection of the Austrian artist Peter Weibel, which displayed the works of Peter Weibel, Dan Graham, Arnulf Rainer, Diter Rot, Douglas Davis, Nam June Paik, Peter Campus and others.

Egyptologist Dániel Bíró, who was one of those who attended every course held by Erdély during the seventies and the eighties, wrote the following about the Creativity Exercises: “Initially, we worked with the media of visual arts, however, the primary aim was not the appropriation of the knowledge of one branch of visual arts – we have the schools for that – but an attempt to ease *‘the terror of our media’*. For example, before starting our experiments with the film camera we completed three exercises. 1. The camera is moving around and everybody tries to stay in its visual field as long as they can. 2. The camera starts moving again, but now everybody has to escape from its sight 3. The group forms a circle and as the camera moves around, each person straightens up as much as he or she can. Something strange happens. Apparently, nothing has changed: everybody strives to get in the visual funnel of the camera that promises eternity, and at the same time, everybody tries to escape from

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<sup>13</sup> Havas–Maurer, Op. Cit., 1991, p. 4.

the clatter of the camera threatening with immortality, but in doing so he is *conscious* of that, and therefore, something must have changed. The third exercise already offers some satisfaction – obviously, through the minimal – but perhaps illusory – structuring of the ‘population’ exposed to the machine and the affinities and choices<sup>14</sup> resulting from that. (Everybody is taller than his neighbour and not taller than ‘the rest’.)

Perhaps McLuhan’s ominous proposition ‘the medium is the message’ can be loosened. Touching upon ‘the affinities and choices’ we have reached the second major aim of the exercises: *the most complete fusion of the creative and critical attitude possible*. Another example: we are sitting in a circle and all of us are drawing portraits of a model sitting in the middle. We have 20 minutes, but after 10 minutes everybody stands up (hidden affinities are liberated), picks a partly finished drawing and completes it. In the second part of the exercise pairs are formed, who have to complete each other’s drawings, already aware of the third part of the assignment, during which they’ll have to work together with their respective partners chosen during the second part. [...]

Being familiar with all canons of all the cultures that might have existed before [...] here we try to take each other’s canons seriously, to confront it with our own, and to finish the work according to the resulting ‘new canon’. As a result, naturally, the closed communities of the ancient cultures are not ‘re-created’, yet a medium arises in which the hidden affinities and the apparent choices of the group are formed by the same movement. In the same way, several other exercises were aimed at discovering how the ‘good’ relationships that have formed during or as a pretext of the creation of ‘beautiful’ objects could manifest themselves in the ‘beauty’ of the whole working community. (‘Logical faults are character faults.’ The disturbances in the communication among the members of the group are the disturbances of the work process, wrong signs given by the members of the community endanger the success of the work.)”<sup>15</sup>

In the spirit of Landau’s book, Creativity Exercises made use of the inspirational and liberating force of the group. The goal was to create an atmosphere where the effects of conformity and the force to perform, which hinders creativity, could be disregarded. The participants could creatively influence the activity. They could make recommendations for exercises and were free to develop the given exercises further. The issue of repetition and uniformity expanded to broader personal and social horizons beyond the layers of meaning in fine art. In the words of Ágnes Hágy, the exercises were, in

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<sup>14</sup> Allusion to the novel of J. W. Goethe: *Wahlverwandschaften* (in English: „Elective Affinities”) which was translated in Hungarian with the title: *Vonzások és választások* („Affinities and choices”).

<sup>15</sup> *Indigo* [The catalogue of the exhibitions of the Indigo Group between 1977 and 1981]. Ed. by Dániel Erdély és Tivadar Nemesi. Printed in the printing house of Department of Typography of the Hungarian College of Applied Arts, Budapest, 1981, pp. 47–48.

fact, “modelling real-life situations”. During this process, participants had the opportunity to transcend these problems and to reach a deeper knowledge of the self by contemplating their own selves reflected in the others. Zoltán Lábás summarized his experiences gained during the Creativity Exercises in the following way: “The experiences of the Creativity Exercises formed a new approach in me, which helped me to find the connections between art and various other fields of life: they heightened my sensitivity to problems and prompted me to think creatively both in everyday life and during artistic work.”<sup>16</sup>

During the Creativity Exercises, photographs, later film footage were shot of the given exercises, motion sequences and drawing positions. Dóra Maurer compiled the film *Creativity – Visuality* (Kreativitás – vizualitás) based on these and the short descriptions and instructions of about thirty exercises, which is the most important visual document of Creativity Exercises, and which was screened a number of times<sup>17</sup> from 1976 before its 1988 standardization.<sup>18</sup> The film was first shown in the summer of 1976 at the *Creativity and Visuality* (Kreativitás és vizualitás) exhibition held at the Józsefváros Exhibition Hall, the aim of which was to introduce the new pedagogical method to a wider circle of people. The documents of Creativity Exercises were displayed on one wall of the elongated exhibition space, while those of Dóra Maurer’s drawing course on the other: a large number of drawings, assignment descriptions and photos created during the courses. The writings of the leaders of the courses about their methods and goals were published for the first time in the catalogue of the exhibition, and during the show, between May 29 and June 20, 1976, creativity exercises were held six times before the public in the exhibition space. It was a novelty that beside the leaders of the course the members of the *Studio for New Music* (Új Zenei Stúdió), Zoltán Jeney, László Sárosi and László Vidovszky – who performed Maurizio Kagel’s composition *prima vista* at the opening of the exhibition – also took part as “leaders” in some exercises. On one occasion the conversation of Erdély with Ferenc Mérei – who had written the preface of the Hungarian edition of Landau’s book (*The Psychology of Creativity*), which was the source of the statement-like quotations published in the exhibition catalogue – also helped to delve deeper into the notions of interdisciplinarity and creativity.

After the exhibition Creativity Exercises continued until the spring of 1977, when they were ended by an incident that seems ridiculous today. In the eyes of the directorate of Ganz-MÁVAG, the

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<sup>16</sup> Lábás, Zoltán: Kollektív rajzolás az Erdély-Maurer csoportban [Collective Drawing in the Group Led by Maurer and Erdély]. *Művészet* [Art], No. 9. 1978, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Dóra Maurer projected the film at the opening of the exhibition *Künstler aus Ungarn* [Artists from Hungary] in the Kunsthalle of Wilhelmshaven (26. August–21. September 1980.), where she gave a lecture on the courses.

<sup>18</sup> *Kreativitás – vizualitás* [Creativity – Visuality]. Directed by Dóra Maurer. Camera: Gábor Dobos. Béla Balázs Film Studio, K (Experimental) Section, 1988. 16 mm, black-and-white, 26 minutes. Adaptation on Web: <http://www.artpool.hu/Erdely/kreativitas/gyakorlatok.html> (Made by Tamás Kaszás, Artpool, Budapest, 2001.)



two courses – the drawing course and Creativity Exercises – were one and the same. The banning of both was triggered by the photographs of the long-haired kids who attended the drawing course. “The subject of their pictures was their own theatre, for which they built a house of plastic sheets in the room, and they walked about naked in there; one of the boys pretended to be a girl, hiding his penis and wearing his long hair in braids.”<sup>19</sup> The photos were exhibited, and that proved to be too much for the director of the cultural centre, who had already been eyeing the courses with suspicion. He confiscated the “indecent” photos as proofs and fired Maurer and Erdély.

### **Fantasy Developing Exercises (FAFEJ)**

The young people who had attended the course stayed together and started looking for another venue. In the fall of 1977 the meetings were held at the Cellar Club of Víziváros (near the Buda castle, District 2 of Budapest), and took place on a weekly basis there for a year. “In 1977-1978 the exercises continued in the verbal medium. Then we gave them the name *Fantasy Developing Exercises* (Fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok). We conducted ‘meditation exercises’ on a given theme in a given form. For example, we made *koans*. Freely at first, paying attention only to the form, then based on a given theme” – wrote Dániel Bíró.<sup>20</sup> The acronym for “Fantasy Developing Exercises” was FAFEJ, which literally means “wooden-head” or “blockhead” in Hungarian. In the fall of 1978, the course moved to the Marczibányi Square Community Centre in the same district, where it lasted for two more months, and then FAFEJ transformed into the Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking course.

FAFEJ continued the work of Creativity Exercises, but it examined the issues of creativity on the level of thought processes. Erdély and his group attempted to “loosen the intellectual blocks that fundamentally stifle the emergence of a comprehensive, creative attitude.”<sup>21</sup> From the practice of earlier artistic work, they adopted “complexity and the holistic view that is indispensable for contemporary thought.”<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of FAFEJ on Marczibányi Square, they exclusively dealt with (Zen Buddhist) *koans* for at least a month. This was the so-called “Koan Factory”.

During the meetings, Erdély gave assignments to the participants with the aim of questioning the familiar patterns of thinking. In Erdély’s words the goal of the exercises was “questioning of evidence”.<sup>23</sup> The assignments inducing the discovery of new patterns of thought were to be solved

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<sup>19</sup> Havas–Maurer, Op. Cit., 1991, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Indigo*, Op. Cit., p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Erdély, Miklós: Kreatív és fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok [Creativity and Fantasy Developing Exercises]. In *Tanulmányok a vizuális nevelés köréből* [Studies on Visual Education]. MTA Vizuális Kultúrakutató Munkabizottság [Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Committee for the Research of Visual Culture], Budapest, 1978, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

orally or in writing in such a way that everyone else could hear the answer given by the others, which helped the participants recognize the formulas of logic used by themselves and the others.<sup>24</sup> Leaving stereotypes and patterns behind was also facilitated by the fact that Erdély often limited the method of solving the assignments: in one word, in three words, a drawing, etc.

Several former participants remember the types of three questions listed in Erdély's 1978 writing<sup>25</sup> and some of the answers given to them. According to Ildikó Enyedi, the answer to the question "What will will illumination look like in 2000?" was that "Man will use his eyes as lighting". Ági Háry remembers two of the answers to the impossible question "Why can't humans walk?" "Because man is either dragging something or is being dragged. Because man is made up of cells, which slide apart." At the next meeting, Erdély evaluated the answers according to the type of the answer and the kind of philosophical, religious or scientific knowledge it was based on.

As Zoltán Lábás remembers, the relationship of art and science was an important subject during the FAFEJ meetings. Erdély often mentioned the names of Einstein, Schrödinger and Heisenberg, and the idea of making a film out of the "clock paradox" of Einstein had already surfaced. According to Lábás the participants criticized and rejected every traditional branch of fine art, except for maybe the happening. Erdély said in an interview that: "the entire theoretical and philosophical background of the avantgarde was condensed in Creativity Exercises and FAFEJ."<sup>26</sup> The way Erdély saw it, the avantgarde was "sinking" into the variation of the types of thought he considered evident. According to Ildikó Enyedi – who wrote an extensive analysis on the method of the Fantasy Developing Exercises<sup>27</sup> – the gist of the exercises was not to encourage somebody to invent, but to make him or her understand the instinctive and unconscious "skilful" pattern-following mechanisms of the thought processes.<sup>28</sup> We can only transcend patterns if we know them well. The absurdity, irrelevance or banality of the questions helped in the recognition of patterns.

In the spring of 1978, the Bercsényi College of the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University in Budapest, which had an exhibition hall for displaying progressive art and architecture, invited applications to the competition entitled *Quasi-Architecture* (Kvázi építészet), which provided an excellent opportunity to turn the method of FAFEJ into practice.<sup>29</sup> The final results brought the

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<sup>24</sup> Enyedi, Ildikó: Egy pedagógiai technika. Az 1977/78. évi fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok módszerének elemzése [A Pedagogical Technique. Analysis of the Method of Fantasy Developing Exercises in the Years 1977-78]. *Magyar Műhely* [Hungarian Atelier, Paris], Vol. 21. No. 67. 15. July 1983, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Erdély, Miklós: Kreatív és fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok [Creativity and Fantasy Developing Exercises], Op. Cit., p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Peternák, Miklós: Beszélgetés Erdély Miklóssal 1983 tavaszán [Conversation with Miklós Erdély in the Spring of 1983]. *Árgus*, No. 5. 1991, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> See note 24.

<sup>28</sup> Enyedi, Op. Cit., 1983, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> The artworks and their evaluations were published in the periodical *Bercsényi* 28–30, No. 2. 1978.

success of the participants of the FAFEJ-course. Péter Berényi's work, *Hilbert's Cube*, which won the first prize, already transcended the context of architecture in its title, guiding the audience towards spaces of several dimensions, curved, mathematic spaces, the theory of relativity and the world of quantum mechanics, proving that elaborating on the connection of art and science during FAFEJ meetings had made its mark. With the help of the architectural metaphor of graph theory, Berényi coupled the absurdity of transforming the Hilbertian space into a real, three-dimensional space with the fiction of architecture as personal space. In the words of a member of the jury panel, László Beke, Péter Mujdricza's project entitled *Reality House* – which won the second prize – “searches for and attempts to ‘represent’ the architectural parallels of various paths of life or models of fate condensed in a single building.”<sup>30</sup> The architectural idea entitled *Ballroom* by Ágnes Házy, one of the winners of the third prize, mixed the creation of space with the creation of sound, and imagined a room, where every single point would generate sounds of a different frequency, which could also be manipulated by the living beings moving inside the space.

### **Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking – The Indigo Group**

In the fall of 1978 FAFEJ transformed into the Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking course. The students attending both the College of Fine Arts and FAFEJ urged Erdély to let them do something, because they were already able to think. This led to the organization of exhibitions. As Erdély summarized it: “We decided in 1978–79 to make our way of thinking – which we regard up-to-date and which we became conscious of during the Fantasy Developing Exercises of the previous year – visible and perceptible. As we did not give up our promising idea of working on the borderline of two cultures – science and art – the group was given the name ‘Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking’ (InDiGo). Our aim was to hold a public presentation each month of a topic arranged for on the previous weekly meeting.”<sup>31</sup> They decided on the themes together during a brainstorming at the gatherings preceding the exhibitions, and everyone wrote down or drew their ideas on piece of paper. They discussed the individual ideas and planned the exhibition together. Dániel Bíró described this method in the following way: “In possession of an elaborate verbal medium, in the autumn of 1978 we returned to visual arts. That meant that we started visual artistic work with the aim of shaping environments. [...] We composed exhibitions based on given themes – coal, sand, weight, painting. Our work proceeds in the same direction as the efforts of the classical avantgarde. The novelty of our work is the *elementary* nature of our themes (we try to explore as exhaustively as possible the potentials of a *single* material, a

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<sup>30</sup> *Bercsényi* 28–30, No. 2. 1978, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Indigo*, Op. Cit., p. 3.

*single* form of communication: the exhibitions did not only speak *in* the actual medium, but also *about* it.) We try to transcend the level of our actual ideas by making use of the possibilities offered by group work and the fundamental character of our subjects and media. For example: after our ideas have surfaced, everybody is given the assignment to plan the entire exhibition alone. Through the joint criticism of the ‘exhibition-ideas’ the material of the exhibition finally took shape: an *environment*. This is exhibited.”<sup>32</sup>

In the first year the “exhibition ideas” were also put on display on a poster nearby the environment. Fortunately, a number of ideas elaborated on scraps of paper can be found in the Erdély estate. The majority of them are connected to the first public presentation or exhibition of the Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking course opened in November 1978 at the Marczibányi Square Community Centre. The theme was “coal and charcoal drawing”, and one can find among the “ideas” the following examples: “A cat is chasing a mouse. (Surely both contain some coal)”; “Vitamin C drops”; “All solid materials are characterized by the proportion of the heaps made of them – The creation of heaps with different slopes from coal.”; “Hen laying a charcoal egg”; “Pillow filled with coal powder”; “Balloon filled with sugar”, “Soda water”; “Coal embedded in a diamond”; “Coal mining and the development of the furnace”; “Vacuum cleaner sucking and blowing coal”; “Coal burnt to charcoal, as a solution to energy problems – perpetuum mobile.” In the catalogue of the exhibitions of the Indigo Group between 1977 and 1981 Erdély wrote the following about the public presentation: “With our exhibition entitled *Coal and Charcoal Drawing* we wanted to express both our origins in fine art and our will to secede from it. By shifting the emphasis from representation to material the extended territory of artistic activity was drawn into a set of meanings; by utilizing the atmospheric effect of coal as a material we demonstrated social–psychological–energetic connections. After a repeated selection process we worked with elements (coal, charcoal drawing, poultry-net, stove-pipe, balloon, light) that can appear in unity, cover all possible relations and are able to establish a visual context with each other.”<sup>33</sup>

The following exhibitions took place at a different venue: the MOM (Hungarian Optical Works) Cultural Centre (District 12) and were organized on a monthly basis: in January 1979 *Sand and Its Forms of Movement* (Homok és mozgásformái); in February *Weight* (Súly); in March *Painting* (Festmény); in April *Faith / Loyalty* (Hűség) and in June *Artists’ Exit* (Művészkijárat). The exhibitions held at MOM were collectively conceived and realized environments, where the issue of authorship did not yet play a definitive role. The exhibitions materialized as the syntheses of individual ideas, but

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<sup>32</sup> *Indigo*, Op. Cit., pp. 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

teamwork was more important than individual invention. We may consider these environments the joint works of Indigo that in some cases have also provided room for individual actions.

In the *Sand and its Forms of Movement* exhibition most of the individual elements of the environment “devoted their attention to the fall of dry sand too keen to obey gravity, basically, the forming power of gravity. [...] Chance also has a great form-creating power: this was often proved by aleatoric works, but such a subordinate substance without coherence of its own as sand is only suitable to be an ironic reminder of chance operations: dices of wet sand showed accidental shapes after they were shaken and rolled.”<sup>34</sup>

László Beke described and commented on the exhibitions *Weight* and *Painting* in the following way: “In the axis of the exhibition space if [of the *Weight* exhibition] there are pairs of rubber boots hanging from truckles. The boots are filled with sawdust and refuse oil. At the end of the hall, above a makeshift pool of foil there is a quilted jacket hanging on the thin line of a fishing rod. Water is sprinkled on it from a hose, the wadded material soaks up the water, the flexible bamboo cane bends increasingly, the line stretches and snaps. The jacket falls into the water. Those entering [the *Painting* exhibition] first catch sight of three heaps of pulverized paint on the floor – red, white, black – each is enclosed by an empty frame. The frames can be moved on pulleys (though that would result in ruining the heaps), and at the same time they are tied to the wall with loose strings. The suckers of toilet plungers stick to a pane of glass hanging in the middle of the hall; if we want to, we may watch the projected pictures at the other end of the hall behind glass within this transparent frame: an endlessly recurring geometrical pattern.

It helps us to better understand the above if we are familiar with some facts about the Indigo group on the outset. They regard their presentations as joint works: they pick a theme, they gather an enormous amount of individual ideas around it (these are sometimes also exhibited), they select the best ideas together and modify these during the working process, so it is impossible to decide who contributed what to the final version. Another characteristic – which prompted me to write ‘presentation’ instead of ‘exhibition’ – is that the activity of this group is halfway between art and (visual) educational and learning exercise, exhibition and demonstrative action. We can accept their work as art (I personally recognize it as such without reservation) but they by no means force us to do so. [...]

The most typical of InDiGo are the thematic assignment descriptions and the freest, most anti-conventional way of approaching the theme possible. Most of the time they work with associations and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 12.



metaphors (in which the influence of the art of their leader, Miklós Erdély is still recognizable). The elaboration of the theme of ‘weight’ lists the tools of physical experiments (pulleys, capillaries, gravity), nevertheless, the method used is subjective: they pick rough everyday objects and materials, which all have their own distinct social system of symbols, yet by combining them with physical processes the entire system gets connected by fine threads of thought; qualities that can be interpreted both literally and symbolically become visible: ‘balance’, ‘saturation’, ‘tension’ (that leads to ‘rupture’).

‘Weight’ creates a fragile network of association between material and social phenomena; on the contrary, ‘Painting’ presents less direct but more complex and even more subjective connections. It does not refer to an actual painting – it illustrates the concept itself with the material components of painting, its objectively existing aesthetic characteristics or its subjective attributes and with examples from domains outside painting. Metaphorically, the spatial environment itself could be regarded as some sort of ‘landscape’ or ‘panel painting’, but it is more useful to separate the individual elements. *Pulverized paint* is the primary material of the art of painting; paint is made of this and it is transubstantiated into color. *Frame* is part of the tradition of European (bourgeois) painting, it is the essential requisite of panel painting – here, the frame is mocked: it rolls on wheels, it is pulled on strings, its mobility is merely apparent. The transparency of the *glass plate*: is it the metaphor of ‘painting as a window’? It sucks in our gaze, similarly to the vacuum of the rubber bells that stick to it, and it directs our eyes to ‘somewhere in the unfathomable distance’. It is the metaphor of the depth of space represented by another medium, *film*. While most schools that followed abstraction attempt to materialize painting, the parable of InDiGo leaves the question open.”<sup>35</sup>

At the exhibition *Faith / Loyalty* the students reacted to the theme of “faith/loyalty” with a series of actions. Most these actions resulted in works and objects that did not survive in their original form. Part of the ideas written on pieces of paper during the preparation for the show were like scores, which were performed, and this connects the exhibition to the Fluxus school. At the same time, the conceptual organizer of the works or actions was primarily the complex notion of faith/loyalty, which spans from representation to personal relationships. In his short essay for the Indigo catalogue András Halász interpreted the notion of “faith/loyalty” (unfaithfulness/disloyalty) from certain aspects of the creative process and reception, and metaphorically from the point of view of the qualities of certain materials (glass, indigo [copy] paper).<sup>36</sup> (“Indigo” in Hungarian is not only the acronym of “Inter-Disciplinary Thinking”, but also means “carbon paper”.) In his essay Halász pointed out the emphatic

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-19, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

presence of a circle of topics connected to traditional artistic representation in the theme of “faith/loyalty”. The faithful artistic rendering or expression of the spectacle (the “model”, the “original”), of the thought (the “idea”) or of sentiments was, however, only one of the definitively conceptual starting points of the exhibition’s theme. Following Halász’ train of thought we may suspect that the “detachment” of the complete work from the author, the well-known and frequent phenomenon when the artist looks upon his finished work as an independent, alien object was defined as the opposite of “faith/loyalty” during the conversations. However, in most cases the artists “objectified” the personal, human aspects of the theme of “faith/loyalty”. The emphatic presence of certain associations of ideas and pair of oppositions was apparent, for example: knife, blade, edge, wound, touch, support, attachment, glueing, connection, brace, impression, unity – duality, half – whole – pair, junction – partition, separation, care, etc. The description of a few actions demonstrates this creative process and thinking well. Dániel Erdély pressed his palm against the inner side of the window of the exhibition hall and – as if by chance – a hand of precisely the same size covered his hand as a mirror image from the cold Pest night outside. István Perczel, the owner of the hand also performed the idea written on a piece of paper by Klára Mentényi (“I skin the leather glove”): he “skinned” a leather glove from his hand. The scrap of paper with his idea has also survived – “Two balloons glued together. Cut them apart, and one will deflate” – but he realized his idea using two inflated rubber gloves. András Böröcz was sitting on a chair placed on top of a table and “sniffed” soil from a plastic bag. In his action he connected the soil as an ecological and national symbol to the cheap drug substitute, “glue”, and faith/loyalty to addiction. In his action Tivadar Nemesi used two study drawings depicting nudes previously presented at two other exhibitions (*Coal and Charcoal Drawing; Sand and its Forms of Movement*) as an example of faith/loyalty. He fanned the drawing depicting a reclining nude placed in a corner of the hall with a charcoal drawing depicting a standing nude as the realization of his original idea – “To wave a flag and fan another flag with it”. The description of one of Ildikó Enyedi’s actions has also survived: “I’m ironing a fruit stain into a shirt.” Judit Juhász hung a candle on top of a standing candle, the wicks nearly touched each other, and she lit both. During one of his actions Miklós Erdély hammered two knives into each other in such a way that the points of the two knives turned against each other penetrated each other’s handle. In two of his works he used carbon paper, with the help of which he created his carbon paper drawings in this period. One of these was a white blind man’s stick, which pressed a sheet of carbon copy paper against the wall. In the interpretation of Zoltán Lábás: “Leaning to the wall expresses tenderness, the dark carbon paper between the identical white of the wall and the stick is dramatic: it separates and connects at the same time. I’ve never thought that we are supposed to ‘represent’ or translate the given title using visual instruments at our exhibitions. I

rather thought that the titles create a conceptual atmosphere around the exhibited objects, the given notion sheds light on the works, so to speak. Pressed against the wall, the light stick leaves – a presumable but invisible – stain on the wall through the carbon paper. Faith takes at least two. One: which, and one: to which. But it is possible that Miklós saw the whole thing in a different context.”<sup>37</sup>

While at the exhibition *Faith / Loyalty* individual actions dominated, the subsequent *Artists' Exit* – which was the closing exhibition at the end of the first year of the course – was a truly collective piece, described by Miklós Erdély in the Indigo catalogue: “The organizers of the International Congress for Semiology in Budapest requested us to hold a presentation related to the congress. Though they withdrew the request for cultural political reasons, we organized the show within the series of exhibitions of the Indigo Group.

As a result of the above, the concept of the presentation was organized around sign and meaning, reflecting our conviction concerning the existence of a total level of meaning, which can be grasped in the relationship between the absolute nature of human existence and the surrounding reality. This meaning was symbolized by the white color, while its refraction is the conceptual level. As a material representation of the color white we chose milk, which nourishes our thinking as that which is perfect nourishes that ‘which is in part’”.<sup>38</sup> Words and concepts were represented in this symbolism not “like clots of blood”<sup>39</sup> but by 200 liters of curdled milk with a rainbow projected onto its surface. The series of events we organized around the curdled milk actualized the alienated total meaning – which could be the synonym of gaining consciousness. We first covered the rainbow projected onto the surface of the curdled milk with three sheets of carbon copy paper, then we sprayed the whole surface of the curdled milk with violet-black shoe polish. A plastic bag of fresh milk, fastened to a glass plate and punctured, emitted a thin thread of milk that provided a pathetic reinforcement while it maintained a palpable relation to the several kilometers’ length of actual sewing thread pulled out from the pool of curdled milk. We sifted sewing needles from the drawers of a card index cabinet with difficulty from milk and hay and distributed them to the spectators, who were asked to thread the needles with the threads soaked with curdled milk, in order to represent the misery of communication and the interrelatedness of people. Then we encouraged the entire company strung on a single line of thread to stitch milk bags containing sand in a separate area of the hall. In order to emphasize the unfavorable conditions, we covered the window of the room with a prison window-like camouflage, which only

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<sup>37</sup> Letter by Zoltán Lábás to László Beke, 1998.

<sup>38</sup> See The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (13:10): „But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

<sup>39</sup> Erdély refers here to a poem by the Hungarian poet Attila József: „Like clots of blood / these words fall / before you.” (*Ode*, 1933, translated by Thomas Kabdebo.)

allowed a peek at the sky, indicating that the common need for the protection of clear meaning can form in the most afflicted state. We built a symbolic barricade of the small sand bags in front of the rainbow after having removed the carbon copy paper cover from it.”<sup>40</sup>

In November and December 1979 Indigo organized two exhibitions in Pécs, the largest town in southwest Hungary, to accompany Miklós Erdély’s lectures on *The Poetic Avantgarde* and *Avantgarde or Experimental Film* held at the House of Youth of the City Cultural Center. No documents have survived of these exhibitions, but we do have the sound recording of the Indigo gathering preparing the exhibition “Poetry”, which was held on the occasion of the “Poetic Avantgarde” lecture. This recording – the transcript of which is published in this book for the first time – is the only direct source that provides a picture of how a given theme was discussed at the gatherings. The members of the group decided to present “poetry” visually at the exhibition. During the long and exhaustive conversation the central topic was the nature of poetry, and they attempted to clarify the meaning of the expressions “avantgarde poetry” and “poetic avantgarde” as well. Miklós Erdély drew parallels between the dematerialized avantgarde (fine) art (which has become conceptual, mental, and spiritual in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the “medium-less” (that is, conceptual, mental, spiritual) poetry, basically, some kind of an *Ut poesis avantgarde* theory or principle is at the center of his train of thought. He rejected the approaches, which traditionally relate fine (image-creating) art and poetry on the basis of imagery, and emphasizes the “clean mental nature” in case of both.

From 1980 the Indigo course gradually transformed into the creative community of independent artists and took the name Indigo Group. Their gatherings were primarily held in private apartments and studios, and their exhibitions held less frequently than the first year also took place at various venues. The exhibitions continued to be organized around a given theme, but the members of the group created individual works. Parallel to this, Indigo as an artist group started to gain recognition on the contemporary art scene as well, and from the spring of 1981 they received several invitations to participate at group exhibitions and other events. At the same time, they also realized joint projects, and in 1982-1983 they again held a course – the Indigo drawing course at the Museum of Fine Arts.

Between 1980 and 1984 the group held a series of thematic exhibitions: In March 1980 they organized an exhibition in the park of the University of Horticulture with the title which must have been inspired by the site: *Botanical Garden* (Arborétum). This was the first exhibition where the members of the group put individual works on display, and where Miklós Erdély, the leader of the course did not participate. From the first half of 1980 the individual, action-like presentations of the

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<sup>40</sup> *Indigo*, Op. Cit., pp. 28–29.

college student members became more frequent at various college events and elsewhere, and the exhibition held in the spring, in the open air, in nature must have been the result of a spontaneous idea, too. The majority of the works were casual creations prepared on site, and alluded to the natural environment, nature itself, the plants and certain elements of the park. In April of the same year, they presented their exhibition *Biography* (Életrajz) at the Young Artists' Club, which was one of the most important centers for avantgarde art in Budapest in the seventies and eighties. Biography writing using fictitious and real elements alike had already been an assignment during the creativity exercises, being a genre connected to artistic creation in several respects: "The joint writing of a biography: the group writes the biography of a fictitious person together, sentence by sentence." Or: "Writing a joint biography: the members of the group shape the biography sentence by sentence, but each member can only continue the story using the actual events of his or her own life." At the Indigo exhibition entitled *Biography* the theme of "biography" was probably defined by the participants in a very broad sense, since it spanned from the use of personal, biographical motifs to the curriculum vitae portraying the social status of the artist, occasionally incorporating the independent shades of meaning of the title ("life" and "drawing"). In December 1980 the theme was *Watercolor* (Akvarell) and the venue was the Bercsényi College. The works presented at the exhibition were loosely connected to the previously defined theme, their circle of meaning spanned from painting techniques to the philosophy of art, and some works examined the relationship of science and art. The authorities closed the exhibition, partly because of Miklós Peternák's work, which featured the extremely embarrassing word "*Strajkújemy*" ("We're on strike" in Polish). The next exhibition entitled *Paperworks* (Papírművek) was part of an exhibition series held at the Youth Club of the Paper Factory in Csepel (District 21 of Budapest). The opening was scheduled for December 17, 1980, but it had to be postponed for reasons unjustified by the authorities and unknown until today. It supposedly had to do with the fact that the rector of the College of Fine Arts did not appreciate the independent activity of the young group members. The *Paperworks* exhibition could finally open on January 14, 1981, although it was closed down before the originally planned date. On the invitation card there was a brief introductory text written by Ferenc Kenyeres about the theme of the exhibition and the individual works displayed: "The activity of the group has been characterized so far by two things: the principle of materialism and the explanation of concepts. That is the reason why paper was fit to become the subject of a thematic exhibition. In case of a few works the artists focused their attention on the material itself, but the majority of the works approach the material in a more indirect, complex way. They ask questions about the role of paper in culture, communication, the transfer of information and in consumption. The different artists have different temperaments and provide different answers." After the usual summer break, in October 1981



they held their exhibition *My Fondest Summer Memory* (Legszebb nyári élményem) at the Cultural Center of the Postal Services, where the majority of the members presented experiences, memories and images in the form of object groups and installations. The exhibition *The Personal and the Sacred* (Ami személyes és ami szent), which was inspired by the thoughts in Simone Weil's essay *La Personne et le Sacré*, opened in March 1984 at the Bercsényi College. Simone Weil (1909–1943) was a writer of Jewish origin, who viewed the world in a holistic way and was opposed to the division of knowledge into separate branches of study. According to Weil, people regard science, art and religion as separate territories because they are incapable of believing in a coherent world order. She believed in the accessibility of a higher, mystical knowledge characterized by unity and universality. “In science truth is sacred. In art beauty is sacred. Beauty and truth are always impersonal.” “That which is sacred is by no means our personality, on the contrary, it is what is impersonal in our human being. Everything that is impersonal in man is sacred. And that alone is sacred,” she wrote.<sup>41</sup>

At the center of Erdély's pedagogical method stood the broadly interpreted notion of creativity, and he extended the scope of problem-solving artistic thinking to issues and phenomena affecting societies or communities as a whole as well. As he put it: “atrophied creativity is a loss to all of society [...], creativity manifests itself not only in, and chiefly not in, performance, but is a sort of state of readiness that works in silence and without any outward sign; it is able to identify the task in any given situation and offer solutions that are inventive and original.”<sup>42</sup> Between 1980 and 1983 the Indigo Group was intensively dealing with issues involving the responsibility of the individual in society in addition to certain artistic tasks. One of the manifestations of their sensitivity to “social problems” was the *Indigo Peace Call*, which was linked to the contemporary international peace movement and its ideas. Members learnt about the main goals of the peace movement from Miklós Erdély's son Dániel, who was a member of the Dialogue Peace Group, which played an important role in the unofficial Hungarian peace movement, and he designed the emblem of the group, too. Around 1982–1983, the Indigo Group and the National Peace Council launched an international art competition the subject of which was nuclear threat. It was Miklós Erdély who worded the text of the invitation to the competition, but it was also discussed at the gatherings of the Indigo Group. This peace call or “manifesto” was published in English in 1986 under the name of the Indigo Group in the publication edited by Hugh Baldwin, *Documents on the Peace Movement in Hungary*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Weil, Simone: *Ami személyes és ami szent. Válogatott írások*. [La Personne et le Sacré. Selected Writings]. Vigilia, Budapest, 1983, pp. 74 and 73.

<sup>42</sup> Erdély, Miklós: *Kreatív és fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok* [Creativity and Fantasy Developing Exercises], Op. Cit., p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> Published by European Nuclear Disarmament Hungary Working Group, London, 1986, pp. 12–13.: Section II: *Artists & Peace – The Indigo Group*. (Translator unknown.) The last sentence was re-translated by Ágnes Csonka.

- [1] Appeals and statements about the nuclear threat to humanity are little more than hackneyed phrases. Their form and rhetoric are ineffectual. Instead of making the endangered populations realize the character and the dimensions of the impending catastrophe, they dull their attention. And so, since they do not understand the essence of the new situation, they are unable to feel their responsibility for their own future; they are isolated from their own destiny by degrees, and sink down into uneasy indifference. In these circumstances they cannot find the right forms either for prevention or for protest.
- [2] From the situation into which humanity has fallen with the stockpiling of nuclear weapons one must draw radical conclusions, so as to break away from false and conditioned ways of thinking. We must find the new, mobilizing and concise forms of expression, which are now necessary.
- [3] The phrase nuclear ‘weapon’ is itself misleading: it assigns to military policy and considerations mad-made forces, which, in terms of their effects, have far outgrown it. (‘God created the world in six days, mankind is able to destroy it in six hours.’)
- [4] The nuclear threat is not a part of the questions of strategy and of world politics: it is the other way round. The production of devices of mass destruction, whose use threatens everyone and offers advantage to no one, cannot be justified by the interests of any nation, class or group. It follows that those who administer those portions of the earth divided by state boundaries or by spheres of interest have no right to make any decisions as to the production of such devices. Such a decision is, in itself, according to the Nürnberg Convention, ‘a crime committed against humanity’.
- [5] We are facing an ontological question that is not only beyond nations, but which is of cosmic relevance, and which cannot even be approached with the concepts of humanism – the making of a decision which brings the threat of total annihilation is *forbidden* in the fullest sense of the word.

The responsibility for making such a decision is immense in proportion to all that we know and have already achieved, but it is infinite in relation to all that we don’t know and have not yet achieved. The damage which this stored-up destructive power may cause is infinite, since it can rob any future from the many-million-year process, the unique result of which is human intellect. It follows that the degree of responsibility is in inverse ratio to the infinitely small probability of the evolution of life and of human intellect. And it also follows that every single

act, however small it may be, which is aimed at the prevention of this infinite loss has, in an ideal sense, an infinitely high value.

[6] If the question is analyzed in this way, then the disproportionate relation between cause and consequence becomes appallingly transparent. The present situation, which brings extreme peril to everyone – and to those who exercise power as well – proves that the exercise of power is itself an illusion: the institutions, like automata, move along their own inertial course.

It is in vain that politicians admit and declare that to store nuclear warheads cannot be justified, either theoretically or in terms of the defence of interests: still they can do nothing about it. Nor can the so-called ‘peace campaign’ act with effect; the danger goes beyond the alternatives of war or peace. A nuclear missile ‘overshoots the mark’ in any case.

[7] There can be no doubt that the present imperilled situation was prepared by the process that we call history. We have to accept, however, that the ‘nuclear weapon’ was made at the lowest point in history. The purpose of its invention was to stop fascism and prevent systematic genocide.

[8] The fact that the existence of fascism brought into being a device of mass destruction which humanity could not get rid of until now, and that the destructive capacity of this has increased to an extent that exceeds imagination, can be seen, as an after-triumph of fascism.

[9] At the moment there is no significant power in the world that is planning systematic genocide. Neither are we aware of either ‘side’ making preparations to use the stored-up destructive force at their disposal. It would be unpardonable folly if so much went into the production of totally useless, but harmless, things. But the devices under discussion here are *totally* harmful and *totally* useless.

[10] Some people speak about ‘unnecessary panic’ concerning the total annihilation of humanity, since not everybody would be destroyed in the event of an accidental nuclear ‘war’. Yet what we should fear the least now is that if there will be a few – or a few million – survivors and these vegetating beings will reproach us: ‘It was all a false alarm! Look, we are still alive!’”

Before the *Indigo Peace Call*, in April 1981 the Indigo Group was invited to the exhibition *Hard and Soft* (Kemény és lágy), which was the sixth show of the exhibition series *Tendencies* organized to present the art of the seventies in the Óbuda Gallery (District 3 of Budapest). This was the first official appearance of the Indigo Group, and the group created an installation entitled *Temporary Sculpture Made of Cotton Wool* (Ideiglenes szobor vattából), which dominated the exhibition dedicated to post-conceptualism. With meticulous work, they built up an enormous mushroom cloud of cotton wool that

reached from floor to ceiling. In the catalogue of the exhibition the picture of the French artist Jean Iposteguy's sculpture *Cerebrum* and the picture of an acacia tree also appeared as formal and conceptual parallels to the mushroom cloud. They also published the "preliminary studies" of the mushroom cloud made by the members of the group. The cerebrum symbolizing human intelligence can be connected to a sentence of the *Indigo Peace Call*, which declares that: "the damage, which this stored-up destructive power may cause, is infinite, since it can rob the future of the many-million-year process the unique result of which is human intellect". The idea that certain organizations or institutions have no authority to make decisions concerning the issue of nuclear threat of cosmic proportions; that the responsibility of the individual has grown, what's more, his "scope of authority encompasses everything" also appeared in the *Founding Certificate of the Voluntary Legislative Body* (Önkéntes Törvényhozó Testület Alapítólevele), worded in September 1982. The Founding Certificate, which had been translated to French as well, made conscious the principle or idea of competence by founding a body with authority over "everything and everyone", which was in this sense open, timeless and "formless". The group introduced the text at the Paris Biennale of Young Artists in September 1982, although the Indigo Group had no official invitation to this event. The last action of the group in the theme of peace was the *Pax Action*, which took place at the Rajk László College of the Marx Károly University of Economics as the closing act of the *Peace Poster Exhibition* organized independently of the Indigo Group in April 1983. During this event, participants shot the rocket-like ink cartridges from "Pax" brand ballpoint pens with the help of the springs inside the pens.

Between 1980 and 1986 the members of the Indigo Group organized several similar, smaller actions at various events. In addition to that they organized two significant actions at the Cultural Center of the Postal Services, which provided them regular opportunities to present their work from the end of 1981. *Table Actions* (Asztali akciók) took place in 1982, when the members of the group performed individual actions sitting around a table. The theme of Table Actions was not eating, although before the start of the actions soup was served in glass soup bowls for the participants, and most of them ate it, and several actions were connected to food and chewing. 14 persons were seated around the enormous table covered with a white tablecloth, and one Indigo member was represented by his (action) objects. The "the laid ceremonial table"; "the company sitting around the table"; "people doing something at the table" or "master and disciples seated around the table" are all motifs well-known from artworks as well, but we should treat them with caution and perhaps regard them as secondary momentum that extinguish the meaning of each other. During *Table Actions*, similarly to the *Faith/Loyalty* show, the individual participants realized their ideas independently of each other, which resulted in various action objects. In January 1983 they created a picture together by the title *Actual*

*Action* (Aktuális akció). “Since it was current, our choice was painting, which once again proved the group’s systematic and unquenchable interest in fine art,” János Sugár wrote about the action. “This time a picture of about 6 m<sup>2</sup> was born from the joint effort. [...] The space was divided democratically, everyone had a horizontal and a vertical strip and could paint on that whatever they wanted to. With this double division we met the requirement that everyone should be able to meet the other participants’ strip. The width of the strips was decided based on how many seconds each participant could whistle with a single breath.”<sup>44</sup>

The one-year drawing course of the Indigo Group took place during this period at the Museum of Fine Arts, launching in the fall of 1982 and closed in May 1983 with a large exhibition at the same location. At the exhibition the study drawings created at the course were grouped according to themes chosen together during the meetings, and most artists’ short descriptions of their work were placed next to the drawings. Miklós Erdély summarized the goal and the program of the course on the invitation leaflet of the exhibition in the following way: “We devoted the past year to drawing. We had a double aim. The first one: we decided that we would draw until this originally extremely obvious activity becomes indescribable. We had at our disposal a paper of determined size and some instruments leaving a trace in order to be able to demonstrate our behavior in a lasting, controllable form. It was proven that the sequence of decisions, the process of realization and the treatment of paper may be retraced from the final result; the method of thinking is traceable, the strayings and the compromises resulting from intellectual inertia may be caught in the act, and authentic inspiration can be clearly isolated.

Within the field of drawing, we treated depiction as a special possibility, and thus we did not exclude ourselves from – and did not limit ourselves to – the interpretation already exploited by traditions.

Being aware that in representational, ‘imitative’ artistic activities the maker’s creative invention always manifests in the ‘how’, our research was not motivated by a wish to oppose or break with tradition. Instead, we looked for the renewal of an ancient craft by avoiding the existing prejudices, misinterpretations and ‘interferences’.

The creators gave a public report on their work every two weeks, exposed to cross-examination by those present. They strived to become the most professional experts of their own works, breaking away from the false practice that divided the complex unity of the instinctive and the conscious sphere functioning within an individual into artist and art connoisseur.

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<sup>44</sup> Sugár, János: Az Indigo csoport aktuális képzőművészeti akciója [The Actual Art Action of the Indigo Group]. *AL* [Artpool Letter, published by György Galántai/ Artpool], 3, March 1983, pp. 22–23.



The other aim of the meetings is connected to this: with the public analyses we wanted to offer an opportunity to art connoisseurs (art historians and critics) to make the creative process their starting point when evaluating a work, which may facilitate the otherwise extremely difficult qualification of contemporary works; offering them a new method of analysis closer to the perspective of art itself. The previously defined, changing assignments were developed based on the consideration that they should liberate creators and analysts alike from the compulsion to perform, and the work-process should motivate the stimuli on a meta-level.

Over the course of the year, we agreed upon the following assignments: ‘Beautiful but bad drawing’; ‘Ugly but powerful drawing’; ‘A good theme poorly rendered’; ‘Mirage’; ‘Sticky techniques’; ‘Drawing for galleries’; ‘Overdone drawing (Tortured Drawing)’.”

The members of the group presented drawings similar to those created at the drawing course by the title *Film Drawing* at the exhibition *Film/Art. The History of the Hungarian Experimental Film* (Film/művészet. A magyar kísérleti film története) that opened in February 1983 at the Budapest Exhibition Hall. The exhibition, which was the first review of Hungarian experimental film, was organized by Miklós Peternák, who became the member of the Indigo Group in the second half of 1980 and was not only shooting films in this period but as an art historian he also researched the history of Hungarian experimental and independent film. Indigo’s presence at the exhibition was also justified by the fact that the group and its members were involved in filmmaking. Several members were regularly shooting films, primarily within the framework of Balázs Béla Film Studio (BBS) and its K (experimental) section, but many of them shot 8mm films independently of institutions. While in the catalogue of the *Film/Art* exhibition Peternák attempted to provide a comprehensive list of the films, film projects and videos of the artists active in this field, “the exhibition focused primarily on the links with fine art and music”, as he wrote in the preface. “This was justified by the fact that the approach of experimental filmmaking (and the artists involved in it) is mostly based on (fine) art (and music), moreover, (abroad) this form of film has found its place and audience in museums of modern art, galleries and art cinemas.”<sup>45</sup> Peternák explained the adjective “experimental” primarily with the similarities between the experiments conducted in the field of science and art, and according to his concept, in this context “we can talk about a method of film use where expression may focus on the nature of the material of film, on film as an instrument of art or communication just as on the nature of

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<sup>45</sup> *Film/művészet. A magyar kísérleti film története* [Film/Art. The History of Hungarian Experimental Film]. Exhibition Catalogue. Ed. by Miklós Peternák. Budapest Kiállítóterem [Budapest Exhibition Hall], Budapest, 25. February–18. March 1983, p. 1.

information conveyed by film and the (intellectual) content film can express.”<sup>46</sup> So on the one hand, the members of the Indigo Group participated at the exhibition individually and they presented their work as a group with *Film Drawing*; on the other, the film projects entitled *Danube Film Competition* (Duna-filmpályázat) and *Clock Paradox* (Óra-paradoxon) were listed under the name of the group in the catalogue of the exhibition.<sup>47</sup> The series of Indigo’s film-related works were opened by the objects made of the material of film, which were presented during Miklós Erdély’s lecture *Avantgarde or Experimental Film* in Pécs in late 1979 (for example: bookmarks made of film strips). The Danube Film Competition was launched in May 1980, and about 15 Indigo members or artists close to Indigo participated in it. “The condition of entering the competition: to create a film of approximately 3 minutes’ length in black-and-white with Super-8 technique related to the theme of the Danube,” the invitation said. The films were screened several times in the eighties in both Hungary and abroad, but were forgotten for a long time, and most of them resurfaced during the preparation phase of this book. In 1980 the Indigo Group submitted its film project *Clock Paradox* to the thematic screenplay competition of BBS K3 (Béla Balázs Film Studio, K (Experimental) Section) entitled *Film Time* (Filmidő). The project was based on “Einstein’s essay *Dialogue on the Objections Against the Theory of Relativity* (Dialog über Einwände gegen die Relativitätstheorie), published in the 48<sup>th</sup> issue of *Die Naturwissenschaften* on November 29, 1918, and its aim was to react by artistic means to the method of cognition of the theory of relativity and the real world described with this method.”<sup>48</sup> The essence of the clock paradox is that clocks run at different speeds in different coordinate systems. In a coordinate system based on a moving point clocks run slower than a clock at a static point. Thus, the moving clock is going to be late compared to the standing one. The source of the paradox is that motion is a relative concept: if one moves along with the moving clock, in his view, the static clock will move. That means that the static clock should also be late compared to the other one, and that is apparently impossible, since two clocks cannot be late compared to each other at the same time. As the Indigo members wrote: “We would like to clarify the paradox described here with the help of illustrations, and to make it clear for everyone that through the cognitive talent of film the contradiction can be illustrated. The

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

<sup>48</sup> Indigo munkacsoport [The Indigo Working Group]: Óra-paradoxon [Clock Paradox]. In *Filmidő. (Tematikus forgatókönyv-pályázat)* [Film-time (Thematic Screenplay Competition)], BBS-K3 [Béla Balázs Film Studio, K (Experimental) Section], Budapest, 1981, pp. 1–6., re-published with the title: *Albert Einstein általános relativitáselméletéhez kapcsolódó forgatókönyv-tervezet* [Screenplay Project Related to the General Theory of Relativity of Albert Einstein] among the screenplay-projects entitled *Relatív gyakorlatok* [Relative Exercises] of the members of the Indigo Group In *Forgatókönyv pályázat* [Screenplay Competition], March 1982, Balázs Béla Stúdió [Béla Balázs Film Studio], Vol. I. pp. 160–165., and also In Erdély, Miklós: *A filmről (Filmelméleti írások, forgatókönyvek, filmtervek, kritikák). Válogatott írások II.* [On Film (Writings on Film Theory, Screenplays, Reviews). Selected Writings II.]. Ed. by Miklós Peterján. Balassi Kiadó – BAE Tartóshullám – Intermédia, Budapest, 1995, pp. 215–219.

impossible state where the same place exists in two types of time can be made visible [...] After the explanatory illustrations we will use Franz Kafka's short story, which was born in the same period as the theory of relativity, and which embodies the spirit of the theory on another level. The title of the short story is *Everyday Chaos*.<sup>49</sup> In the final part of the project they also described the illustration of the paradox, which – as Einstein put it – cannot be questioned citing “common sense”. If we imagine the “moving” coordinate system as a train moving on a track, then the “train running at a uniform speed can be considered ‘static’, while the track along with its surroundings can be considered “moving at uniform speed” as well.”<sup>50</sup> According to the general theory of relativity in this case the possibility of the change in the speed of the surroundings must exist. In the planned film two figures standing inside a train are visible during the conversation concerning this topic, along with the moving landscape outside the window. “During the final sentences of the conversation the train suddenly stops and the trees standing outside fall down with a great crackle. The last sentence is followed by the sound of an enormous cataclysm. The two figures stay motionless.”<sup>51</sup> Film is a temporal art where the manipulation of time is possible. Montage offers an excellent opportunity for the comparison of different sets of coordinates. The members of the Indigo Group realized the cognitive possibilities of filmmaking under the leadership of Miklós Erdély, in whose film *Train Trip* (*Vonatút*) they participated as “performers”, and they probably followed the final stages of filmmaking closely.

Miklós Erdély shot his film based on and realized according to structuralist principles in the spring of 1981.<sup>52</sup> He described the structure of the planned film in the following way: “A film about an hour-long train trip, which presents the tension between real, irreversible processes, ephemeral moments and the possibilities of repetition and interchangeability provided by film. The one-way time process is represented and illustrated by the train's progress. The repetition of characteristic or neutral five- or ten-second fragments of processes selected from the recorded material according to a certain system breaks the one-way rolling of time. By certain system I mean that I intercut the emblem-like fragments in a reverse order compared to their actual order over and over again in an increasingly complete form in order to arrive to the initial fragment by the end.”<sup>53</sup> One of the “goals of the film was

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. (1995), p. 216.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. (1995), p. 218.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. (1995), p. 219.

<sup>52</sup> Standard Copy: Béla Balázs Film Studio, K (Experimental) Section, 1988. Camera: Ferenc Papp, Editor: Mária Rigó, Music: Tibor Szemző, 16 mm, black-and-white, 104 minutes.

<sup>53</sup> Erdély, Miklós: *Vonatút (Kísérleti filmterv)* [Train Trip (Experimental Film Project)]. In Erdély, Miklós: *A filmről* [On Film], Op. Cit., p. 214.

to record the Indigo Group”,<sup>54</sup> that is why the members of the group screened this film in November 1986 at the Múcsarnok, when they commemorated their deceased master with the reconstruction of *Table Actions*.

After 1984 Miklós Erdély’s illness and subsequent death pushed joint creative work into the background. After 1986 Indigo ceased to be an active group, although the members did create a environment entitled *No(t) This Way* for the 1998 Miklós Erdély retrospective exhibition at the Múcsarnok in Budapest. It was a work that realized a previously unrealized idea of Erdély. According to János Sugár, Indigo exists even today, since no one has ever dissolved it.<sup>55</sup> The fact that fairly recently, in 2005 the group held an exhibition by the title VÉGKÉP (a play on words: “Finally” or “Final Picture”) at the 2B Gallery in Budapest is a proof of that.

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<sup>54</sup> *Miklós Erdély (1928–1986). Films*. Budapest Film–Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat–Balázs Béla Stúdió, K-Szekció [Budapest Film–Society for Popularization of Scientific Knowledge–Béla Balázs Film Studio, K Section], Budapest, 1988, s. p.

<sup>55</sup> See also: Sugár, János: Indigo Group. In *East Art Map*, Op. Cit. (see the note No. 2), pp. 216–217.