



1+1+1

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Vít Havránek & Ján Mančuška

Radical Solutions

Art and Language club

Revolution in an asynchronous space

Missing Gaps in the structure

Absence of Tension

Why we selected the following works: In the first place, we are creating our own 'family tree' of Czech art. Naturally, references to and works of artists of other countries – predominantly of Eastern Europe – are found in it. This family tree stands in certain opposition to and in tension with the current notion of Czech art after 1945, in which Czech art history supports artefact and aesthetics, and often a lyrical or surreal solution. The selected works have a certain shared radicalism, outwardly appearing as neglecting formal and aesthetic qualities. In our view, the aforementioned historical works essentially and deliberately revise local aesthetic solutions. Therefore, we've chosen older works that were not reflected upon or considered important when they were created. These works are 'virtual histories' which due to contemporary sensitivity now begin to exist. The contemporary works continue in their radical spirit, or, in other words, are important for their interpretation.

We are attempting to construct a discourse and context on the basis of radical solutions.

a Vladimír Boudník
Street Actions
1949–57

Vladimír Boudník is perceived in the Czech Republic as predecessor of the informal abstraction movement. His actions and manifestos are exhibited as frenetic prologues to his graphic works. Our interpretation largely ignores his graphic works and places an emphasis on his street actions and manifestos. During his actions, he'd ask passers-by what they saw in cracked walls and would involve them in the actions by drawing real or dream-like forms. 'Each of us will be an artist if we rid ourselves of bias and apathy.' 1949.

b Stano Filko, Alex Mlynárčík, Zita Kostrová
Happsoc
1 May 1965

A Happsoc was a social happening on the basis of which there was an 'Action prompting a perception and complex experience of reality isolated from everyday existence.. In contrast to the happening, its expression is a lone non-stylised experience, which in its original form is not influenced by direct interference.' A Happsoc was conducted as a specification of information that the artists obtained by inquiring at the Office of Statistics (the number of men and women living in Bratislava as of a given date). A summary of the data was, together with the Happsoc Manifesto sent out by post and distributed. The title, the pronunciation of the word 'Happsoc' contains in itself an essence of our heritage that we would like to document here.

c Jiří Kovanda
30 November 1977
Prague, Charles Square
Not documented

'I had arranged to meet friends at 7.40. I decided I would arrive at the agreed spot about 10 minutes early...'

In 1977, performance was to a certain extent a codified means of artistic thinking and expression. For Kovanda, it is a typical minimum gesture moving art beyond the border of an explicitness that stems from normal reality. One interesting aspect is the target group of this action. The performance is designed for a group of friends, and introduces doubt and uncertainty to an individual in their network of relationships.

d IRWIN
East Art Map

The mental cartography of 'Eastern European' space. The art group conducted work that was traditionally reserved for museums and research institutions. IRWIN applied to art of the past fifty years a network in which they still avoided perceiving history as a linear and causal structure, and made visible relationships and interactions to the detriment of data and chronology. They considered it impossible for unknown references of Eastern European art to be integrated and compared it in the West to 'the whole' of art history.

e Pavel Humhal
The Stars of My Body

Historically significant work for our environment. Humhal's work has brought an intimacy to the art scene in this period dominated by post-modern symbolism. Intimacy in his work and in the work of the group Monday, to which he belongs, reached the dimension of a theme that can be discussed publicly.

f Martin Kippenberger

The irreducible spectrum of Kippenberger's activities cut through two generations of Czech and Slovak art in the 1990s. Czech and Slovak art can through Kippenberger be linked to the context of German speaking countries.

g Pawel Althamer
Actors on the manifesto

Some of Althamer's actions are similar to those of Jiří Kovanda, even though they were created about 20 years later in a different context. If we place side-by-side Kovanda's and Althamer's actions that are considered outwardly similar, in examining the motives and meaning of both artists we realise that they are two distinct universes.

h Azzoro
Pyxis Systematis Domestici Quid Video Dicitur (VHS Cassette) colour, 39.00
2003

The actions of the group Azzoro focus on the practices of contemporary art. The result is usually a video recording featuring a curator, art-piece or institution. In the action they present their journeys from Krakow to Vienna in order to personally deliver the video cassette to an exhibition at the Ludwig Museum. On the way the group stops in several places in Poland and the Czech Republic and communicate only in Latin with people of whom they ask directions to a hotel or petrol station. Latin was the language of the elite throughout Europe – so it is a reference of sorts to the lost universality of culture in contrast to the schemas of art's operation and its value structures.

i Ján Mančuška
... and Back Again
text, aluminium boxes, museum
2004

In this project Mančuška deals with the method of history's construction, which he has worked with for some time. An important factor is the role of the museum as an institution in which such constructions often seek support. The artist covered pictures of famous Czech painters with aluminium boxes at a permanent exhibition of Czech modern art up until 1945. From the front these boxes are cut out with texts that were created on the basis of a critique of Modernism, always in reference to a specific work. The pictures themselves can be viewed through the text. The project addresses a theme that is important to Mančuška – the 'ephemerality' of art, in which the box without the picture ceases to be a work of art. Therefore, existing as art only under certain circumstances.

j Jiří Skála

Skála's practice often works with measurability and measurements that can seem to be somewhat technical, but does not concern subjectivity or meaning. His work deals with the conflict between the objectivity of measurability and the personal impact of measurements and statistics in our lives. In his ruler project, for instance, he shortened the length of a 30 cm ruler by half a centimetre. The ruler still appeared completely normal. Skála discretely distributed them and tried to pass them off to people working with exact measurements (architects, etc.). In his volume-measurement project he measured the volume of all members of his family, converting them to exact minimally articulated cardboard boxes. He exhibited them side by side in a gallery. As he himself said, he was also interested in the contrast of the inside and outside – he knows his parents thoroughly from the outside, but what they conceal within remains a mystery to him.

k Roman Ondák

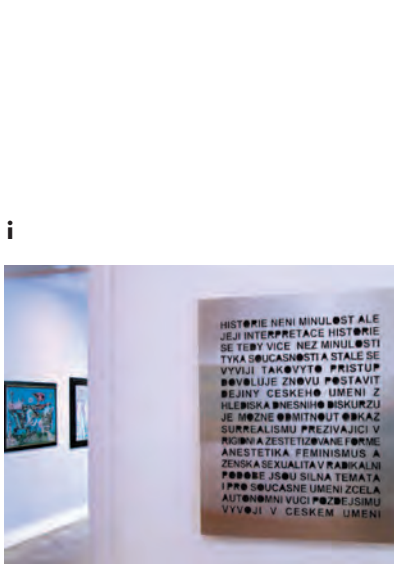
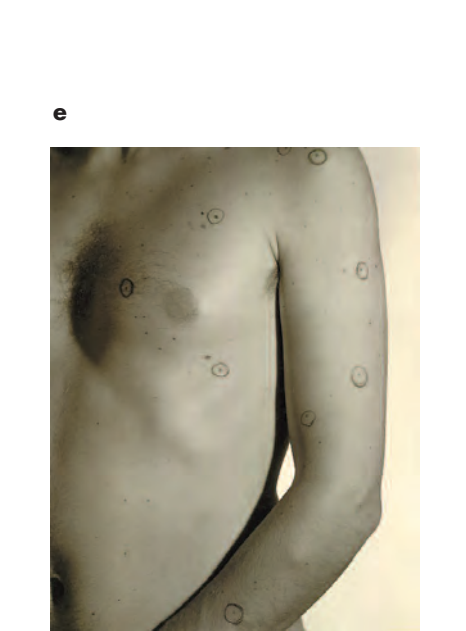
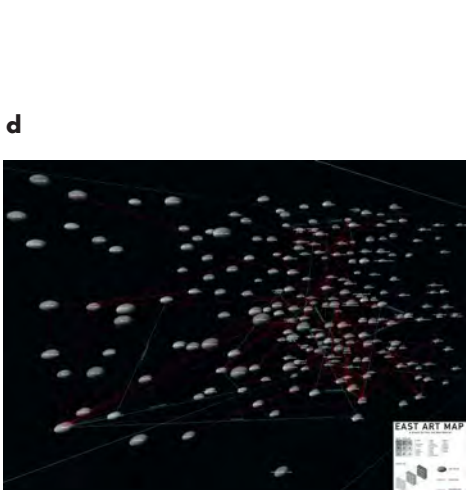
He is a subtle and thoughtful writer of screenplays. At first it appears to be based on observation. That which makes his work exceptional is the distillation of that which is thoroughly observed and the numerous possibilities these pose to the artist. For example, the phenomenon of queues that occurred frequently for scarce goods carried specific meaning during Socialism. Ondák worked with a collection of images that appeared in the daily press. He then staged an actual queue in front of the entrance to a Kunstverein where we would least expect it. The subtle movement in the quotidian thus created a space for speculation, uncertainty and work with the imagination.

l Boris Ondreička
ps1

Radically intellectual approach that arises from personal mythology and poetics. A passionate debater and the author of hundreds of pages of polemical texts. He transforms codes and practices from many areas in his work – from poetry, the independent music scene and philosophy.

m Anatolij Osmolovskij
Against all over the mausoleum

An important source of theoretical discussion for our circle as well as for the group IRWIN. His term 'non-spectacular art' has stood at the threshold of our theoretical activities and his texts were published several times in Czech magazines in the 1990s.



TO GET HER



Roman Ondák



SK Parking
2001

Slovak Skoda cars were parked behind Secession,
Vienna, for two months



A portrait being made of a young tourist guide,
commissioned for the advertisement of his
[Guided Tour](#)



[Guided Tour \(Follow Me\)](#)
2002

Tours were provided by a 12-year-old boy
whose commentary was given entirely in the
future tense

Images courtesy of gbagency, Paris



Stills from [Energy Lithuania](#), 2001

Some notes on the work of Deimantas Narkevičius

Great or small, profound or superficial, their [philosophers] lives have lost that simplicity and elegance of line they attribute (fictitiously no doubt) to the lives of their illustrious models. Philosophers and philosophy can no longer be isolated, disguised, hidden. And this is precisely because everyday life is the supreme court where wisdom, knowledge and power are brought to judgement.

Henri Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1, 1956

Context:

The whereabouts of the essayist in relation to a work of art, determines the emphasis brought to bear on the origin of the work of art in question. The distance between Vilnius and London, the respective homes of artist and writer, presents an active space (either psychological or literal) that in and for itself creates and determines understanding. Nationality is forever held in dialectical tension, as emphasis shifts and circles other aspects in play. I must express from the start that this geographical contingency is of note not because Deimantas Narkevičius is Lithuanian, but because located within the anatomy of Narkevičius's work, an embodiment of a relationship to Lithuanian identity and history can be found. These tensions reinforce a complexity in his project, that paradoxically enables it to speak beyond itself, translating its specificity and exceeding cartographic and sociological geographies.

Lithuania has moved from Soviet colonisation to the post-communist era that currently bears witness to its integration into the EU. This straightforward observation does little to mark out the territory of Narkevičius's concern, as the formal aspect is as integral to the project as the story or event that unfolds. Narkevičius does not view himself as part of the party politic, unsurprisingly former Soviet states generally view Politics as a dirty business. However, the embedding of 'politics' or social commentary cannot be denied – what constitutes politics? Our Western view that politics is found in everything is countered by Narkevičius, but I suspect that this is a terminological problem. He clearly engages with set moments within the country's history that hold social and political significance registered through personal and communal histories. What is presented is a conversation between content, strategies of moving image and the institutional display of the work. Physically the mediums used include found footage, animation, super 8, video, and 35mm film. In turn the work mediates a number of genres that negotiate documentary, cinema, and video. All this is to the aid of Narkevičius's investigation into what could be called experience. Here, this experience is mediated in relation to the Soviet perpetration of official history as a universally experienced continuum. He asks questions of it by emphasising specific individuals, monuments, industrial and cultural sites, that would have negotiated a myriad of politics and cultures during Lithuania's occupation then and so called rehabilitation now.

The practice emerges out of a temporal landscape that is both sculptural and filmic that we can identify as a divergent set of interests commonly found in contemporary practice that has come forth from western systems, but in this case has not. Narkevičius addresses the films and television broadcasts during Communism, which he says were beautifully crafted works often employing the most able camera personnel, directors and editors. The history of Soviet film is of course well documented, so it comes as little surprise that the richness of a public visual language from before 1989 could have provided a wealth of ideas (though most of these archives how now been destroyed). The concept of art emerges through the relationship to space and the installation component. This incorporates the position of the viewer and the institution in which the work is shown (that has included more 'site-related' works such as [The Role of a Lifetime](#) made for St.Peter's church, Brighton 2003).

A notion of history:

It is a question asked by any number of artists working today, and one that refuses to duck behind the wave of rabid commercialisation. Why? Well, a concept of history is in itself an ongoing progression, a mutation that is forever changing shape as well as being given a new face. This is the concrete aspect of history, the one that we can measure and see. But what of the one that is formed all at odds with what we know – a growing mountain of new ontologies. The sublimation of the subject in Hegalian logic has long become a *bête noir* of philosophical thought. This in no way accords the mere rise of 'being there fore itself subjectivity' but the idea that there need be more of an interplay between the general (eg. society as a whole) and the particular (eg. societies constituents). What this permits, is an idea that there is something to be gained from an analysis or promotion of individual accounts as they broadly inform this 'whole'. The problem as ever is how can this be achieved without bending to the gut wrenching call of lamenting individualism. These thoughts come to me as I watch a Narkevičius work. His achievement cannot be underestimated by moving the whole into the sphere of medium, or the specific in terms of the conditions and context of making. The work 'speaks' in a language that touches on the familiar. The undulating individual reflections gain access to another set of histories that expand and shrink our horizons all at once. How this is accomplished has to do with the knitting of medium and content, concepts of art and concepts of film and how these occupy time and space.

A platform for vision

The way in which we see works of art is continuously renegotiated. This has been addressed no more then with the arrival of time based work in the gallery space. If it is a moving image could it not as well be experienced in the confines of a cinema auditorium? The viewing relationship that needs to be established in the gallery is conditioned upon a number of pretexts that define the work as 'doing' something other than that of the cinematic/televisual experience. For Narkevičius this initially grew out of a relationship to sculpture and three-dimensionality. This remained at the heart of his project that renders the screen in relationship to the space used, and implicitly to the viewer's appearance inside this configuration. The viewer is therefore asked to assert themselves in relation to the material shown, that is, to provide something. The shadow cast by this viewing figure maps a three-dimensionality that hinders mere consumption, even if the presence of the figure is sometimes merely implied.

Case study

[Energy Lithuania](#), a film from 2001, reveals through the use of Super 8 film the simmering sights of a Lithuanian power plant. The film mediates the architecture of the plant, the life of inhabitants of Elektrėnai and memories of a plant employee. A lovingly filmed reverie of a socialist fresco depicting workers is experienced to Mozart's adagio from the piano sonata in F major (KV 280). This ends the work on a suitably reconciled note. Life in Elektrėnai is marked by its ordinariness on the one hand, a group take a Latino dance class and children play in the sun and jump off a pier, and the extraordinary tale of Elektrėnai's construction on the other. It is within this mediation that a surfacing of the story occurs, not through the depiction of particular scenes per se, but the space created in-between by the fall out from these representations. One could say that a sense of narrative is reinforced by the look of Super 8 that intensifies a feeling of nostalgia. What follows is an experience of distance that encourages a parallel encounter with the film, that has been opened up by the aesthetic space that the materiality of Super 8 affords. The distance that we experience is not only due to a lapse in time, but also the intimacy of some of the images that recall the home-movie that are self containing and create a sense of private space. The home-movie sensation gives way to documentary-style footage and narration when a worker, addressing the camera recounts his experience of Elektrėnai through the decades. He begins by telling us,

Everything took place in bright light that seemed even too strong. What I remember most distinctly was the sense of security in a large but limited space that contained a perspective, a discovery of something new. That was the time when prisoners were released from the Siberia. It was in 1956-57. Here they could find shelter and work. They used to come in huge numbers, thousands of them could settle down. Having gone through all this misery, these people were very happy.

He refers to the sense of international community and his love and excitement for the task of providing electricity. The signposts of the past are recalibrated though his account – the notion of significance has undergone a transformation in order to account for these lives that have been marked by the experience of history. Pushed to an alternative viewing point, the film constructs this narrative as our focal point.

I was fond of electricity. I mastered the skills of making wind-powered electric generators and rewinding dynamos. I installed electricity in my house and then in my neighbour's house. Well, you set up a windmill, an accumulator, and you have light. Nobody has ever experienced such joy as those who laid power lines. They lay an electric power line to a place with no electricity, install the wiring and light a bulb. The place lights up, the streets light up. How much joy this brought to those people: they install electricity – and it's light. This work can be done when all people want it. Then people don't spare time. There was great enthusiasm for building. There was a great wish to create. Man is a creator by nature.

The more information we have, the more this story feeds a relationship between the viewer and the place. We become invested in it – the intensity of the account discloses something to us, perhaps even something ubiquitous about the human condition that nurtures desire, expectation and the satisfaction of work. The plant is clearly still in operation, providing a vast percentage of electricity for Lithuania. Reclamation, inheritance, transference of power are therefore also shown by the hand of this narrative device. A distinction is revealed between 'dead' politics on the one hand and the actuality of the lives of the population on the other. In these terms a simple binary perhaps, but on another level a kind of free play begins to occur – creating signification that allows an internal dialogue to take place. A dialogue that escapes this binary (of public and private) by adding/producing meaning not only through what is in front of you, but also by the constant re-negotiation of history itself.

Lisa Panting

: Double agents

Co-convenors:
Graham Ellard
Anne Tallentire

Members:
Adam Chodzko
Jaki Irvine
Uriel Orlow
Lisa Panting

1+1+1 edited by Lisa Panting
Designed by bc, mh
Printed by Aldgate Press

Central Saint Martin's
School of Art and Design
107-109 Charing Cross Rd
London WC2H 0DV

doubleagents@csm.arts.ac.uk
www.doubleagents.org.uk

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