

Radislav Matuščík

Basement

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This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the info@institute.hr.

All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, www.institute.hr.

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020**. Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

Radislav Matuščík

Basement

Installations of "Basement" have raised important problems of culture and art at the turn of the eighties and the nineties in a way that is radically different from views of successive layers of development defining the present profile of Slovak art. A found object, the qualities and interpretations of which accentuate industrial technologies and tend to "cool" articulation, critical rationality of the syntax of the structure, which is realized by work "on site" respecting qualities of environment, have created a room for a play of ironical imagination. Common denominator of individual interpretations of the programme of a new object is a conviction about the topical relevance of this medium in a situation characterized by an exclusive artifact of aesthetic voluntarism looking in vain for a way out of its aporetic bondage on one hand, and on the other hand by an impersonal and endless "high-tech" reproduction of utilitarian products. By paradoxical negation of original purpose and programmed functions of objects of technical civilization, the authors of installations (the code of which suggests that they are placed - postconceptually and postminimalistically - beyond booby traps of the aesthetic) discover a new meaning of objects in a world that is one-sidedly orientated on functioning but, at the same time, schizoidly looking for a lost mythical home.

In the second half of the eighties, several variously motivated, orientated and founded polemics, efforts and trends have changed the appearance of Slovak artistic scene, dangerously satisfied with its official form after 1972. Some of them have revised, others at least made problematic up to then uncriticisable status of programmes, movements, personalities and works. Activity of the "transavant-garde" part of the drive of the young generation after 1985 had the strongest impetus and differed mostly in its character. Comebacks of excommunicated movements and personalities that

dominated in endeavours of generations at the end of the fifties and beginning of the sixties were less marked and surprising. Several sculptors and painters have won belated acknowledgement. Due to their personal efforts, some authors afflicted by anathema have been rehabilitated, too. Artistic scene has been most guarded in accepting important authors, who were disqualified after 1972 because of the decisive part they played in development of the "other" creativity parallel to incursions of English, American (pop art) and European (Nouveau Realisme) art of the fifties and the sixties, with the following movement of re-structured languages from object to concept, from environment and happening to land art, arte povera, installation, body art and performance.

Slovak history, theory and criticism of art has either compromised itself by its participation in excommunications and exorcisms or has been silent and continues to be silent. It engages in changes of the contemporary scene only exceptionally, and in the most cases indecisively · and unqualifiedly. Especially young critics have not - tragically - found and recognized their own "transavantgarde". They have not used their chance - not surprisingly, considering their poor education. Theoreticians of the middle generation prefer authors of 1957 and 1961 or promote younger (especially unproblematic and unprovoking) tendencies from the seventies. The story of Slovak art of the last three decades has remained unwritten. Events (even those of basic importance) have not found their description, not to say their interpretation.

Absence of the historical implies incompetence in the present. Problems put forward by the exhibition of a found object in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum or by the exposition Individuals in MOCA Los Angeles, by Kassel "documenta 8" or by Aperto 88 part of the Biennale of Venice do not disturb our "kunsthistorical" community. In relation to the "other" creativity it is manifested also by theoretical reduction to the outdated iconoclastic episode of the past, after which - fortunately - the artists began "to paint again" disregarding this pathology of modernism (that was exposed by a postmodern interpretative revision). However, "Basement" is not just another aesthetic reminiscence of an unacknowledged generation or group. Neither is it just a polemic with a generational initiative of a belated "transavant-garde" but it is also a proof that excommunication of object and other media of the "other" creativity could not halt continuous creative restructuration of established languages and re-definition of culture and of its functioning - it could, perhaps, only keep it secret.

In contrast to the prevailing majority of initiative movements on Slovak artistic scene of the second half of the 20-th century, biographical motivations have no substantial meaning in the programme of the new object. "Basement" represents a community of decision, a kinship of choice. Its eight authors belong to various generations. They were entering into cultural live from the middle sixties up to the middle eighties. Their different artistic fortunes can be read as individual parts of a story of the "other" creativity in mostly unfavourable changes of culture and art in three decades; of a story that forms the basis of present hope.

Individual endeavours of Koller (1939), Kren (1958), Meluzin (1947), Oravec (1960), Pagac (1960) and Zelibská (1941) have met on the common platform of the "other" creativity in "Terrains" (summer 1982, winter 1982-1983, autumn 1983, spring 1984), in four confrontations of independent works of thirteen authors developing new types of action. The oldest of them have belonged to the founders, the youngest ones to the fourth phase of the development. Both stages, markedly different in all their basic characteristics, are separated by fifteen years: from that perspective, the prime of years 1965-1971 has seemed to be unbelievably remote, because the following years officially stamped the action (by which, for the first time, Slovak works were integrated into European context without a delay of several decades) as a degeneration and destruction of a "sound" tradition. Performative solution of communication, a communiqué that is enacted, accent on an action can be found with the remaining two authors of "Basement", too. With Adamciak (1946) from the middle of the sixties, its basis lying in the musical, with Ronai (1953) in the eighties, beside his painting.

Documentation and analysis of actions of the eighties has proved that the authors have not been only re-evaluating their own development from happsoc (Mlynarcik) and anti-happening (Koller) beginnings to model communicative plays but also interwoven experiences of development of a number of media, techniques and practices of the "other" creativity in the years 1965-1988. In these complicated processes, action-conceptual linkage of opening declarations, object interventions and manipulations played the most important role. From its changes that had been actualized after the violent interruption (1972) of the development of great festivities - basic type of the second phase - gradual resignation to thematic implications (characteristic for pop-art conception) resulted. In further development, visualizing function of an object in concept art could be overcome by a renewed critical re-evaluation. This de-sedimentation of meanings and links made possible a new understanding of an object in a contemporary

action as a definition of operations that it is undergoing. As the context is never fixed definitively, the meaning - similarly as in the deconstruction theory (Derrida, De Man) – is fundamentally inconstant. Communicative action, communicative model play to which the differentiation between the model and life is irrelevant (parallel to Culler's reading of Derrida: "Serious behaviour is a case of role-playing") leads the "other" creativity to a paradigm of understanding that overcomes limit of logocentrism. Within it, the "deconstructive" diagnosis does not become an appeal to restate the myth (Oliva), the primitive, the childish etc., it is not a rational defensive and capitulation. It ends in an ironical philosophical perspective. It is this that represents the value of installations of "Basement" towards the end of the postmodernism.