

An Engaged Nouveau Réalisme? Eastern European Mutations as an Alternative to Criticism of the Movement. The Conceptual Approach of Alex Mlynárčik

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Abstract

The article analyses the connections between Slovak artist Alex Mlynárčik and the French milieu centred around Pierre Restany, theorist of the Nouveau Réalisme (New Realism) movement in the 1960s. Referring to the research method of Czech art historian Tomáš Pospiszyl called associative art history (2018), the text attempts to challenge myths about the development of art in the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the impermeability of the Iron Curtain or the secondary nature of Eastern Bloc artistic production in relation to their Western counterparts. The method allows us to view Mlynárčik's artistic projects and compare them in a non-hierarchical way with the works of artists such as Joseph Beuys and the art and architecture theory of Frenchman Michel Ragon. In addition, the article not only highlights Mlynárčik's original contribution to the development of art in Europe, but also analyses his early conceptual approach, which may be a response to the limitations of the New Realism movement and its criticism.

Keywords: Alex Mlynárčik, Slovak Art, The Nouveau Réalisme, Associative Art History, Conceptual Art, De-Westernisation

On July 16, 1971, at 8:45 p.m. in the city of Bratislava, the Slovak artist Alex Mlynárčik co-authored with the Italian artist Gianni Bertini a collective artwork under the title *Art anticonceptionnel* (*Anticonceptionnel Art*). The artists knew each other through an intermediary, the French critic Pierre Restany. The artworks of both could be defined at the time as corresponding with the French Nouveau Réalisme (New Realism) – a movement co-launched by Restany in the early 1960s. This artwork, which was highly provocative conceptually and challenged the principles of the Nouveau Réalisme, helped define Bertini's and Mlynárčik's work as a response to conceptual art and its path of development since the mid-1960s. The ordinary matchbox that constituted the frame of their so-called “anticonceptual pill” was labelled with the name of the project and its authors

and a stamp with the exact date of its completion. Inside the matchbox was a yellow pill, resembling vitamin-C pill, placed on a piece of yellowish cotton wool. The artwork was intended as a criticism of the practices of conceptual art – the negation of a formal aspect of an art project, a work to be conceived mentally than physically. As Alex Mlynárčik later stated, conceptual art was seen by him as a simplification of the artwork, and through the pill he wanted to cure the artworld from its spread.¹ It likewise referred to the appearance of the contraceptive pill, which protected women from becoming pregnant.² Like the Austrian architect Hans Hollein's *Architekturpille* (*Architecture Pill*) from 1968, which sought to expand the understanding of the architectural design as such, Bertini's and Mlynárčik's pill became a tool for stretching the definition of art. Paradoxically its

consumption, which was supposed to prevent the receiver from creating conceptual works, could itself be defined as a symbolic and conceptual gesture. Challenging the rules in force in the art world and in society, this artwork became a thought-driven projection that not only could be defined as conceptual art, but which also marked a shift in Mlynářčik's and Bertini's works from practices that were aesthetically and physically distinct from practices defined by New Realism – even if the conceptual rooting here resulted from the artists' play with the conventions of conceptual art and even if this occurred against the artists' will. The box also contained instructions (*Mode d'emploi*) in a mixture of languages, with words borrowed from French, German, Slovak and Latin. It constituted a free association of images juxtaposing whiskey and beer, Greek mythology, and Romani music, suggesting the imaginative or even hallucinatory effects of the pill.

This direct collaboration between Mlynářčik and Bertini is a significant example of teamwork between artists from Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc in the 1970s. It illustrates the porosity of the Iron Curtain, and its existence tells us that contacts and friendships among artists from both parts of Europe were possible, even if rather rare. Moreover, Mlynářčik's and Bertini's collaboration is an example of a de-hierarchised phenomenon in which two artists act as a pair. There is no superiority of the West over the East, common in typical discourses on art after World War II. It could also be described in terms of the cultural transfer. Coined in the mid-1980s by Michael Werner and Michel Espagne, this concept originally described non-hierarchical exchanges between the literary milieux of France and Germany.³

This collaborative artwork, as well as other projects, could be also described by a term coined by the Czech art historian Tomáš Pospiszyl: associative art

history.⁴ In order to escape the hierarchical narratives of the European East and West from the 1945–1989 period, he expands the practice of comparison. In his redefinition of the Czechoslovakian neo avant-garde art of the postwar period, Pospiszyl stressed the common ground, parallel processes and dialogue between the two sides of Europe. I would like to reference this concept to re-examine Mlynářčik's work in relation to the practices of Western European art by, among others, Joseph Beuys and Nouveau Réalisme. Drawing on the writings of the American scholar Alexander Alberro,⁵ I will also trace the proto-conceptual and conceptual approaches in Mlynářčik's work, which distinguish him from artists at the heart of the Nouveau Réalisme, and moves him towards the position of Yves Klein.

Alex Mlynářčik, a Parisian artist in Czechoslovakia

Alex Mlynářčik was among the artists from the Eastern Bloc who took advantage of the limited liberalization of social control during the post-Stalin thaw to travel abroad in the 1960s. Before the so-called “normalization period” in Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s, he had made several trips to France, which allowed him to discover the Parisian visual arts and its key figures. The French capital's artistic community warmly welcomed Mlynářčik's art, and he, like a few other artists from the East at the time, had the opportunity to exhibit and carry out his projects abroad. His personal contacts with the French artistic community also fostered the development of an interest in the social dimension of art, which was already present in his early works. This developed in his work under the influence of the French artistic and philosophical trends of the time—the most significant of which was his discovery of the Nouveau Réalisme. Mlynářčik's work in the 1960s and 1970s

¹ According to the author's interview with Alex Mlynářčik, Žilina, 10 October 2014.

² Ibidem.

³ ESPAGNE, M. – WERNER, M.: *Transferts. Les relations inter-culturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)*. Paris

1988; ESPAGNE, M.: *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands*. Paris 1999.

⁴ POSPISZYL, T.: *An Associative Art History Comparative Studies of Neo-Avant-Gardes in a Bipolar World*. Zurich and Dijon 2018.

⁵ ALBERRO, A.: *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. Cambridge, MA 2004.

bears the traces of both the events of the Prague Spring and May 1968. This is why in order to gain an overview of his work, it is important to mention a few elements of his biography, which will help us understand why his work constitutes a veritable “bridge” between the two sides of the Iron Curtain.

In April 1964, Alex Mlynárčik, an artist from Žilina, a city in northern Slovakia, obtained a passport and travelled to Paris, where he met Pierre Restany at the Lara Vincy Gallery.⁶ At the time, Restany was one of the most knowledgeable French art critics of artistic creation on the other side of the Iron Curtain.⁷ His friendship with Restany continued during Mlynárčik's frequent stays in Paris until 1968, and also during the Frenchman's visits to Czechoslovakia. It should be noted that 1964, the year in which the relationship between Restany and Mlynárčik began, marked the peak of the critic's collaboration with the Nouveau Réalisme group of artists, even though the group had already begun to disband at that time. Thanks to his friendship with Restany, Mlynárčik had the opportunity to establish contacts with artists and critics in Parisian circles. His work was initially in dialogue with by Nouveau Réalisme, and later with other Parisian artistic trends of the time. He also had the opportunity to participate directly in the artistic life of the French capital through several solo exhibitions.

The most important exhibitions from the perspective of Mlynárčik's artistic development were those held in Paris in the latter half of the 1960s. In 1966 and 1967, the artist created environments at the Raymonde Cazenave gallery in Paris: in 1966, *Les Manifestations permanentes* (Permanent Manifesta-

tions),⁸ and a year later, *La Tentation* (Temptation).⁹ In 1968, Mlynárčik created the third part of *Les Manifestations permanentes* at the Sorbonne. In 1968 and 1969, he also carried out projects in the municipal park of Châtillon-sous-Bagneux (*Les Mégalithes du XXI^e siècle – The Megaliths of the 21st century* during the Châtillon des Arts and *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet – Good Morning Monsieur Courbet* action). In 1967, he participated in the 5th edition, in 1969 in the 6th edition, and in 1971 in the 7th edition of the Paris Biennale (actions entitled *Lola II* and *Donation* at the Galliera Museum, and *Anno Domini*). A few years later, in the 1970s, Mlynárčik also had solo exhibitions at the Lara Vincy gallery in Paris: *Inter-Etrennes* in 1972, *Argillia* in 1977, and *Métamorphoses* in 1979.

Moreover, many artists supported by Pierre Restany appeared directly or indirectly in artistic events or festivals organized by Mlynárčik after 1968 during the period known as the “normalization” in Czechoslovakia. This was the case, for example, with César, François Dufrêne, Niki de Saint-Phalle, and Mimmo Rotella, whose artworks were sold at auction during a horse racing event organized by Mlynárčik in 1971 in homage to Edgar Degas. In addition, Christo, François Dufrêne, and Mimmo Rotella participated with Pierre Restany in *Marriage d'Eve* (Marriage of Eve), an event organized by Mlynárčik the following year.

These examples of Mlynárčik's artistic activity in Paris attest to the roots the Slovak artist had put down in the French capital and his knowledge of the artistic and intellectual trends of the time. A more detailed analysis of selected works Mlynárčik produced in France and Slovakia during the 1960s

⁶ According to the author's interview with Alex Mlynárčik, Žilina, 10 October 2014.

⁷ Pierre Restany “discovered” Central and Eastern European art and came into contact with artistic circles in Eastern Europe during his trip to Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1960 and his participation in the 7th Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) held that year in Warsaw. His new contacts with artists and critics from this part of Europe bore fruit in a series of articles on Czech and Polish art published in periodicals such as *Les Lettres françaises* and *Doums*. From 1964 onwards, he became the Paris correspondent for two Czechoslovakian magazines: the weekly *Výtvarné práce* (Plastic Works) and the monthly *Výtvarné umění* (Plastic

Arts). This collaboration lasted until 1969, when Restany was banned from entering the country during the consolidation of the Czechoslovakian state after the Prague Spring. On Pierre Restany's relations with Czechoslovakia, see: BARTOŠOVÁ, Z.: Rozhovor Zuzany Bartošovej s Pierrom Restanym / L'entretien de Zuzana Bartošová avec Pierre Restany. In: *Očami X: desat' autorov o súčasnom slovenskom výtvarnom umení*. Eds.: BAKOŠ, J. – BARTOŠOVÁ, Z. Bratislava 1996, pp. 183 – 200; See also: LEEMAN, R.: *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*. Paris 2009; PÉRIER, H.: *Pierre Restany Le prophète de l'art*. Paris 2013.

⁸ *Mlynárčik*. Exh. cat. Paris 1966.

⁹ *Mlynárčik Urbásek*. Exh. cat. Paris 1967.

highlights the specificity of his creative dialogue with Parisian artistic trends. These works also demonstrate Mlynárčik's creativity, and how he drew on the visual art of French groups and ideas of the time, and, drawing on his experience as an Eastern European, assimilated them in ways that were unique to him.

**Duchamp before Restany:
everyday reality in Mlynárčik's work
Towards a redefinition of social relations**

In the introductory text to Pospiszyl's book about associative art history, the American-German scholar Sven Spieker stresses the importance of redefining the place of Czechoslovakian postwar art in global art history.¹⁰ The main aim of this process, however, is not to stretch and diversify the Western canon, but to rethink and rewrite the European history of art. The referencing of Western models and labelling of East Europeans as "followers" should be replaced, Spieker stresses, by less hierarchical terms such as asynchronicity.¹¹ By quoting the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski's contribution to the horizontal art history,¹² Spieker highlights the importance of the peripheral gaze that allows (Western) European discourse on art to be "provincialized".¹³ In order to do so, it is important to highlight existing contacts between these two European artistic milieus. The case of Mlynárčik is one of the most effective examples in that it allows us to rethink European art and its main actors.

Undoubtedly, a relationship that was crucial to Mlynárčik's artistic development and the launch of his international career was the one he had with Pierre Restany. Since the mid-1960s, following the ideas expressed by the French critic, the Slovak artist

became increasingly interested in the aspect of randomness in art, the multiplication of interpretative possibilities, and the redefinition of the role of the viewer, who gradually becomes the main actor in his performances. Mlynárčik drew inspiration from these new aesthetic ideas to create environments, object-sculptures (works of art based on everyday objects), assemblages, and collages that reflected the functioning of society at the time, both in Western and Eastern Europe. The artist's interest in social issues can be explained by the influence of the Nouveau Réalisme movement, which arose out of a confrontation with the contemporary urbanized world. That said, Mlynárčik's artistic activity was rooted first and foremost in the reality of Czechoslovakian society at the time.

Mlynárčik's first artistic action, inspired by his trip to Paris and his encounter with Nouveau Réalisme, was entitled *Happsoc*, which he carried out in 1965 in collaboration with another artist, Stano Filko, and art historian Zita Kostrová.¹⁴ The *Happsoc* project took place over eight days, from May 2 to 9, 1965, in the city of Bratislava, which, according to the manifesto signed by the authors of this action, became a work of art. This gesture of total annexation of the entire city is an early example of the conceptual trend in Czechoslovakian art. Due to the nature of the annexed territory, this work acquired a social dimension but through the choice of its context, it was also political in nature. Indeed, the first week of May in Czechoslovakia at that time was marked by a series of festivities organized by the authorities in public spaces to celebrate Labor Day on May 1, a particularly important holiday in the calendar of all Soviet bloc nations, and Army Day on May 9. *Happsoc* took the form of a manifesto, announcing a series

¹⁰ SPIEKER, S.: Conditional Similarities: Parallax in Postwar Art from Eastern Europe. In: POSPISZYL 2018 (see in note 4), pp. 4 – 11.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹² PIOTROWSKI, P. Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde. In: *European Avant-Garde and Modernist Studies*, Vol. 1. Eds.: BRU, S. – NICHOLLS, P. Berlin 2009, pp. 49 – 58.

¹³ Spieker follows here Piotrowski in his reference to the Indian

historian Dipesh Chkrabarty and his seminal book: CHAKRABARTY, D.: *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000. See as well: ANDRÁS, E.: Provincializing the West: Interview with Piotr Piotrowski. In: *Artmargins*, 8 October 2012, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/691-provincializing-the-west> (Accessed: 27 August 2025).

¹⁴ FILKO, S. – MLYNÁRČIK, A. – KOSTROVÁ, Z.: Čo je HAPPSOC? – *skutočnosť* (manifest). *Teória anonymity*. 1 May 1965. In French: *Manifeste Qu'est-ce que Happsoc?* In: RESTANY, P.: *Ailleurs. Alex Mlynárčik*. Bratislava – Paris 1994, pp. 27 – 28.

of seven actions that took place between these two major solemn celebrations of the Czechoslovakian nation under the Communist regime.

The incorporation of reality into *Happsoc* was generally in keeping with the spirit of Nouveau Réalisme. Its affiliation with the artistic movements of the time is confirmed by statements made by art critics associated with Mlynářčik. The artist's friend and eminent Prague art theorist Jindřich Chalupecký places this action in the Slovak line of the French movement, and highlighted its conceptual approach in relation to the works of Yves Klein. He writes:

Nouveau Réalisme—like Pop Art—drew artists' attention to the contemporary everyday world, and Mlynářčik unabashedly adopted its tendencies as his own.¹⁵

As for Pierre Restany, a close friend of Mlynářčik, he speaks clearly in a monograph published in 1994 about the Slovak artist and the role he himself played in his artistic development in 1965. Restany, who christened Mlynářčik the following year "the grandfather of industrial folklore,"¹⁶ noted:

When Alex [Mlynářčik] returned from Paris in 1965, he wasted no time. He took two key ideas from my philosophy of Nouveau Realisme: the appropriation of reality and the response of the public. The artistic baptism of the object bases its legitimacy on public acceptance: it is the viewers who make the art. The *Happsoc* manifesto, which

he published on May 1, 1965, with sculptor Stano Filko and art historian Zita Kostrová, reiterates these two fundamental points.¹⁷

Nevertheless, it is in its affiliation with the artistic avant-gardes, particularly Dadaism, that *Happsoc* differs from works belonging to the Nouveau Réalisme movement, even if references to Marcel Duchamp's art and the Dadaist tradition were advocated at the time by Pierre Restany. In a text entitled "A 40° au-dessous de Dada" (40° Below Dada), considered the second manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme and published in 1961 in the catalogue for an exhibition at the Galerie J of artists from the movement, the French critic saw the Dadaist tradition as a starting point for creation for New Realism artists. He wrote:

In the context of contemporary art, Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades (and also Camille Bryen's functional objects) take on a new meaning. They express the right to direct expression of an entire organic sector of modern activity, that of the city, the street, the factory, and mass production. This artistic baptism of everyday objects now constitutes the "Dada fact" par excellence. After NO and ZERO, here is a third position in the myth: Marcel Duchamp's anti-art gesture takes on a positive meaning. The Dada spirit is identified with a mode of appropriation of the external reality of the modern world. The ready-made is no longer the height of negativity or controversy, but the basic repertoire of a new expressive repertoire.¹⁸

¹⁵ "Nový realismus- jako popart- obracel pozornost umělce k současnému všednímu světu a Mlynářčik bez rozpaků přijal jeho tendence za své." CHALUPECKÝ, J.: *Na hranicích umění: několik příběhů*. Munich 1987 (Praha 1990), Chapter: "Příběh Alexe Mlynářčika", pp. 106 – 122, 108.

¹⁶ "grand-père du folklore industriel". Restany, Pier. Folder of the exhibition *Mlynářčik*. Paris, Galerie Raymonde Cazenave, 13 May 1966.

¹⁷ "Quand Alex [Mlynářčik] revient de Paris en 1965, il ne perd pas de temps. Il a retiré de ma philosophie du Nouveau Réalisme deux idées-mères: l'appropriation du réel et la réponse du public. Le baptême artistique de l'objet fonde sa légitimité sur l'adhésion du public: ce sont les regardeurs qui font l'art. Le manifeste *Happsoc* qu'il publie le 1^{er} mai 1965, avec le sculpteur Stano Filko et l'historienne d'art Zita Kostrová,

reprend ces deux points fondamentaux." RESTANY 1994 (see in note 14), p. 22.

¹⁸ "Dans le contexte d'art actuel, les ready-made de Marcel Duchamp (et aussi les objets à fonctionnement de Camille Bryen) prennent un sens nouveau. Ils traduisent le droit à l'expression directe de tout un secteur organique de l'activité moderne, celui de la ville, de la rue, de l'usine, de la production en série. Ce baptême artistique de l'objet usuel constitue désormais le "fait dada" par excellence. Après le NON et le ZÉRO, voici une troisième position du mythe: le geste anti-art de Marcel Duchamp se charge de positivité. L'esprit dada s'identifie à un mode d'appropriation de la réalité extérieure du monde moderne. Le ready-made n'est plus le comble de la négativité ou de la polémique, mais répertoire de base d'un nouveau répertoire expressif." RESTANY, P.: *A 40° au-dessous de Dada*. In: *A 40° au-dessous de Dada*. Exh. cat., Paris, Galerie J, 17 May–10 June 1961, 2 unnumbered pages.



Fig. 1: Alex Mlynárčik and Gianni Bertini, *Art anticonceptionnel* (*Anticonceptional Art*), 1971. Mixed Media. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Private Collection of Katarzyna Cytlak, Poznań.

Restany therefore rejects the capricious, disturbing, nihilistic, and somewhat hazardous aspects of the Dadaist myth. Nevertheless, he attaches importance to Duchamp's ready-made gesture, whose initial goal—the negation of art itself—would be surpassed by artists from the Nouveau Realisme movement. By applying Duchamp's strategy in their artistic creation and referring directly to everyday reality, they sought new means of expression, but also emotion and poetry. At the same time, Restany renounced the directly provocative nature of Dadaism. On this last point, Mlynárčik's position seems to differ from that of his French friend. While Restany clearly rejected the grotesque and nihilistic dimensions of Dadaism, the Slovak artist decided to reappropriate them.

Admittedly, the three authors of *Happsoc* make a conscious reference to the work of early 20th-century avant-garde artists. For example, they created their work in the form of a manifesto; moreover, they aspired to complete a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art. This desire to encompass as many, if not all, aspects of human activity in a single work undoubtedly evokes the writings of the first Avant-Garde artists.

Nevertheless, in a manifesto entitled *What is Happsoc?*¹⁹ the authors' casual attitude is evident. The list at the end of the statement of participants in the artistic action, beginning with women, men, and dogs, followed by houses, taps, gas ovens, tulips, trolleybuses, typewriters, and hospitals, is not without

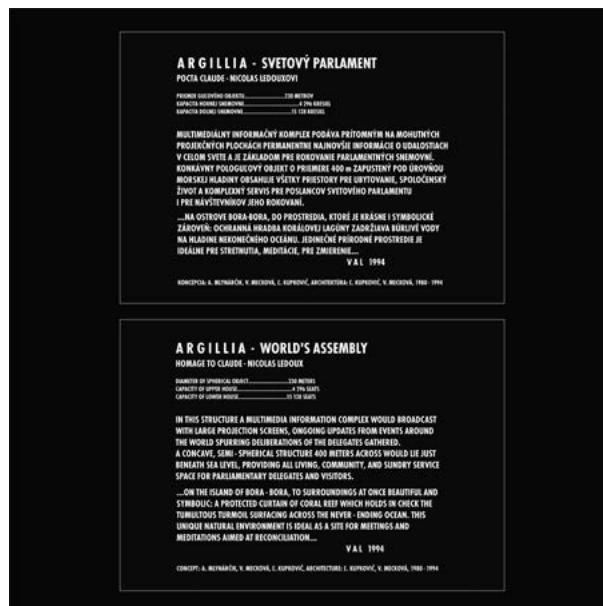


Fig. 2 – 7: VAL (*Voies et Aspects du Lendemain – Ways and Aspects of Tomorrow*: Alex Mlynárčik, Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič), *Argillia National Assembly*, 1972. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Collection of Ľudovít Kupkovič, Žilina.

¹⁹ FILKO – MLYNÁRČIK – KOSTROVÁ 1965/1994 (see in note 14).

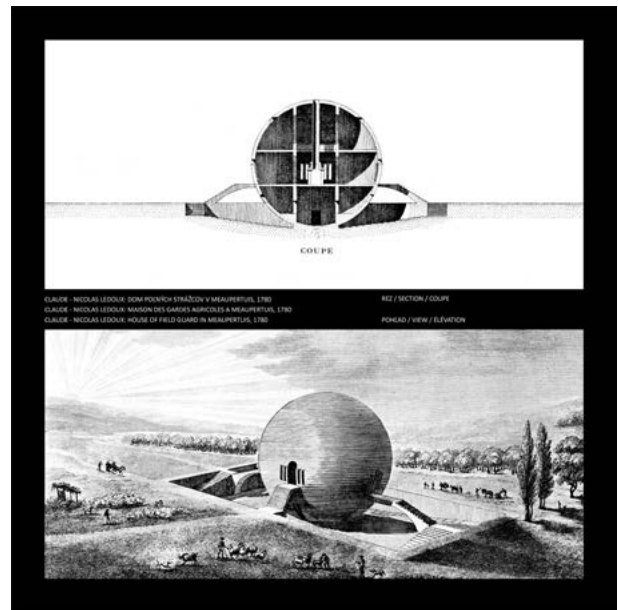
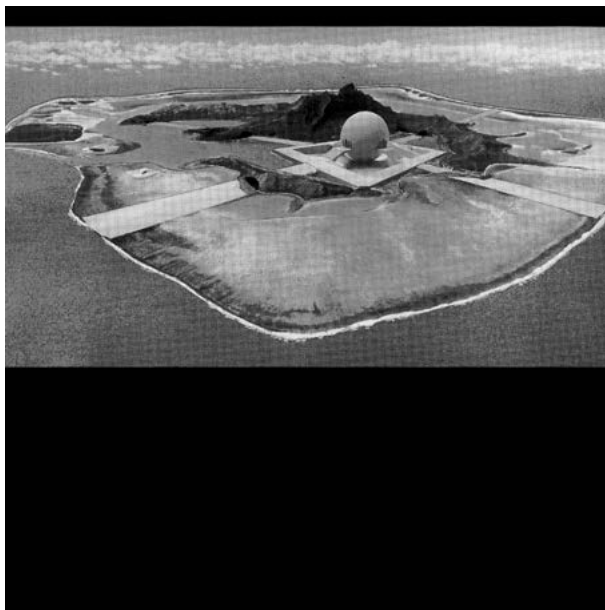
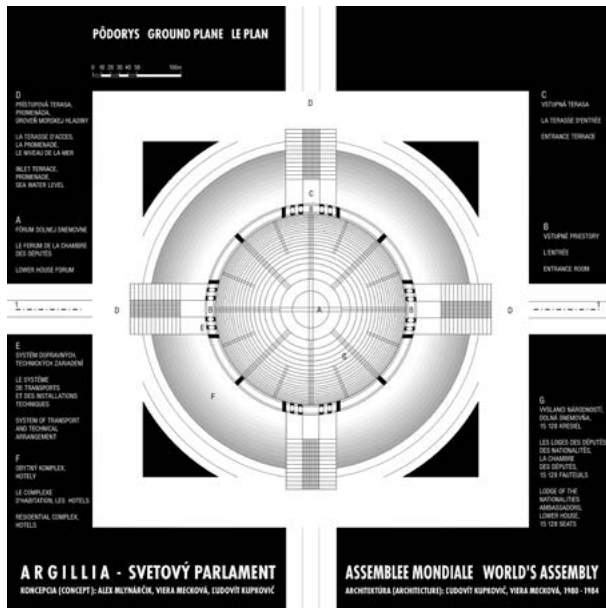


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humour. *Happsoc* was therefore a “found reality,” and as such, as well as through its touch of irony, it seems to be linked to the Dadaist legacy. In the manifesto, the authors wrote about their project:

He revives a whole series of happenings, shocking people by his very existence. But unlike a happening, he presents himself as reality itself, without any stylization, as reality in its original form and without any direct external intervention.²⁰

The title *Happsoc*, an abbreviation of two words: “happening” and “society” (or happen society), defines the search for a link between art and social reality. This work was also an attempt to circumvent censorship that was unfriendly to artistic interventions in public spaces. The action itself constituted an extension of Duchamp’s gesture of annexing reality, on the scale of the city, which became the object and actor of every event.

Happsoc shares with Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades the simplicity and economy of an artistic gesture based on a nominative strategy. Nevertheless, it differs considerably in scale. It constitutes an extension of the French artist’s gesture into the urban field, so that the city becomes both a polymorphous art object and an art spectacle, since what matters to its authors are the festivities in public space (i.e., the actions). These actions become as important to the meaning of the work as the choices of the artist or artists themselves. It is therefore not, as in Duchamp’s case, a questioning of the status of the work of art in the era of industrial revolution,²¹ but rather a questioning of the process of manufacturing and visualizing the ideology of the communist state of Czechoslovakia.

Mlynárčik rejects Restany’s interpretation of Duchamp’s gesture as “positively charged.”²² This was undoubtedly due to the socio-political context in which the work was created, which led the artist toward politics. *Happsoc* has been viewed by researchers of the development of 20th-century art in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski, as an example of political protest. Piotrowski noted in his book *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, in which he examines the evolution of art under the communist regime, that:

The timing of this total and conceptual ‘action’ gave the work a subversive character, since its duration coincided with the official, solemn celebrations of May Day in Bratislava and throughout the Communist world. The May Day parades, which included the highest ranks of the party and state leadership, became part of the artwork.²³

But not everything was left to chance in the course of the action. The spatial and temporal boundaries were clearly defined. The date and location were also not neutral or without political implications: the authors of the action aimed to encompass and reclaim all national festivities. A challenge to authority could not take the form of open protest, as would have been the case if an action similar to that of Alex Mlynárčik, Stano Filko, or Zita Kostrová had been carried out in France or in the West in general. It was this need for a “veil” that distinguished Mlynárčik’s work most from that of Western artists. Despite living and working in a country that did not allow open criticism of the political system, the authors of *Happsoc* managed to carry out an action with political content in public space.

In the case of *Happsoc*, the ambition to create a total work of art was a somewhat ironic nod to the authorities, whose aim was to encourage all citizens to participate in the regime’s official celebrations, both through propaganda and more direct means of persuasion, such as attendance lists for parade participants or persecution at work. On a symbolic level, the annexation of an entire city for a work of art constitutes an obstacle to attempts to annex that same city during the official events organized during those days in May in honour of the government.

The fusion between the aesthetics of Nouveau Réalisme and the Duchampian tradition thus became,

²⁰ “Il renoue avec toute une série d’actions de happening, il choque par son existence même. Mais à la différence du happening, il se présente comme la réalité elle-même et sans aucune stylisation, comme la réalité dans sa forme originelle et sans aucune intervention extérieure directe.” FILKO – MLYNÁRČIK – KOSTROVÁ 1965/1994 (see in note 14).

²¹ Belgian art critic Thierry de Duve interprets Duchamp’s ready-mades as a response to the impasse in which painting

found itself when confronted with the growing practice of serial production in the new industrial society. According to him, ready-mades signify the end of the practice of painting. DE DUVE, T.: *Résonances du ready-made. Duchamp entre avant-garde et tradition*. Collection Rayon Art. Nîmes 1989, p. 132.

²² RESTANY 1961 (see in note 18).

²³ PIOTROWSKI, P.: *In the Shadow of Yalta: The Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945 – 1989*. London 2009, p. 228.

from the outset, a defining feature of Mlynárčik's work. His artistic actions, most often collective in nature, in which the artist referred to the French movement, were in fact closer to the happenings of the Fluxus movement in West Germany. One example of this is an action entitled *Zabrády kontemplace* (*Gardens of Contemplation*), which Mlynárčik carried out in 1970 with his young colleague Róbert Cyprich. Created for the tenth anniversary of *Nouveau Réalisme*, it consisted of sweeping the sidewalks of Bratislava throughout the night of October 27–28. The action was also conceived as an initiation to the open workshop, with volunteers being invited to participate in cleaning the streets.

This action preceded the sweeping of the streets of Karl-Marx Platz in West Berlin by Joseph Beuys and two students, one Korean and the other African, after a demonstration by the German political left on May 1, 1972 (*Ausfegen* (*Sweeping Up*)). The action, carried out under the auspices of the Organization for Direct Democracy, aimed to question Marxist ideology, or as Florence Malet notes, “It is a matter of ‘dusting off’ Marxism from its ideological fixations”²⁴ in order to open it up to a broader social perspective. A comparison of these two events, one rather contemplative, the other with a strong critical and political dimension, reveals the social implications of some of Mlynárčik's projects. Similarities in the approaches of the German and the Czechoslovakian, each driven by a different intention, give the artist a new task. In the context of their respective societies, they emphasize the need for a certain social regression: the artist, who as a creator is in a privileged position, becomes a public servant.

The architectural projects of the VAL as a transgression of the aesthetics of the Nouveau Réalisme

Mlynárčik's artistic projects dedicated to architecture and urbanism surpassed the idea of art fostered by the *Nouveau Réalisme*. The projects of the VAL (*Voies et Aspects du Lendemain* – Ways and

Aspects of Tomorrow) collective, formed in Žilina in 1972 by Alex Mlynárčik and the architects Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič, also belong to this movement in Czechoslovakian culture. Their highly unusual formal characteristics and the nature of the process that preceded their development explain why their proposals occupy a special place among all the experimental architecture projects developed in Slovakia. Two other aspects contributed to the uniqueness of this group: the inspiration they drew from architectural theory developed in France in the 1960s, and their exploration of the concept of prospective architecture developed by art critic and architectural theorist Michel Ragon. Existing only on paper, VAL's megastructures went far beyond the field of architecture, offering futuristic visions of a new human environment. Moreover, in the context of Czechoslovakia during the normalization period, their projects redefining public space took on the character of social criticism.

Created by artist Alex Mlynárčik and two architects, Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič, the VAL group stood out on the Eastern European art scene due to the interdisciplinary nature of its practices. After completing his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts (*Vysoká škola výtvarných umení*) in Bratislava, Mlynárčik graduated in 1965 from the monumental painting workshop ('Plastic Arts in Architecture' section) at the Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademie výtvarných umění*) in Prague; it should be noted that this specialization was closely linked to the practice of construction. Before embarking on the VAL project, he therefore gained some experience in the field of architecture. Between 1962 and 1990, Alex Mlynárčik, alongside his artistic work, created seventy architectural designs in several towns and villages, particularly in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. Among his most interesting works are a mosaic wall relief entitled *Cosmic Paths* for the University City of Bratislava (1967), a fountain for Váhostav (Construction Company) in Žilina (1968), the clubhouse at the train station in the city of Košice (1971), and the administrative foyer of the SZTŠ in Bratislava (*Slovenský Zväz Tanečného Športu*–

²⁴ “Il s'agit de le [marxisme] “dépoussiérer” de ses fixations idéologiques”. MALET, F.: *Balayage*. In: *Joseph Beuys. Exh. cat.* Paris, MNAM Centre Georges Pompidou, 199, pp. 321

– 322. See also: BLUME, E.: Ich durchsuche Feldcharakter. In: *Beuys. Die Revolution sind wir.* Exh. cat. Eds.: BLUME, E. – NICHOLS, C. Berlin – Göttingen 2008, pp. 270 – 272.

Slovak Dance Association, 1972).²⁵ In most cases, these works were a transposition of the principles of neo-constructivism and kinetic art into the field of applied arts. Although Mlynárčik had worked on architecture from a theoretical perspective, writing a text entitled “Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts” (unpublished)²⁶ with architect Antoni Cimmermann in 1966, it is difficult to speak of continuity in his activity as an artist in the group’s projects. In fact, in the latter half of the 1960s, under the influence of French New Realism, Mlynárčik created the *Epitaphs* and *Reliquaries* series.²⁷ These were hybrid relief compositions of everyday objects and sometimes advertising images in which the artist mixed the artistic language of *Art informel* with that of graffiti. Around 1967, his compositions took on the dimension of environments. At the same time, Mlynárčik was active in the field of happenings. He specialized in creating large-scale outdoor actions emphasizing the active participation of the viewer. His activity within VAL therefore represented a break with his previous artistic creation.

Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič, who were invited by Mlynárčik to participate in the VAL project, were at the time architects actively practicing their profession in Žilina. A graduate of the Slovak Technical University (SVŠT – Slovenská vysoká škola technická) in Bratislava, Viera Mecková had been working as an architect at Stavoprojekt in Žilina since 1958. Organized as a network throughout the country, Stavoprojekt was a network of architecture and urban planning offices founded in 1948 with the aim of renewing architectural design and public

spaces, as well as developing standardized housing construction in socialist Czechoslovakia.

During more than thirty years of professional activity within Stavoprojekt, she completed numerous public building projects. Several of which stood out for their formal innovation, demonstrating Viera Mecková’s keen awareness of global architectural trends. Among her other achievements are the archaeological centre in Gánovce (designed in 1971 – 1973; completed in 1976),²⁸ the cultural centre in Dolný Kubín (designed in 1975 – 1978), and the administrative building for the city of Žilina (1981 – 1987). For the latter project, the Union of Slovak Architects awarded her the prize for the best building completed in 1988.²⁹ In 1970, Mecková also received first prize from the Ministry of Culture for her design of the cultural centre in Púchov (1966 – 1970).³⁰ At the same time, Mecková became interested in artistic bookbinding and carried out several book design projects. She also devoted herself to jewellery design.

Younger than these two members of the VAL, Ľudovít Kupkovič also graduated from the Slovak Technical University (Slovenská vysoká škola technická) in Bratislava. Like his colleague, he worked for Stavoprojekt between 1967 and 1976.³¹ During his years with the VAL group, he worked on several architectural projects that stood out for their exploration of new forms. Among the most important were: the project for the UNIDO International Center (Vienna, 1969); the ski resort in Ráztoka (1980 – 1983); and the sports hall in Žilina (1979 – 1986), for which he received the award for best building from the Union of Slovak Architects in 1986. As an archi-

²⁵ Mlynárčik also designed the lighting for the ballroom of the Government Hotel in Bratislava (1974), the illuminated ceiling of the Žilina Conservatory Hall (1980), and the interior of Café Slovakia in Bratislava (1982), among other buildings. On this subject: KUPKOVIČ, Ľ. – MECKOVÁ, V. – MLYNÁRČIK, A.: *VAL. Cesty a aspekty zajatrájska*. Žilina 1995.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ On this subject, see: RESTANY 1994 (see in note 14); CHALUPECKÝ 1987/1990 (see in note 15), pp. 106 – 122.

²⁸ The project was carried out in collaboration with Jozef Mecka.

²⁹ In 2003, Mecková received the prestigious Emil Belluš Award

for her entire architectural oeuvre. See: *Viera Mecková. Architektúra, knižná väzba, šperk*. Žilina 2003.

³⁰ Among other achievements of this architect during this period were: the National Bank and Savings Bank building in Liptovský Mikuláš (1966 – 1972) and the Conservatory building in Žilina (1979 – 1985).

³¹ During his work for Stavoprojekt, Kupkovič and Mecková collaborated on several projects, including the administrative building for the Liptovský Mikuláš region in 1973 and the interior of the spa resort in Rajecké Teplice in 1978 – 1979. Alex Mlynárčik also collaborated with Mecková. He created the interior design for her archaeological centre in Gánovce and for her cultural centre in Dolný Kubín.

tect, Kupkovič was also active in the field of art: he created numerous photo collages and still practices photography professionally today.³² According to the three founding members, the group was formed out of friendship. Its projects were the result of long discussions during which no one member had a privileged position over the others. Given his training as a visual artist, Alex Mlynárčik could be considered the main initiator of VAL's proposals, which went beyond the usual framework of architecture. That said, Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič were not ordinary architects or engineers. They undoubtedly had extensive knowledge of construction techniques, but both stood out among their colleagues in Žilina for their creative approach to architecture. They proved this through their projects outside the framework of VAL, which did not correspond to the conventional construction patterns of the time.

Ľudovít Kupkovič and Viera Mecková collaborated with Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina for more than twenty years, until 1993, working voluntarily and without any hope that their work would ever be realized. The group developed eight projects: three city-buildings, two monument-buildings, a hotel, a concert hall, and a building for the National Assembly. All of these projects are situated halfway between art and architecture and could be considered “city-sculptures” or “building-sculptures.”

Dialogues with Michel Ragon's prospective architecture

By carefully planning and documenting its architectural projects, the VAL group made the construction of these buildings a reality, so to speak, which for ideological, political, and financial reasons was obviously impossible to envisage in the context of Czechoslovakia at the time. Nevertheless, the artists hoped for better times in the future, when their projects could be realized. Alex Mlynárčik himself

repeatedly emphasized that giving his architectural visions the appearance of ordinary architectural projects, designed to be realized at any time, was an important aspect of his work. In an interview in 2007, he stated the following:

I became interested in prospective architecture because I know the Tatra Mountains well; my family comes from there, and I wondered if it would be possible to organize, for example, the Olympic Games there. I started thinking about an area in the mountains where the Olympic city could be located. I wanted to give this fantasy a little bit of real life, so I started looking for architects... Finally, I found two architects, Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič, and we started working together. For me, it was very interesting. It was new. They worked eight hours a day as architects and then carried out the project on a voluntary basis. It was a very cheerful, fun collaboration. I discovered that my fantasy had a foothold in reality. Thanks to the architects' work, my project became technically feasible, of course.³³

Ľudovít Kupkovič emphasizes that creativity was an important programmatic element for the group, in addition to representing a break with the type of professional activity he had pursued until then:

When Viera Mecková and Alex Mlynárčik invited me to join VAL, I didn't hesitate. VAL was a new challenge: free creation in architecture, architectural dreams, poetry.³⁴

One of the main theoretical sources for VAL's architectural projects was the writings of Michel Ragon, an art critic, architectural theorist, and founder of GIAP (Groupe International d'Architecture Prospective). In the 1960s, having “denounced the commercial and speculative aspects of painting,”³⁵

³² Based on an interview with Ľudovít Kupkovič in Žilina on April 10, 2014.

³³ Based on an interview with Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina on September 28, 2007.

³⁴ Based on an interview with Ľudovít Kupkovič in Žilina on April 10, 2014.

³⁵ AMELINE, J.-P. – WIESINGER, V.: Entretien avec Michel Ragon. In: *Denise René l'intrépide. Une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait 1944 – 1978*. Exh. cat. Paris, Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2001, p. 71.

Ragon went on to develop his own theory of architecture.³⁶ This led to an interest in artists and architects from Eastern European countries whose work fell within the scope of experimental architecture. He first showed his interest in these creations by organizing, with Tony Spiteris, the exhibition *Sculptures Architecturales et Architectures Sculptures* (Architectural Sculptures and Architectures-Sculptures) as part of the Paris Biennale in the fall of 1963 at the Anderson-Mayer Gallery. The exhibition featured projects by Polish artist Piotr Kowalski, his compatriot Alina Ślesieńska, and Hungarian-born artists Nicolas Schöffer and Pierre Székely. Their proposals were displayed alongside projects by some of the most prominent artists and architects of the 20th century, such as Antonio Gaudí, Oscar Niemeyer, André Bloc, Marino di Teana, and Claude Parent.³⁷ Czechoslovakia was practically the only country in Central Europe where Michel Ragon's architectural theory found resonance. His manifesto and his second publication on architecture, *Où vivrons-nous demain?* (*Where will we live tomorrow?*) published in 1963, was translated into Czech and published under the title *Kde budeme žít zítřka?* by the Prague-based Mladá Fronta (Youth Front) publishing house in 1967, just four years after its publication in France.³⁸

This publication brought Czech and Slovak readers closer to new trends in Western architecture, both in Western Europe and the United States. One could even argue that the interest in architectural experimentation in Czechoslovakia originated, at least in part, from Ragon's publication.³⁹ The vocabulary he developed in it was then taken up by Czechoslovakian artists, architects, and art critics to analyse Czechoslovakian architectural achievements of the time. It can therefore be said that he somehow sensitized Czechoslovakian art critics to the aspects and challenges of new architecture.

The influence of Michel Ragon's vocabulary is noticeable in the texts of Ľubor Kára, a Slovak art critic and exhibition curator at the open-air festivals held in the town of Piešťany, where, alongside sculptures, artistic projects close to the ideas of prospective architecture could be seen. The idea of a rapprochement between art and architecture was clearly formulated by Kára in 1970. In the catalog published for the second edition of the festival, entitled *Polymuzický priestor I* (Multi-Art Space I), he described a work of art taking "the position of the architectonic object," calling it "the sculptural-architectonic work (representing the independent contribution of the architect)."⁴⁰

³⁶ On the subject of Ragon's theory impact on the VAL group see: CYTLAK, K.: Complexity and Contradiction in Central European Radical Architecture. Experiments in Art and Architecture in the 1970s / Složitost a protiklad ve středoevropské radikální architektuře. Experimenty v umění a architektuře v sedmdesátých letech 20. století. In: *Umění/Art. Časopis Ústavu dějin umění*, Akademie věd České Republiky, vol. LXIII, 2015, no. 3, pp. 182 – 203; CYTLAK, K.: L'architecture prospective en Tchécoslovaquie. Convergences et divergences entre l'approche du groupe slovaque VAL (1968 – 1994) et la théorie architecturale de Michel Ragon. In: *RIHA Journal*, INHA-Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art – Paris, September 27, 2017, pp. 1 – 30, <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2017/0179-cytlak> (Accessed: 12 August 2025).

³⁷ The exhibition *Sculptures Architecturales et Architectures Sculptures* was organised at the gallery Anderson- Mayer, Paris, 19 September – 12 October 1963 and at the Théâtre-Maison de la Culture, Caen, 10 – 30 November 1963. The exhibition accompanied the publication of a manifesto book, published at the same time: RAGON, M.: *Où vivrons-nous demain*. Paris 1963.

³⁸ RAGON 1963 (see in note 37); Czech translation: RAGON,

M.: *Kde budeme žít zítřka?* Prague 1967. In the 1970s, it was also translated and published in the USSR, but without the author's permission. According to the author's interview with Michel Ragon, Paris, February 4, 2014.

³⁹ In 1967, Ragon also published an article on new trends in architecture in *Výtvarné umění*, a Czechoslovakian art magazine with which Pierre Restany was collaborating at the time. RAGON, M.: Experimentální architektura. In: *Výtvarné umění*, no. 2, 1967, p. 79.

⁴⁰ KÁRA, Ľ.: Sculpture—object—lumière—musique v l'espace polyartistique. In: *Socha, objekt, světlo, hudba – polymuzický priestor I, II, III: socha pieštanských parkov 1970 – 1973*. Ed.: KÁRA, Ľ. Exh. cat., organised by Mestský národný výbor v Piešťanoch, Okresný národný výbor v Trnave, Zväz slovenských výtvarných umelcov v Bratislave. Piešťany 1970, four unnumbered pages. Among the works presented during this festival are pieces on the borderline between art and architecture by three Slovak artists: the project *Dýchanie* (Breath, 1968 – 1970) by Stano Filko, *Optipolyton* (Optipolyphone) by Ivan Štepán, and *Kinetická veža* (The Kinetic Tower) by Milan Dobeš, which is a demonstration of architecture: inflatable, kinetic, and mobile.

A historian and art critic from the Slovak part of the country, Tomáš Štrauss also seems to have been aware of the architectural language of the new Czechoslovakian plastic arts while writing his text on Stano Filko's environments in 1967.⁴¹ To define them, the critic used terms such as "new building units" ("nove stavebne celky") and "sculpture-housing" ("socha-obydlí").⁴² Furthermore, Michel Ragon's ideas certainly did not go unnoticed by two other Czech architectural theorists: Peter Wittlich and Dalibor Veselý, the latter of whom wrote the afterword to the translation of Ragon's book *Où vivrons-nous demain ?* (Where Will We Live Tomorrow?).⁴³ In his preface, Veselý developed a conception of architecture directly linked to the human psyche, one which should result from human needs, and thus differing from Michel Ragon's approach. Indeed, Veselý's approach was similar to that developed at that time in Austria. In 1963, Viennese architects from Hans Hollein's circle developed a similar idea, defining architecture as "the expression of man himself" ("Ausdruck des Menschen selbst") and "the embodiment of the most subtle emotions, the sensitive recording of the finest stirrings, the materialization of the spiritual" ("Verkörperung subtilster Emotionen, sensitive Aufzeichnung feinsten Erregungen, Materialisation des Spirituellen").⁴⁴ Like Ragon, Peter Wittlich championed the architecture-sculpture movement, to which he devoted several articles in Czechoslovakian art journals.⁴⁵

The publication of *Where Will We Live Tomorrow?* had an undeniable influence on an entire generation of Czechoslovakian artists and architects. In a 1999 text analysing the development of experimental architecture in Czechoslovakia, the Czech architectural historians Ludmila Hajková and Rostislav Švácha mention the influence of the concept of megastructure developed by the French critic on the *Domurbia* (House-City, 1962 – 1965) project by the Czech architect Karel Honzík, and on *Slunečné město* (Sun City, 1967) by his compatriot Stanislav Švec.⁴⁶ The impact of Ragon's vision is clearly visible in the work of the VAL (Voies et Aspects du Lendemain) group. In an interview with Žilina on September 28, 2007, Alex Mlynářčík spoke openly about the influence of Ragon's writings on his projects. Mlynářčík, who was very familiar with the French language, had access to other publications and articles by the French theorist. The artist also mentioned several meetings and discussions he had had with Ragon during his stays in Paris between 1964 and the normalization of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s.⁴⁷ During this interview, Mlynářčík explained the following:

At the time, I was interested in avant-garde movements, including the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s. Then I met Pierre Restany and Michel Ragon. The latter had published numerous books on prospective architecture at that time, including *Where Will We Live Tomorrow?* I knew them well. I

⁴¹ ŠTRAUSS, T.: Filkovo slovo k architektúre. In: *Výtvarná práce*, no. 16, Prague, 1967.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ VESELÝ, D.: Doslov. In: Ragon 1967 (see in note 38), pp. 157 – 171.

⁴⁴ HOLLEIN, H.: Architektur. Lecture at the Galerie St. Stephan, Vienne, May 1963; Quoted after: Feuerstein, G.: *Visionary Architecture in Austria in the Sixties and Seventies. Inspirations – Influences – Parallels*. Exh. cat. Sensing the Future – the Architect as Seismograph, at the Austrian Pavillon, VI International Architecture Biennale, Venice. Klagenfurt 1996, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Two articles by Wittlich should be mentioned here in particular: *Socha a architektura*, from 1962 and *Možnosti integrace* from 1970, introducing the Czechoslovakian public to the

architectural sculpture movement in Western art, from Antonio Gaudí to Constantin Brâncuși's *Endless Column* and André Bloc's *Habitacles*, Richard Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes for the 1967 Montreal Expo, to Michael Heizer's land art works. WITTLICH, P.: *Socha a architektura*. In: *Výtvarná práce*, vol. X, 1962, no. 13, pp. 6 – 7. WITTLICH, P.: *Možnosti integrace*. In: *Výtvarné umění*, vol. XX, no. 6, 1970, pp. 254 – 267.

⁴⁶ HÁJKOVÁ, L. – ŠVÁCHA, R.: *Vizionářská architektura*. In: *Akce, slovo, pohyb, prostor: experimenty v umění sedesátých let / Action, word, movement, space: experimental art of the sixties*. Ed.: HAVRÁNEK, V. Exh. cat. Prague 1999, pp. 114 – 159. About the project of *Domurbia* by Honzík see also: ŠEVČÍK, O. – BENEŠ, O.: *Architektura 60. let*. Prague 2009, p. 207.

⁴⁷ Based on the author's interview with Alex Mlynářčík in Žilina on September 28, 2007.

had many discussions with Ragon on the subject of prospective architecture, and I became more and more deeply involved in it.⁴⁸

VAL's architectural work is a highly complex and coherent example of visionary architecture, which Michel Ragon describes as "prospective." According to Mlynárčik, it was Ragon's encouragement that inspired him to develop and deploy his ideas in his creative work. It was also from him that Mlynárčik borrowed a specific theoretical vocabulary to discuss VAL's achievements. Ultimately, the concepts developed by Ragon interested the members of the group during the development phases of their projects. However, VAL was far from being a mere imitator of Parisian trends. While the group's projects were based on theories and aesthetics from France, they were adapted to suit their own needs. Some of VAL's projects were thus explicitly created in relation to the local Eastern European (Slovak) context. Moreover, the group's proposals undoubtedly evoke the theory and practice of both the art and architecture of the Czechoslovakian avant-garde of the early 20th century. Finally, there are differences between the Slovak group's approach and that of Ragon, particularly with regard to the potential for experimental architecture to challenge the status quo.

The architecture of the global state Argillia

VAL's building proposals stood out not only for their formal inventiveness, but also for their underlying desire to redefine the function of public buildings. Their innovative form corresponded to the new types of experimental music that would be performed in the concert hall it housed. In their other projects, the members of VAL attempted to challenge the concept of the "public monument." The *Argillia National Assembly* project went even further: it had the ambition of representing a new state system. In 1972, Alex Mlynárčik launched the idea of creating a fictional state called *Argillia*. The king of this imaginary republic was Ondřej Křištofik, a pipe maker, an entirely ordinary man. His home in Terchová, a small village in northern Slovakia, became the site of the kingdom. However, the royal court was made up of prominent figures from the world of the arts, such as Mlynárčik's French friends Pierre Restany,

Michel Ragon, Raoul-Jean Moulin, Czechoslovakian art critics such as Jindřich Chaloupecký and Radislav Matušík, as well as artists such as Miloš Urbásek and several other people, who became ambassadors of this imaginary country in Paris, Milan, Venice, and Ua Huka in French Polynesia. This country counted all the inhabitants of the Earth among its citizens. It had its own currency, postage stamps, and its own university, Duchampiana Argilliensis. In 1977, the Parisian gallery Lara Vincy became AAP – Agence Argillia Presse, the office of the official press agency of this imaginary kingdom.

Argillia also had architectural ambitions. In 1979, the Japanese sculptor Kakuzo Tatehata developed a project for this imaginary state in the form of a model-sculpture of the Royal Museum building, an underground structure hidden in a valley. A year later, in 1980, the VAL group worked on the building for the Argillia National Assembly, whose dream location was on the island of Bora Bora in the Pacific Ocean. The project was completed in 1994. It is a reinterpretation of the *Maison des Gardes Agricoles* (1780) by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, a major architect of French neoclassicism. Ledoux's project, which was never realized, consisted of a building located in the park of Maupertuis, a village whose palace and garden were designed by the architect. It was a spherical building with three portals flanked by two pairs of Doric columns on either side of the building. It was set in a kind of square basin. Access to the building was provided by ramps leading to stairs that connected them to the promenade along the edge of the basin.

In the VAL project, the spherical building, 230 meters in diameter and identical in shape to Ledoux's, rested on the flat surface of a hemisphere 400 meters in diameter, which was submerged in the sea. As in the French architect's project, this building was connected to land by ramps. The complex was surrounded, as in the model project, by a square promenade. The spherical VAL building contained boxes for delegates from all the world's nations, as well as administrative spaces and areas dedicated to multimedia and relaxation. The underwater hemi-

⁴⁸ Based on the author's interview with Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina on September 28, 2007.

spherical building housed hotels, accommodation for delegates, and cultural and sports centres.

VAL's projects often had a universal perspective: first, they had to be disseminated throughout the world—or possibly throughout the immeasurable cosmos; similarly, they were dedicated to eminent figures in human history who contributed to broadening our perception of the world. Finally, some of his projects updated the concept of a global state – this was the case with the *National Assembly of Argillia*. The utopian aspect of this project seems to be obvious even if the VAL architects were in dialogue with the idea of Michel Ragon's prospective architecture, a concept transcending the idea of architectural utopia, being conceptually utopian but technically possible to realize (to be realized in the future).⁴⁹ It could be seen as constituting the VAL's commentary on the processes of globalisation.

The project had a strong political dimension. Let us not forget that VAL was founded at a time when Czechoslovakia was transitioning from the post-Stalinist thaw to a normalization period. The latter meant the loss of certain social freedoms that had been gained in the mid-1960s. In both Prague and Bratislava, the 1970s were marked by artistic and cultural regression, as well as the persecution of intellectuals and artists, who were expelled from universities and banned from official cultural life. At that time, it was very difficult not only to exhibit, but also to officially practice the profession of artist or architect due to the exclusions pronounced by the Unions of Artists and Architects of Czechoslovakia. One example is Ľudovít Kupkovič, who between 1971 and 1981 was expelled from the Union of Slovak Architects because of his “subversive ideas” and his “freedom” in the field of architectural creation.⁵⁰ At

that time, Mlynárčík was no longer a member of the Union of Artists of Czechoslovakia.⁵¹ Throughout this period, VAL's proposals were never exhibited in Czechoslovakia. It was only after the breakup of the Eastern Bloc in 1996 that the group's first Slovak exhibition took place.⁵² This period, which was particularly difficult for artists and architects who were not affiliated with the government and who wished to express their disagreement with the precepts of socialist realism, coincided with the development of conceptual art, both in Czechoslovakia and throughout Central and Eastern Europe. In this part of the world, conceptual art was characterized by its formal heterogeneity, the plurality of media used, and the exploitation of possibilities offered by all kinds of artistic fields, including architecture. In addition, it had a strongly rebellious character: for the artists who were part of this movement, it was as much a question of developing a critique of the structures of the language of art as it was of questioning the context in which these structures appeared.⁵³ In this context, artists questioned the functioning of both art and the society in which they lived. To do so, they drew on concepts developed by the classical avant-garde, particularly that of utopia. This was particularly the case in the Slovak part of the country, which was severely affected by the devastating cultural policies of the Gustáv Husák government.⁵⁴

At that time, a generation of Slovak artists whose artistic beginnings dated back to the 1960s, including Alex Mlynárčík, developed projects using an imagined “beyond,” which anticipated a parallel reality. Having become a *UFOnaut*, Július Koller, for example, carried out so-called UFOs (*Universal Futurological Cultural Operations*) from the 1970s onwards, aimed at denouncing the paradoxes of the society of his time.

⁴⁹ RAGON, M.: *Histoire de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme modernes*, Tome 3: *Prospective et futurologie*. Paris 1978.

⁵⁰ After: KUPKOVIČ – MECKOVÁ – MLYNÁRČÍK 1996 (see in note 25), p. 136.

⁵¹ He was expelled from the Union of Artists in 1972. Based on the author's interview with Alex Mlynárčík in Žilina on March 21, 2013.

⁵² The exhibition *VAL – Cesty a aspekty zajtrajška (VAL – Paths and Aspects of Tomorrow)* took place at the Umelecká Beseda in Bratislava, from September 17 till October 13, 1996.

⁵³ On that subject: BEKE, L.: Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art. In: *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*. Exh. cat. Ed.: FARVER, J. New York 1999, pp. 41 – 51.

⁵⁴ In this regard, 1976 was the most shameful year of all: the Czechoslovakian army destroyed public buildings and monuments, as well as sculptures located in public spaces. In particular, they destroyed works by artists who had become inconvenient for the state. This information is largely based on the author's interview with members of the VAL group in Žilina on March 21, 2013.

The motif of “elsewhere” is reflected in the actions, but also in the topographical maps, drawings, and photographs of Rudolf Sikora, who seeks to play with science, ecology, and cosmology. We should also mention the works of Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, who anticipated encounters with other civilizations and sought a new language appropriate for interplanetary communication (*The Message from the Cosmos*, 1973 – 1975). We can add to this the global state of *Argillia*, developed by Mlynárčik in 1972, which stemmed from a desire to break out of the isolation and atmosphere of repression that had gripped the country since 1971. Certain utopian visions expressed the opposite and became anti-utopias or dystopias, as was the case with some of Jozef Jankovič’s architectural proposals, which ironically and insolently deploying an idealized image of a communist state; these proposals delivered a message that contravened official propaganda.

Suffocating under this regime, which was politically repressive and artistically backward, the artists of the time sought to escape to a more or less distant elsewhere. Thus, they projected their art into the mountains, the cosmos, and the future. The distant journey, ideally into outer space, was akin to a quest: the quest to transcend one’s own condition. This evoked omnipotentiality, the absence of spatial barriers. This artistic orientation was the result of the exclusion of artists from public life and the lack of real prospects for change. Under these conditions, developing a vision of the beyond meant criticizing the present.

Resisting the directives of the authorities and continuing their work in the private sphere, the activities of VAL and other artists appear very important in hindsight. This was emphasized by the architect Alexander Valentovič, who stated in 1995:

The V.A.L. group never betrayed its principles. Not even during the period of “normalization.” Its members continued to seek answers. They offered their views on urban planning and touched on the cosmic dimension by creating monuments to human courage.⁵⁵

Admittedly, Alex Mlynárčik himself recently stated that his actions were never intended as a direct challenge to the authorities,⁵⁶ but this does not prevent us from seeing VAL’s architectural works as a negative critique of the social and political life of the time. VAL’s proposals could be considered conceptual artworks for several reasons. Firstly, they constitute “Project Art” in the classical sense of the term, insofar as no tangible realization results from his projects. Through drawings, models, or photocollages, VAL reveals an idea. Similar to artistic projects considered conceptual, the process of creating architectural works prevails over the final result. Secondly, the optimism that emanated from these projects on the theme of human development seemed to contrast to starkly with the reality of Czechoslovakia at the time to be taken literally. Furthermore, the critical potential of these works brings VAL closer to certain groups advocating radical architecture. These groups adopted a rebellious stance in a specific social context (capitalist or conservative society), in some cases approaching conceptual art, as clearly illustrated by the example of Austrian architect Hans Hollein.⁵⁷

VAL’s proposals therefore embody the dream of a better society, based on relationships between people that are different from those proposed by the Czechoslovakian authorities at the time. In a challenge to what was being observed in Eastern Bloc, VAL reintroduced public space. In authoritarian regimes such as Czechoslovakia under normalization, the distinction between public and private space was declared obsolete. As the French philosopher Claude

⁵⁵ “Le groupe V.A.L. n’a jamais trahi ses principes. Pas aux temps de «la normalisation». Ses membres ont continué à chercher des réponses. Ils ont proposé leurs vues sur l’urbanisme, ils ont touché à la dimension cosmique en réalisant des monuments au courage humain.” VALENTOVIČ, A.: 1996. VAL - c’est un sigle. In: KUPKOVIČ – MECKOVÁ – MLYNÁRČÍK 1996 (see in note 25), p. 115.

⁵⁶ During an interview with Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina on March 21, 2013.

⁵⁷ See: *The Austrian Phenomenon. Konzeptionen, Experimente, Wien, Graz, 1958 – 1973*. Exh. cat. Vienna, Architekturzentrum, 2004.

Lefort stated in his analysis of the totalitarian system, public space, understood as a place for expression and the formation of social bonds, was destroyed.⁵⁸ It became a homogenized space of control and observation that also took root in the domestic sphere through practices such as wiretapping and denunciations. Eventually, it was transformed into a place where political and historical narratives were rewritten in accordance with the ideology of the communist state.

In this context, VAL's artistic practice, based on the creation of parallel worlds, could be interpreted as a form of resistance to authoritarian power, as defined by Michel Foucault in the 1970s. More specifically, the stark contrast between the optimism that emanates from the universe of VAL's projects and the experience of Czechoslovakian social reality at the time makes it likely that VAL intended to act as a form of resistance. Similar to the futuristic projects of artists already mentioned, such as Jülius Koller and Rudolf Sikora, which date from the same period, this artistic practice could potentially serve as a "chemical catalyst that would make it possible to highlight power relations."⁵⁹

Use of the concept of utopia made it possible, through architectural language, to discuss the current social situation. If, according to Louis Marin, "utopian practice indirectly denounces a situation of historical crisis,"⁶⁰ the members of VAL also used it to anticipate the aesthetic directions of possible change and to express their disillusionment with the present. In short, it was not only a question of reviving the dream of rupture of the early avant-garde, but

also of introducing a similarity between the situation in Czechoslovakia at the time of normalization and that immediately after the First World War, when the now independent country reappeared on the map of Europe and its newly optimistic citizens had to reorganize it politically and socially.

Nevertheless, VAL also drew inspiration from older utopian proposals, such as those relating to the architecture of the French Revolution, which also interested other architects of the time. Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Étienne-Louis Boullée, and Charles Fourier were considered visionaries of their time, and their proposals would inspire radical architecture groups such as Utopia and Archigram.⁶¹ One example is a monumental cow-shaped barn designed in 1812 by Jean Jacques Lequeu, which was a source of inspiration for the American artist Claes Oldenburg.⁶² Similarly, VAL's approach, which echoes the form of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's *Maison des Gardes Agricoles*, fits perfectly within the architectural practices of the late 1960s. The fact that VAL drew inspiration from Ledoux's work also encourages us to interpret some of the group's projects from the perspective of political and social protest. Indeed, Ledoux's visionary buildings, which were meant to "speak to the eyes"⁶³ and were intended for a new, harmonious society, sense foreshadowed the French Revolution in the sense that they bore witness to the awakening of civil society in the pre-revolutionary era.⁶⁴

To learn about French Enlightenment architecture, it is very likely that VAL members referred to the writings of Prague architect and urban planner Jiří Hruza. In addition to Michel Ragon's *Where Will*

⁵⁸ LEFORT, C.: *L'Invention démocratique: les limites de la domination totalitaire*. Paris 1981.

⁵⁹ "catalyseur chimique qui permet[trait] de mettre en évidence les relations de pouvoir". FOUCAULT, M.: Le sujet et le pouvoir. In: FOUCAULT, M.: *Michel Foucault. Dits et écrits*, Tome IV: 1980 – 1988, Paris 1994, pp. 222 – 243.

⁶⁰ "la pratique utopique dénonce indirectement une situation de crise historique." MARIN, L.: *Utopiques: jeux d'espaces*. Paris 1973 (2009). Quoted after the edition from 2009, 207.

⁶¹ See: OBRIST, H. U.: Intervista a Jean Paul Jungmann / utopie group. In: *Archphoto*, 20 May 2005, https://www.archphoto.it/archivio_storico/2005/05/20/hans-ulrich-obrist-inter-

[vista-jean-paul-jungmannutopie/index.html](https://www.vista-jean-paul-jungmannutopie/index.html) (Accessed: 12 August 2025).

⁶² After: CARROLL, P.: Interview with Claes Oldenburg by Paul Carroll. In: OLDENBURG, C.: *Proposals for monuments and buildings, 1965 – 69*. Chicago 1969, pp. 11 – 36, 14.

⁶³ "parler aux yeux." LEDOUX, C.-N.: *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs, et de la législation*. Paris 1804, p. 52.

⁶⁴ After: KAUFMANN, E.: *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur*. Leipzig – Vienna 1933; VILDER, A.: *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Architecture and utopia in the era of the French Revolution*, Bâle – Berlin – Boston 2006 (chapter 13: Utopia or revolution), pp. 145 – 151).

*We Live Tomorrow?*⁶⁵ his book entitled *Města utopistů* (Utopian Cities), published in 1967,⁶⁶ was a second key reference for the generation of Czechoslovakian artists and architects of the time. It contained a wealth of information in the following fields and activities: utopian representations in architecture and the plastic arts, philosophy and literature from antiquity to the modern era, architects of the prospective movement such as Yona Friedman, Walter Jonas, Paul Maymont, those of the Archigram group and Japanese Metabolism. In the first chapter of the book, entitled “Bez utopie není realizmu” (“Without utopia there is no realism”),⁶⁷ Hruža traces the history and significance of the concept of utopia in European culture and castigates the common opinion that this concept has had little concrete impact on the real world. In light of his remarks, we can better understand VAL members’ insistence on the need to anchor each of their projects in a concrete social and political context; this corresponds to their dual ambition of solving current problems and responding to the needs of their time.

Establishing a genealogy of VAL’s projects not only allows us to multiply interpretations, adding an extra layer of complexity to these works, but also helps us to determine the group’s importance in the architectural creation of its time. First, it should be noted that VAL’s position is difficult to grasp. At first glance, their projects appear to form to consist of a relatively homogeneous whole. However, a more in-depth study reveals subtleties that, when taken into account, considerably alter the initial interpretation of these projects: VAL’s proposals no longer appear as dated remnants of the architectural foresight of the 1960s, but as transitional works between the modern and the postmodern or, if you prefer, post-communism.

VAL’s projects are eminently paradoxical. On the one hand, VAL members distanced themselves from the concept of utopia and the modernist project; on

the other, they were fascinated by the avant-garde architectural projects of the 1920s and 1930s, knowing that these contain a strong utopian and futuristic aspect. Moreover, they themselves engaged in a kind of “utopian practice” because their activity did not fall within the official culture of the time. Similarly, the members of the group certainly advocated for architecture that reflected the latest technical innovations, but at the same time they restored architectural forms from the past, such as Ledoux’s building and the ziggurat of Babylon. Finally, it should be noted that although VAL’s architecture is universal in perspective, it is nevertheless strongly rooted in the local context. Heir to the avant-garde vernacular tradition, it responds to certain problems facing Czechoslovakia at the time, such as the organization of tourism in the Tatra Mountains and the development of the suburbs of Bratislava. In terms of their references, VAL’s proposals show a strong eclecticism, while at the same time forming a very homogeneous entity. Every detail of each project is carefully thought out and contributes to the multiplication of meanings of the whole. Thus, VAL appears unusual in the global architectural landscape of its time. Was it the last avant-garde group, or did it intend to break with the traditions of modernism? The answer is probably neither. However, their polysemic and multi-referential nature allows us to rethink the distinction between modernism and postmodernism, given that the latter never fully took root in the culture of post-communist countries.⁶⁸

Towards a contestation

Examples of Mlynárčik’s artistic creation include *Happsoc* from 1965, the *Gardens of Contemplation* from 1970, and finally, the projects of the VAL group; all of these works are within the Slovak artist’s oeuvre,

⁶⁵ RAGON 1963 (see in note 37).

⁶⁶ HRUŽA, J.: *Města utopistů*. Prague 1967; HRUŽA, J.: Moderní urbanismus a utopie. In: *Architektura ČSSR*, 1967, no 7, pp. 389 – 395. I would like to express my gratitude to Jan Wollner for pointing out the importance of Hruža’s book on the architecture developed in Czechoslovakia at the time. On this subject, see also: NOŽIČKOVÁ, P.: *Skupina VAL a její architekti* (The VAL Group and its Architects). Thesis in art history, Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, Bratislava 2008, p. 8 (unpublished).

⁶⁷ HRUŽA 1967 (see in note 66), chapter: Bez utopie není realizmu, pp. 7 – 10.

⁶⁸ On this subject: GROYS, B.: *Art Power*. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London 2008, especially “Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Post-Communist Other”, pp. 149 – 163; ERJAVEC, A. – GROYS, B. – ŠUVAKOVIĆ, M. – GYÖRGY, P.: *Postmodernism and the postsocialist condition: Politicized art under late socialism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles – London 2003.

in which the dialogue with French art of the time is most noticeable. Mlynárčik himself repeatedly emphasized the profound influence that Restany and his circle had on him. He always insisted that his art developed in response to Western art, which he was able to experience during his stays in Paris. However, his goal was not to reproduce elsewhere, in a more or less similar form, what he observed in Parisian galleries: his artistic actions were creative reinterpretations of the Parisian trends of the moment, which stimulated the Slovak artist's imagination.

In analysing Mlynárčik's work during 1966, Pierre Restany applies the notion of "assemblage objectif" (objective assemblage),⁶⁹ but this action does not consist solely of the act of assembling, but rather expresses the desire to encompass, to include life as a whole in an action. The appropriation of reality by the authors of *Happsoc*, or the *Gardens of Contemplation*, took place with the involvement of both the mundane and the random. Nevertheless, it was neither an assemblage as such nor an artistic intervention. The only gesture was changing context of the event. This conscious reference to Marcel Duchamp's gesture brings Mlynárčik closer to the artists of the Nouveau Réalisme. However, the artist refers to Dadaism in a different way, following artists from the generation slightly later than Nouveau Réalisme, notably Daniel Buren, who, while appreciating the nihilistic or committed side of the Dada movement, criticized their desire to produce material objects over and over again.⁷⁰ With his 1965 action *Happsoc*, Mlynárčik, like Buren, created a work outside the museum/gallery setting, which was moreover traced only in the form of a manifesto.

The associative method by Tomáš Pospiszyl can be used to not only to redefine Mlynárčik's

art in relation to the art of the Nouveau Réalistes, but also to rethink its conceptual entanglements in non-hierarchical terms – a necessary but also a difficult task as the artist himself seems to resist conceptual discourse on art. The definition of conceptual art provided by Mlynárčik and Bertini in *Art anticonceptionnel* (*Anticonceptionnel Art*) is somehow simplistic and based on the stereotype of an easy-made artistic proposal lacking of its significative depth. Both artists reveal themselves to be above all critical to the on-going fashion in the artworld of the 1970s. However, Mlynárčik's criticism seems to be turned against his own art, in which the conceptual and proto-conceptual components were crucial (as it was above all in the *Happsoc*). This position appears particularly important for the development of his own "conceptual" undertaking of the New Realism's art practices. as Mlynárčik himself retrospectively stated on the occasion to speak about his art critical distance was crucial for him to preserve his freshness as the artist, even if it included self-criticism too.⁷¹

As Alexander Alberro justly observed conceptual art movement was deeply intertwined in the social context⁷² – not only institutional, or symbolic one. However, the political aspect was generally lacking in the work of the Nouveau Réalisme, which was criticized for its lack of political and social engagement during the second half of the 1960s. Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, French art critic and curator of the 1964 exhibition "Mythologies Quotidiennes" (Everyday Mythologies),⁷³ which showcased politically and socially engaged French visual art, opposed Restany in his 1967 article "A propos du Nouveau Réalisme" (On New Realism).⁷⁴ He judged it to be "romantisme honteux" (shameful romanticism) which, by referring

⁶⁹ "Alex Mlynárčik, grand-père du folklore industriel". Restany, Pierre, Folder of the exhibition *Mlynárčik*, 1966.

⁷⁰ One notable example is Daniel Buren's 1971 text "Repères" (Landmarks), in which he highlights the conservative nature of Marcel Duchamp's ready-made art. According to the author, Duchamp's work contributes solely to the renewal of the formal language of art, while continuing to create traditional art objects. BUREN, D.: *Repères*. Text written between August and September 1970, published in German in: No author, 1971. *Daniel Buren Position – Proposition*. Exh. cat. exp.

Mönchengladbach 1971, pp. 5 – 23; In French: *VH101*, 1971, no. 5, pp. 28 – 39.

⁷¹ Based on the author's interview with Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina on March 21, 2013.

⁷² ALBERRO 2004 (see in note 5).

⁷³ No author. *Mythologies Quotidiennes*. Exh. cat. Paris 1964.

⁷⁴ GASSIOT-TALABOT, G.: A propos du Nouveau Réalisme. In: *Opus*, 1967, no. 2, pp. 78 – 80.

to everyday reality in an “objective” and therefore superficial way, denied the need for art engaged in the political and social issues of the time.⁷⁵

The work of Mlynárčik, an artist recognized by Restany as a Slovak representative of New Realism, escapes these accusations. Alex Mlynárčik himself recently stated that his actions have never been a direct challenge to authority. This does not preclude viewing his artistic achievements with a degree of irony. *Happsoc* is a kind of joke whose purpose, as in the case of Dadaist parties, is to tame a terrifying reality, in this case military force and ideological fanaticism in the context of the Cold War. In his other actions, the artist also attempts to tame reality, to divert it, and thus to open it up to a new dimension, to an alternative path. Mlynárčik’s actions seem to have a particular significance in the context of the

development of Slovak art, but also for the Parisian art scene. Not only did they constitute a synthesis between artistic trends in Czechoslovakia and France, but they can also be considered in the light of the opposition between the opposing Parisian artistic currents we have mentioned. In this sense, they form a “bridge” between Restany’s vision and those presented by more radical critics, committed to the political left, such as G  rald Gassiot-Talabot and Raoul-Jean Moulin. Mlyn  r   ik’s art thus allows us to better understand the various debates that stirred up the Parisian art scene at the time. His example demonstrates how important it is to discuss European art on both sides of the Iron Curtain simultaneously. Only by engaging in this perspective can we establish new meanings, clarify paradigms, and nuance antagonisms.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

**Angažovaný Nouveau Réalisme?
Východoeurópske mutácie ako alternatíva ku kritike hnutia:
konceptuálny prístup Alexa Mlynárčika**

Resumé

Článok skúma vzťahy medzi slovenským umelcom Alexom Mlynárčikom a francúzskymi umeleckým okruhom sústredeným okolo Pierra Restanyho, teoretika hnutia Nový realizmus (Nouveau Réalisme) v 60. rokoch 20. storočia. Vychádzajúc z výskumnej metódy českého historika umenia Tomáša Pospiszyla, nazývanej asociatívna história umenia (2018), sa text pokúša vyvrátiť mýty obklopujúce vývoj umenia vo východnom bloku v 60. a 70. rokoch 20. storočia, ako napríklad nepriepustnosť železnej opony alebo druhoradosť umeleckej produkcie východného bloku vo vzťahu k ich západným náprotivkom. Táto metóda umožňuje nehierarchické skúmanie Mlynárčikových umeleckých projektov a ich porovnanie s dielami umelcov ako Joseph Beuys a teóriami umenia a architektúry Francúza Michela Ragona. Článok okrem toho nielen zdôrazňuje Mlynárčikov originálny prínos k rozvoju umenia v Európe, ale rozvíja analýzu jeho raného konceptuálneho zamerania, čo môže poskytnúť odpoveď na obmedzenia hnutia Nového realizmu a jeho kritiky. Kolaboratívne umelecké projekty Mlynárčika, ktoré presahujú myšlienku umenia podporovanú Novým

realizmom, boli venované predovšetkým architektúre a urbanizmu. Štúdiá sa zameriava na projekty kolektívu VAL (Voies et Aspects du Lendemain – Cesty a aspekty zajtrajška), ktorý v roku 1972 v Žiline založil Alex Mlynárčík s architektmi Vierou Meckovou a Ľudovítom Kupkovičom. Prináša nový pohľad na súvislosti s architektonickou teóriou vyvinutou vo Francúzsku v 60. rokoch 20. storočia, a prehĺbenie konceptu perspektívnej architektúry, ktorý navrhol umelecký kritik a architektonický teoretik Michel Ragon. Do priamej súvislosti s týmito aktivitami kolektívu VAL kladie ďalší projekt Alexa Mlynárčika z roku 1972, založenie fiktívneho štátu s názvom Argillia. Autorka v článku tvrdí, že v kontexte Československa v období normalizácie mohli tieto kolektívne projekty, ktoré redefinovali verejný priestor, nadobudnúť charakter sociálnej kritiky, napríklad v aspektoch redefinovania funkcie verejných budov, spochybnenia konceptu verejného pamätníka a integráciou experimentálnej hudby. Autorka zdôrazňuje participatívny rozmer a záujem o urbánne plánovanie, ktorými sa Mlynárčík vymyká užšie definovaným cieľom Nového realizmu.

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