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Hannah-Arendt-Institut
für Totalitarismusforschung e.V. an der
Technischen Universität Dresden

*„Überwindung der
Diktaturen -
Dichter, Künstler
und Schriftsteller in
der Begegnung“*

*„Overcoming Dictatorships -
The Encounter of
Poets, Artists and Writers“*



2nd Project report

(May/ June 2007)

I. WORKSHOP IN ÚSTI NAD LABEM (17/05/2007 – 19/05/2007)

OPENING:

After a short introduction for the Czech audience by GERT RÖHRBORN (Hannah Arendt Institute) the main focus of the opening event at May 17th 2007 lay on the work of the artists. While talking about a rather sad issue MIKOLAŠ CHADIMA, leader of the still popular Czech band MCH did not only earn himself the attention but also the sympathies of the audience for his dedicated report on the role of rock music in times of communist dictatorship. Painter and participant of the project ZBYNĚK BENÝŠEK showed some of his works during the speech in return to illustrate CHADIMA's theses. CHADIMA „answered“ this illustrations with historical audio clips from his career.



Zbyněk Benýšek



Mikoláš Chadima

PRESENTATION OF THE ARTISTS OWN ARTWORK:

Afterwards the artists used the possibility to present the audience one of their works under bracing moderation of Dr. Dr. JUTTA VINZENT (University of Birmingham). The repertoire of the exhibits ranged from installation and video art (MICHELE ZAGGIA, VLAD NANCÁ, MIRELA DAUCEANU), sculpture (ALEXANDER M. ZYŠKO) to a synthesis of architecture and painting exemplified by the reconstruction of the cityhall in the city of Burg, Saxony-Anhalt (Germany) by ULF GÖPFERT. His aim was to open a second architectural perspectiv through large area and multi-faceted painting. He gave an inspiring example of how to illustrate the project theme of crossing borders. It was the Italian artist SILVESTRO LODI who produced a little sensation. Starting out from the objection that he was an artist, not an art critic – „I have no voice but only thinking hands“ – he refused to speak about his art but let his artwork „stock of history“ speak for itself.. He presented a coat hanger with 9 stripes, with different flags and hand signs from dictators like Ceausescu or Mussolini printed on them. Whether you like moving this “stock of history“ with your own hands or hanging it into a warehouse – for LODI both are legitimate methods to handle the unsettling history of European dictatorships.



*Silvestro Lodi presents the
“Stock of History“.*

THE SECOND DAY:

The second day's morning saw the participants already split up in two groups. The artists were invited to visit the art gallery of Ústí nad Labem. At the same time students of the University of Ústí nad Labem had the opportunity to interview the poets and writers about their personal experiences made under dictatorships. LUTZ RATHENOW perceived the late GDR as a cabinet of curiosities. He admitted he still had phantom pains. Having to get used to the various product substitutes common to the GDR planned economy he later could not enjoy the original products – bananas did not reach the chemical “quality” of his childhood toothpaste “Putzi” with banana “taste”. Such issues may sound funny, he reminded his student audience, though in a social history perspective they are still very important. RATHENOW'S first poem was inspired by the concept of happiness of normal citizens who were no longer interested in issues of world politics: „trabantglücklich“ (i.e., “being happy with your car Trabant”). EDUARD VACEK talked about his experience in a Czech prison. He described this experience in his book: „Passport, please!“. For the students his courage was very astounding. He went to jail to understand the regime from an inner perspective, putting himself and his young family at high risk. His hard criticism of the Czech Republic's penitentiary system proved to be no less disturbing. Still, students agreed with VACEK on the lack of a new concept of historical learning and teaching in Czech schools. ALESSANDRO TAMBURINI, GABRIEL CHIFU and DENISA MIRENA PIȘCU presented one recent piece of work each. TAMBURINI created a picture of the dictatorial past as a bomb which has so far not been deactivated by mainstream culture of commemoration. CHIFU presented a very mystical and fictitious way to handle the theme. In his story “Dream of a child, going over snow without leaving footsteps“ he focuses on the Romanian situation from the view of a childish ghost world. In the end PIȘCU read out some of her poems which illustrate her search for identity in an interregnum between communism and European democracy:

„The child said: „Bring the window to me so I can see how beautiful it is outside!“¹

Students' reactions to this somewhat melancholic endeavour were very different. Thanks to the existence of Czech translations of PIȘCUS writings they will hopefully deal with the subject in near future.

¹ Published in: Fluffy and Mechanical, Bukarest: Vinea 2003.



Lutz Rathenow delivers his book „Ost-Berlin“, a present for University library in Ústí nad Labem. The book is provided with photos from Harald Hauswald.



Barbara Lubich illustrates the influence of cybernetics theory on performative arts in the GDR

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROJECT CONTRIBUTIONS:

After a telling presentation by BARBARA LUBICH on the strong influence cybernetics theory had on performative arts in the GDR since the 1960s participants met another time in different groups to discuss their project contributions. With the articles by WOLFGANG TEMPLIN („Reading and Writing under Dictatorships“), JIŘI DĚDEČEK („Oznak“ - Badge), MIKOLAŠ CHADIMA („Rock and Dictatorship“) and ZSOFIA BALLA (poems and essays) already set, the remaining members of the **anthology** group presented their ideas. EDUARD VACEK is going to reproach the past by describing his family story – his great-grandfather was one of the founders of the Czech communist party, his grandfather a legionnaire and his father again a communist – and psychologically disturbing indoctrination at school: „Jak to byla?“ (“How it was?”). GABRIEL CHIFU follows his drive to find out whether oppositional poems broadcasted by Radio Free Europe have lost their subversive character for good. DENISA MIRENA PIȘCU is currently adding new poems to her favourite theme of “identity“. ALESSANDRO TAMBURINI

and LUTZ RATHENOW will travel through time. Interested in the acute violence of dictatorships, TAMBURINI in his story „Il cielo che prima non c’era“ (The sky which did not exist before), brings together two young men for a discussion about the real-life implications of fascist dictatorship in the year 1944. Using his experiences in the NVA RATHENOW carefully follows the echos of National Socialism in GDR. He intensively argues against a mentality of a „dictatorship à la carte“ which in an irresponsible way tries to pick and defend suitable “good aspects” of various systems of dictatorship.

PROPOSALS FOR THE EXHIBITION:

The artists presented their first ideas for the **exhibition**. The second proposal will be provided in Budapest. ALEKSANDER MAREK ZYŠKO presented the artworks „Cross in Cross“ and „Hammer and sickle“. VLAD NANČA is going to come up with photos from Gorica and Bucharest. MIRELA DAUCEANU proposed an installation critical of consumer society, consisting of a combination of a TV set and a fridge. MICHELE ZAGGIA is going to broach the steadily accelerating life-time effects of globalization in a short video clip. SILVESTRO LODI is working with paper slices in the size of 1 sqm. ULF GÖPFERT presented his model of a coloured tank (original: 1m), illustrating the suppressed human ambiguity of uniformity and individualism typical for dictatorships. ZBYNĚK BENÝŠEK created a triptych of paintings which tries to catch the atmosphere of the Czech transformation society (“St. Sebastian” – “Prague Dinner” – “Night Watchman”). The end of the day saw an excursion through the historical and beautiful hinterlands of Ústi nad Labem right up to Leitmeritz/ Litoměřice.



Ulf Göpferts Model of a coloured tank. The artwork should be 1 meter high in original.

HOW CAN WE REALIZE COMPENSATION AND PREVENTION?

Saturday morning left room for communication between all participants and project partners in a good atmosphere. A commented video clip from Ústi nad Labem urban archives presented the most important facts of ČSSR history through the lenses of private cameras. No wonder the “Prague Spring“ clips left their terrifying impact, but it was also the immense and

unique wave of destruction brought to intact downtown settings of historical buildings in the late 1970s that caused a small sensation among the spectators.

EDUARD VACEKS controversial theses concerning compensation and prevention of injustices provoked many participants to confront him with critical questions. VACEKS claim for a consequent replacement of former leading political and economical personnel as well as his demand for common anti-totalitarian history books caused immense opposition in the plenum. From all sides his program was criticised as being of a strange totalitarian descent itself. A majority insisted on a more cautious approach of intensified communication between victims and offenders supported by better political education. Sufficient time and financial resources were called for. The issue of prevention revealed a fundamental dissent among the participants. ULF GÖPFERT described his position which received strong approval:

“The generation directly concerned can do nothing but live with it. Prevention can only be with new generations. Not with our generation. For me personally, to turn into a European is the actual prevention“.

VACEK insisted on a compensation for the affected generations. In his view it is a question of decency that members of the former opposition are not worse off than former offenders today. Interpreted as part and parcel of a strategy to openly discuss and heal the social and individual wounds caused by dictatorships, this position was widely acceptable to the plenum. Following Hannah Arendt’s egalitarian topos of reconciliation winning over punishment and remission the plenum reproached the sense of the project „Overcoming dictatorships“ – a combination of European cultural transfer and discussion between the individually concerned on an equal footing.



Eduard Vacek declaims his theses about compensation and prevention of injustice.

II. WORKSHOP IN BUDAPEST (12/10 - 14/10/2007)

The meeting at Open Society Archives of Central European University in Budapest is going to be the first highlight of the project. The writers and poets read out their contributions to the anthology to a Hungarian audience. The artists provide insights into their work and present selected artworks, while the preparation of the project exhibition continues. Dr. CLAUDIA BERNARDONI (author of „The victims of Minotaurus“) gives a presentation on the topic of *“Integration – a Trojan horse in the democratic society?”*. It marks the starting point of the conference „Arts, literature and religion in dictatorships“ which is organized by the journal „Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte“ in cooperation with the project. It will add new perspectives to the view on the dictatorships of our past.



Open Society Archives in Budapest

III. CONTACT

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