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Introduction

by the Editor

Beer is everywhere. But in the Czech Republic it is an inalienable tradition. Like the national epic by Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, who tells his stories like Scheherazade. Beer is the reason why the Bohemian region is considered the equivalent of the Czech Republic, because Pilsner Urquell is produced there in the city of Plzeň. Even the communists, who ruled after World War II in the Soviet style, were not able to shake the tradition of beer. The hospoda became a house of art.

Of all the Central European countries, it was in the Czech Republic that surrealism was rooted the most strongly. And after the War, it became a legend of the avant-garde. After the Revolution of 1968, the Prague Spring, total control of society was imposed by the authorities. They themselves called it *normalization*. For artists, drinking beer in a hospoda became the only safe form of group meetings. At the same time, it was a very natural and understandable form in the context of surrealism as a common life activity raised to the rank of a work of art.

The first opposition artistic movement in Prague was Šmidrové (Lazy Eye, a disorder of sight, c 1954-68). Around 1962, Křižovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtipu [Crusader school of pure humour without a joke] was founded, named after its seat in the hospoda U Křižovníků [At The Crusader], and continued in the 1970s in other places, still being reborn on the basis of beer culture. The notion of 'pure humour' sounds a lot like 'pure art,' a principle that operates at a meta level.

Another example: František Maxera in the hospoda U Lojzy in Prague (1973) organized an exhibition of large ceramic jugs made by himself, which stood on the bar, full of beer. Since the author was a well-known opposition activist, the opening was also a political manifestation.

They are all indebted to the movement The Incoherents (Les Arts incohérents), Paris 1882, with its subsequent Dada-Surrealist forms of presentation.

The concept of "humour without joke" sounds similar to *The Party of Moderate and Peaceful Progress Within the Limits of the Law*, a book written earlier by Jaroslav Hašek (1911), where the author found opportunism as the highest form of political critique of life under the pressure of the authorities.

"Drinking beer with friends is the highest form of art" stated Tom Marioni in his conceptual art project, which he began in 1970 in San Francisco. In the same year, Petr Štembera - the most radical Czech artist of that time - contacted him. When Marioni visited Prague in 1975, they executed a joint performance. It is in the context of conceptual art that beer can be understood as a ready-made, and drinking beer becomes a form of critical art, both in Prague and San Francisco.

Artists are doing nothing illegal, but at the same time say to the authorities: I see you, I know what you are doing, and you will not break me.