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READYMADE–HUMAN: PRINCIPLES OF ARTISTIC AND THEORETICAL WORK OF ROBERT CYPRICH

Introduction

This study aims to present the artwork and, in part, the mindset of the Slovak artist and theorist Robert Cyprich (1951 Levoča–1996 Prague). During the sixties to eighties, he was active within the context of the alternative or unofficial art scene. He articulated his perspectives and endeavoured to cultivate participatory activities from his position on the periphery. Given the lack of documentation for many of his activities and the circulation of texts only in transcripts and samizdat literature, the primary source for this study is archival material, particularly Cyprich's extensive correspondence. I would like to express my gratitude to Jan Mlčoch for making the author's archive available to me, as well as to Daniel Grúň for facilitating access to Cyprich's correspondence with the Czech artist Jiří Hynek Kocman. I am also indebted to Zora Rusinová and the collector Boris Kršňák for allowing me to borrow the correspondence between Cyprich and Alex Mlynárčik, which forms part of his collection. In the case of quotations from correspondence,

I adhere to the author's original formulations and the use of capitalisation as employed by the author in his writing.

Cyprich was an artist of considerable versatility whose significance extends beyond the borders of Slovakia. He was not a professional artist by trade. He undertook studies in art history at the Comenius University in Bratislava, but did not complete his course of study due to the direction of the discipline at that time and also in part due to his bohemian nature. By the end of the sixties, he had become immersed in a multitude of artistic and literary pursuits, creating events, conceptual projects, happenings, musical scores and visual poetry. From an early age, he engaged in frequent and extensive correspondence with a diverse array of artists. He engaged in epistolary exchanges with artists and art theorists from the then Czechoslovak Republic, Poland, as well as from Western European countries (especially France), the former Soviet Union, and Argentina. As he lacked the official status of an artist and thus was unable to pursue a freelance occupation, he was compelled to engage in a range of occasional and civilian employment.¹



Robert Cyprich, photo collage, early 1970s (?), Collection of Ján Miľoch

In addition to his creative output, he was also engaged in theoretical activities. His reflections on contemporary Czech and Slovak art, as well as international art more broadly, are substantial and marked by his knowledge of the wide-ranging context of international literature. His proficiency in several languages (English, French, Russian) and extensive written correspondence enabled him to gain knowledge beyond the local environment. His texts, which are replete with erudition, contain discernible criticism of the ethos of 'avant-gardists,' a mindset that is often prevalent among local artists. To this day, his texts are dispersed throughout samizdat publications or, on occasion, published in semi-official catalogues. In addition to his artistic and theoretical activities, he also engaged in the commercial breeding of dogs as a source of income. It is noteworthy that during the eighties, he effectively abandoned his artistic activities in favour of this latter occupation. He lived an intense and, at times, self-destructive life. He left behind a substantial body of work, including poetry, texts, concepts, musical scores, manifestos, actions, and a rich correspondence. From the sixties until the eighties, he was involved in the publishing and distribution of samizdat through his own publishing house, P.A.N. (Pro Arte Nova). He translated, transcribed and distributed texts by international artists and theorists, and also compiled thematically focused anthologies (such as those on Fluxus, Happening and Performance).

Cyprich died prematurely at the age of 45, as a consequence of long-term health issues and mental exhaustion. A comprehensive survey of his artistic and theoretical work has yet to be undertaken.²

Experimental Tendencies

Cyprich began creating art and forged his first contacts in music or visual art through his association with Slovak artist Milan Adamčiak. Both artists hailed from Ružomberok. In the latter part of the sixties, Adamčiak was engaged in teaching a cello class at a local music school. In 1968, the then deputy director Imro Fellegi dispatched a 16-year-old Cyprich to Adamčiak with the supposition that the two would establish a rapport despite their five-year age difference. His interests were not solely focused on music. He amassed a considerable corpus of knowledge from a multitude of sources, encompassing literary, philosophical, and artistic domains. It was inevitable that, in the context of a relatively insular environment such as that of Ružomberok, he would encounter constraints on the extent to which he could expand his knowledge. Adamčiak served as both a mentor and a partner for dialogue to the younger Cyprich. He provided him with books and together they commenced a search for information via direct correspondence with artists whose work they admired, not exclusively from Czechoslovakia.³ During this period, Cyprich introduced Adamčiak to the works of Ben Vautier and Julien Blaine (*Propositions*), which he had encountered in foreign periodicals. In 1967, they participated together in the IFCM (International Festival of Contemporary Music) in Prague. At that time, both were engaged in the composition of their own experimental texts. Cyprich proposed that they visit Ladislav Novák, Jiří Valoch, Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová and Milan Grygar with their work. Valoch and Hiršal furnished them with a number of addresses, and upon returning to Ružomberok, they commenced a period of intensive correspondence.⁴ Their shared interest in experimental art (including happenings, performances, concrete and visual poetry, notations, scores, and so forth) Furthermore, Cyprich's interest in computer art⁵ and his experience of life in a small town reinforced the collaboration between the two men, leading in

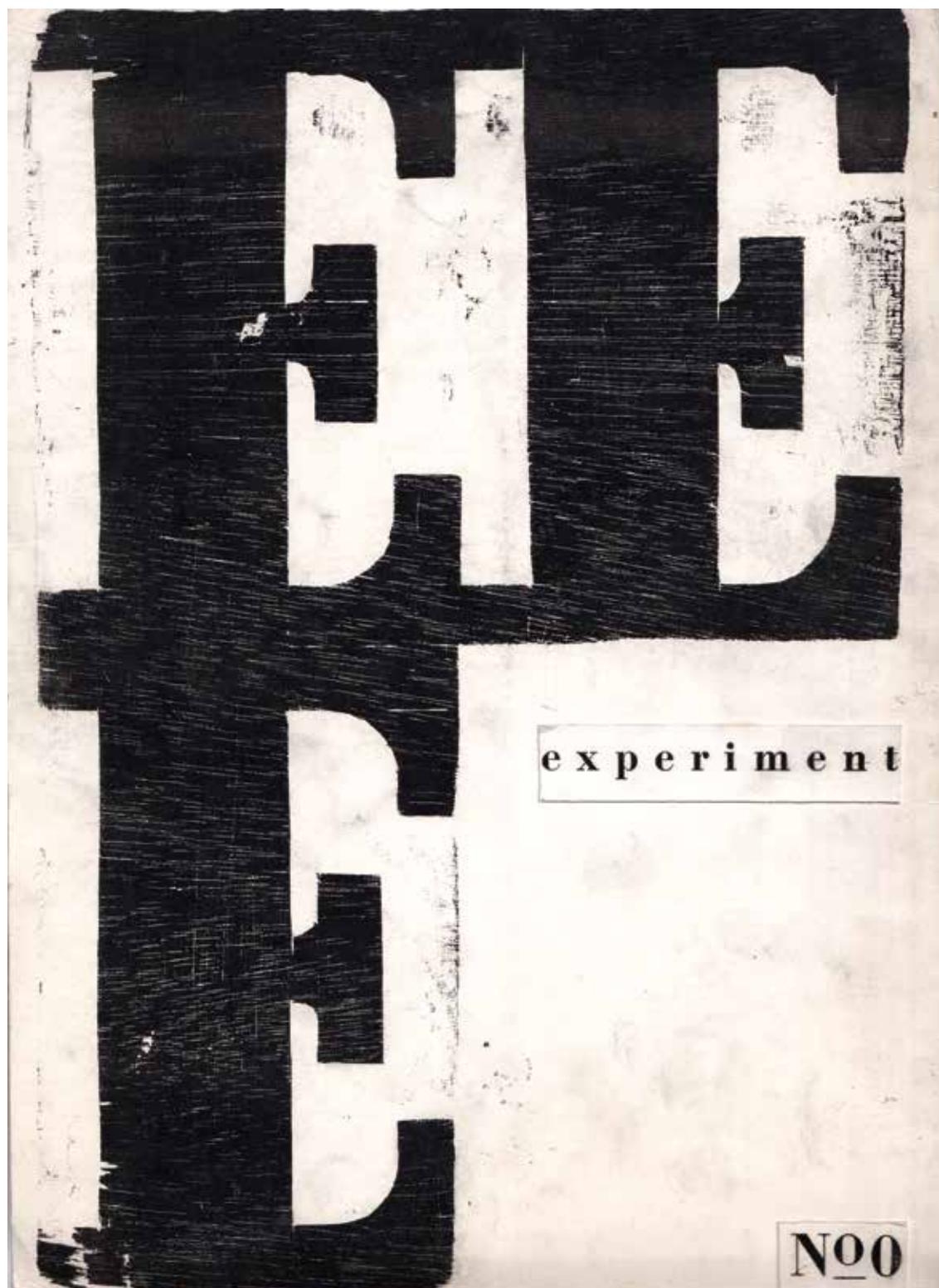
1968 to the decision to publish a magazine. This was to be an anthological publication of their own texts, together with international and translated texts on contemporary art of the time. In 1968, they commenced the collation of materials and the design of the inaugural issue of the *Experiment* magazine, which was to be designated the 'zero' issue. As the principal editor, they approached Vincent Šábik, the editor-in-chief of the esteemed *Revue světové literatury* magazine. The archive has preserved the order form, which announced the forthcoming publication of the magazine and also contained a preliminary plan of the texts that were to be published. *Experiment 0*, subtitled *Journal of the Confrontation of Experiments in Art*, announced the following texts: Robert Cyprich, "Credo of Syntology;" Ladislav Novák, "On the Festival of Phonic Poetry;" Jaroslav Paclt, "About the Acoustic Drawings of Milan Grygar;" Ladislav Kupkovič, "Ad Libitum;" Knížák's, "Manifesto of Actual Art," along with computer art, new music, samples of acoustic drawings, concrete poetry, and the presentation of the Brazilian magazine of concrete art *Ponto*.

The activities undertaken during the period 1968-69 constituted an initiation for Cyprich into the art scene and the alternative sphere. This was a departure from the conventional gallery environment and a move towards a non-institutional operation.⁶ At this time, he was still a high school student, but rather than pursuing studies, he was engaged in the exploration of art and texts, seeking to expand his knowledge beyond the confines of the domestic artistic environment. This expansion of knowledge resulted in a deviation from the Fluxus-musical concept towards a highly intermedia nature of his work. Cyprich began to expand his artistic ambitions, devoting himself more assiduously to his own work. For subsequent sociologically oriented events, focused on the motif of appropriation, activation and performative transformation of reality, his acquaintance with the artist Mlynářčík was pivotal.⁷

By the end of the sixties, Cyprich, in addition to actively participating in artistic activities, reflected on the work and artistic events around him also through theoretical works. It is also important to mention the *Credo of Syntology*, which presents a synthesis of ideas from various theorists and thinkers (Pierre Restany, Herbert Marcuse, Leon Bagrit, Louis Armand, André Lerou-Gourhan, etc.) in the form of a text that is both theoretical and reflective. He synthesises the disparate elements and links them with an argument for a comprehensive scientific and artistic exploration of the world. In relation to Cyprich's concept of Syntology, he states:

With the advent of the 21st century, the classical notion of the structure of 'work' – comprising material, media, form, and so forth – ceased to exist in space-time. The concept of Syntology was thus born. Syntology can be defined as a form of creation that is based on interpretation. The art of SYNTOLOGY encompasses the realms of science, philosophy, and art. However, the practice of creating art in the 21st century is not exclusive to artists alone. Rather, it is a pursuit that can be engaged in by anyone, and the act of doing so serves to stimulate the individual's unique creative potential. Syntology can be defined as a form of humanist ethics. Our sentences do not end with periods, as is the case in the natural sciences, nor with question marks, as is typical in philosophical discourse, nor with exclamation marks, as is common in artistic expression. The art of Syntology is not a closed system; rather, it is a maximally open system. Dynamics is a constant in our methodology. Syntology is an open form of immediate action.⁸

In an effort to achieve complexity in absorbing and projecting diverse paraphrased ideas from the fields of science, social studies, philosophy and art, the linguistic impermeability



Cover design for the magazine *Experiment*, 1968–69, design by Saša Ryčeký, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

DEAR G N L M N
E T E E

Č SSR 23 VII 69

I AM SENDING YOUR MY RESPECTFUL GREETINGS

EXCUSE ME FOR TROUBLING YOU WITH MY HUMBLE REQUEST

KNOW YOU AS AN EXCELLENT EXPERIMENTATOR IN CON
TEMPORARY ART

THAT'S WHY I WANT TO INFORM YOU ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WILL
INTEREST YOU HERE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA THERE IS A GREAT NUMBER
OF GOOD "CONCRETISTS" BUT THEY MISS PLACE FOR CONFRONTATION
OF THEIR OPINIONS

THAT IS WHY I RESOLVED WITH MY FRIENDS TO EDIT THE REVUE
"experiment"

THAT IS SPECIALISED ON THESE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS:

- experiments in arts
- technics and science in art
- integration of science and art
- experimental esthetics
- art and life

THE REVUE IS NONPERIODICAL/ 2-4TIMES IN YEAR/ AND IS PUBLISHED
IN FOLLOWING EDITORSHIP:

alex mlynarčík/environmental happenings/
vincent šabík/literature esthetics/
robert cyprich/synthesis of sciences and arts happenings
computer-art objective poetry/
milan adamčík/events concrete poetry musical graphics/
jirí valoch/concrete poetry esthetics "inter-medies"/
jindřich procházka/ art of new naturalism/
saša rychecký/plastic part/

the REVUE WE SHALL SEND YOU FOR EXCHANGE WITH YOUR PERIODICAL
AND NOW I BEG YOU TO HELP US BY
CREATING AND EDITING YOUR

REVUE BE SO KIND AND WRITE SOME
ARTICLE OF YOUR BRANCH OR OF YOUR OWN PRACTICE/also with some sam-
ples/

*Thanking in advance for
your news
Yours respectfully Robert Cyprich*



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1. Robert Cyprich – Milos Adamčiak: *Water Music*, 1970, photo by Juraj Bartoš, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

2. Alex Mlynárčik (collaboration: Robert Cyprich): *Eva's Wedding*, 1972, Žilina, photo: Miloš Vančo.

3. Robert Cyprich, Reproductions: *Memories of the Present III*, (samizdat, 1972) leaflet cover, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

of Cyprich's texts arises, and often the inability to determine where his own reasoning and original formulations begin. However, given the considerable time that has elapsed since the creation of the *Credo of Syntology* (1968/69) and the relatively young age of the artist, the text represents an admirable outline of the author's highly current ideas, which were not yet translated into Czech or Slovak at that time. It bears witness to Cyprich's unceasing pursuit and his unwavering endeavour to comprehend the world and to identify the prevailing issues and trajectory of our times. Furthermore, the motive of interpretation and appropriation is also closely aligned with his initial interest in music and musical scores. The following text will focus on Cyprich's use of the method of appropriation in his artistic activities. This involves transforming the initial work into a situational action with the nature of a performance or happening.

Cyprich – Organiser and Co-Creator

By the end of the sixties, Cyprich's period of intensive collaboration with Adamčiak came to an end, which saw both artists engage in joint projects with Mlynárčik, in addition to pursuing their own individual projects. The period between 1969 and 1971 was characterised by a high level of activity within the Slovak art scene, with numerous collective actions taking place. Cyprich was present at numerous events as both an organiser and an artist. One of the most extensive and organisationally demanding was the *Festival of Snow*. This was conducted as part of the FIS Ski Jumping World Championships at Štrbské Pleso in 1970. In addition to the aforementioned three artists, other colleagues also assumed the role of co-organisers. Furthermore, the following individuals were instrumental in the organisation of the event: Erik Dietman, Zita Kostrová, Miloš Urbásek and Anton Cimmermann. As stated by Cyprich, the festival marked the inaugural instance of interpretation in visual art as a conduit

for a novel mode of conceptualisation. The event constituted the implementation of the *Manifesto on Interpretation in Visual Arts*, which was authored by Mlynárčik and Urbásek in June 1969. It states:

The interpretation of visual art represents a novel creative dimension. It opens up new avenues for exploration, offering fruitful outcomes that emerge from the authentic gestures we have previously adhered to with a sense of trepidation. It can be defined as the creative implementation of a project or the re-implementation of an existing work of art.⁹

At the festival, Cyprich interpreted the work of Walter de Maria, *Mile Long Drawing* (1968) through the creating of two 50-kilometre-long ski trails in the snow, 10 centimetres apart, made by cross-country skis.

In letters to Mlynárčik from the late seventies, Cyprich expressed a sense of mild bitterness regarding the event. He questioned the dominant position granted to Mlynárčik and Urbásek in the organisation of the event, as reflected in their late seventies correspondence. Concurrently, he was engaged in correspondence with a number of artists and was preparing a comparable event in Ružomberok, designated *Project 0.00*. Among those who promised their participation, and submitted projects were: Christo, Dick Higgins and Ben Vautier. Ultimately, the event did not take place, and the *Festival of Snow* was held instead. The reason for this is not stated by Cyprich in the letter. Cyprich's emancipation from the notion that he was a collaborator of Adamčiak and subsequently Mlynárčik is also reflected in his correspondence with Kocman from 1979. In one of the letters, he states that the concept of the *Festival of Snow*, which focused on interventions in the natural environment, was his own idea. Mlynárčik, Urbásek and others only joined the project at the implementation stage.

The year 1970 was characterised by a proliferation of group activities. Cyprich was instrumental in initiating or participating in several of these activities or directly. A brief overview of these will be provided here. In March, the trio of artists Adamčiak, Revallo and Cyprich organised an intermedia event, entitled *Water Music*, in the indoor swimming pool of Bernolák dormitory in Bratislava. An underwater composition for three string instruments and a xylophone was performed in honour of G. F. Handel. The performers, attired in either swimwear or diving suits, situated the musical event outside the conventional concert venues, thereby emphasising the elements of the Fluxus gag in a manner that was both whimsical and Dadaist in nature. Furthermore, the event was also inspired by John Cage's *Water Music* (1952) and *Water Walk* (1959).

On October 27, Cyprich and Mlynárčik initiated the *Garden of Contemplation* action. It was a work intervention announced through the medium of an invitation and a poster. They extended an invitation to participate in the *Open Studio*, which the city streets of Bratislava were to become. Participants were offered the opportunity to earn additional income by sweeping the streets during nighttime hours. The demonstration was held in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the French New Realism. Additionally, Cyprich, Adamčiak and Mlynárčik took part in the inaugural *Open Studio* event on November 19, 1970 at the residence of Rudolf Sikora on Tehelná Street. As part of the exhibition, they performed as Ensemble Comp. (Adamčiak: cello, drums; B. Bubelka: drums; Cyprich: drums; M. Lucký: drums) with a musical intervention, 5 x 1/4, based on four independent 10-minute improvisations, where each song was accompanied by a rhythm section of three cymbal players. In his individual contribution, Cyprich presented the piece *Fuga a Soggetti For Three Philips*, which made reference to Bach's unfinished counterpoint composition (*Fuga a 3 Soggetti*). In this instance, the ambience of Bach's composition was replaced by the sound synchronisation of three tape

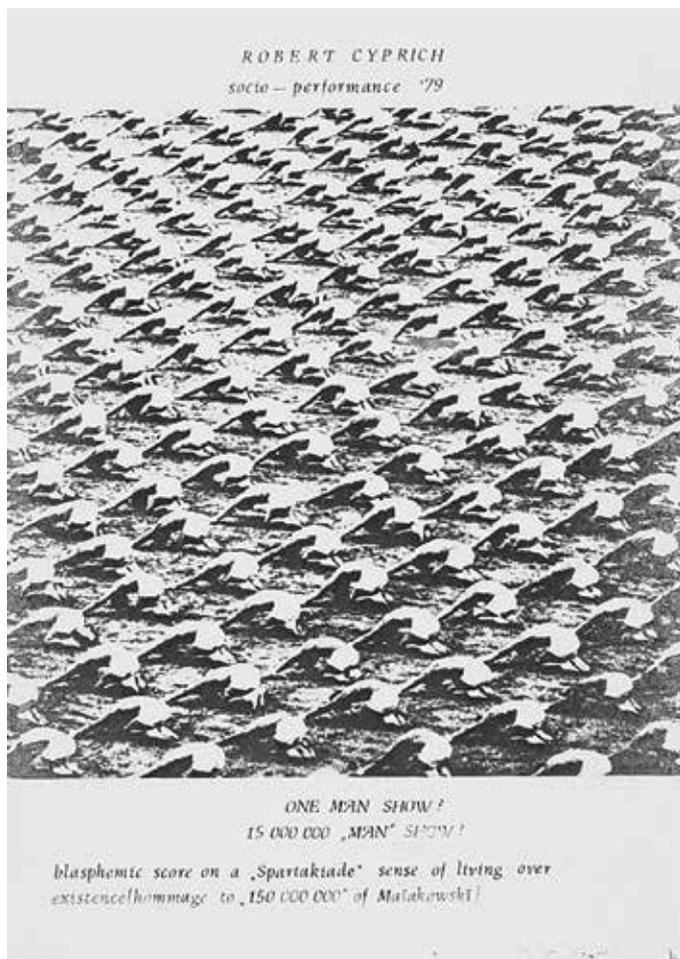
recordings of rock performers (Jethro Tull, Julie Driscoll and Tiny Tim). Additionally, he contributed to the sound environment, which constituted a component of Mlynárčik's action entitled *Three Graces*. In this instance, the artist engaged in an act of appropriation by contracting the presence of three models, who were permitted to move freely among the visitors during the exhibition.

In the Christmas period of 1970, an action initiated by Adamčiak and named *Pax Et Gaudium* took place at Orlovská lúčka under Malinô Brdo mountain. Both Mlynárčik and Cyprich participated in the event, which was documented photographically by Peter Surový.¹⁰ The event was monumental in terms of the number of participants and the complexity of its dramaturgical plan. *Day of Games – If All the Trains in the World* (1971) was an all-day event conceived by Mlynárčik in honour of the termination of the operation of the forest railway running between Nová Bystrica and Zakamenné. The participants included Adamčiak, Cyprich, E. Dietman, M. Dobeš, V. Jakubík, V. Kordoš, A. Miralda, M. Mudroch, H. Nagasawa, L. Nusberg, D. Seltz, J. Shejbalová-Želibská, Ch. Tobas and Urbásek. The creative embellishment of the train, the impromptu ambience, artistic interventions and events at each halt fostered a celebratory atmosphere of collective participation, uniting the local populace with visitors and invited artists. In the 'mail wagon,' Cyprich placed baskets with messenger pigeons, which were symbolically released at the Cyprichova Kykuľa train stop. Three cards (*Pigeogram*) have been preserved in the artist's estate, bearing greetings to the artists and the artistic group (Knud Pedersen, Edgardo Vido and CAyC – Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Argentina).

The final extensive collaboration between Cyprich and Mlynárčik was the city happening titled *Eva's Wedding* (1972), which was realised as a 'live play' based on the painting by Eudovít Fulla. *Eva's Wedding* was not merely a dramatisation of the plot derived from the



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1. Robert Cyprich, *Ladislav Faga – Presentation*, July 21, 1979, Čútkovo, Ružomberok, Archive of Július Koller, Slovak National Gallery

2. Robert Cyprich, *ONE MAN SHOW? 15,000,000 "MAN" SHOW!*, leaflet, Archive of Július Koller, Slovak National Gallery

3. Robert Cyprich, 1979, *Red Year*, poster for the event with a list of addressed artists, 1979, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

ROBERT CYPRICH

introduces the year

1979

in form of the International Festival of Socio-cultural Processual Feasts as

RED YEAR

with the creative cooperation of 365 friends from all over the world

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
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THE AUTHOR

Robert Cyprich is a Czech writer, poet, and translator. He was born in 1928 in Prague. He studied at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. He worked as a teacher and then as a translator. He has published several books of poetry and prose. He is also a member of the Czech Writers' Union. His work is characterized by a deep sense of history and a strong sense of social responsibility. He has translated many works of world literature into Czech. He is considered one of the most important Czech writers of the 20th century.

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Robert Cyprich, July 1979, Bratislava, Czechoslovakia

... LET EACH DAY BECOME FEAST FOR YOU...



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1. Robert Cyprich: *EX-TENSION* (collaboration: Jozef Molitor) April 19, 1980, Theatre at Roland, Bratislava, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

2. Robert Cyprich, newspaper advertisement with the text: "I will advantageously sell my participation in the Biennale in Paris 1975. Agreement certain. P.S.: »Art Trade«" (text in Czech language), 1975, Collection of Ján Mlčoch

Budapest, 74.nov.22.

Kedves Robert,

ne haragudj, hogy kérésedre csak most tudok
 ... a "La ..."
 4 hodin v..."-

MELANTRICH

Brno, tř. Vítězství 25/27

ujszágban
 sem vették

LIDOVÁ DEMOKRACIE

Pište čitelně!

TEXT INZERTU

Rádků:

UPOZORNĚNÍ!

Při zadávání inzerátů musí inzerent předložit osobní nebo jiný úřední průkaz.
 Nepřijímáme inzeráty půjček, kaucí, prodej-koupe zlatá, šperků a podobně.
 Při prodeji nebo pronájmu hospodářských usedlostí nutno předložit povolení ONV.
 Při náboru pracovních sil musí být předložen souhlas k volnému náboru.

Výhodně oprodám účast na Biennale de Paris 1975.

Dohoda jistá.

Zn.: "Obchod s uměním".

Číslo inzerátu

Den uveřejnění

Rubrika

Cena

Den podání

Mir 3-3602049

Vít.
 Vyřizuje:

Telefon: 25 337-3

G 13 3044 70

forementioned painting; it was also a genuine wedding ceremony between two young people. A situation that represents a significant event in the life of an individual was deliberately selected. The celebration was relocated to an unconventional setting, namely a public theatre that drew upon the motifs of folklore and folk wedding rituals, thereby reviving the civilising aspects of the city.

It must be acknowledged that the calculation of participatory actions in which Cyprich participated between 1966 and 1972 is incomplete. It is my intention to mention and highlight the key pieces. This period was of significance with regard to its formation and subsequent active co-organisation. In his correspondence with Kocman, he categorises the period as 'the period of Ružomberok activities (1966-1969),' which was characterised by a high level of interest in a range of cultural phenomena, including events, happenings, experimental poetry and New Music. Then a collective, 'comlynárčik' period followed characterized by the reflection of the legacy of New Realism and the Soviet avant-garde.¹¹

Interest in Humans

In his letters, Cyprich refers to the subsequent period as 'the period of lonely running' (1973-74), which was characterised by a synthesis of his previous activities. He then refers to 'the period of deep immersion in society' (1974-78), during which he engaged in an intensive search for and verification of the fundamental tenets of his philosophical approach. This period was the subject of his subsequent detailed examination. This represents an endeavour to apply the methods of creating works of art in an environment that is not typically associated with artistic pursuits; specifically, in a factory and among the workers therein. Cyprich investigated the viability of the concept of the 'world of art' and the question of whether a work of art arises from its acceptance and categorisation within the

art world or vice versa. He sought to ascertain whether it is a means of transforming society that is apathetic or resistant to artistic production. His scepticism towards the commercialisation and commodification of art led him to orientate himself towards working with people from a non-artistic environment.

In a samizdat text from this period, "Marktlücke," written in November 1978 and edited in April 1979, Cyprich considers the potential for artistic creation to occupy a 'gap in the market' between its conventional, liberal form of production for the artistic community (or in the West for the art market) and the social functions that could facilitate the transformation of aesthetic experience into broader social and cultural understanding. He discusses social issues and, surprisingly, 'socialist art,' which draws inspiration from the research of Russian interwar avant-gardes.¹² This art "takes the social structure into its own hands like a marble sculptor and helps to sculpt poor-quality and beautiful protrusions." Avant-garde art will

conceptualise urban folklore (not an anachronistic and outdated representation) as an exhibition space whose streets will serve as a canvas, as Mayakovsky imagined. If it returns to the pivotal cross-roads, it will rectify everything and can be defined as the New Socialist Realism.¹³

It can be observed that Cyprich employs contemporary terminology, but imbues it with novel meanings. He conceives of 'New Socialist Realism' as an avant-garde and highly experimental art form that emerges from elitist exhibition spaces or various 'pseudo-underground' movements confined to loyal communities. These works seek to verify their efficacy on ordinary people and in their natural environment. He does not differentiate between social or socialist art and the avant-garde, but rather views them as complementary. The capacity of the avant-garde to engage with a diverse audience and facilitate their

transformation through shared experiences or collaborative creation is a defining feature of its vitality and life force. This was most evident in the collective events *Days of Joy* or *Eve's Wedding*.

In his text “Marktlücke,” Cyprich asserts that the socialist state employed a strategy to render avant-garde art unsustainable. It seeks to suppress the creative and vital power of the artistic avant-garde, which results in the artistic avant-garde moving further and further away from its ideals. The avant-garde art movement is beginning to seek outlets for its creative energy in more liberal spheres, and it is evident that it is being acknowledged and appreciated in the context of liberal culture. This represents a further misunderstanding. From an ideological and creative perspective, liberal culture is no longer based on the values of avant-garde poetry and instead uses it for propaganda purposes. Despite the fact that this creation often exhibits high creative parameters, it is employed by liberal culture solely for the purpose of addressing a specific market need. MARKTLÜCKE.¹⁴

In the period between 1979 and 1980, Cyprich developed the motifs from “Marktlücke” in correspondence with Mlynárčik. He outlined his activities in terms of his interest in working in society, especially with people in Ružomberok and in the Slovnaft factory in Bratislava, where he was employed at that time. In his correspondence, he expresses an interest in appropriation techniques, which he refers to as READYMADE-HUMAN. In an undated letter to Mlynárčik from 1979, he states:

The modern readymade: a person is the individual with whom I shared hundreds of moments in Ružomberok, a significant amount of tension, aspirations and stress in Slovnaft, and numerous instances of misunderstanding and deceit in various aspects of life.¹⁵

During the period between 1974 and 1978, he undertook regular visits to his native Ružomberok with the intention of implementing social projects in which he sought to act as an intermediary and elucidate the concepts of modern art to individuals from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds. He engaged in discussions with young workers, introducing them to the principles of modern art. A variety of social activities were prevalent within the art world at the time. In Slovakia, a parallel can be observed between the activities of artists belonging to the alternative scene, such as Július Koller, Lubomír Ďurček and Květa Fulierová with amateur artists.¹⁶ Social interactions and educational initiatives reached their zenith in two major events: *Operation Mátrayi* (1973–1975) and *Presentation Ladislav Faga: Ready-Made '79*.

In the case of *Operation Mátrayi*, it was a process-based work that he carried out in 1973–75 through a friend from Ružomberok. My knowledge of the work is limited; I am only aware of it from vague descriptions in Cyprich's letters.¹⁷ The long-term strategy of the ‘play-pretend artist’ was based on a concept of absurdity. Cyprich attempted to demonstrate to a working-class individual that it was possible for them to become an artist as well. The social game's objective was to persuade Mr. Mátrayi from Ružomberok of the merits of his art. A note in the letter to Kocman indicates that the game has reached its limits and that several individuals from the artistic community have been invited to participate in the project in its entirety. In his writings, Cyprich states:

Right now, I am attempting to persuade Štraus (Slovak art historian and theorist) to publish him as an equal progressivist in Domus, and it is possible that he will also appear in the Lexicon of Modern Slovak Art as one of the cornerstones of this culture.¹⁸

The event, entitled *Presentation Ladislav Faga: Ready-made '79*, took place on July

21, 1979, in Čutkovská dolina in Ružomberok. This event represented the pinnacle of socially conscious initiatives undertaken in Ružomberok. In contrast to the preceding events, which were largely conducted via correspondence, the presentation evinces a similar grandeur to the joint 'festivities' organised with Mlynárčik. The event assumed the form of an exhibition opening in a setting in nature, attended by a broader circle of Cyprich's acquaintances beyond the confines of the art society. Subsequently, the group proceeded to Mount Šťastlivá, where they paused at thirteen locations to view the charcoal drawings, which depicted the landscapes of Ladislav Faga. At the conclusion of this 'procession', a feast with music awaited the participants. Goulash was served, and wine was poured from a bottle bearing the label 'Rosé Selavy,' a reference to Marcel Duchamp's female alter ego. In a letter to Július Koller dated 25/07/1979, Cyprich states that "the era of grand rituals and grand optimism is now behind us." However, he maintains an optimistic outlook on the world,

regardless of the definitive nature of this world and European civilisation. To perish amidst the chaotic vortex of the carnival in Rio de Janeiro... to die amidst the masses, surrounded by their ugliness, superficiality, depravity, yet also their wisdom and poeticism (...) Duchamp's readymade was an everyday ITEM, ready to wear. In my view, this individual is an ordinary, "ready-made", "communal" HUMAN (...) This HUMAN does not adhere to the conventional forms of cultural expression, yet does not believe in some kind of OTHER CULTURE. Instead, he appears to embrace a PERSONAL CULTURE. And that is the moment that appeals to me, to reinforce his sense for personal culture. Ultimately, each individual possesses a unique skill set (I work with computers, whereas someone else may be an artist, librarian, or worker)... and the rest is our

PERSONAL CULTURE, encompassing our capacity to live and our CREATIVE SUPERSTRUCTURE.¹⁹

A longer excerpt from the letter elucidates the methodologies employed by Cyprich in the latter half of the seventies. On the one hand, there was a prevailing scepticism about large-scale happening events, given the prevailing atmosphere of normalisation and the associated feasibility challenges. Conversely, there was a sustained interest in the use of art as a means of fostering collective experience, whereby the nuances of everyday life are enhanced through heightened awareness of processes and a focus on a form that is collaboratively created and shared, even within a more circumscribed group comprising artists and non-artists. An interest in the motif of reproduction, re-creation or creation that follows or copes with another is a defining characteristic of the Slovak neo-avant-garde. Cyprich situates the motif of the reproduction of live events within the context of a festive event (e.g. the *Presentation of Ladislav Faga: Ready-made '79*). He pursues the establishment of a new poetic objectivity, a new reality, and the glorification of the elementary energies of socio-process and an anthropological scale of reality.²⁰ Cyprich's oeuvre is oriented towards reinterpretations of the readymade; towards 'appropriation' as a strategy that may not only be related to the object or work of art, but also to an event or even a person. Readymades are individuals who are neither artists nor even amateurs, but who are nevertheless included in the context of art. They are situated within a specific context and are presented with situations that correspond to the artistic operation. This may involve the implementation of exhibitions, the inclusion of their works in magazines, or the persuasion of a theorist to write about them. The process of 'readymadeization' represents a significant departure from the conventional principles governing the creation of an organic work of art. The objective is to

uncover the institutional nature of art, which is predicated on the establishment of the artist or work on the basis of a network of curators, commissioners, gallery owners and institutions that verify and sanctify the work. Although the institutional theory or commodity function of art is not a prominent topic of interest in Czechoslovakia, due to differing conditions and the status of the artist compared to Western, capitalist societies, Cyprich perceives that art has a commercial aspect, which motivates galleries to enhance the nominal value of works for financial benefit. He was aware of this model through his correspondence with Mlynářčik, who had first-hand experience of the Western, particularly French, gallery scene. Despite the disparate circumstances in Czechoslovakia, Cyprich's artistic strategies are oriented towards the defetishisation of the work. He concentrates on the experience of working with amateurs or reflects and critiques the commercialisation of artistic production in his work.²¹ The artist's thinking is strongly influenced by Hal Foster's later essay "What's New in the Neo-Avant-Garde?" in which he discusses the following: "If the historical avant-garde focuses on conventionality, the neo-avant-garde focuses on institutionality."²²

The originality of Cyprich's work lies in his perception of the position of Slovak neo-avant-gardists in relation to the specific position of the artist in Czechoslovakia. The artists' work is situated within the context of unofficial activities, reflecting progressive tendencies. However, they also utilise the status of an artist who can pursue a freelance career and engage in public or state commissions. Cyprich subsequently relinquishes this position. He is gainfully employed in a factory, yet he devoted a portion of his time to art as a leisure activity. He perceived it as a mission in an environment outside the art world, with the objective of reinstating the significance of art in the process of sensitisation across a broad social spectrum. In the latter part of the seventies, he commenced an intensive study of the documents and history of the Russian avant-gardes of the

twenties and thirties. Despite characterising his position as neo-avant-garde, namely reflecting the context in which art is created and for which it is intended, the primary source of inspiration for his methodology during this period is Russian constructivism and productivism. He provides a detailed account of his endeavours in a series of letters to Mlynářčik between 1980 and 1981. In these texts, he presents himself as a 'missionary' of art among the general public.²³ Some of Cyprich's statements evoke a messianic fervour and express admiration for the works of avant-garde authors such as Alexei Gan and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

He articulated his perspective most explicitly in the aforementioned text "Marktlücke," wherein he explored the concept of integrating the tenets of socialist art with those of the avant-garde. The socialist project aimed to bring about social change through the advancement of construction and industry. However, it largely overlooked the cultural and spiritual sphere, which encompasses art as a vital aspect. For Cyprich, the avant-garde can be considered a form of socialist art insofar as it seeks to transform the individual into a participant in the creation of material and cultural values. It is evident that he was aware of the utopian nature of his ideas, given his residence in a socialist country. In the text, however, he advocates a return to the original ideas of the avant-garde, an acceleration of revolutionary vitalism, and the emancipation of humankind through the freedom of creation. In his proclamatory text, he states that:

the essence of the socialist revolution with art, with avant-garde art in particular, is of paramount importance (...) avant-garde art occupies a primary position in the ideological foundation of the socialist revolution. The discrepancy between current practice and the ideals of the revolution is not a result of flaws in the revolutionary ideals themselves, nor is it a reflection of shortcomings in the role of art. It is often observed that when weapons are used, the muses are silent. However,

in a socialist state, where machines and production halls are in operation, art must remain silent. NEVERTHELESS, SOCIALISM IS NOT A PROGRAM FOR ONE GENERATION. The socialist revolution is a project of a new era, a distinctive and popular endeavour to reinstate the role of the individual. It is a harbinger of a new era of human development, a concept that is central to the contemporary avant-garde artistic movement.²⁴

Cyprich's perspectives and attempts to connect the avant-garde orientation of art with an anti-bourgeois ideology represented a bold and thought-provoking approach within the context of contemporary art historical discourse. The rehabilitation of the term 'socialist art' through references to the Russian avant-garde of the early twentieth century represents an effort to return to the ideals of art as the principle of forming and constructing social relations. He is interested in the motif of participation in the relationship, as defined by the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer: "the peculiar existence of a work of art consists in the fact that, like this work, it becomes an experience that transforms the one who experiences it."²⁵ Art as a game is therefore not only something spontaneous but is a form of creating time-space for an intensive experience with co-creation and participation in the creation of a situation or a work of art. The concept of 'socialist art' as employed by Cyprich in *Marktlücke* is to be understood as having a meaning that differs significantly from that which is conventionally ascribed to it in the present era. This connection is made in relation to the aspect of personal change, which is revolutionary in nature and only possible within the context of relations with others. It is in opposition to the passive and conventional approach to life, as well as the elitism of the so-called 'quasi-avant-garde' art. In his artistic and theoretical work, Cyprich attempts to synthesise two disparate concepts:

1) To rehabilitate the principles of the avant-garde, where art has the task of changing the individual and society.

2) To address the contemporary situation of socialist art, which is essentially the art of idealisation and kitsch and has relinquished its primary responsibilities of reflection on society.

In Cyprich's terminology, the true essence of socialist art is to embody the characteristics of the avant-garde, to possess a visionary quality, and to foster a sense of relationality. It should not be employed as a propaganda tool; rather, it should be utilized as a means of facilitating joint discourse and the creation of cultural, ethical, and aesthetic values that emancipate and displace material values. In light of the socio-political discourse that pervaded Czechoslovakia during the seventies, this mode of thinking is particularly noteworthy. The texts and ideas of international authors, such as José Ortega y Gasset, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, are referenced and engaged with. Furthermore, the theoretical framework is present in Cyprich's artistic initiatives. Such works frequently assume the form of a text, a correspondence challenge, or a verbal performance that encourages action. He conceives of a work of art as a means of constructing a new whole, which can also manifest as social relationships initiated through mail-art challenges.

Reflection on the Socio-Cultural Context

The poster appeal entitled *ONE MAN SHOW? 15,000,000 MAN SHOW* represents the pinnacle of efforts related to the appropriation of the social context. It features a reproduction of a photograph from the Spartakiad exercise. The accompanying text beneath the photograph pays homage to Mayakovsky, and it is evident from the context of the title that it is a reference to his poem *15,000,000*. The number also

serves to indicate the approximate number of inhabitants in Czechoslovakia, who collectively constitute a social body. Such physical rituals exemplify the characteristics of a totalitarian spectacle, wherein individuality is subjugated and the individual assumes the role of an imaginary member within the collective body of a socialist society. The body becomes a conduit for obedience, a unified character of society where individual freedom is an expression of undesirable liberalisation and emancipation. Cyprich's interpretation of the concept of socialist art employs a range of connotations, with the objective of co-creating an environment through the voluntary relinquishment of part of one's individuality by those engaged in the act of creating a collective work. The work *ONE MAN SHOW?* offers a critique of socialist understanding and indoctrination, which is based on uncritical collectivisation and unification. This is also indicated by the term 'Man,' which denotes 'man' in English. However, in this context, it also evokes Heidegger's philosophy and the German indefinite pronoun. The German word 'man' is an indefinite pronoun that denotes a mode of existence characterised by shared thoughts, emotions and actions. The concept is antithetical to individuality, manifesting itself in the form of general principles and conventions.²⁶ The ambiguity inherent in the title is significant, as it determines the relationship between the individual and the social construct, which erodes and obscures the subject's identity. The poster is regarded as blasphemous in relation to the prevailing attitudes and understanding of social or socialist creation during the period in question.

The Red Year 1979 project represents the pinnacle of collective and continuous efforts to develop the concept of festivity within banality of everyday life. In the correspondence appeal, Cyprich sets forth the fundamental prepositions:

The Red Year is an event of the international festival of socio-cultural processual festivities. Processual is not limited

to a mere duration of 365 days, but also encompasses the structure and nature of the individual actions taking place. These events are themselves shaped by processual nature, action, and spatio-temporality. The concept of *The Red Year* entails the poeticisation and transformation of the concept of "everydayness" into that of a holiday. It represents a synthesis of EUROPEAN and SLAVIC traditions within the context of an analysis of the socialisation of art. It is a programme of continuous engagement. The Red Day is regarded as a holiday in the calendar. The event constitutes a curriculum in which all the festive days are transformed into a creative poetisation of the socio-process and the participation of the artists involved.²⁷

Each of the 365 artists contacted was required to send the relevant documentation (photographic, project, text, etc.) within 40 days of the project realisation, but no later than December 25, 1979. The poster served to encourage participation in the creation of a unified output and the pursuit of innovative humane points of view. The project's ambition is evident from the appeal that was issued. Furthermore, Cyprich considered the distribution of individual names in the calendar as part of the concept of the socio-cultural year. The days are thus associated with a variety of symbolic contexts. Additionally, the placement of names of theorists at the end of the calendar is deliberate, with the intention of fostering an atmosphere conducive to making statements in favour of future years. He does not affix his name to the calendar, instead perceiving himself as an organiser who provides an impetus for action. Nevertheless, the planned sequence of daily activities, artistic works and concepts, which were to be created by individual artists, did not come to fruition. The majority of respondents did not respond to the call, as evidenced by subsequent correspondence from Cyprich. This suggests that they did not perceive the call to be sufficiently justified or relevant. The

participants interpreted the project as a mail art initiative, whereas Cyprich's intention was to create an artistic participatory work that would be implemented throughout the year. Concurrently, the title was selected in consideration of the author's interpretation of the ideological and statist implications associated with the concept of socialist art and the pervasive symbolism of red. In a letter to Kocman following the unsuccessful appeal, he states:

It is impossible to isolate oneself from such a reality where sickles and hammers are affixed to fences and our cities are somewhat "fairytale-like" cloaked in "red cloth". *The Red Year* represents my reaction and direct response to the transformation of this "redness" into my poetic world, which currently stands on its own (or maybe for now "toddles") in the midst of this public and official "redness". The vision of the Red Year evokes the poetic experience of the "everydayness", thereby transforming it into a holiday-like state of being. Furthermore, it has no intention to render the "redness" on the fences in an absurd manner; rather, it is to indicate where it should be situated in accordance with my ideas.²⁸

Following the failure of the project, Cyprich's interest shifted towards a more in-depth study, with the artistic or organisational creation being gradually postponed. He drew inspiration from the aforementioned environment of the Russian avant-garde of the period 1909-1915. In letters to Mlynářčík from the eighties, he provides a comprehensive account of his research methodology, which involved the collection of literature on the context in question and the identification of sources of inspiration for what he characterises as a "fantastic time of great messianism, creative boil, countless manifestos, conflicts and qualitatively radical concepts."²⁹ Cyprich's primary interest was in Russian productivism, a movement that placed

greater emphasis on the role of the artist as an engineer than as a painter of canvases. It was proposed that greater attention should be paid to social processes than to the suggestion of visionary paths or the decoration of public or gallery space. However, what particularly captured his attention during this period is the shift in focus from the artist as an isolated figure to the artist as a representative of the people. The manifestos of this era were not disseminated through publications such as *Le Figaro* or presented at Cabaret Voltaire; instead, they were delivered directly to the public in public spaces, serving as a reflection of the diverse social landscape.³⁰ The study of Russian avant-garde art (e.g. Tatlin's speeches in factories and squares) served to reinforce his conviction that art can be a vehicle for participation in the creation of new forms through the medium of activation. The foundation of this approach is the reflective aspect, which can be observed in both the work and the writing, and which is to be followed by the aspect of visionary thinking. Through a reflexive reading of manifestos, Cyprich develops two key concepts: the construction of the future and utopianism, as well as the interest in the human, which positions the artist as a guide mediating experience. In his correspondence, however, he also makes reference to non-Russian authors, such as John Dewey, the author of the celebrated book *Art as Experience* (1934), which was a significant source of inspiration for the emergence of the happenings movement. Dewey posits that any experience can be imbued with an aesthetic quality, or indeed become artistic, provided that it is fulfilled. The completion of the work is contingent upon the interaction between the artist and the audience, which occurs through the act of perception. The objective of the artist is to create a complex work in which the conclusion is of equal importance to the process. The participation of the viewer in the completion of the experience allows for the deduction of not only their reception of the work, but also the co-creation of meaning independent of the process taken by the artist.³¹ Despite the new

theoretical stimuli, however, 1979 was the year that saw the lack of success of *The Red Year* event, which proved to be a significant turning point for Cyprich. His activity waned in the eighties, although he did undertake several actions³² and also participated in group performances, either initiated by the artist Peter Meluzin or involving the circle around Ján Budaj. Once more, he demonstrated his capacity for collaboration, yet there is no longer any opportunity for him to pursue his own original work.

In conclusion, an overview of Cyprich's selected activities from his youth to 1980 indicates a strong relationship to cooperation (Adamčiak, Mlynárčik), a tendency to experiment with various artistic forms, and at the same time reveals a significant interest in text and the written word. His keen interest and linguistic abilities enabled him to familiarise himself with a considerable corpus of foreign literature, and his capacity for rigorous research and reflection was also evident in his own writings and correspondence. This text primarily focuses on his interest in artistic interpretation and appropriation, particularly in the sixties when he became intensely interested in the communicative and participatory aspect of art. The central function of the artist in the present era is to organise leisure time in the natural environment of those to whom they wish to communicate. This is to be done in the context of urbanised nature, including factories, offices and streets. The significance of Cyprich's paraphrase lies in its recontextualisation of the setting and timeframe of events, with the aim of engaging with humanity in a manner that is neither exploitative nor demeaning. The use of declarative statements, the discovery or appropriation of materials, and the creation of an unconventional, game-like context represent a significant strategy for him. A significant number of activities were not documented photographically, and we are only able to gain insight into them through an extensive body of correspondence. Moreover, in the second half of the seventies, the avant-garde manifestos of Russian artists exerted a significant influence

on him, providing insights and principles that informed his understanding of contemporary art.³³ Cyprich, therefore, challenges the conventional interpretation of the avant-garde as a counterpoint to socialist art. In his correspondence with the critic and art historian Tomáš Štraus, dated April 1979, he states: "It seems to me that the most avant-garde act of today is to leave the avant-garde."³⁴

In his work, the artist draws the viewer into the context of the work as a found subject, as a readymade, with the intention of disrupting the hermetic and elitist concept of art. Cyprich attempts to rehabilitate the concept of art as a socially significant and socio-cultural phenomenon. He argues that it should not be ideologized in the context of 'socialist' culture. Instead, he suggests that it should align with the principles of the avant-garde, which emphasize human transformation through experience or aesthetic experience.

Translation: Katarína Müllerová

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Notes

¹ In accordance with the socialist legislation (65/1965 Coll.), individuals were not only entitled to employment, but were also obliged to be employed. An exception was made for artists who were permitted to pursue a freelance profession. In the event of evasion of work and the absence of registration by the employer on the ID card, one was threatened with prosecution under §203, 53/1963 Coll., for parasitism. From personal conversations with his friends and acquaintances (art historian Jozef Molitor, artist Dezider Tóth), I was able to confirm his unconventional way of life, including his occasional employment and part-time work. In his correspondence, Cyprich mentions his employment with Slovnaft. He applied his technical expertise in this capacity. By the end of the 1960s, he had developed an interest in technological development and cybernetic systems, which he employed in both his professional and artistic practices.

² At the turn of 2020–21, the exhibition *Experiment* took place in art space tranzit.sk in Bratislava (Dec.11, 2020–May14, 2021). This was a selection of the artist's works. The works from Cyprich's archive, which were kept after his death by his partner, art restorer Zuzana Melíčková, and which are currently managed by the artist and curator Jan Mlčoch, were supplemented by works by younger artists. Artists who responded to the themes and legacy of Cyprich's work included Liza Gennart, Katarína Hládeková, Katarína Karafová and Michal Hušťatý, Martin Toldy and Miroslav Tóth. The exhibition was not a retrospective; rather, it was based on materials that remained with Cyprich's partner after his death. For further information, please see: Ján Mlčoch, Ján Kralovič, Beata Jablonská, *Experiment* (Bratislava: TRANZIT, 2020).

³ Adamčiak had subscriptions to numerous periodicals, including *Sešity pro mladou literaturu*, *MY 64*, *Dialog*, *Host do domu*, *Výtvarné Umění*, *Divadlo*, *Mladá tvorba*, *Typografie*, *Revue světové literatury*, and others. These publications offered insights into the evolving trends in global art during the second half of the 1960s, translating and disseminating texts on experimental art. For further information, please see: Michal Murin (ed.) *Archive I., Experimental poetry 1964–1972* (Košice: Dive buki, 2011), 21.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 14.

⁵ Cyprich was among the first Slovak authors and theoreticians to reflect this new direction in art. Furthermore, the text *Art and computer?* (*Experiment* magazine, a samizdat publication from 1968) employed the use of computers in its artistic practice. Art historian Radislav Matuščík makes reference to Cyprich's composition *Mon Alphabet de la Syntologie pour Paris* (presented by Jochen Gerz), which was a poetic composition created through a mathematical principle and generated by a computer. Radislav Matuščík, Before 1964 – 1971 (Žilina: Považská Gallery of Art, 1994), 95.

⁶ Alternative forms of artistic creation involved an effort to shape the field of production, which demonstrated a degree of freedom in terms of disconnecting from conservative artistic expression and seeking new means of expression. A significant development was the establishment of genuine, independent communication channels, whether through artistic works or through community gatherings, discussions, and exhibition presentations. In the Slovak context, the distinction between alternative and unofficial scenes has been subjected to detailed examination by the art historian Zuzana Bartošová. Bartošová provides clear definitions of the individual terms. The term 'alternative scene' refers to artistic events held prior to 1972, when a greater degree of flexibility existed in terms of creative possibilities and approaches. However, following the second November Congress of the Union of Slovak Fine Arts, it became necessary to adopt a different terminology, with the term 'unofficial art' emerging to describe the sphere of prohibited and undesirable artistic expression. For further information, please see: Zuzana Bartošová, *Despite Totalitarianism* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011), 36–56, 320–322.

⁷ Cyprich met Alex Mlynárčík in the summer of 1969 as part of the *Spawning* event at the Teriánske Pleso lake in the High Tatras (19 July 1969). In the following years, they collaborated on numerous projects, including the *Donations for the Youth Biennale in Paris* (1969), the *1st Festival of Snow* (1970), and *Gardens of Contemplation* (1970), among others. In one of his letters to J. H. Kocman, Cyprich refers to this period as the 'co-mlynárčík period.' He further states that

it was already a period of collaboration with Mlynárčík, rather than a period of formation. Prior to this, Mlynárčík and I were not acquainted. I consider the period between 1967 and 1969 to represent a period of honest work on my part, which, at times, appears more convincing than certain gestures from my recent work (and not only my own). Therefore, the notion that Mlynárčík is my 'godfather' is an absurd fabrication, both in my own estimation and in that of Mlynárčík himself. Given that Mlynárčík and I had some degree of familiarity with one another through our respective relatives, it is reasonable to assume that we initiated contact and collaborated to a greater extent than with other individuals. Nevertheless, the entirety of the collaboration effectively spanned a mere two and a half years.

As stated in a letter to Jiří Hynek Kocman (manuscript, 1979). In the archives of Jiří Hynek Kocman.

⁸ Robert Cyprich, "Credo of Syntology" (typescript, 1968–69). The text forms part of the typewritten texts in the folder of the forthcoming *Experiment* magazine. The following material is drawn from the archives of Jan Mlčoch.

⁹ Pierre Restany, *ELSEWHERE* (Bratislava: SNG, 1995), 78.

¹⁰ Milan Adamčiak recalls that the event did not conclude favourably for him. During the course of the event, he suffered an epileptic seizure and was subsequently admitted to the hospital in Ružomberok. He subsequently elected to create an additional iteration of his contribution to *Pax et Gaudium*, which occurred in 1971. Michal Murin, *Archive IV. Actions, performances, projects, concepts and exhibitions* (Košice: Dive buki, 2014), 212.

¹¹ From private correspondence. From the archive of Jiří Hynek Kocman.

¹² At the time of writing, an extensive exhibition entitled *Revolution was in progress. The exhibition Russian Avant-Garde 1912–30* (October 1972–January 1979) was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and is referenced in the text. This demonstrates Cyprich's keen awareness of exhibitions in the West.

¹³ Robert Cyprich, *Marktlücke* (samizdat, typescript 1978-79), 6.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 7-8.

¹⁵ Letter from Robert Cyprich to Alex Mlynářčik (manuscript, undated, 1979), 4, From the Archive of Boris Kršňák.

¹⁶ See: Daniel Grůň, ed., *AMA: Lubomír Ďurček, Květoslava Fulierová, Július Koller and Amateur Artist* (Vienna: Schlebrügge, editor, 2020).

¹⁷ The work was examined by Daniela Šiandorová in her exceptional doctoral dissertation: Daniela Šiandorová, "Theoretical and Artistic Work of Robert Cyprich in the Context of the Age" (MA thesis. University of Trnava. Faculty of Education, 2020), 60–62.

¹⁸ Letter from Robert Cyprich to J. H. Kocman (manuscript, undated), from the archives of J. H. Kocman.

¹⁹ Letter from Robert Cyprich to Julius Koller (Ružomberok/Bratislava, 25.07.1979). Available at: https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_358-B1-486.

²⁰ See: Robert Cyprich, *Reproductions: Memories of the Presence III*. Samizdat (1972).

²¹ In 1972, Cyprich participated in the Venice Biennale independently with an event called *Souvenir du présent*. In this proposal, he suggested filling the city of Venice with planes and cars containing counterfeit banknotes. The banknotes would bare the inscription 'Où est-ce que ç est Biennale Internationale d'Arte Venezia Les argentés.' [Where it the International Biennale of Art? Only money, nothing else.] The question thus arises as to the current status of the Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia. The sole focus was on financial gain. The artist's principal concept was to 'decipher' the role of money as a motivating factor in interpersonal relationships and human megalomania. In 1975, at the Youth Biennale, he distributed an advertisement to various newspapers in which he stated his intention to sell his invitation to participate in the event. In 1979, in the work *Time of Cage*, he responded to one of the auction records at the time. Two works by Yves Klein were auctioned in Zurich: *The Red Monochrome* was valued at 17,000 Swiss francs, while the *Blue Monochrome* was valued at 46,000 Swiss francs. On 5th September 1979, Cyprich contacted three prominent French galleries. Alexandra Ilolas, Matias Fels and Denis René. During the call, he remained silent for four minutes and 33 seconds, a reference to the famous composition by Cage. Cyprich was subsequently charged 300 Czechoslovak crowns for these telephone calls. His silent 'protest' or subversive reaction to the commodification of art was reflected in the actual financial cost of maintaining his silence.

²² Hal Foster: "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?" *Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones* 4, no. 8, (2010): 75.

²³ In a letter to Mlynářčik from 1980, undated but likely written in the early 1980s, he provides a summary of his activities in recent years.

Perhaps it would be beneficial to provide a more detailed account of my spiritual wanderings and the mission I have been pursuing over the past four to five years. It is, in fact, a considerable amount of work, and I feel it would be unwise to divulge too many specifics, as it might prove disruptive to the overall structure. In essence, I was seeking the contemporary READYMADE WORKER, a man who may be the sole individual capable of safeguarding the conscience and reputation of our civilisation, given that he is not merely its product but also its architect. I made regular visits to Ružomberok. Over the course of the past four years, I have engaged in discussions with young workers, preached the word of modern artistic thinking, and worked in Slovnafť among proletarians in the most authentic sense. Here, I WAS LEARNING to (in a painter's language) PRIME THE CANVAS. (...) I instructed them to build PERSONAL CULTURE. I do not understand the term 'to teach' in the context of pedagogical discourse. Indeed, I lived with them and therefore taught them in the most direct way possible.

In conclusion, he states:

What is the subsequent step? After a period of approximately four to five years, I emerged from my secluded state to share insights regarding my experience of remaining within that state. What is the subsequent step? This is a curious state of affairs. LIFE, after all.

The text is a letter from Robert Cyprich to Alex Mlynářčik (manuscript, 1980) which is not paginated. It is currently held in the archives of B. Kršňák.

²⁴ Robert Cyprich, *Marktlücke*. Samizdat, typescript (1978-79), 8.

²⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Truth and Method," in Miroslav Petříček, ed. *II. Reflections on the Theatre* (Prague: Herrmann & Sons, 1993), 10.

²⁶ Robert Cyprich, 'Man' (definition of the term), ONE MAN SHOW? 15 000 000 "MAN" SHOW? Available in the SNG /Július Koller Archives: https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_358-B1-504.

²⁷ Robert Cyprich: *Dear friend, (Invitation to participate in the Red Year project) I*, Available in the SNG/Július Koller Archives: https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_358-B1-494.

²⁸ Letter from Robert Cyprich to Jiří Hynek Kocman (manuscript).

²⁹ From a letter by Robert Cyprich to Alex Mlynářčik (typescript, 21.03.1980) Archive of Boris Kršňák.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 5.

³¹ See Mario Perniola, *20th Century Aesthetics* (Prague: Karolinum, 2000), 99–101.

³² The most significant action of the beginning of the 1980s was Cyprich's performance EX-TENSION (April 19, 1980, Divadlo u Rolanda theatre, Bratislava) with participation of the art historian Jozef Molitor. The event was based on the auction of parts of his own body, during which he gradually revealed his naked body and symbolically offered parts for the highest possible price to the audience. Cyprich exchanged the coins that had been auctioned for paper money, which he then consumed in front of the audience. This act served to confirm the value of both himself as an artist and his status as an art object.

³³ When the term 'monochrome' is mentioned, it provokes a reflexive response, prompting the mention of Klein, American painting of the second half of the century, or Fontana's White Manifesto. There is a tendency to overlook the fact that in 1921, I repeat, 1921, Rodchenko exhibited works such as Pure Blue Colour and Pure Yellow Colour. When the term 'Living Theatre' is mentioned, it is generally understood, although not universally, what it refers to. However, the use of cranes, trucks, and kinetic environments by Annenkov and Popova is not as widely recognized.

The following text is taken from a letter written by Robert Cyprich to Alex Mlynárčik (manuscript April 12, 1980), 7. Archive of B. Kršňák.

³⁴ Robert Cyprich, letter to Tomáš Štraus, in Tomáš Štraus, *The Slovak Variant of Modernity* (Bratislava: Pallas, 1992), 220.

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Collection of Boris Kršňák, Prague

Collection of Ján Mlčoch, Prague

Collection of Jiří Hynek Kocman, Brno

Archive of Július Koller, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava

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