

Barbora Klímová

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Barbora Klímová: Mutually – A Portfolio

Barbora Klímová (Brno)

I will write about my works, which materially began with the *REPLACED – BRNO – 2006* project. But the roots of my work are deeper, arising out of my gradual awareness of specific local cultural conditions, influenced by the previous decades and the period of “normalization” when culture was an instrument of the socialist state’s political power. In the nineties, I was educated at school by artists who had spent most of their active lives outside of art institutions. Most of them had not studied artistic disciplines, had had non-artistic occupations, and had created in their free time in the context of communities of like-minded friends and acquaintances.

The exclusion of freely-creating artists from the public sphere was obviously influenced by social circumstances. The statements of some of the artists and theorists of the time reflect a more general distaste for the exclusivity and commerciality of art. For example, Jindřich Chalupecký and Ivan Martin Jirous both quoted Duchamp’s slogan: “The great artist of tomorrow will go underground.”

My predecessors – artists whose work I respect – were forced to spend most of their lives in detached, alternative, non-institutionalized cultural spheres, which enriched the local neo-avant-garde.

Traces of local history leak into the contemporary social and political context; this affects individuals. The Czech Republic is obviously different from democratic countries, but also from other “Eastern bloc” countries. I’m interested in the specific conditions at the level of cities, communities, communication, and influences. I was born in Brno. The cultural community here tends to define itself in opposition to “pragocentrism” and the idea that art thrives only in big cities. In Brno, I feel the desire to opt out of the competitive pressure and professionalism in art. But of course one can also recognize in the cultural scene admiration for large centers, feeling of underestimation of local events etc. If I wanted to respect cultural history, based on names, authorities, and stars, I would definitely not involve myself with Brno artists. In my research, I am more focused on environment, communication, community.

I researched the specific nature of the Czech urban and cultural environment influenced by the recent past within *REPLACED – BRNO – 2006*. I selected five events by five Czech performers carried out in urban environments in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s. I have treated the documentation of the performances as recorded situations in time. I was more interested in moments on the edge of civil activities than in expressive, artistic performances. Through the reconstruction of these events, I examined how urban areas have

changed in recent decades. I recorded the differences in the responses of random passers-by and the effect that these events had. I also documented the differing contemporary motivations, perspectives, and interpretations in comparison to those of the original artists.[\[1\]](#)

I.

My interest in the development of the 1970s and 1980s originates from a feeling that our cultural history is being unjustly perceived as backward and inferior. This is mainly a local perception, but it also exists abroad.

My motivation was the conviction that this periods influenced and continue to influence Czech society and its environment. The period has an impact on my view of art, my position as an artist, and my work. By establishing contact with my predecessors, I attempt to better understand my present notions of art.

My subsequent activities are based on the feeling of insufficient reflection on the culture of this period. I am interested in how I can, from my perspective, comment on the impending collective oblivion of the diversity and spontaneity of cultural events. I am curious about how to view the culture of this period if the model based on traditional media, disciplines, artists, authorities, and centers fails. And I want to know how to empathize with and revive specific situations in time.

Since 2006, I have established contact with several artists from the 1970s and 1980s. Some of them were my teachers at the art academy. All of them are men, which is quite typical for this generation: women figured within alternative culture events rather as inspiring muses, guardian angels, or sometimes as documentarists. These artists worked in the realm of unofficial culture at that time. In most cases, their work is not now generally known. It was oriented locally, important for the participating community; it generated micro-communities and alternative spaces.

I dealt mostly with the private archives of the artists, which consisted of photographs, texts, drawings, projects, traces of communication such as correspondence, printed matter, and in some cases also films and video. Together with the artists in question we used fragments and larger parts in exhibitions, and reflected them in events and presentations.

The key for my work is that the artist's archive or the artist himself is open to the possibility of a contemporary view – that he doesn't provide a complete framed and unquestionable value, but rather presents questions. I approach the recent past from my current artist's perspective. I consider the fragments of specific archives based on their relevance to the present day rather than for their significance at the time of their making. I often deal with archive layers which the artist/archivist does not consider important or artistic; yet from my perspective, they have some value. I mainly use experimental methods – intergenerational dialogue, confrontation, and cooperation.

II.

In 2007, I developed a conceptual and curatorial project based on the work of architect and unknown performer Vladimír Ambroz. It arose from the desire to publish the work I admire. Vladimír Ambroz is a Czech performance artist of the 1970s and 1980s. Born in Brno in 1952, he graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Brno,

where he studied from 1972 to 1978. After 1974, he was engaged in conceptual art and had a number of performances and events bordering on the private and public spheres. He organized a number of exhibitions and illegal meetings in Brno of like-minded friends and artists. As a graphic designer, he worked with folk and rock music groups. Since 1980, his work has focused on interior and graphic design. His performance work is unfamiliar even to Czech audiences as a result of the stance the artist has taken concerning his performances, supported by the fact that he resides in Brno, which has a tendency to demarcate and depreciate itself in relation to the Prague scene. There appears to be little or no photographic documentation of his performances.

In the context of the *REPLACED - BRNO - 2006* project, I conducted and recorded an interview with Vladimír Ambroz. It became an important moment in my contemplation of the determination of individual gestures and events, their situation and the time of their conception. One question related to these ruminations is that of the contemporary presentation of performance of the 1970s and 1980s as an active dialogue with the past.



III.

The exhibition project *Vladimír Havlík Yesterday* (Parallel Gallery, Prague 4 to 30 June 2009) was developed in cooperation with the artist.



It introduced four digitized 8 mm films, dating from 1981 and 1983, made as student experiments by Vladimír Havlík and Zdeněk Cupák.

The archaic notion of the film is related to the unavailability of an up-to-date technique. It demonstrates the specific situation of the artists in a small town during normalization. Havlík characterizes the films as “strangely adopted documents”. Until now, they had been in his private archive. He considered them incomplete, indefinable in terms of authorship and purpose.



<http://intermedia.ffa.vutbr.cz/havlik-cupak-fragmenty>



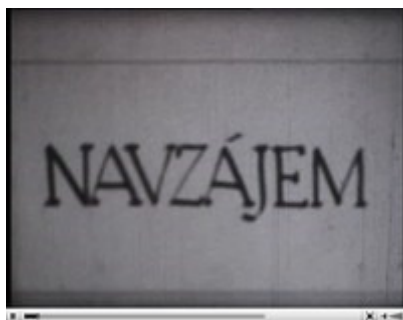
<http://intermedia.ffa.vutbr.cz/havlik-jestrdej>



<http://intermedia.ffa.vutbr.cz/havlik-ostrihal-se>

Similarly, he never presented his crazy performance of famous rock hits recorded on a dual tape recorder in the 1980s. We perceived their current presentation as a conceptual gesture, provoked by our mutual dialogue. It led us to reflect on the blending of civil life and creation. We published our interview in an accompanying artist's catalog.

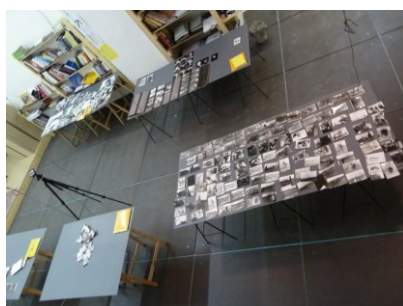
The film *Mutually* (*Navzájem*) is also from Vladimír Havlík's archive. It documents a 1981 journey by Pedagogical Faculty students from Olomouc to Budapest, Pécs, Sofia, and Burgas. The documentary mingles with the performative inputs and the artist's experiments with the medium of film. The film was the impetus for a contemporary reconstruction that took place in 2010. Based on memories and the film, I repeated the journey with Vladimír Havlík, Zdenek Cupák, and Filip Cenek. The outputs are diaries in letters addressed to one another.



<http://intermedia.ffa.vutbr.cz/hapuka-navzajem>

IV.

Since 2010, I have completed similar activities, situations, and presentations within the Tranzitdisplay program in Prague. Here, Vladimír Havlík and I have carried out a series of workshops designated for each other (*Mutually*).



Mutually, public workshop – Barbora Klímová for Vladimír Havlík, 2011.
Tranzitdisplay, Prague. Photo: Vladimír Havlík.

The workshops arose from questions concerning how to present the documentation of events that were created for a private community of like-minded friends and acquaintances in the 1970s and 1980s to a contemporary anonymous audience. We discussed what influenced and is still influencing the manner of event documentation and its format of

presentation. We published our differing perspectives of the past in the text *Sentences About the Past – Events – Documentation*.

Sentences on the Past – Actions – Documentation
Vladimír Havlík and Barbora Klímová

The action art of the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia may from a present standpoint appear to possess a certain ambivalence in relation to its documentation. For many artists a record of the performance, or action, is, on the one hand, mere prints left from the situation, similar to a journalist's photograph. On the other hand, even this is, in time, framed in relation to the traditional painting and to the institution of art. The situation in our country is complicated by, among other things, the fact that at the time of its creation there were practically no possibilities to publically present displays of experimental art. Therefore artists were not forced from the start to consider an action as a publically presented work, but conceived it much more for a specific community of similarly thinking individuals.

*We find in Vladimír Havlík's private archive, for instance, severally distinct layers (regarding content and form) of documentation of his own actions. On the one hand, the archive features informally developed photos taken by various participants and developed for photographic paper. The collection, uncensored by the artist, also includes various private or peripheral photos, those that were poorly developed, damaged in time or finger-smudged, tests on strips of paper, etc. The notebooks, which were a cross between an author book and album also contained photographs amassed by Vladimír Havlík and the creator of the photo-documentation Radek Horáček, were meant to be distributed among their circles of acquaintances. Various modified albums also served for a more formal presentation of the artist's action to his acquaintances and specialists in the field. Formally pure and uniformly enlarged photographs of A3 and A4 format document the first public presentation in 1986. Layers mix, in connection with current presentations and publications, and correspond to the artist's image created for the current anonymous public. One of the tasks of our collaboration was to try to distinguish the individual layers. The archive's mapping, however, became an important parallel to this unveiling/ an analysis of the process of the present recollection and reflection. The differing points of view of those reflecting are illustrated by, among other things, the *Sentences on the Past - Actions - Documentation*, mutually addressed. They were formulated on the basis of previous communication and cooperation during the June 2010. The initial statements of Vladimír Havlík are complemented by immediate reactions of Barbora Klímová. Both layers are published without subsequent adjustments. Sentences published here are open to a further confrontation, adding:*

.....

At Tranzitdisplay, we attempted to retrospectively grasp a specific past with Josef Daněk and Blahoslav Rozbořil. The series of four working public lessons, called the *Nonutilitarian School*, was committed to a specific educational system that the artists created in the 1980s.

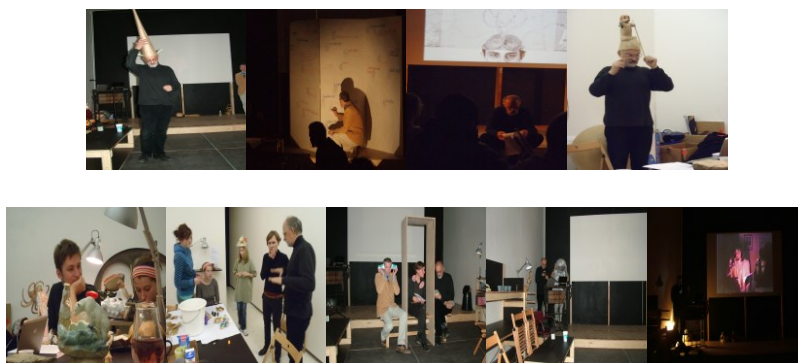
Nonutilitarian School I was a public reconstruction of masks and educational aids which the artists used for their performances.

Nonutilitarian School II, entitled *Ambroz – The Picture in the Picture*, revived a documentary film from 1989, which was created on the basis of their first film recording a 1988 event that took place in a flat entitled *The Celebration of St. Ambroz – The Holiday of Holidays*. The

artists commented on the film a year later in a documentary, which we screened and re-interpreted at the present public event.

Nonutilitarian School III, entitled *The Pile*, presented a utopian attempt at systematic categorization, or an overview of their archive.

Nonutilitarian School IV, entitled *Josef Daněk and Blahoslav Rozbořil Present the Audience to the Audience*, was devoted to the mutual influence of the private micro-community of the audience – the participants in their events from the 1970s and 1980s.



Nonutilitarian School I – IV

Cooperation with these artists is based on the specific format of the activities they developed over the years. In confrontation with our present perspectives, we question their current reinterpretation.

V.

I also organized two exhibition projects entitled *At the Moment*, concentrating on the work of Marian Palla. They were developed on the basis of a report the artist sent to his friends at the beginning of the 1980s. He notified each of them that they had become owners of one of seventeen parts of a whale's back. The message also contained a schematic drawing and a list of all the proprietors. The project allowed me to visit and document some of their archives and to interview the respondents. The exhibition at Gallery Jelení reconstructed the whale back drawing and metaphorically paraphrased the whale back community. In my pseudo-documentary, I pointed out how Palla's activity at the time resonated in the lives and works of members of the community. But this wasn't the only text message which this artist sent at the time. He recorded most of his activities via transcriptions, which he sent to his friends. I call this method of communication "centrifugal archiving". The presentation at Tranzitdisplay exposed Palla's activity, which I had uncovered in several private archives. The exhibition was complemented by an artist's reading.



At this Moment. Barbora Klímová, based on activities of Mariana Palla, 2011.
Installation view Jelení Gallery, Prague. Photo: Radek Jandera.

VI.

Since 2006, I have developed a range of projects within which my position shifts between artist, documentarist, and curator.

The curatorial approach is represented for example by the *Mutually* project, which was established with Slovak theoretician Daniel Grůň and Czech artist Filip Cenek. The exhibition *Mutually*, subtitled *Archives of Noninstitutionalized Culture of the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia* was first held in Bratislava in 2012, than was shown in Brno and Prague in 2013, with the subtitle *Communities of the 1970s and 1980s*.

Each member of our curatorial team is personally concerned with subjectively selected private archives and has a history of communicating and cooperating with artists of the given generation in our regional environments (Brno/Moravia – Bratislava/Slovakia). In the exhibition, we focus primarily on artistic expressions on the border of creative, spontaneous events or leisure activities; creative activities which lead to an intense experience of the moment. The subjective, artistic–curatorial approach to the exhibitions is based on associatively linking how the documents communicate with each other from our contemporary perspective. We suppress an objectifying view of history, art, artifacts, and the artist’s status. The conceptual layout of the exhibition is laced with the potential of incorporating individual archives within the spatial framework of the exhibition.



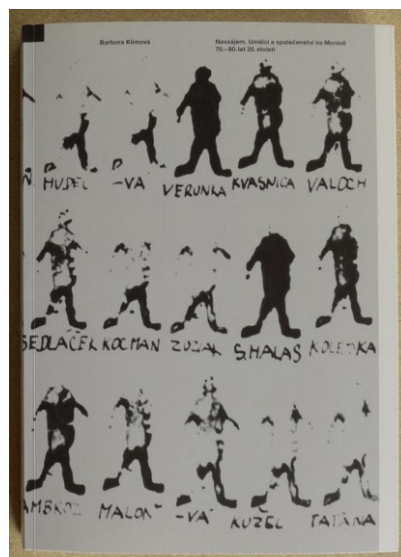
Mutually. Communities of the 1970s and 1980s

Lots of my works were motivated by the desire to meet someone, to learn something, or even to reveal buried layers of the past. In *REPLACED - BRNO - 2006*, I dealt with written history. I approached the artists who were traditionally associated with body art in the Czech Republic: Karel Miler, Jan Mlčoch, Petr Štembera, Jiří Kovanda, and Vladimír Havlík. I revealed differences in how the artists who stopped doing art (mostly in the late 1970s) and those who are still active communicate about their work, and what the differences are in talking with artists who are a generation or two older. Some of the interviews took the form of a kind of mantra, with artists repeating how and what they learned to talk about in the past. With others, by contrast, we managed to establish personal contact and in-depth communication and confrontation, which developed into an artistic cooperation based on their archives and memories. I'm not saying that we ever reached an absolute understanding. It was always a long process of approaching various aspects of the recent past, based on parts of private archives or on their system. Types of cooperation unfolded depending on the nature of the communication and the archives. These included exhibiting and publishing different kinds of archival materials or their reflections, as well as events in which we look into the past.

VII.

I summarized several years of cooperation with these artists in the book: *Mutually. Artists and Communities in Moravia in the 1970s and 1980s*.

The publication examines artistic phenomena at the edge of social events in the Moravian environment of the 1970s and 1980s.



Mutually. Artists and communities in Moravia in the 1970s - 80s, Publication, tranzit.cz and VUTIUM, Prague and Brno 2013. Photo: Barbora Klímová.

Each of the five chapters is dedicated to a single artist or pair of artists. In the environment of state-controlled cultural policy, the free-thinking artists of the then-Czechoslovakia operated on the periphery of society. They formed various communities and alternative zones, and even alternative institutions. The text, therefore, also touches on communities connected by experimental creation, its environment and its context.

Aside from the disparate positions and approaches of the different generations, the attitudes of the artists with regard to their own past and with regard to their own archives are also revealed.

Therefore, the contents of the individual chapters fundamentally vary, which is already indicated by their titles. Published in the order in which they were created, they document, among other things, the development of a perspective on the issue in question. *Marian Palla – At This Moment* is derived from text reports – records of activities and creative initiatives – which the artist mailed to friends and acquaintances. The preservation of these reports in their personal archives facilitates the reconstruction of the communities. The reports provide motivation for considerations about the eccentric method of archiving and the scattered archive, and also bear witness to the non-utilitarian approach of the artist to art.

The text *Vladimír Havlík – Yesterday* came about on the basis of a professional collaboration with the artist, allowing a critical approach to the documentation of events, the archive and recollection. Issues of the delimitation of the work of art and its authorship also extend to both artists' present-day approaches to art.

The chapter *The Lesson of Josef Daněk and Blahoslav Rozbořil* compares the contemporary process of becoming acquainted with their work to an educational lesson. The interpretation of their multilayered work ends here with the project *Nonutilitarian Education*, by means of which these artists reacted to the pragmatic social order.

The narrative *Getting Close to Miloslav Sonny Halas* takes into account the distance from his work brought about, among other things, by the artist's death. In contrast to the other texts, it is based on the documentation of his actions in the collections of the Museum of Art in Olomouc.

Report on the Archive of Jiří Hynek Kocman and on the Collections and Traces of Jiří Valoch concerns the peripheries of the works of these two relatively well-known artists since the end of the 1960s, opening up various possibilities of viewing the Kocman archives. On the basis of traces of creative, curatorial, theoretical, and collecting activities, the text reconstitutes Valoch's comprehensive contribution. The examples indicate the important radical positions of the artist's personal and professional engagement in the period in question, creating alternative institutions and intervening in state-controlled institutions.

All of the texts end around 1989, even though the work of the artists continues. The book covers a narrowly-defined, specific segment of time. It proposes in a subjective view an

alternative to the universally conceived histories of art. It examines the peripheries of art instead of clearly distinguishable artifacts. Art is perceived here primarily as a lived reality.

[\[2\]](#)



Vladimír Havlík, Barbora Klímová, *Return: Pictures - Images - Houses - Dreams*, Mušov 2013.
Reconstruction of an event from 1979. Photo: Petr Ingerle, Marie Kratochvílová.

Barbora Klimova (1977) creatively explores aspects of vernacular cultural history. She participates on the programme Work at tranzitdisplay in Prague. In 2013 she finished her PhD studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. Since 2011 she has been teaching at the Environment Studio, Faculty of Fine Arts, Brno University of Technology.

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Education

2010–2014 PhD Study, Academy of Arts and Design, Bratislava
2004–2006 HISK, Higher Institute for Fine Arts, Antwerp

1997–2004 Faculty of Fine Arts, BUT

Awards

2006 J. Chalupecky award

Occupation

From 2010 Barbora Klimova Opens Archives of Seventies and Eighties Authors, program at tranzitdisplay, Prague

From 2011 Head of the Environment studio, Faculty of Fine Arts, BUT

Exhibitions (selection)

2015

Me, You, Us and Them. Exercises on Collectivity, Off Biennale, Budapest

2014

Grodzka 5, Centre for Culture in Lublin, Lublin

Circular Ruins, Meet Factory, Prague

Report on the Reconstruction of the Past: Barbora Klímová a Eva Kořátková, Bohemian Hall, New York

THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY, Gallery of Fine Arts in Ostrava, Ostrava

2013

SKOK! Tales of (y)our City, Spinnerei, Leipzig

Modern Architecture Works, Industrialna Gallery, Sofia

Mutually. Communities of the 1970s and 1980s. Together with Filip Cenek and Daniel Grůň. The Brno House of Arts and tranzitdisplay, Prague

Up Till Now, GfZK Leipzig

2012 *Mutually. Archives of non-institutionalized culture of the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia*.

Together with Filip Cenek and Daniel Grůň. Tranzit Workshops, Bratislava.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY, The West Bohemian Gallery, Pilsen.

Islands of Resistance: 1985–2012, National Gallery in Prague

2011

Brno Art Open, Dům umění města Brna.

2010

CITY DREAMERS. Emil Filla Gallery, Ústí nad Labem.

Fish leaves no traces, Künstlerhaus Bremen.

2009

Formats of Transformation – Identity, The Brno House of Arts.

Performing the East, Salzburger Kunstverein.

WHERE TO GO? Notes on Transformation after 1989, < rotor >, Graz.

Prague Biennale 4, Karlin Hall, Prague.

New Millenium. Minor Sensastions, Museum of Art, Seoul.

2008

Manifesta07, Trentino, South Tyrol.

6. Biennial of young art Zvon (Bell), City Gallery Prague.

2007

Hot Destination / Marginal Destiny IV., Emil Filla Gallery, Usti nad Labem, Motorenhalle, Dresden.

Re: Place, Siemens_artLab, Vienna, Bastart Gallery, Bratislava.

Whatever video may be..., Beursschouwburg, Brussels.

Famous Brno Villas II., G99 Gallery, Brno.

LeereXVision Connectios, MARTa Herford.

2005

Selected Czech Sculpture 1995–2005, National Gallery in Prague.

Fifth Biennial of Young Artists, City Gallery Prague.

SLiders, Atrium of The Moravian Gallery in Brno.

2004

Anxiety of Influence: Bachelors, Brides and Family Romance, Stadtgalerie Bern.

2003

PRAGUEBIENNALE 1, National Gallery in Prague.

Publications (selection)

Barbora Klimova, *Mutually. Artists and communities in Moravia in the 1970s – 80s*. tranzit.cz, Prague, Fakulta výtvarných umění VUT v Brně, Brno 2013.

Barbora Klimova, *We Lived this Project. Construction of Family Homes during the Normalization Era*, Golden Section publishers, Prague 2011.

Barbora Klimova (ed.), *Replaced – Brno – 2006*, Brno 2007.

[1] See: Klímová, Barbora: *Replaced – Brno 2006. Reenactments as Reflections on Social Transformation*, MAP#2, 2010. <http://www.perfomap.de/map2/transf/klimova>, 22.05.15.

[2] Excerpt from the English summary of the book: Klímová, Barbora: *Navzájem. Umělci a společenství na Moravě 70.–80.let 20. století*, Praha / Brno 2013, S. 241.