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THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS OF THE HAPPENING

HANA BUDDEUS

It would be difficult to find a profession of allegiance to the legacy of another artist in Czechoslovakia comparable with that made by Allan Kaprow in 1958 to Jackson Pollock.¹ Nonetheless, Czech art history, looking for its own Pollock and thus a predecessor of the happening, plumped for Vladimír Boudník. This decision was reached not only because both artists died under tragic circumstances (Pollock in 1956, Boudník in 1968), but on the basis of a comparison of their approach to creativity, the production of artefacts, and the emphasis they placed on performed activities. At a time when the work as artefact was giving way to the action, photography played an important role as mediator. Pollock and Boudník enter the pantheon of art history as legendary figures, whose existence is confirmed by photographs capturing them at work. These photographic depictions correspond to the ideal of the solitary creator while establishing a myth of the artist entering into a space and dialogue with the viewer. We may therefore assume that there will be a stage in Boudník's development (as there was in the case of Pollock, albeit on the basis of a different backstory) when the conditions were in place allowing for subsequent developments and the integration of the happening into art history via photographic documentation.²

In 1958, Allan Kaprow published what amounted to a manifesto entitled "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock",³ in which he

² The differences in the situation of both artists was pointed out by, for instance, Jiří Valoch: "From the start of their careers, [Jackson Pollock and Georges Mathieu] enjoyed huge publicity and the attention of experts. Vladimír Boudník had neither expert nor institutional backup of any kind." Jiří VALOCH, "Boudníkova padesátá léta", in: Zdeněk PRÍMUS (ed.), *Vladimír Boudník: Mezi avantgardou a undergroundem*, Prague: Gallery 2004, p. 59.

³ KAPROW, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock".

used the word "happening" for the first time in connection with a new type of art and highlighted the kinetic aspect of Pollock's art. According to Kaprow, Pollock's legacy did not reside in painting but in action. He was persuaded of this amongst other things by photographs of Pollock taken by Hans Namuth, which depict a coiled artist ready to strike. Kaprow is at pains to remind us that, for all that Pollock created beautiful paintings, he destroyed painting as such, and this is the argument he uses to justify his opinion of Pollock as predecessor of the happening. Kaprow's text features two photographs showing Jackson Pollock and Kaprow himself at work. As Judith Rodenbeck, author of *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*,⁴ points out, at the same time as the article "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" came out, Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double*⁵ was published for the first time in English, Yves Klein began to work with naked female bodies instead of a brush, and the first American exhibition by the Japanese Gutai group took place at the Martha Jackson Gallery.⁶ As a trained art historian, Kaprow was well aware of the advantages of firmly anchoring a new emphasis on the process of creation and an attempt to transcend the boundaries of the traditional image (backed up by references to a great artist) within the narrative of art history.

This type of art, which dictated the development of the happening and action art, was introduced less than ten years later to Prague by Jindřich Chalupecký (for instance, in 1967 he organised an exhibition of the Gutai group at the Galerie Václava Špály).⁷ Furthermore, it was thanks to Chalupecký's intercession that Allan Kaprow became acquainted with the work of Milan Knížák and subsequently included it in his book *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*.⁸

Unlike Kaprow, Knížák is keen in his texts to repudiate any possible connection between the happening (and the activities of the Aktual group) and previous developments in art. His article in the journal *Art and Artists* (1972), in which he refers to Aktual, oscillates between simple description and promotion, which is also true of the arguments on which he bases his case, to wit, that in Czechoslovakia, unlike other countries, these activities had no antecedents but were autochthonous: they "fell from the sky".⁹ Eight years later he expanded on this idea:

The history of the action in Czechoslovakia differs from that of the West. The action here did not originate as a small step following previous developments, as it did in the West (Cage and his disciples, etc.), but as the expression of a yearning for a new type of life, as a revolt against laziness and dullness of thought and the whole of life, as a reflection of the history of the revolutions that had marked our youth. The activities surrounding actions in our country were more like a religious, revolutionary or social movement than art. It was not Duchamp and Cage et al. who were present at the birth of the action, but Adamites, the visionaries of our mountains, Russian revolutionaries, and the workers' collectives of the 1950s.¹⁰

Leaving aside Knížák's conception of history as *action* (his appeal to a non-artistic context and the universal validity of the art of the action as a life strategy), other historians view Boudník as the predecessor of action art in Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and the "guiding light of the local form of art informel"¹¹ on the other (though as we shall see later these

10 Milan KNÍŽÁK, "Performance jako vývoj i jako degenerace" (1980), *Vokno*, 1981, no. 4, p. 45.

11 Mahulena NEŠLEHOVÁ, "Informelní projevy", in: Rostislav ŠVÁCHA – Marie PLATOVSKÁ (eds.), *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1*, Prague: Academia 2007, p. 127.

12 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Umění, šilenství, zločin", *Sešity pro mladou literaturu*, vol. 2, May 1967, no. 11, p. 47. Věra Jirousová also refers to Hašek when in 1970 she describes the clumsiness with which a new type of art was received in Czechoslovakia: "And then in the provincial character of our culture there is still an inappropriate emphasis laid upon art at a time when everywhere else in the world artists are attempting to learn the non-art they practice. I do not deny that this fact needs first to be clarified by a sociological study. However, in the country that gave the world *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk* as one of the works anticipating postmodernism, it is paradoxical." Věra JIROUSOVÁ, "Příklad postmoderny", *Výtvarná práce*, vol. 18, 1970, no. 5, p. 6.

are not mutually incompatible claims). The search for precursors of action art does not stop at Vladimír Boudník. Jindřich Chalupický, for instance, traces the futurism-dadaism-surrealism-happening developmental arc and views the proverbial output of Jaroslav Hašek as a prototype¹². Nevertheless, the cap fits best in the case of Boudník. The first to refer to him as the "admittedly unwilling but completely authentic predecessor of today's happenings" is František Šmejkal in 1965, who goes on to call him the "precursor and initiator of our post-war non-figural art and one of the best graphic designers in the country at present".¹³ It was around the same time that Jindřich Chalupický¹⁴ made the acquaintance of Boudník and also linked his name with happenings.¹⁵ Knižák distances himself from Boudník and claims that the only thing they share in common is that both turn to a "non-artistic audience", while he regards Boudník's greatest contribution to be his realisation that "the process is more important than the artefact".¹⁶ Later, Petr Štembera refers to Boudník as a possible forerunner of Czech action art, though here again there is no explicit allegiance claimed to his heritage.¹⁷ Štembera devoted part of his text on Czechoslovak action art, happenings and land art that he published in 1970 in the magazine *Revista de Arte* to a description of Boudník's activities. Just as Kaprow emphasises the blurring of the boundaries between creator and viewer when writing of Pollock,¹⁸ Štembera deems it important to point out that Boudník engaged the viewer, who entered into direct contact with the act of creation.¹⁹

The assimilation of these artists into art history did not take place without the photographs that documented their work. Boudník we know from the shots capturing him in front of a chipped wall or when printing out graphic designs, Pollock in action above his canvas. Important elements in the

16 Milan KUNŽÁK, "Polemizují s J. Chalupickým", *Výtvarná práce*, vol. 14, 1966, no. 13, p. 2. Cf. also Pavlína MORZANOVA, "Czech Action Art in the 1960s Press", in: Vít HAVRÁNEK (ed.), *Action Word Movement Space: Experimental Art of the Sixties* (exh. cat.), Prague: City Gallery Prague 1999, pp. 366–369.

17 Petr ŠTEMBERA, "Events, Happenings and Land-Art in Czechoslovakia: A Short Information", *Revista de Arte*, no. 7, December 1970. This text was also published in edited form as: Petr ŠTEMBERA, "Events, Happenings, Land-Art, etc. in Czechoslovakia", in: Lucy LIPPARD (ed.), *Six Years: The Democratization of the Art Object*, New York: Praeger 1973, pp. 169–170.

18 KAPROW, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock".

19 Cf. ŠTEMBERA, "Events, Happenings and Land-Art".

creation of the myth that grew up around these artist-fore-runners were their tragic deaths.

Kaprow opens his article on Pollock as follows: "The tragic news of Pollock's death two summers ago was profoundly depressing to many of us."²⁰ He then devotes the entire first page to this theme. Boudník's tragic demise encouraged similar hagiographies. Indeed, legends already surrounded Boudník and these were lapped up eagerly by Czech art historians, despite the best efforts by Šmejkal as far back as 1965, i.e. while Boudník was still alive, to "downplay" them:

And today, as attempts are made to come to grips with the last twenty years, a period during which Boudník should occupy a leading place, nobody any longer remembers him, even though his bizarre fate would become an obliging theme for literary and even film treatment that again places him in a similar light to that surrounding him in the 1950s. And so Boudník's personality was again shrouded in legend that it has been impossible to correct by means of the outcomes of his genuinely creative work. [...] This retrospective exhibition of Boudník's prints wishes above all to downplay these legends and carve out the kind of status in contemporary Czech art that he deserves [...].²¹

"A kind of Boudník-esque legend arose imperceptibly,"²² wrote Čestmír Krátký on the occasion of an exhibition of Boudník's works in Liberec in 1964. A "legend in his own lifetime" declared Antonín Hartmann in his text on an exhibition in Písek in 1970.²³ In his article "Umění v odlišném světě (Art in a Different World)", Chalupecký says of Boudník's death: "These days both [Medek and Boudník] are legends. Boudník

26 Vít HAVRÁNEK, "Boudníková šedesátá léta", in: PRIMUS, *Vladimír Boudník*, p. 161.

died at the end of 1968 at the age of forty-four by hanging himself."²⁴ In 1984, Jiří Valoch wrote that "Vladimír Boudník is a concept, but it is above all the name of one of Bohumil Hrabal's heroes", and that "there are even those who regard him to be a made-up, literary figure".²⁵ Twenty years later, in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Vladimír Boudník: Mezi avantgardou a undergroundem* (*Vladimír Boudník: Between the Avant-garde and the Underground*), Vít Havránek picks up on this idea:

In the case of Boudník, the radical abstraction given by the emptiness of the subject is replaced by the story of the artist. [...] This switch, which first took place in Hrabal – a short story or novel – made of Boudník one of the mythical figures of Czech culture. This was not on the basis of his works, but by virtue of the filling of the "emptiness" of his works with Hrabal's (con)fabulations. This gave rise to a simulacrum of Boudník, in which both his life and work were comingled.²⁶

Though the legends surrounding both Pollock and Boudník share a similar basis, not least a tragic end, in fact they relate to two very dissimilar stories: on the one hand, the literary figure of Hrabal's texts, depicted by Věra Chytilová in her film version of *Automat svět* (1965), and on the other, the American artist whose fame was fanned by, for instance, the documentary by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg premiered in 1951 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.²⁷ As Vladimír Merhaut²⁸ points out, film documentaries were also shot about Boudník. For instance, there exists a recording of a partially staged action in the street, and there was also the film *Rorschachova serenáda* (*Rorschach's Serenade*). However,

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27 Cf. Ulf KÜSTER, "Action Painting – Myth and Reality", in: Delia CIUHA – Raphaël BOUVIER – Christopher WYNNE (eds.), *Action Painting* (exh. cat.), Basel: Fondation Beyeler 2008, p. 15.

28 Cf. Vladislav MERHAUT, "Explozionalista Vladimír Boudník očima kamery", *Kritická příloha Revolver Revue*, 1999, no. 14, pp. 133–136.

this cannot be compared with the impact that Hrabal's story and Chytilová's *Automat svět* had. When Robert Fleck writes of another film featuring Hans Hartung, he refers in passing to the fact that the atmosphere and the way the artist approaches gestural painting reveals, unlike films about Pollock, a clearly European character: the artist working in a small room, on paper, etc.²⁹ While Fleck compares the American and European approaches, Boudník in *Automat svět* reflects a completely different situation. Whether this might be deemed typical of Czechoslovakia at the time is a question we shall leave to one side. What is more important is that Boudník qua literary figure provides substantial support for Boudník qua real-life artist. The extent to which this situation was different from how objectivising documentary films presented the artist can be seen from this short excerpt from Hrabal's short story:

"And how are you? Do you still like working at the plant?"

"Definitely," said the young man. "Living without the plant is as unimaginable as living without my girlfriend. After all, they installed my first exhibition." His eyes misted over as he said the word "installed". "But it almost came to fisticuffs with the guy in charge of cultural activities, who eventually told me to set it up at night." So late one night I broke in and tacked up the whole thing: Tactile Experiences on the Job. When that cultural guy saw them the next morning, he practically had a breakdown. Then there was a little bit of an argument and I tore one of his sleeves off, but the exhibition went on all the same. The guys at the plant really liked it. For the opening we invited a chorus of blind children. They



A postcard from the Tate Modern souvenir shop, the author's archive

Children's play area in the Cobra Museum in Amstelveen, the author's archive





Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Úzkou cestou", *Výtvarná práce*, 1966, no. 5, p. 369



Bohumír MRÁZ, "O Vladimíru Boudníkovi poněkud polemicky", *Výtvarné umění*, 1966, no. 1, p. 2

30 Bohumil HRABAL, "Automat svět", *Literární noviny*, vol. 12, 15 May 1963, no. 24, p. 7 (Bohumil HRABAL, *The Death of Mr. Baltisberger*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2010, pp. 180–181). A book of the same name was published in 1966: *idem*, *Automat svět*, Praha: Mladá fronta 1966. The director Věra Chytilová made a film version of *Automat Svět* as one of five stories in her film *Perličky na dně* (*Pearls of the Deep*, 1965).

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31 Hana LARVOVÁ, Vladimír Boudník, 1924–68 (exh. cat.), Prague: GHMP 1992, p. 14.

stood facing a sign that stretched from one end of the balcony to the other. WE MUST DEFEND OUR UNITY LIKE THE APPLE OF OUR EYE. And now the plant is always boasting of how I had my first exhibit right there at the plant."**30**

So what did the legends surrounding Boudník and Pollock respectively have in common (as seen through the eyes of art history)? In 1992, Hana Larvová offered a summary: "[Boudník's approach is] the opposite of Jackson Pollock's, since the latter accorded crucial significance to the actual physical act of creation and rejected the traditional concept of painting."**31** Zdeněk Primus agrees:

In the mid-1950s, Vladimír Boudník was a legend in the former Czechoslovakia in the same way that Pollock had been in the USA after the Second World War. Both artists were uncompromising champions of abstraction, both were admired and won respect amongst other artists, and both died in their forty-fourth year though through their own actions without therefore completing their work in a natural way.**32**

However, Primus also suggests that photography played a certain part in the creation of the legend in both cases:

In 1963, Květoslav Příbyl documented Boudník at work in his studio on Kostnické náměstí. It is possible that two sittings were involved. Whether this be true or not, what we see in the photographs is Boudník in full flow. There is the obligatory cigarette dangling from his mouth, and this enhances the nervous atmosphere

32 Zdeněk PRIMUS, "Vladimír Boudník – model, lektor, demonstrátor, fotograf", in: *Vladimír Boudník*, pp. 34–35.

present during the creation of a print. In 1950, Hans Namuth photographed and filmed Jackson Pollock in his studio working on the paintings *One: Number 31* and *Autumn Rhythm*. The resulting photos without doubt played their part in the creation of the legend of Jackson Pollock, whose technique was called "action painting" by the American critic Harold Rosenberg.³³

The significance of these photographs was picked up by Jiří Valoch, who writes that Pollock and Mathieu "also realised that even more important than the work might be the photographic documentation thereof".³⁴ However, other questions need to be asked as to what role photography used in this way plays in the history of art, in what situations is it created, and what the circumstances are that surround it. An increased interest in the photograph was one aspect of the fundamental shift away from an emphasis on the artwork to an emphasis on process or the activation of the viewer, and the new way photography was being used was an important part of the transition from modernism to postmodernism. Rosalind Krauss in particular was interested in photography viewed in this light, on the one hand in connection with Duchamp and subsequently art of the 1970s, and on the other in relation to surrealism, regarding which she investigated the indexical character of photography and its capacity for manipulation (specifically she speaks of *repetition* or *replication*).³⁵ And although the title of my essay is "The Photographic Conditions of the Happening", at this point I feel I should make clear that this refers to the photographic conditions of the incorporation of the happening into the history of art, and not to those photographic conditions that Krauss writes about in connection with surrealism. What is important here is more the

³³ Cf. Rosalind E. KRAUSS, "Notes on the Index: Part 1", "Notes on the Index: Part 2", and "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism", in: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1986, pp. 196–209; 210–220; and 87–118.

ease with which photography can be distributed rather than its essence. At the moment the work itself gives way to the action, photography takes on the role of mediator between artist and viewer. In the case of Knížák or Kaprow, photography is treated as such right from the outset. We can therefore assume that, in the case of Boudník and Pollock, there is an unspoken assumption that subsequent developments will take place. Such an interpretation is backed up by Judith Rodenbeck, who spotlights the photographic conditions of the happening as one of the prerequisites for its incorporation into the history of art:

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Any examination of ephemeral works is necessarily conditioned by the artefacts remaining – photographs, scripts, anecdotes; such apparently secondary texts bear uneasy witness to crucial aspects of the works they describe. Briefly, the issue is this: the ‘photographic conditions’ that come to constitute postmodern aesthetic production are generally taken to resolve into paradigmatic status in the late 1960s; meanwhile, the happenings have consistently fallen out of art historical view precisely because of their perceived attachment to outmoded painterly practices. I am suggesting a revision of that perspective. For, to the degree that their ‘photographic conditions’ structure the radicalized readymades that were the happenings, by now these works exist only through their surface of inscription.**36**

In other words, the conditions of the Czech iteration of the happening are not to be found in the indexical character of photography as described by Krauss in connection with 1970s art (“But it is not just the heightened presence of the

photograph itself that is significant. Rather it is the photograph combined with the explicit terms of the index³⁷ but in its reproducibility. Photography facilitates comparison,³⁸ opens up the possibility of fruitful misinterpretations, and supports the creation of an art history narrative. The photographs showing Pollock and Boudník as solitary artists with cigarettes dangling from their mouths paradoxically correspond to the ideal of the self-centred modernist genius while establishing the myth of an artist entering into space. What is even more interesting in the case of Boudník is that, in addition to active printmaking³⁹ comparable to Pollock's action painting, he was involved in explosionist activities that transcended the framework of the traditional artwork even more boldly and activated the viewer directly within public space.⁴⁰ Several of these activities were also documented, and without the existence of these photographs we would perhaps never encounter any description of them in the pages of art history.

The links to action painting also reveal the restrictions under which the art of the happening operated and why the genre had been exhausted by the end of the sixties. The happening was viewed as an extension of painting, the entry of the artist into the artwork, a crossing of borders. Chalupický writes that "for Kaprow the happening is a kind of artwork but distributed within time and space".⁴¹ This description can be applied to all Czechoslovak happenings of the sixties. Leaving aside Milan Knížák and Aktual, it also speaks volumes about Eugen Brikius, Rudolf Němec, Jan Steklík, Karel Nepraš, Hugo Demartini and Zorka Ságlová. The starting point for all of these artists was the artwork as artefact, a three-dimensional work in space, albeit a work that appears in a new, open form or even simply as an intellectual construct.

39 Cf. Jiří Valoch: "The artist himself called this original and highly fruitful method active printmaking. I would say that at this time the simplest thing was to find your own terminology until you learned that the term action painting was now being used, mainly in connection with the work of Jackson Pollock." VALOCH, "Boudníkova padesátá léta", p. 72.

40 Cf. Věra JIROUSOVÁ, "Akce 60. let", in: Vlasta ČIHÁKOVÁ-NOSHIRO (ed.), *Umění akce* (exh. cat.), Prague 1991, pp. 3–6.

41 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Happening a spol." (1969), in: *Cestou necestou*, p. 93.

42 One of the possible arguments is the fact that in Czechoslovakia at that time artists had no need to establish a distance from the commercialisation of the happening, a phenomenon lent impetus by photography, since nothing of that kind was underway here. Ivan Martin Jirous amongst others makes this point. Cf. Ivan Martin JIROUS, "Current Expressions in Contemporary Czech Art", *Artscanada*, October – November 1971, nos. 160–161, pp. 62–65.

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As we have seen, the question of possible predecessors was only really asked retrospectively, and this includes the photographic documentation of happenings, which Milan Knížák approached in a purely pragmatic way as a means of sharing his activities. Photography's more specific role was only recognised later.⁴² In contrast, Judith Rodenbeck shows that Allan Kaprow was critical of photographic documentation and the way it was returning the happening to the sphere of art history, and instead began to incorporate the photographic process directly into the structure of the artwork: a specific example would be the action of 1968 entitled *Record II*.⁴³

BREAKING BIG ROCKS
PHOTOGRAPHING THEM
SILVERING BIG ROCKS
PHOTOGRAPHING THEM
SCATTERING THE PHOTOGRAPHS
WITH NO EXPLANATION⁴⁴

The situation was similar as regards a number of Kaprow's other works of that period. For instance, the invitation to *Six Ordinary Happenings* (7 March – 23 May 1969) is composed of descriptions structured as verses and accompanied by small illustrative photographs.⁴⁵ In several of these happenings, the photographic work takes place within the very framework⁴⁶ of the action. In the case of Knížák, the immediate involvement of photography only appears in the seventies, most clearly in *Portrait* of 1978:

While walking in a random direction, take photographs of the things, people, phenomena, etc. that we meet.
Only select those images that interest us the most (at

44. The original translation reads:
BREAKING BIG ROCKS /
PHOTOGRAPHING THEM / SILVERING
BIG ROCKS / PHOTOGRAPHING THEM /
/ SCATTERING THE PHOTOS / WITH NO
EXPLANATION

45 Cf. Harald STEEMANN (ed.),
Happenings & Fluxus (enh. cat.),
Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein
1970, unpagged.

46 POSE / CARRYING CHAIRS THROUGH THE CITY / SITTING DOWN HERE AND THERE / PHOTOGRAPHED / PIX
LEFT ON SPOT / GOING ON/ (MARCH 21); FINE! / PARKING CARS IN RESTRICTED ZONES / WAITING NEARBY FOR
COP / SNAPSHOT OF GETTING TICKET / DETAILED REPORT / SENDING PIX, REPORTS, FINES TO COPS /
/ (APRIL 4); GIVEAWAY / STACKS OF DISHES / LEFT ON STREET / CORNERS / PHOTOGRAPHED / NEXT DAY,
PHOTOGRAPHED / (MAY 2).

any given moment). There should be at least ten photographs every day. Do this for about a week. Later on, examine the photographs and in this way examine yourself. Variant: We photograph only portraits of people (ideally using telephoto lens), those who at any given moment interest us and whom we can get close enough to so as to be able to capture them. We can then regard the resulting collection of faces as a self-portrait.**47**

Otherwise, the masterminds of Czech happenings (in particular certain members of Fluxus and the Crusader School) never stopped claiming that their activities were mainly live events and that photography was but a secondary business or even a necessary evil. Milan Knížák spoke at length of photographic documentation in an article published in 1981 in the magazine *Vokno*, where inter alia he writes: "The happenings of the 1960s still did not have such a need for documentation. Sure, it was beginning, but only on the edges of events, like a message for successors, a page of Art History written in advance."**48** Knížák did not concern himself too much with the details of photographic documentation. He used it to chronicle actions and disseminate the fact that they had taken place. When Judith Rodenbeck speaks of photographic conditions in connection with Kaprow, she places them within quotation marks in order to distinguish them from the photographic conditions associated with the indexical character of photography qua medium that Rosalind Krauss wrote about. We might surround the photographic conditions of the Czech happening with two sets of quotation marks: the first, in the spirit of Rodenbeck, would highlight the shift from an emphasis on indexicality to an emphasis on reproducibility; the second would indicate the distance from

49 RODENBECK, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 203: "It follows that the photographic documentation of the artists at work had become one means of advancing the career of that artist, of certifying an artist's emplacement in the scene and the market."

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50 According to the authors of *Art Since 1900*, in the case of the Gutai group this involves a creative misreading of Pollock. Cf. Hal FOSTER – Rosalind KRAUSS – Yve-Alain BOIS – Benjamin BUCHLOH, *Art Since 1900*, New York: Thames & Hudson 2004, p. 411.

photography, connected, paradoxically, with the unquestioning utilisation thereof.

As we know, photography was very present in happenings because it was through the medium of photography that happenings became part of art history. The retrograde commercialisation and institutionalisation not only of happenings but to a large extent of dematerialised art via documentary photography is not a random paradox but, on the contrary, a natural consequence of the fact that photography made it possible to connect this type of creativity with the world of fine art. Milan Knížák was as ready to acknowledge this fact as he was unprepared to concede the existence of any predecessors. As Rodenbeck put it, following the example of Pollock, photography became not only a means of placing the artist on the market, but – and more importantly – confirming his or her role.⁴⁹ Knížák's refusal to acknowledge any debt of gratitude to Boudník (either conscious or unconscious) meant that the latter's role as predecessor of the happening had to be retroactively fashioned by art historians in the latter half of the sixties, amongst other things on the basis of black-and-white photographs documenting his activities. In other words, in Czechoslovakia the happening enters the annals of art history by means of a comparison with Boudník. And as in the case of Pollock, so in the case of Boudník, there is a kind of fruitful misunderstanding.⁵⁰ Both become a forerunner of the performative postmodern subject (as Amelia Jones puts it in connection with Pollock),⁵¹ one as an icon of the modernist cult of the artist,⁵² the other with an intermezzo in the form of a legend based independently on the history of fine art. However, what is characteristic of both is the fact that their work served as an example for artists using performance as

51 Amelia JONES, *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998, p. 16.

52 As Kaprow remarks in connection with Pollock's tragic death: "This ultimate sacrificial aspect of being an artist, while not a new idea, seemed in Pollock terribly modern [...]." KAPROW, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock", p. 24.

a means of expression and also for abstract painters. As Jones goes on to say,

performativity is not simply “adopted” by a younger generation of artists spontaneously in the 1960s but, rather, was always already a part of modernism (again, this relates to the paradoxical performative that appropriates and exaggeratedly rearticulates particular modernist practices as postmodern).**53**

Within the Czech context, these roots go back to what Jindřich Chalupecký highlights in Medek and Boudník, namely that they were fundamental to their generation primarily for their “uncompromising identification of the personal with the work of art”.**54**

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54 CHALUPECKÝ, “Umění v odlišném světě”, p. 230.