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CZECH ART AROUND 1980 AS A FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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This essay will not simply offer a bland description of the Czechoslovak art scene around 1980, but will attempt to explain how it came about. This will require that we cast our gaze back even further. However, if only for practical reasons this chronological regression must be limited in some way. An analysis of the restructuring of the art scene after “Victorious February” (a reference to the 1948 coup d’état during which the communist party assumed control of the government of Czechoslovakia) and the political thaw of the sixties would certainly be in order. However, I shall assume the reader has a smattering of knowledge regarding the topic. The second part of the title – “as a field of cultural production” – refers to the methodological prism through which I will explain the Czechoslovak art scene in the midst of the normalisation period. This is Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological model of culture, most comprehensively articulated in his book *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, published in 1992.¹

The first section of Bourdieu’s book is a detailed analysis of literary production in France in the latter half of the twentieth century, while the second section attempts to establish a general “science of art”. At the heart of this model is the concept of a *field of cultural production*. It should be possible to relate this not only to literature, but also to fine art or the natural sciences.

2 Bourdieu speaks of a *field of power*, within which actors do battle who possess the capital necessary in order to assume the dominant position in different fields (the economic and cultural in first place). It is within the context of this battle that a hierarchy of different types of capital is established. The result of this hierarchy is that the field of cultural production assumes a subordinate position within the framework of the field of power. See *ibid.*, pp. 283–293.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 305.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 304.

A field of cultural production is a historically constituted social micro-world in which different rules apply from the social space outside it.**2** Inasmuch as economic capital represents a “general means of control”, a field of cultural production turns this on its head. An openly declared interest in maximising economic profit is replaced by an openly declared interest in a complete lack of interest in profit.

Like *prophecy* [...], which according to Weber proves its authenticity by the fact that it secures no remuneration, the heretical rupture with current artistic traditions finds its criterion of authenticity in disinterestedness.**3**

The literary (etc.) field is a force-field acting on all those who enter it, and acting in a differential manner according to the position they occupy there (whether, to take the points furthest removed from each other, that of a writer of hit plays or that of an avant-garde poet), and at the same time it is a field of competitive struggles which tend to conserve or transform this force-field.**4**

Thus any position exists exclusively in its current and potential situation within the structure of the field, i.e. “in the structure and distribution of those kinds of capital (or of power) whose possession governs the obtaining of specific profits (such as literary prestige) put into play in the field”.**5** The space of *positions* conceived of as a system of objective relations of superiority or inferiority, mutual support or antagonism, finds its analogue in the homologically structured space of *attitudes* created alongside artworks themselves by political activities, polemics, manifestos, etc. At the same time, if it is an explanation of the artistic and political attitudes of a particular actor we seek, then we must attend to their *position*, for it is this that establishes their specific “interests”.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

The field of cultural production is a place of conflict between two principles of hierarchisation: *heteronymous*, played out to the benefit of those who control the field economically or politically, and *autonomous*, transforming commercial success into an unbecoming compromise with secular power and failure in the “sign of election”. The cultural field in question is autonomous to the extent that, within it, the principles of external hierarchisation are subordinate to the principles of internal hierarchisation:

... the greater the autonomy, the more the symbolic relationship of forces is favourable to producers who are the most independent of demand, and the more the break tends to be noticeable between the two poles of the field, that is, between the *subfield of restricted production*, where producers have only other producers for clients (who are also their direct competitors), and the *subfield of large-scale production*, which finds itself *symbolically* excluded and discredited.⁶

This conflict within the context of the field inevitably takes the form of a struggle for *definition* in the strict sense of the word. If a diehard supporter of a pure art unblemished by any economic or political interest claims of certain artists that they are not true artists, they are attempting to determine the boundaries of the field such that they correspond to their interests. It is this “seeing from the standpoint of” that represents the foundational field of view by which the field is determined as such: “‘that none enter here’ unless endowed with a point of view which accords or coincides with the founding point of view of the field”.⁷

However, the parties to these struggles are not joined by relations of direct interaction. Indeed, “writers or artists from opposite sides may, at the limit, have nothing in common except their participation in the struggle for the imposition of opposite definitions of literary or artistic production”.⁸ So as to emphasise the fundamental difference between relations of interaction and structural relations constituting the field

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, p. 299.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

of cultural production, Bourdieu adds that those holding opposing positions “may never meet each other, or may even methodically ignore each other, and yet remain profoundly determined, in their practice, by the relation of opposition which unites them”.⁹

“The struggles for the monopoly of the definition of the mode of legitimate cultural production contribute to a continual reproduction of belief in the game, interest in the game and its stakes [...]”¹⁰ Belief in the game, which Bourdieu calls *illusio*, is both the product and precondition of these struggles. The fact that the player’s “system of dispositions” is at the very least partly the product of the operation of the field offers her within its framework (the framework of its rules) “objective possibilities” for realising her own interests. In other words, the player is constituted by and for the game, and the manner in which she plays this game keeps her alive. The artist is not the exclusive source of belief in the value of the artwork. In order to find the sources of this value, i.e. of the belief in the artist as an “uncreated creator” of this value, we must search the entire set of actors and institutions of the productive field.

To give an idea of the collective labour which goes to produce this belief, it would be necessary to reconstitute the circulation of the innumerable acts of credit which are exchanged among all the agents engaged in the artistic field: among artists, obviously, with group exhibitions or prefaces by which consecrated authors consecrate the younger ones, who consecrate them in return as masters or heads of schools; between artists and patrons or collectors; between artists and critics, and in particular avant-garde critics, who consecrate themselves by obtaining the consecration of the artists they champion or by rediscovering or re-evaluating minor artists and thus activating and giving proof of their power of consecration, and so forth.¹¹

My aim here is not to provide an overview of Bourdieu’s sociological thinking. Instead, I have reduced this methodological digression to the essentials necessary for what follows. Similarly, I shall omit the

12 Cf. Ivan GABAL, "Percepce umění jako element společenské reprodukce života", *Sociologický časopis*, vol. 24, 1988, no. 2, pp. 161–181; Jonathan LOESBERG, "Bourdieu a sociologie estetiky", *Aluze*, vol. 3, 1999, nos. 3–4, pp. 207–221; Miroslav DOPITA, "Epistemologie Pierra Bourdieua", *Filozofia*, vol. 61, 2006, no. 4, pp. 309–322; *idem*, *Pierre Bourdieu o umění, výchově a společnosti*, Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého 2007.

13 See "K likvidaci Svazu československých výtvarných umělců", *Výtvarná práce*, vol. 19, 1971, no. 5, p. 3; "Z jednání Přípravného výboru Svazu českých výtvarných umělců", *ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.

traditional discussion of the method chosen. The "field of cultural production" model has elicited a storm of criticism since its inception.**12** The fact that I have chosen it as my methodology does not mean its wholesale apodictic acceptance, but rather that it has something to offer our understanding of the situation on the Czechoslovak art scene at the turn of the seventies and eighties. I shall adopt the standpoint of a researcher applying a recognised method: the possible theoretical implications of this attempt, albeit interesting, will not concern us here.

My main source included period journals (especially *Výtvarná kultura*), exhibition catalogues, texts devoted to contemporary art published by Odeon, and a selection of unpublished works often later released in anthologies after the Velvet Revolution. Work with secondary literature was basically limited to the extraction of the necessary factual information.

ARTIST / UNION OFFICIAL

The situation on the Czechoslovak art scene during the normalisation period can also be seen as a struggle over the very definition of artistic creativity and art as a profession, a struggle over what it means to "be an artist". On the one side was the "official artist", whose role was staked out by period journals. A perfect example of the other side were members of the "sixties generation" squeezed out of the game by normalisation.

Of fundamental importance in the process of normalisation in the sphere of fine art was the liquidation of the original Union of Czechoslovak Fine Artists, compromised by its links to the reformist programme of the Prague Spring, and its replacement by the Union of Czech Fine Artists (SČVU).**13** This was intended to be the only institution enjoying the patronage of the state and the Communist

14 An impression of the sheer range of activities of the SČVU can be gleaned from its report dated 1982: “Zpráva o činnosti Svazu českých výtvarných umělců za léta 1977–1982”, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 6, 1982, no. 5, pp. 5–10.

15 For details of the organisation of the SČVU see “Návrh stanov Svazu českých výtvarných umělců”, *Výtvarná práce*, vol. 19, 1971, no. 5, pp. 1–3.

Party, the institution that would decide who was and was not an artist and what was and was not art. It was furnished with all the requisites to fulfil such a purpose and was responsible for exhibitions, art theory and criticism, the awarding of prizes and grants, the purchase of artworks, etc. An agenda customarily placed in the hands of a plurality of actors and institutions was administered or at least overseen by a single agent.¹⁴ It was the Union that decided on the official definition of the “profession of artist”.

As a consequence, the “socialist artist” had nothing in common with anything that these days, following in the modernist tradition, we associate with the profession of artist. There was no gripping story of heroic revolt against the debased tastes of the majority. On the contrary, aspiring artists climbed a career ladder propped up by these very tastes. The first rung involved registering at the Czech Fine Arts Fund (ČFVU), a move ideally preceded by the appropriate tertiary education. A candidate was already expected to show that they had accepted the criterion of “professionalism” as defined by the upper echelons of Union officials. Only after taking this first step could they be brought into the fold as artist. However, another, more difficult test was to follow. It was now dependent on the will of the Union of Czech Fine Artists, more precisely on its Central Committee (ÚV SČVU), as to whether the aspirant was accepted by its members and became one of up to a thousand chosen ones that decided, in close “cooperation with party and state bodies”, what form art was to take in a communist society.¹⁵ The artist’s career would then continue within the framework of this “ideologically creative organisation”. There was a range of functions on offer. At the top of the pyramid was the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, presidium, central committee, candidates for the central committee, and the control and review commission. Alongside these was a host of special commissions, internal or external bodies to which the Union sent representatives. The first group included the commission overseeing painting, sculpture, printmaking and restoration, the commission for work with young artists,

16 For more details on the commissions for the collaboration of artists and architects, see Jozef SOUKUP, "Problémy spolupráce Svazu a ČFVU", *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 1, 1977, no. 3, pp. 30–31.

17 The regular duties of high-ranking union officials included the writing of celebratory essays marking different state anniversaries. In 1978, the chairman of the SČVU, Karel Souček, celebrated Victorious February with the article "Tužby se naplnily [Our Dreams Have Been Realised]", published in *Rudé právo* – Karel SOUČEK, "Tužby se naplnily", *Rudé právo*, 1978, no. 36, p. 5. Though the union had a purely administrative apparatus, its members also had their own organisational duties. In the "Zprávy o činnosti Svazu za léta 1977–1982", for instance, we find artists complaining that the activities involved in recording new members in the register of the ČFVU meant they had no time for their own work – "Zpráva o činnosti", p. 9.

18 "Zpráva o činnosti", p. 5.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

and the commission for art theory and criticism. The second involved the influential procurement commission and a commission dealing with the cooperation of artists and architects.**16**

The artist's life was thus transformed from a "story worthy of being recounted" into a career path not dissimilar to that which a dutiful member of the Communist Party might follow in the state apparatus. The ideal official artist – a genuinely *ex officio* artist – was in fact a party official for matters concerning fine art. In one hand he held a brush, in the other a briefcase, and his creative work was linked to administrative and organisation activities and the duties involved in representing state and party.**17** In vain would we attempt to explain the artist's status on the basis of the free struggle for a monopoly on artistic legitimacy. An official artist was above all a product of their function, and it was the Party or state that acted as guarantor of the value of individual rungs on the career ladder. A high-ranking position in the Union apparatus meant privileged access to symbolically and economically more valuable and highly prized state commissions (the Palace of Culture, the New Stage of the National Theatre) or the possibility of displaying one's work at the prestigious "national" exhibition institutions (the Prague Castle Riding School, the National Gallery, etc.). This in turn generated characteristically monotonous speeches of gratitude ("We are fully aware that the successful development of fine art was inseparably linked to the unprecedented conditions and systematic nurture of our party and the socialist state [...]")**18** and devotional service ("Let us set forth boldly under the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia [...] to meet the further objectives of creating an advanced socialist society in our beautiful homeland [...])."**19**

20 Zdeněk ČUBRDA, *Miloš Axman*, Prague: Odeon 1988, pp. 191–192.

21 Such lists form an essential part of the monographs entitled *Umělecké profily* [Artistic Profiles] published by Odeon press. A useful guide and eloquent testimony as to how important were such awards is the *Přehled výtvarných umělců: Nositelé čestného titulu národní a zasloužilý umělec, řádů, státních vyznamenání a cen*, Prague: Svaz českých výtvarných umělců 1988.

Miloš Axman, a member of the Central Committee of the SČVU and rector of the Academy of Fine Arts, was an exemplary official:

1971	honourable recognition by the Ministry of Culture
1971–1981	deputy and chairman of the culture committee of the Federal Assembly
1973	honourable mention by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, honorary medal of the Central Committee of the SČSP (Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship), 2nd degree
1974	Klement Gottwald state award
1975	1st degree prize on the 30th anniversary of liberation, honourable medal from the Central Committee of the SČSP, 1st degree
1976	meritorious artist
1981	national artist 20

Party, state and art form a perfect amalgam. The curriculum vitae of a great artist becomes a simple sequence of ever higher party and state awards. The awarding of titles and orders perhaps best captures this inseparable bond. We only have to glance at the pages of the Union's in-house journal *Výtvarná kultura* to be persuaded of the importance attached to the titles of artists at the turn of the seventies and eighties. There is no mention simply of Karel Souček, but of “national artist professor Karel Souček”, or even better, of “chairman of the SČVU, national artist professor Karel Souček”. And no monograph was complete without a full enumeration of titles and prizes possessed by the author at the end.**21**

THE PROBLEM OF THE YOUNG

This concept of the profession of artist also assumes a completely different approach to the “issue of succession”. According to Bourdieu, within the highly autonomised subfield of limited cultural production, the arrival of a new generation takes place through the effects of structural opposition. A fresh new avant-garde challenger places herself in opposition to a recognised classical artist. This newcomer is devoid not only of heteronymous, economic or political capital, but above all, of the specific symbolic capital by which they would be recognised and acknowledged as an artist. She may thus only question the status of an avant-garde classical artist by accusing them of having deviated from their original principles, having succumbed to the lure of Mammon, and having become a collector of functions, prizes and titles, etc. By means of her absolute purity, often militantly defended as an absolute value in and of itself, the newcomer carves out a position for herself in the field and thus acquires her initial recognition and respect amongst her avant-garde contemporaries. In the aesthetic sphere, this self-identification in opposition to the profane, commercialised and vulgar often takes the form of a rebellious gesture of rejection and contempt. Hence the importance of manifestos, which are not so much the positive definition of a new programme as a concentrated condemnation of everything old. This is how Bourdieu describes the established, legitimised principles of permanent revolution that stand behind the changes within the framework of the sub-field of the pure production of cultural goods.²²

This “revolutionary” rise of the younger generation is difficult to reconcile with the official definition of the profession of art. The repudiation of the “experienced”, “tried and tested”, and “established” in favour of something that derives its justification mainly from the fact that it is “new”, “other”, etc. was something the Union, as “experienced”, “tried and tested”, and “established”, could not accept without openly declaring itself to be redundant. Permanent revolution had no place in an organisation whose task was to ensure the unity and continuity of socialist culture and its subordination to the ideals of communism

in general and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in particular. Another model of generational exchange had to be introduced, or more precisely the full inclusion of the young generation in creative life:

It has always been, remains and will be our task to ensure a unified and joint approach of all generations of artists, not to allow generational conflict, but to permit artists beginning their career to build upon the developments of the past by adopting the best experience of the older generations and cooperating closely with them on the creation of a contemporary socialist fine art.**23**

This was how the Central Committee described its programme of work with younger talent in its "Report on Activities, summer 1977–1982". No revolution, simply patient mentoring. An older artist was not someone an ambitious newcomer should define themselves as being in conflict with, but an authority that must be respected, from whom one could learn, and whose work pointed the way forward. Of course, when dealing with the young, some gentle pedagogical indulgence had to be shown: "In the sphere of the arts, as in every other human activity, a person grows by means of trial and error, insecurity, etc."**24** Youth is by definition a time of insecurity, searching, trial and (especially) error, and this is inevitably accompanied by failures and faux pas... The right approach is to patiently issue warnings, reprimands and punishments in order to point out that the path does not lead in this direction, and to praise and reward the student doing the right thing. The solution is education.

A crucial role was played by tertiary education, though of course this was by no means the end of the process. In their "infantile dependency" on the model of the teacher, hopeful artists had to adhere to the principle of competition. It was here that experienced masters evaluated and rewarded the work of creative apprentices. The highest praise was reserved for the student who had learned all the lessons of their teacher. Prizes represented an ideal teaching instrument, and these included annual prizes of the SČVU and ČFVU for young artists up to 35 years of age, as well as awards

25 “Zpráva o činnosti”, p. 7.

26 Milan VAŠÍČEK, “Tvůrčí pobyty mladých”, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 4, 1980, no. 2, p. 49.

27 *Mladí výtvarní umělci k XI. světovému festivalu mládeže a studenstva v Havaně* (exh. cat.), Prague: Mánes 1978; *Nová tvorba mladých výtvarných umělců* (exh. cat.), Prague: Mánes 1981; Dušan KONEČNÝ, *Mladí čeští malíři*, Prague: Odeon 1978; Karel HOLUB, *Mladí čeští sochaři*, Prague: Odeon 1978; Simona HOŠKOVÁ, *Mladá kresba*, Prague: Odeon 1984.

associated with different exhibitions and political anniversaries. There were also competitions for an array of grants and study trips. The Union leadership regarded the most important of these trips to be the six-month residencies undertaken by young artists in industrial factories and agricultural cooperatives. The time spent in “comradely collectives of workers” was not only to provide inspiration for new works, but also fulfil the “ideological educational mission” of the Union.**25** Fifty-five young artists were selected for the second round of study trips in 1979 “on the basis of the maturity of their work as adjudged by the works they submitted to the exhibition celebrating the 30th anniversary of February”.**26**

The creative work of young people still at the stage of being “mentored” and receiving the benefits of “positive experience” could not of course be placed alongside acclaimed qualities and classical values. Their works were usually assigned to a special training facility, at which only time would tell who would deserve to be accepted as a “mature artist”. These were then given a special exhibition – *Young Artists for the 11th World Festival of Young People and Students in Havana*, or *The New Work of Young Artists*, etc. – and a special supplement in *Výtvarná kultura* and publications released by Odeon – *Young Czechoslovak Painters*, *Young Czechoslovak Sculptors*, *Young Drawing*, etc.**27** Young people were to work hard and be mindful of their duties and responsibilities in order to become first ordinary members of the Union, and later high-ranking officials responsible for the successful development of socialist culture.

THE SIXTIES GENERATION

Looked at from the other side of the barricades, who was an artist? The best impression is to be gleaned from the texts by the spokesman of the “forbidden generation” of the sixties, Jindřich Chaloupecký.

28 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Příběh Evy Kmentové" (1980), in: *Na hranicích umění*, Munich: Arkýř 1987, p. 123.

29 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Dílo a oběť" (1978), in: *Cestou necestou*, Jinočany: H & H 1999, pp. 246–254.

The impossibility of exhibiting and publishing and the breaking of links to current events in the art world beyond the Iron Curtain was not always viewed as a brake on the development of authentic creative work:

Surprisingly, this situation has prompted an unusual development. While elsewhere in the world the modern artist is entranced by the idea of success, i.e. fame and wealth, here artists cannot count on success, or at least not success of that kind. And while elsewhere artists have adapted their work so as to meet the conditions of this success, here artists have nothing to adapt to. And so, while in the outside world a kind of standard modernity has taken over, usually under the influence of the art of North America, the outcome of which one could with some legitimacy call a new academicism, here the modern artist has remained free in his studio, responsible only to himself or the impulse that drove him to take up art in the first place.**28**

Jindřich Chalupický sees the isolation of Czechoslovak art as a kind of sanctification. The fact that artists do not receive support from the public and patrons and are not financially or otherwise rewarded for their work does not represent an obstacle. In fact, it is for this very reason that they remain authentic artists. Nothing obliges them to adapt to alienating trends that elsewhere such success involves. In his text "Dílo a oběť" ("The Work and the Sacrifice") of 1978, Chalupický takes this approach to its extreme,**29** citing one critic, theoretician, philosopher or artist after another, from Baudelaire via Artaud to Satie, in order to show that the mission and fate of the modern artist means not only renouncing success, but actively embracing failure, contempt and resistance. Becoming a "real artist" means adopting a culture of sacrifice.

According to Bourdieu, this definition of an artist is characteristic of the most autonomous pole of the art field. Devoting oneself to art in order to get rich is inadmissible, as is yearning for official honours in the form of titles, prizes, diplomas and medals. That which in different

30 BOURDIEU, *Pravidla*, p. 284.

31 *Aktuální tendence českého umění: Obrazy sochy, grafika* (exh.cat.), Prague 1966; *L'art tcheque actuel* (exh. cat.), Paris: Galerie Renault-Élisées 1969.

32 For more details on the Congress of Czechoslovak Fine Artists, see Marie PLATOVSKÁ – Rostislav ŠVÁCHA, *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění 1958–2000*, Prague: Academia 2007, p. 26.

33 I am paraphrasing the language of period “account settling texts” such as [Red.], “Umění a život”, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 1, 1977, no. 1, pp. 6–25.

circumstances would mean failure is, in this relatively autonomous world, proof of being one of the select few, those chosen by god. Art and religion go hand in hand in Chalupecký’s texts. Rather than a priest preaching to the converted of an institutionalised church, Chalupecký sees the authentic artist as a prophet, or even better a heretic disrupting the world of eternal truths. One only has to look at the role the opposition plays in Bourdieu’s model between an orthodoxy compromised by success and a heresy that “proves its authenticity by the fact that it secures no remuneration”.**30**

However, the sixties generation of artists were by no means ascetics uncorrupted by any hint of success. Up until the commencement of normalisation, many of them travelled far along the path from “avant-garde heresy” to “consecrated avant-garde”. In 1966, the following were represented at the exhibition *Aktuální tendence českého umění* (*Current Trends in Czech Art*) on the occasion of the Prague congress of the Association Internationale des Critiques d’Art (IACA): Hugo Demartini, Vladimír and Věra Janoušek, Čestmír Kafka, Alena Kučerová, Karel Malich, Karel Nepraš, Zdeněk Sýkora and Adriena Šimotová. Three years later, though still prior to the advent of normalisation, essentially the same group offered a flavour of *L’art tchèque actuel* to a demanding public in Paris.**31** After the “coup” in the Union of Czechoslovak Artists in 1964, some members occupied official functions in the organisation, e.g. Kolíbal, who headed the painting, sculpture and printmaking section.**32** In short, at the end of the sixties these artists represented the Czech avant-garde at home and abroad and were well on the way to being famous. However, this also meant that they were enemies of the state number one, “rightwing opportunists”, disseminating “subjectivist and formalist deformations” during the normalisation settling of accounts. “Artists born of February”, regarded by the sixties generation as bootlickers of the regime, were suddenly put in a position of being able to exclude these “arrogant imitators of capitalist fashion trends” from the game.**33**

34 BOURDIEU, *Pravidla*, p. 290.

35 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Osud jedné generace" (1972), in: *Cestou necestou*, pp. 153–161.

36 For more on these commissions, see Stanislav KOLÍBAL, *Stanislav Kolibal: Retrospektiva* (exh. cat.), Prague: Národní galerie v Praze 1997.

37 Vladimír HOLAN, *Nokturnál*, Prague: Odeon 1980.

What this meant was that the sixties generation, rather than being in a position to highlight their splendid isolation as the supreme virtue in the face of the heresy of older colleagues compromised by success, were thrown mercilessly into isolation by normalisation. And it is in this new situation that the "collective capital of specific traditions"³⁴ enters the scene, reviving with a new intensity memories of artistic martyrs, from ill-fated poets to closer-to-hand domestic models.

Shortly after the start of the normalisation period, Jindřich Chalupický wrote about "Osud jedné generace" ("The Fate of One Generation").³⁵ Three artists, Vladimír Boudník, Mikuláš Medek and Jiří Balcar, had all died prematurely, and regardless of the circumstances Chalupický opted to interpret this as the fatal outcome of their artistic authenticity. No return to some form of essential human creativity standing outside of time and space, but the "hagiographic tradition" of Czech and world art firmly anchored in time and space allowed Malich, Šimotová, Nepraš, Kolíbal and others to continue working. The modern artist might be despised and unsuccessful in the customary sense of the word, and yet – or perhaps therefore – could be a true artistic genius. One only had to look at Baudelaire or Boudník.

However, the isolation of the sixties generation was not as absolute as its own self-presentation might lead one to believe. In 1976, Stanislav Kolíbal, working under a different name, realised his design for the refurbishment of the entrance hall to the Marble Palace in Tehran, and a year later was successful in a competition with two other sculptors for the design of a decorative wall for the Czechoslovak Cultural Centre in East Berlin.³⁶ In 1980, drawings by Adriena Šimotová featured as illustrations to the eighth volume of selected works by Vladimír Holan.³⁷ In the same year, a work by Alena Kučerová found its way amongst the three and half thousand exhibits at the exhibition *Výtvarní umělci k 35. Výročí osvobození Československa Sovětskou armádou* (*Artists on the 35th Anniversary of the Liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army*), and after a long break works by Zdeněk Beran, Karel Malich and

38 *Výtvarní umělci k 35. výročí osvobození Československa Sovětskou armádou* (exh. cat.), Prague: Svaz Československých výtvarných umělců 1980; *Kresby* (exh. cat.), Rychnov nad Kněžnou: Zámek Rychnov nad Kněžnou 1980.

39 Karel SRP, *Adriena Šimotová: Koláže, objekty, kresby*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1979; *idem, Karel Malich: Vědomí a kosmické energie*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1982; *idem, Eva Kmentová: Kresby a plastiky*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1980; *idem, Stanislav Kolíbal: Mezi prostorem a plochou*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1980; *idem, Hugo Demartini: Modely*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1983.

Eva Kmentová were displayed at an exhibition entitled simply *Drawings* held at the Rychnov nad Kněžnou Chateau in the company of artists of the younger generation³⁸ Until it was closed down in 1984, the Jazz Section published the *Situace* series introducing the current work of selected artists. Many issues were devoted to classics of the sixties created by Šimotová, Malich, Kmentová, Kolíbal, Demartini, etc.³⁹

This is a very incomplete selection and it would be interesting to examine the acquisitions of regional galleries, architectural projects, illustrated books, etc. These seemingly random examples show that interstices appeared in the fabric of normalisation and that “proscribed artists” benefitted from a degree of cautious support or at the very least a modicum of understanding even in surprising places. In other words, the opposition between “artist – Union official” and “artist – victim” on a symbolic level gradually faded away.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

I have placed members of the sixties generation in opposition to “official artists”. It would seem that we are dealing here with the traditional dichotomy between official and unofficial. On the one side there is the party expert in matters of fine art, systematically ascending the rungs of the Union career ladder, and on the other an artist faithful to their mission even at the cost of material hardship. However, things were more complicated than that. One useful strategy is to determine a threshold beyond which the official begins, and to abide by it. At first sight the most useful criterion would be membership of the Union. However, possession of a membership card did not in itself guarantee

40 For a full list of members of the Central Committee elected in 1977 at the second congress see “II. sjezd Svazu českých výtvarných umělců”, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 1, 1977, no. 3, appendix *Kronika*, unpaginated.

41 For more on Záborský see Jiří M. BOHÁČ, *Adolf Záborský*, Prague: Odeon 1985.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 54. Reservations regarding Záborský's work had already been voiced at the end of the fifties. Cf. Václav FORMÁNEK, “Skupina 58”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 8, 1958, no. 10, p. 452.

unconditional acceptance of the official definition of the profession of artist. Even in the upper echelons of the Union we encounter contradictory approaches, and the silent struggle between heteronomy and autonomy continued. One only has to look at the professional curriculum vitae of two members of the Central Committee of the SČVU from the turn of the seventies and eighties, Adolf Záborský and František Gross.**40**

For the inconspicuous illustrator of children's books, Adolf Záborský, “Victorious February” provided a kick-start to a faltering career.**41** He fully identified with the new centrally controlled concept of fine art. The little known illustrator soon became an acclaimed creator of engaged sgraffito and striking propaganda posters. As someone who had built his career around loyal obeisance to the Communist Party, Záborský was a model of the new type of socialist artist. However, during the sixties, in the words of Jiří M. Boháč, there gradually arose “tendencies in our fine art that were hostile to Záborský and his realism”**42** And so the party abandoned him. The rules of the game changed and engagement no longer made the artist. According to these new standards, at the forefront of which were creative freedom and independence, Záborský ceased to be a “genuine artist”. The entry of Warsaw Pact troops and the subsequent period of consolidation was seen by Záborský as an opportunity to return a socialist, or even better a party, character to art. He contributed to this process from his position as chairman of the creative committee of the Ministry of Culture of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and as a member of the preparatory committee of the newly established SČVU. In 1971, he was awarded the title of national artist and his career received a new boost. Up until his death in 1981, he worked on the *Revolutionary Traditions of the Czechoslovak People*, a work in which he basically claimed open allegiance to his strict aesthetic of the fifties. This cycle of drawings, originally planned to be made into a mural, represents the official image

43 BOHÁČ, *Zábranský*, p. 56.

44 For more on František Gross see Eva PETROVÁ, *František Gross*, Prague: Vltavín 2004.

45 The quote is taken from a conversation between Jaromír Pelc and František Gross. Jaromír PELC – Karel SÝS, *Návštěvy v ateliérech*, Prague: Odeon 1981, p. 31.

46 For more on this exhibition see PETROVÁ, *Gross*, p. 164.

of historical teleology, which, from Hussitism via the peasant uprising and First Republic strikes, culminated in the victory of working people in *February 48*, the title of the last episode from this revolutionary epic. According to Boháč, the artist's aim was to "express 1968 and then events from the seventies, especially from the consolidation process in our society",⁴³ though sadly this aim was never realised.

Both Zábranský and František Gross were born in 1909 and began their artistic careers before the Second World War.⁴⁴ Here, however, the similarities end. The former became an unremarkable illustrator, while the latter was attracted by the colourful life of the avant-garde. Gross attempted to make contact with the group of surrealists around Nezval and made the necessary pilgrimage to Paris, at that time the Mecca of modern art. During the war, he was one of the young artists gathered in the group Skupina 42, and after the war became a loyal and unconditional supporter of the Communist Party. He attempted to align his politics with his aesthetic. Twenty years on he recalled the difficulties he encountered when asked to paint "a traditional landscape with illusory space": "It was an almost impossible task and I nearly had a nervous breakdown because of it."⁴⁵ The gulf opening up between an avant-garde politics and an avant-garde aesthetics also created a headache for Gross, so much so that he stopped painting for a while. His forced attempts to furnish his industrial landscapes with a more traditional appearance he gave up as quickly as he could. During the sixties he undoubtedly knew what was required of him. Full of energy he returned to avant-garde experimentation. In the mid-sixties, the prophet of artistic innovation, Jindřich Chalupecký, organised an exhibition of Gross's work in his shrine to young art, Galerie Václav Špála.⁴⁶

Nothing could have been more alien to Gross than the idea that there should only be one true socialist art. When asked about this in 1970, he said: "Everything in art is justified that expresses something new or that has an element of discovery about it, whether created by traditional or

47 "Anketa Krajina dnes", *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 18, 1970, no. 24, p. 3.

48 PELC-SÝS, *Návštěvy*, p. 31. An example of Gross's more officially commissioned traditional works would be *Velkozakladač*, an industrial landscape exhibited in 1980 at the exhibition to mark the 35th anniversary of liberation. See Bohumír MRÁZ, "Česká krajinomalba na přehliďce čs. umění 1980", *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 4, 1980, no. 5, pp. 19-25.

untraditional means, or indeed by any means whatsoever."⁴⁷ However, during the sixties, such avant-garde freethinking could, it seems, be combined to a certain degree with official recognition. In 1964, Gross represented Czechoslovakia at the thirty-second Venice Biennale and a year later was awarded the Order of Merit. The post-August '68 consolidation process was unlikely to have much to offer him.

Though some of his previous work had flirted with an art-for-art's-sake spirit of experimentation that was now the target of condemnation, Gross was accepted into the newly established normalisation Union of Czech Fine Artists and eventually became a member of its Central Committee. Here he had the opportunity to spotlight the more traditional, industrial, and constructional aspects of his work and tactfully move his more non-conformist pieces into smaller galleries outside Prague. In any case, it would have been inappropriate to depose a "meritorious artist" and it was impossible to deny that some of his fame was due to his being an engaged communist artist. Gross took the line of least resistance. When necessary he opted for a style close to the more traditional landscapes of the post-February '48 period, while in the late seventies and early eighties remaining convinced that "it is possible to use almost all the means of expression of modern art" and that "only in this way can one capture the genuine pathos, not only of an industrial landscape, but the whole of civilisation".⁴⁸

THE SEVENTIES GENERATION

Let now move from the Central Committee of the Union back to the autonomous pole of the field of art. I have already mentioned the institution of permanent revolution, which according to Bourdieu lies behind the rotation of generations of artists in the sub-field of restricted production. However, were we to attempt to find an analogue of this

49 I have in mind younger artists, many of whom later became members of the Volné sdružení 12/15.

50 According to Tereza Petišková, for instance, "Ivan Ouhel's landscapes began to be accepted by officialdom at the start of the eighties". What she clearly means is that Ouhel was able to exhibit and sell his pictures in galleries of the Dřlo national enterprise. However, if we opted to view the category of "official artist" in this way, we would have no way of distinguishing between the position of Ivan Ouhel and that of Adolf Zábanský. Tereza PETIŠKOVÁ, "Oficiální umění sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let", in: PLATOVSKÁ – ŠVÁCHA, *Dějiny*, p. 454.

institution on the art scene of Czechoslovakia during normalisation, we would discover the relations involved to be more complex than those of Bourdieu's model.

The sixties generation could not be accused by the young generation of having compromised its original ideals for the simple reason that it had not done so and was unlikely to given the pressure being exerted by the authorities. This was apparent in the status of the circle of young artists of the seventies generation.**49** It would be difficult to speak of their being thrown into isolation. Just when artists of the seventies generation were deciding on their career, two irreconcilable definitions arose of what it meant to be an artist. On the one hand, there was the position of cultural normalisers offering heteronymous capital in the form of various grants, the opportunity of being gifted an exclusive studio, to exhibit without restriction, etc. And on the other, there was the autonomous position of proscribed artists whose attractiveness resided above all in the "collective capital of specific traditions", in the possibility of becoming a genuine, authentic artist true to themselves. Michael Rittstein, Ivan Ouhel, Jiří Soznaský and Kurt Behauer gradually moved over into the second, autonomous pole, though they were never excluded from being official artists as inflexibly as was the sixties generation, plunged into isolation by the so-called consolidation process. In the latter case the opposition official/unofficial loses its clarity. Rather than operating within two incommensurable worlds, we shift to an imaginary scale running from "artist – Union official" to "artist – martyr".**50**

Amongst the participants of the "exhibition of the young" organised in 1976 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the International Federation of Students, in addition to Jan Grimm chairman of the commission for work with young artists, we also find Václav Bláha, Kurt Gebauer, Josef Mžyk, Michael Rittstein and Jiří

51 *Umění mladých: Přehledka současného českého výtvarného umění mladých k 30. výročí založení Mezinárodního svazu studentstva* (exh. cat.), Prague 1976. Participants at the exhibition marking the 35th anniversary of the liberation included Michael Rittstein, Kurt Gebauer and Josef Mžyk: *Výtvarní umělci k 35. Výročí osvobození Československa Sovětskou armádou* (exh. cat.), Prague 1980. In the book *Mladí čeští malíři* we find Rittstein, Sozanský, Sopek and Ouhel: KONEČNÝ, *Mladí čeští malíři*. In 1980, an article appeared on Ouhel in *Výtvarná kultura: Simona HOŠKOVÁ, "Příroda v tvorbě Ivana Ouhela"*, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 4, 1980, no. 6, pp. 45–46.

52 Blahoslav ČERNÝ, "Vyznání, konfrontace a výhledy: Na okraj přehledky *Umění vítězného lidu*", *Tvorba*, 1978, no. 17, p. 6.

53 *Obrazy: Bláha, Novák, Ouhel, Pavlík, Rittstein, Sozanský* (exh. cat.), Karlovy Vary: Galerie umění Karlovy Vary 1981.

54 Dušan KONEČNÝ, "Ohlédnutí za rokem 1981 v naší výtvarné kultuře", *Tvorba*, 3 February 1982, no. 5, pp. 8–9.

Sozanský. Furthermore, the eighties generation was not excluded from the mammoth national art shows, the representative publications put out by the Odeon press, and the pages of *Výtvarná kultura*.⁵¹ Some like Michael Rittstein received favourable reviews on the whole. In 1978, when Blahoslav Černý reviewed the exhibition *Umění vítězného lidu* (*Art of the Victorious People*), he made reference to Rittstein as "the heir apparent of contemporary painting", and saw in the latter's *Děti včerejška* (*Yesterday's Children*) a "dynamic invocation from the world of the tired and downtrodden" that followed in "the best tradition of social painting during the period between the world wars".⁵²

However, the very same artists participated in a wide range of activities that could and sometimes did find them in conflict with the leadership of the Union. All they had to do was present themselves as a "generational grouping" and they had already disturbed the obligatory "unity of the creative front". When Dušan Konečný "looked back on 1981 in our art culture", he also made reference to the "controversial" exhibition *Obrazy* (*Pictures*) in Karlovy Vary.⁵³ This was one of the events moved out of Prague, though not out of the institution of a regional gallery, a strategy that this generation pursued in order to keep below the radar of the authorities. Nevertheless, Konečný was able to describe the polemical character of the exhibition as a "sympathetic feature".⁵⁴ He would have undoubtedly been more cautious in the case of the exhibition of drawings and prints organised by Marie A. Černá in the institutionally ambiguous setting of the gamekeeper's lodge in the Hvězda enclosure the same year. Černá included a short text in the mimeographed catalogue in which, as well as mentioning generational affinity, a *sine qua non* for the Academy of Fine Arts in the first half

55 Marie A. ČERNÁ, *Kresba, grafika: Hvězda 1981* (exh. cat.), Prague 1981.

56 For more on the exhibition at the Institute of Microbiology see Marcela PÁNKOVÁ, "Než bilo 12/15: S Petrem Pavlíkem hovoří Marcela Pánková", in: Milena SLAVICKÁ – Marcela PÁNKOVÁ, "Zakázané umění II", *Výtvarné umění*, 1996, no. 1–2, p. 103.

57 Josef KROUTVOR, "Nechci v kleci!" (1979), in: *Suterény: Vybrané kritické texty 1963–2000*, Jinočany: H & H 2001, p. 217.

of the seventies, she stated that the main criterion when selecting the works on show had been the "degree of authenticity and serious commitment"**55** of the individual artists. She thus implicitly set the seventies generation in opposition to the "inauthentic" and "official" art produced by the rest of the "creative front" on the basis of political commission.

Both of these events duly ran their course. However, the exhibition *Confrontation* at the Institute of Microbiology in Prague was closed down by the censors.**56** Josef Kroutvor reviewed the exhibition and the events surrounding it in an article in the samizdat magazine *Spektrum*. He outlined in more general terms the situation of artists who "in the first half of the seventies left art school and entered life and art... These were not people compromised by the events of '68, they had a clean slate and believed that the Union would be receptive to them." To begin with they were naive: "They appealed to the honeyed words of officials, applied for grants, studios, their own exhibitions, the attention of critics, etc." Kroutvor then mentions the "attempt" to submit their demands to the "appropriate cultural institutions" in the form of an open letter. The attempt failed and the letter was never sent. "Each new draft represented a greater and greater compromise, until the meaning of the gesture was lost in an amorphous form of a fawning application for support". Whether this failure was the result of "fear of possible sanctions" or "a feeling of dignity that prevented the writers from further watering down their demands, of humiliation and the selling out of their creative freedom", Kroutvor is not sure. However, the failure itself he deems "more important than a questionable success"**57**

The seventies generation was exposed to pressure from all sides. On the one hand, there was the heteronymous power of the state, party and Union deploying both carrot and stick, offering grants, studios, solo exhibitions and recognition by critics at the same time as creating a fear of sanctions. The other side of this power equation, though symbolic, exerted no less a pressure. Only a rejection of compromise and

58 Artists belong to the seventies generation made strenuous efforts to contact their counterparts from the previous generation. See the conversation between Petr Pavlík and Marcela Pánková: PÁNKOVÁ, "Než bilo 12/15", pp. 102–108.
59 *Ibid.*

the ability to defend creative freedom regardless of whomsoever was in power at any given moment in time makes for a true artist. Young artists had to fail in order to be artists. Only thanks to their failure could they be recognised within the *sub-field of restricted production*, above all by the sixties generation that represented the symbolic dispenser of artistic authenticity.

The position of an Adriena Šimotová or Karel Malich in the *sub-field of restricted production* was also unprecedentedly powerful thanks to the "consolidation process" or normalisation. Those who were on the way to being meritorious and national artists suddenly found themselves to be *artistes maudits* once again. Under these circumstances Bourdieu's vertical opposition between the consecrated avant-garde and avant-garde heretics could not fully develop. The seventies generation "failed" in its attempts at compromise with "the appropriate cultural institutions". However, compared with those who were "plunged into isolation", this failure was only relative. At the end of the seventies it was still more acceptable to criticise younger artists such as Michael Rittstein, Ivan Ouhel and Jiří Sozanský for "inappropriate compromises with worldly powers" than it was the "proscribed generation" of the sixties.

Artists of the seventies generation were more interested in listening to their counterparts from the sixties, following their model and deriving support from it in the struggle for independence in relation to official art, than in treating them as competitors.**58** In the name of authenticity, Bláha, Ouhel, Rittstein, Sozanský and others could lead a symbolic revolution against the "arrogant and all-powerful Union of Artists",**59** but less easily against Adriena Šimotová or Karel Malich, with Jindřich Chalupecký, theoretician of the artist-as-martyr par excellence, at their head.

60 I am paraphrasing the language of period texts, for example by Dušan Konečný, “Naše umění slouží zájmům lidu a socialismu”, *Výtvarná kultura*, vol. 6, 1982, no. 5, pp. 4–17. Reprinted in abbreviated form in Jiří ŠEVČÍK - Pavlína MORGANOVÁ - Dagmar DUŠKOVÁ (eds.), *České umění 1938–1989: Programy, kritické texty, dokumenty*, Prague: Academia 2001, pp. 394–397.

61 For some basic information regarding Prague action artists see Karel Miler (ed.), *Karel Miler, Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch* (exh. cat.), Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy 1998.

PRAGUE BODY-ART AND BRNO CONCEPTUALISM

In a sense it was Prague-based body-artists and the Brno conceptual art circle that led a successful symbolic revolution against the sixties generation. Looked at from the official perspective, members of the sixties generation were “right-wing opportunists”, enemies of socialist culture, the initiators of an all-encompassing cultural decline that only normalisation brought an end to. The seventies generation then represented the potential for a new flowering of socialist art, but unfortunately was unaware of the responsibility of its mission and became alienated from it as time went on.⁶⁰ Both groups found themselves in the crosshairs of Union officials, while the Union, believing they were “decadent”, nevertheless recognised them as artists. Prague body artists and Brno conceptualists, on the other hand, regarded themselves as artists and yet disappeared almost completely from the art scene. Because for the most part they could not even be bothered to register with the Czech Fine Artists Fund, they were not eligible for grants, studios, exhibitions, critical acceptance, etc. Nobody expelled them from “artistic operations”, because they had never entered into these operations prior to normalisation and so could hardly leave them after normalisation. At least to begin with, their natural home was outside the sumptuous exhibition galleries. At the same time, artists from both these circles consistently adopted a certain artistic approach common behind the Iron Curtain, by means of which they carved out a distinctive existence in relation to each other and their generational predecessors.

Karel Miler, Petr Štembera and Jan Mlčoch acquired their artistic legitimacy not at home in conflict with officialdom but on the international stage.⁶¹ They enjoyed greater independence and confidence than the sixties generation. Rather than searching for symbolic support in an attempt to defend their creative freedom against Union apparatchiks, they earned the respect of their predecessors as

62 “For the moment we must remove the damage done by school and spread greater solidarity amongst this generation before the interventions arrive from without,” said Josef Kroutvor in 1979 of the tasks facing lecturers in the future working with the seventies generation. KROUTVOR, “Nechci v kleci!”, p. 222.

63 Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, “Příběh Petra Štembery a Jana Mlčocha” (1984), in: *Na hranicích*, pp. 134–146.

64 This is most striking in Chalupický’s *Nové umění v Čechách*, in which, if we leave to one side the older Dalibor Chatrný, there is not a single mention of the Brno conceptualists. Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, *Nové umění v Čechách*, Jinočany: H & H 1994.

65 CHALUPECKÝ, “Příběh”, p. 143.

66 Starting in 1974, Flash Art offered regular reports on the activities of the Prague action artists. In 1978, Mlčoch introduced in person his new piece in Los Angeles at the exhibition *Polar Crossing* organised by Chris Burden. For a bibliography and list of exhibitions see SRP, *Miler, Štembera, Mlčoch*, pp. 72–74.

pioneers of new creative worlds. Jindřich Chalupický, attracted above all by the pieces of Štembera and Mlčoch, who conformed to his idea of the artist as martyr by virtue of the aesthetic suppression of physiological needs and thus self-harming, followed their work and wrote about it. He was not prompted to do this in order to protect it,**62** but because as an educated outside observer he was fascinated by artists who had “come up with something completely new”.**63** In the same way the Brno conceptualist circle represented a clearly defined new art movement emerging completely independently and in the main alongside the existentially flavoured “classics of the sixties”. Characteristically, Chalupický paid them little if any attention.**64**

However, at the start of the eighties both Brno conceptualism and Prague body-art experienced something of a crisis, which in the latter case culminated in the complete termination of its activities. Why did the Prague action artists down tools? Chalupický offers a straightforward explanation. They were prevented from continuing in their work by:

the success or rather that type of success they had achieved. They had begun to be interesting within an environment deemed avant-garde or even underground. The great tidings they brought became an artistic attraction, and their performances thus became meaningless.**65**

It seems that the destructive power of public opinion and acceptance, albeit still restricted to “avant-garde” or “underground” colleagues in the arts, was responsible for the decision. Though they had been integrated into the art world behind the Iron Curtain,**66** the situation

67 As well as Chalupecký, this decision reached by the action artists has been examined by, among others, Helena KONTOVÁ, “Je možné tvořit v izolaci? Postminimalističtí umělci v Praze”, in: *Sborník k 70. narozeninám Jindřicha Chalupeckého*, Prague: [self-published] 1980, pp. 208–216; Helena KONTOVÁ, “Is Isolation the End of Art”, *Live Magazine*, February 1982, nos. 6–7, pp. 113–116.

68 BOURDIEU, *Pravidla*, pp. 191–209.

in communist Czechoslovakia reinforced their belief that all of these articles and exhibitions were simply a dangerous epiphenomenon that a genuine artist should spurn. This belief was so strong that as soon as they achieved so much as a hint of wider public recognition, they quit art, since that which they would otherwise henceforth find themselves doing could not in all honesty be called true art. However, this considered and much commented on collective gesture also became the supreme artistic gesture.⁶⁷ The complete and utter rejection of success cannot but provoke awe and respect in avant-garde circles, of which fact Chalupecký's commentary is the best proof. Moreover, they were following in hallowed footsteps: had not Duchamp himself given precedence to chess over art? Only where “success means failure and vice versa” does the gesture made by Miler, Štembera and Mlčoch make sense.

However, without in any way undermining Chalupecký's argument, it has to be acknowledged that in Czechoslovakia at the turn of the seventies and eighties the impossibility of fully achieving success made it somewhat easier to reach the decision of the action artists to withdraw or drop out of art. Bourdieu notes how the original recognition that an avant-garde artist receives amongst his avant-garde companions for his uncompromising rejection of monetary profit increases the more critical essays, theoretical reflections and academic studies are published and the more often this circle participates in exhibitions. In time, the avant-garde artist becomes known and is recognised as such by an ever larger public. From this ensues the *economic cycle of symbolic goods*. The rejection of immediate, short-term profit may under certain conditions lead to stable profit in the long term. While a trashy novel enjoys good sales for a year or two, after which it basically ceases to exist, an avant-garde novel has only a small print run to begin with but becomes a classic, ideally included on syllabuses, after which it is never out of print.⁶⁸ At the turn of the seventies and eighties, when the body-art trend subsided behind the Iron Curtain, the trio of Miler, Štembera and

69 For more details regarding Czechoslovak in general and Brno-based conceptual art in particular, see Jiří VALOCH, “Konceptuální projevy”, in: PLATOVSKÁ-ŠVÁCHA, *Dějiny*, pp. 555–573; Alena POTŮČKOVÁ, *Umění zastaveného času II. Česká výtvarná scéna 1969–1985. Akce, koncepty, události* (exh. cat.), Prague: České muzeum výtvarných umění 1996.

70 Jiří VALOCH, “Umění v sedmdesátých letech” (1984), in: ŠEVČÍK-MORGANOVÁ-DUŠKOVÁ, *České umění*, p. 353.

71 VALOCH, “Konceptuální projevy”, p. 561.

72 I am drawing on the descriptions contained in VALOCH's text “Konceptuální projevy”, pp. 353–354.

Mlčoch was not and could not be brought into the domestic network of institutions generating faith in the value of their work (galleries, journals, critics, theoreticians, gallerists, curators, etc.). This network would have demanded more and more new pieces and would have thus rendered irrelevant theoretical doubts as to whether what they were doing made any sense.

Conceptual art too faced a crisis at the end of the seventies.**69** Jiří Valoch, the progenitor of Brno conceptualism, believed the cause lay in “the democracy of this type of creativity”, which led to the “overproduction of ‘creations’ with zero information value, the communication of ideas or, more frequently, jokes lacking any quality”.**70** This time the crisis did not culminate in the termination of creative activities. For instance, during the latter half of the seventies, Jiří H. Kocman, “disgusted with the international proliferation of banality”,**71** turned his back on the radical emptiness of pure conceptualism and returned to experimenting with the book form. Another reason for the crisis of conceptualism might be the interruption of the economic cycle of cultural goods caused by normalisation. In the end, Brno conceptualism lacked the complex network of actors and institutions that would, by sheer force of numbers, separate the wheat of “intellectually significant” works by “intellectually significant” artists from the chaff of “tedious pornography” produced by “dilettantes of the spirit”.**72** Moreover, in the case of conceptual art, an academic, critical and above all theoretical “meta-discourse” was a necessary accompaniment to the work, or even better an integral part thereof, since without it, it was almost impossible to distinguish good quality from dilettantism. Without such an accompaniment, incrementally increased over time, it was easy for Jiří H. Kocman to lose faith in the “intellectually significant” value of his stamps as opposed to the many examples of “dilettante” stamps.

CONCLUSION

Normalisation represented an attempt to promote a new definition of the profession of artist and art in general, a definition based on the concept of conscientious service. The sixties generation, excluded from official art, defended creative autonomy and believed that any form of service was incompatible with the mission of an artist. In comparison with the concept of creativity anchored in the modernist tradition, the official definition gradually ran out of steam. This is borne out not only by the fact that not all the members of the Central Committee of the Union of Czech Fine Artists identified with it, but by the situation of the seventies generation. Artists such as Rittstein, Gebauer and Pavlík deemed Kolíbal and Šimotová rather than Miloš Axman to be genuine artists. However, in their attempt to extricate themselves from the influence of Union institutions they had no option but to retain the status of pupils in awe of their masters in relation to their older models. The Prague body-artists and Brno conceptualists were more successful in carving out a distinctive position for themselves in relation to the sixties generation.

This essay makes no claims to be exhaustive. Much has been only hinted at and much left out altogether. It cannot even claim to have uncovered radically new facts. What is new about it is the endeavour to examine the topic using Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production. At the very least this has clearly shown that we have to know the whole before we start analysing its parts. The fact that the chapter on official art in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění 1958–2000* (*History of Czech Art 1958–2000*) is only twelve pages long demonstrates the extent to which art history still acts more as a cheerleader for artistic autonomy than as an impartial judge of the situation art found itself in at the turn of the seventies and eighties.⁷³ Any such understanding presupposes the bracketing of what Bourdieu calls *illusio*, while any attempt at explanation must not adopt the perspective of artists of the sixties generation, who saw in Axman and others similar to him simply a slavish pseudo-artist it made no sense to talk about. Kolíbal's perspective would not exist were it not for Axman, or to

generalise further, unofficial art presupposes the existence of official art. At this point it is important to add that such a process of bracketing represents simply an essential methodological step and does not imply any change of personal preferences.