<u>Kateřina Šedá</u> (\*1977 in Brno) is an artist who lives and works in Brno and Prague (CZ). In 2007 she participated in the documenta 12 exhibition with the project *For Every Dog a Different Master*, in which she involved the inhabitants of the Brno – Líšeň housing estate. After the end of the project the artist invited all 1,000 participated families to compose their responses to the project.



## <u>Kateřina Šedá</u> For Every Dog a Different Master

### New Líšeň

"I'm from Líšeň," is my answer to anyone who asks where I'm from. But I never add that Líšeň is a district on the outskirts of a city; I just let the inquirer think it's an out-of-the-way village somewhere. Similarly, if you ask people from our high-rise apartment development, New Líšeň, where they're from, they never admit that's where they're from; they'd rather just say "I'm from Brno." As if the development didn't exist; as if it were cursed. You'll never run into tourists here — what would they be looking for?

## Please leave the carriage

While the old village ways survive in Old Líšeň (we known each other here, we have a local folk preservation group, we have social functions...), New Líšeň has the character of a tram stop: most of its inhabitants just "get off at their stop" for the night and spend the rest of the day in the city.

A childhood experience has stuck in my memory: I was with one of my primary school classmates, walking her home after school one day. We climbed the hill along Klajdovská Street and as soon as the low houses gave way to the first slab blocks, people stopped answering when I wished them a good day. It was as if – out of the blue – the development had made me invisible. My friend turned to me, perplexed, and said, "Around here you don't have to say hello to everyone anymore – only to those you know!" I remember I didn't quite understand, although I did heed the advice on my way back: I made as if I didn't see anyone passing by. I later learned from my parents that people don't say hello in housing developments because they don't know each other. Everyone moves to them from different places and they have nothing in common. That seemed to make good sense, so I stopped worrying about it.

## For every dog a different master

But last fall I suddenly noticed that the development had changed significantly. The grey complex had literally become fragmented beneath

coats of bright paint and New Líšeň shone like a splendid attraction. It was the result of a project several architects had worked on together called the "Regeneration of High-Rise Housing Developments". However, none of them took an overarching view of the whole, approaching each building on its own; that's why the development took on the appearance of a pattern book of buildings, each one different from the next. On this basis, I suddenly realized that was precisely the thing that united all the inhabitants, though it hadn't been visible up to that point: EVERYONE COMES FROM SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT! When I found myself in a development on the other side of town a few days later, the same scene opened up before my eyes. I was looking at the MAIN PARADIGM of the housing development.

## The main paradigm

The colorful individualization of each building had no effect on people's behavior, though: they still only said hello to those they knew. That's why I took it upon myself to find a way to make the MAIN PARADIGM show and thus unite the inhabitants of the development, thereby regenerating not only the place, but the relationships in it as well.

One of my first thoughts came from the following realization: the thing we have in common really becomes visible when we divide it up amongst ourselves. If I want people to unite on the basis of the main paradigm "everyone comes from somewhere different", I had to divide it up among them equitably.

### How to make it show?

I decided to create an image of the development: I got the blueprints for the main types of building and placed them next to one another so as to get as close as I could to making the impression that each came from a different place. It occurred to me then that the only way I was going to be able divide such a thing up equitably was by reproducing it. Because I'd conceived of the "MAIN PARADIGM" as a real picture from the start, I decided to reproduce it on fabric and then sent my design to a textile printer. Then, when I was holding the reproduced image in my hands, I realized that in order for people to understand that it was a PARADIGM, they were going to have to see it among them. And how would they be able to see a PARADIGM like that among them? By wearing it! I had 1,000 shirts sewn using the printed fabric—it was that article of clothing that best enabled me to embody the sort of "invisible person" that might be able to unite the development's inhabitants.

## Disappear!

Finally, I had the MAIN PATTERN in hand. However, that didn't guarantee they'd be actually able to see each other through it. I was basing myself on the idea that people would have to do the dividing up themselves, or it wouldn't bring them together. Then it dawned on me that the main paradigm would only enable the inhabitants of the housing development to see each other on one condition — I SHOULDN'T BE STANDING IN THEIR MIDST! All of a sudden I found myself facing the most important task of the entire project: I HAD TO DISAPEAR! It was the first time I wouldn't be the visible center of all activities in one of my projects. This time, however, the culmination of the whole project depended on my invisibility. I knew I HAD TO DISAPPEAR!

## Divvy it up!

In order for the event to remain a secret, I had to get a list of the development's inhabitants in some way other than through official channels: for several days, I went around the development and copied their names off the buzzers at the entrance to each building. Then I chose 1,000 families on the list and paired them up. I always tried to make sure that the "Líšeň Gorge" lay between the pair I'd chosen, which ensured they lived far enough from each other and therefore probably wouldn't know each other. On May 30, 2007, I sent out the same package containing the shirt sewn out of the fabric with the main paradigm on it, always putting the other family in the pair down as the sender. Thus, in this simple way, something each pair had in common appeared to them, and they had symbolically divvied it up among themselves. This approach carried the promise that each of the parties might contact each other.

My person and name vanished from the whole event, appearing nowhere in the housing development and remaining, I hoped, in secrecy until the moment when the same families would get (one month after they got the shirt) an invitation to the Moravian Gallery in Brno to see the paradigm they'd received a month earlier placed on exhibit. A month is enough time for my "mnemonic device" to "settle in." The project made people contact each other and start talking about it; some people put the shirt on and others started talking with them because of it. The period of time was long enough for almost everyone to have talked about it: it engendered a sort of myth which was wanting at the development, with its 20,000 inhabitants; at the same time, it wasn't so long that people's curiosity wouldn't start flagging, so they might still come to the exhibition.

In this way, the gallery became a part of the project. This time, however, it won't be what's on display that's important, but, who they meet at the gallery. All of the 1,000 people invited will thus be able, through the main paradigm, to see the most important picture of the entire project: ONE ANOTHER.

Kateřina Šedá, *Každej pes jiná ves / For Every Dog a Different Maste*r, 2007, dopisy účastníků / letters from the participants (foto / photo Kateřina Šedá)







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Deze vidine, jak jaern rengovala povrchné. Menho toho už nempere im. Pokad bych vien ale mohla nějsk pomoci, udělám to tida. Přemo je vši nižod velm najimová, a vrčitě oslově pocornější obyvatele Liloh než jaem ja. Vim ale, co udělám. Půjdu se se ovými žišky podívat na výstavu do Moravské galerie.

Přeji vám hodně úspěchů.

Jane Gillerra!

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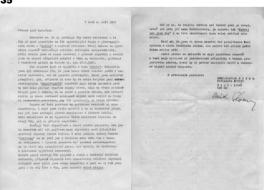
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# For Every Dog a Different Master Letters from the participants

#### 1 postcard

#### Dear Madam!

I don't know you at all, so why should I help you, that's one thing, and another is how did you get my address that's a mystery to me, but I also don't know what it is you want.

#### 2 letter

August 6, 2007 Brno

Dear Kateřina Šedá.

You probably meant well with your project; you have not impressed me in particular with it. I dare say that, basically, none of the 1,000 families you selected has understood it. I have even informed, in writing, the Líšeň district office about your package.

You cannot expect to undo the colossal anonymity of a housing development with a shirt. Particularly when the old residents of the area did not want to accept the "newcomers" among them. Another thing you seem to be unaware of is that while you were growing up with your family in a house of your own among kind-hearted aunts and uncles, the great majority of us lived in crowded apartment buildings where every toilet was shared by three families and so everything was an open secret.

So it should be no surprise to you that we long for privacy and only say hello to those in our closest circles. I am really not sure whether people will start changing their long-standing ways after receiving your shirt. Rest assured that all you have achieved in most cases is that the families have either started pointing fingers at each other, returned the shirt to the sender, or just dismissed it all with a wave of the hand. Nobody but the post office has benefited from your project.

Maybe if we had found out about your intentions along with the shirt, you might have been achieved something.

So you drove young families with children to worry that someone would want money for the shirt and other people, like me, were irritated that someone was misusing their names. You yourself wrote that they were not provided legally.

That is why I did not come to the opening of your exhibition.

You did not really expect the two families you chose in such a haphazard way to come together, did you?

Making contact involves other, much more important factors than chance selection.

The next time you feel like dreaming, do not forget to think a bit. These are no times for dreamers.

Nevertheless, I wish you much success.

Brno, August 6, 2007

#### Dear Madam.

I would like to answer your letter of August 2 of this year. I can tell you I was surprised to find a package in my mailbox, with no accompanying note or signature, and I was even more surprised when I opened the package and found a nice, colorful shirt inside.

I was at a loss, because I never order that sort of thing and thought to myself that someone must have made a mistake. I know my neighbors do order things, so I asked them if they hadn't ordered it and it had come to me by mistake. After making sure it wasn't theirs and their telling me I should be happy to have such a nice shirt, I wanted to return it to the address on the package, but my girlfriend had sent put the wrapper in with the old newspapers and junk mail and sent it all to be recycled. I waited for some follow up, so I could return it.

When, after some time, I received a brightly colored invitation to your exhibition, the shirt came to mind immediately and I knew it had been from you. I couldn't come to the exhibition opening, because I was ill, but I'll certainly come and take a look at it.

If I might respond a bit to the letter in which you explain why you embarked on your project, I can tell you that although you're right in that the differentiation of the buildings using different colors didn't bring anything new to the way people behave, at least the housing development looks more cheerful and attractive than before. The Velvet Revolution brought many positive changes, which expressed themselves in many things and influenced many people, too. At present, people are more reserved; the lives of many have changed, they communicate little and don't know how to have fun or help each other out. Everyone takes care of himself or of those closest to him and even though we live in the same buildings, we often don't know the people we're living with – whether we're newcomers or originally from Líšeň.

Your idea of changing something about this state of affairs is exceptional, as is the idea of sending out all those brightly colored shirts you came up with, which must have been very costly for you. I wanted to return the shirt to you and I might still do so, if you ask me to. I've still got it, wrapped in aluminum and in a safe place.

Nonetheless, I can tell you that when I'm sad, because I'm alone most of the time, and I look at the interesting, colorful shirt, I feel a bit better right away (unless I've got health troubles, of course, which are the hardest to bear and aren't relieved by looking at something pretty). I guess I've gone on a bit, but after reading all the things you enclosed and finding out about all your efforts to make changes, I couldn't resist and wrote at least a few lines, like you wanted.

I wish you all the best and much success in your future projects. Regards,

#### 5 letter

Líšeň, August 9, 2007

#### Dear Kateřina Šedá.

I was born in a village, but I've lived in Líšeň for 23 years and I still feel like a stranger in the city. And that's because besides those who live in my building (not all of them) and a few friends I meet every once in a while, I don't know anyone else in the entire development. Due to my heavy workload and frequent business trips, I'm not too surprised, either. And whenever people have time off, the development seems to empty itself out, as if by a miracle; everyone leaves, and I do too. What is there to do? Sitting in one of the few pubs in the development doesn't cut it. Culture? Only every once in a while does anything happen and it's the same with sports facilities. And that's why I'm glad town hall organizes the "New Year's Parade," at least, where you can meet other people who live in Líšeň. But lately it seems to me there have been more and more people from other parts of the city coming to the parade. As you write in the description of your project, "For Every Dog a Different Master," it would be great if the people who live in the development were proud of where they live and tried to do more for it.

I'm behind what you're doing and I'd like to help you, but experience tells me that getting people to start caring about the development where they live would entail a lot of hard and thankless work. To begin with, people would ridicule you and call you crazy, because there are all sorts of services for everything and they're always accompanied by the unwillingness of bureaucracy to help get anything done – especially if you want it done quickly.

Under communism there used to be this interesting event called "Event Z." People would look after their surroundings (even though they did so under orders) or build something for themselves and the work would give produce some sort of benefit and give me the feeling that I'd done something for my surroundings. With the fall of communism, these events ended and people started looking after themselves first and foremost and closing up more and more. It's more important to look after one's own well being than take care of one's surroundings. It's probably connected with today's hurried lifestyle.

Although I did get your shirt, I've been taught by the market to send things like it back to the sender because I don't like that sort of unexplained thing – particularly those that seem to say "Here you go for free today and you'll have to pay double for it tomorrow or you won't be able to get rid of me." Now I know that the shirt you sent was different and was supposed to get us to know ourselves, our development and the other people who live in Líšeň better. All this in response to your letter; I'm keeping my fingers crossed so your project will meet with as much success as possible. I'll be glad if any change comes of it.

Best wishes.

62800 Brno

#### 6 letter

#### Dear Miss Šedá.

We've become part of your project, even though we did nothing to this end, and now you want us to respond and say what we think. Finding your shirt in our mailbox was a big surprise which was connected with the question "What's this supposed to mean?" Before we were able to contact our partner family, the the project of the year of the year just as surprised and had the same question on their minds. We talked about it for a bit and ended our meeting by agreeing to wait and see what would happen. About a month later we got an invitation to the opening, which we took part in. It was only there that we got an answer to our question and found out about your project. What you had in mind and, in general, the whole idea of joining the inhabitants of the housing development by means of the "main paradigm" is definitely original, but I don't know if you'll be able to do it in today's hustle-and-bustle world. At least you've succeeded in getting some of the development's inhabitants to stop and think about the issue a bit. In my particular case, I'd already known the from before. Because I've lived in Lišeň since I was a child, lived in Old Lišeň before that, and have lived in this development for the last ten years — and work in Lišeň too — I know a lot of the people who live here personally, or at least by sight.

I wish you much success in your creative endeavors.

Best wishes,

Brno, August 9, 2007

#### 7 letter

Líšeň, August 6, 2007

#### Dear Kateřina,

First, we were quite surprised and uncertain whether or not we should open the package we got from you or not. Then we were baffled by the sender's address. We set off to see the sender and found out the woman had also received a shirt from us. That surprised us even more and we even wanted to go to the authorities to see if the whole thing wasn't some sort of "illegal activity."

Everything became clear when we got the invitation to your opening, which was quite dazzling and I imagine all those present were happy with – for which we thank you. We learned something about your work and the project as a whole. I admire your diligent efforts to join the people who live in New Líšeň.

**Best wishes** 

#### 10 postcard

Brno, July 26, 2007

Dear Madam.

I took a group of children participating in "Brno Ahead, the Forest Behind Us," an art class organized by the Brno City Museum, to your exhibition at the Moravian Gallery, where we inspired ourselves freely. We drew postcards with our apartment buildings in them and sent them to our favorite neighbors.

We wish you many more interesting ideas.

Radek, Štěpka, Lucka, Jan, David, Kristián

#### 11 letter

Dear Mrs Šedá.

First of all, I'd like to send my greetings and apologize for not being able to come to your exhibition. I don't know what made you contact me (or rather my family). I am divorced and live in my apartment with my son. I would be very happy to help you, but I still don't understand how? Our housing development has become colorful, I meet a lot of people I'm in contact with here and in my building as well, where I serve as administrative director. Could you please write and tell me what I can do for you concretely?

Once again, I send my greetings and wish you much success, serenity and a heart full of love.

Brno, August 6, 2007

#### 12 letter

Brno, August 6

Dear Mrs Šedá.

I wanted to write you something about your project. The fact that you've inconvenienced me doesn't bother me; what bothers me is that I found a shirt in my mailbox from a stranger. I don't approve of the shirts in the mailboxes. I don't think they bring anybody together. I threw the shirt away immediately. I think if everyone in the development had one of those shirts with the development pictured on it, it wouldn't bring them together. I'd say the way people act is even worse than when the development was all one color. Most people are interested mainly in money and property. My main concerns aren't property or money; I'm a modest person, I don't even have a car. I'm different from everyone else. Here in my building, people don't take much notice of me or say hello to me, either. Everyone's got himself and no one else, they're not interested in anyone else's problems. I can't approve of the shirts in the mailboxes, but I approve of your exhibition, but I'm sorry to say, madam, that I can't help you with it. I'm just an ordinary person, I'm not an architect or an artist or a designer. I'd like to help you very much, but I don't understand it; that doesn't mean I'm not all for art, though. You've got a family, friends and they'll be sure to give you good advice. I have no family or friends. I've got enough problems of my own. I admire the energy and courage it took for you to take on your project. I think if you didn't have your family behind you, you wouldn't have ever taken it on. I'm really sorry I can't help you.

I don't have any ideas how. I haven't been able to have any children. I too wanted to do things in life, but things haven't worked out for me somehow. My life is nothing but bad luck and pain. I'm really sorry I can't help you. If you ever want to meet, I've got nothing against it. I wish you many creative ideas and am quite sure the exhibition will be successful.

Wishing you well,

L.B.

#### 13 letter

I saw about 6–8 shirts in our mailboxes. That's when I thought they were some kind of marketing ploy I didn't understand when I got mine. That's why I wasn't interested in the sender's name. When I got the invitation to the opening, I put the shirt on and set off along with my wife. The opening was nice and a former schoolmate I hadn't seen for 30 years showed up wearing the same shirt. Later I wore the shirt again and in Tesco some woman came up to me and said she wanted to take a picture of me. Then she told me she was the sister of the woman behind the project and she wanted to make her happy. So why not.

#### 14 letter

#### Madam,

First, thank you for the shirt, it's a pretty design and I like it an awful lot and I haven't worn it yet, I wear a number 39 collar, I was at your exhibition too, but you were in Prague I was told by a man I don't know what his name was, so I came home again. Otherwise the weather's nice and have a great day and, above all, I wish you health.

I'm going to finish now and once again thanks a lot.

#### 27 letter

Líšeň, 21 August 2007

Dear Mrs (Ms) Šedá,

Our family has lived in the Líšeň housing complex for over 25 years and we aren't ashamed of where we live at all because we've lived through all its pains and transformations over time until it reached its present state.

We consider your method of sending shirts original. The first impression, however, was a shock. We thought the sender was a presumptuous family business, which we tried to track down, with no luck. They'd had their land line cut off. The woman who got the shirt "from us" probably experienced the same feelings and she came to visit us in person. We got to know each other a bit and swore we wouldn't pay the "wise guy" who'd sent us the shirts and explain to him, emphatically, that that was no way to do business. Then your explanation and the exhibition followed. I think the colorful transformation of the housing complex was all for the better – even though some of the color combinations are a bit bold for our taste. Perhaps you'll appreciate to know that our grandson (now eight years old) has been referring to the place where we live for three years already as the "jelly beans" and, thanks to the colors, can get his bearings fine (he lives in a single-family house in Hořovice, in the outskirts of Prague). I think differentiating the buildings by color has helped a lot of people – not just to get their bearings, but it's also improved the esthetic perception of Líšeň's inhabitants and had a positive effect on them psychologically, too. Thanks to you, the circle of the people we know here at in our housing complex has grown by one family.

In closing, we'd like to tell you that saying hello and contacting other people isn't as horrible as it seems at first sight. Cultural center Líšeň also contributes to this with its programs and

events. We like folkloric music and we regularly go to ???? concerts and other concerts at the Worker's music hall, at town hall and at the palace, and we also greet people we don't know and who we're connected with by nothing but our common likes.

We don't know if our letter will help you in any way, but we only wrote about the things that call our attention every day in our housing complex.

We wish you much success in your work,

#### 31 letter

Brno - Líšeň, August 23, 2007

Dear Mrs Šedá.

Please accept a couple of lines on your charming project. Inasmuch as I am (perhaps only assumedly, as will be explained below) a member of a family destined to become one of its 1,000 participants, I think I can write you, all the more so since we received your letter in which you asked participants for a short letter "on the story that began when we found the shirt in our mailbox."

It was in the letter that we first learned of the existence of the shirt and from the enclosed letter, it followed that we were supposed to have found a package containing a shirt in our mailbox sometime in early June. We never actually got it; I do not know how that could have happened. Later we received your invitation to the opening, but because we were unaware of some basic facts, we thought we would take a look at the exhibition some other time before September 30. And then your letter finally arrived, on August 2. I kept meaning to write to you, because the project seemed interesting to me, as I already mentioned, charming, a bit Quixotic and, all in all, quite bold, with its assumption that people are playful and have a sense of humor. (The mentality of a person who lives in a housing development is probably not all that different from that of the ordinary city dweller, at least as far as the capacity and desire to establish neighborly relations. For example, people in the development do not say hello because they do not know each other, which is true of the city generally. New Lišeň is something quite different from Old Líšeň. Dog owners are a special category; they may not know each other's names, but they know each other by the names of their dogs and they sometimes even say hello to each other!) So I wanted to express my approval and solidarity, even though I have only lived in Líšeň since last December and only part time, to boot. Still, I like it here very much and I would not want to leave. That is true of me; my daughter-in-law, Mrs was practically born at and identifies with Líšeň, considering herself a bona fide "Líšeňite" – and she is right.

I waited until after going to your exhibition to write the letter. We did not make it there (with my daughter-in-law, who lives here as well) until today, and it was not until today that we really were supposed to participate in your project as the family (family), with Mr family as our paired shirt holder). We liked the exhibition, including its artistic dimension; most of all, however, it told us a lot more about your project and gave us a window on the circumstances relating to it, as did the catalog, with its many illustrative photo-

Your intention is captured in the characterization of the exhibition on the back cover of the catalog: "... the artist ... brings down the resignation of the residents' mutual isolation." I have to admit that I am particularly interested in how the participants have responded to your project. And I should add that the dog, whose stylized head is also a line of connection, seems to say something about who brings down that resignation and anonymity.

I wish you all the best. Very truly yours,

628 Brno - Líšeň

32 letter (mailing card)

Dear Katka.

Thank you for your letter. I'm all for your work and I think "For Every Dog a Different Master" is a great idea. It breaks through the anonymity of the housing development. I like Líšeň a lot and I'm sure there are loads of wonderful and intelligent people living here. Both happy and unhappy, but that's life.

Kateřinka, I hope your endeavors bring you a lot of success and keep up the good work! With thanks,

35 letter

Brno, September 4, 2007

Dear Kateřina.

Excuse me for addressing you this way and for not answering earlier your letter which explained the gift "shirt" in my mailbox. The reasons for my late response involve certain family responsibilities which prevented me from getting around to a written response and I was also unable to attend the meeting with you at the opening organized in the Pražák Palace on Husová Street on 28/6/2007. So, first I would like to express my thoughts on the "gift." Above all, I was surprised that I received the gift right on my birthday, which was a really big surprise. I thought hard about how or through whom the sender, "MRS "" had found out my date of birth and why she should be sending me any gifts, since we didn't know each other at all. I concluded that it was just a fluke and the gift shirt was nothing but a free ad sample from some fledgling company or private business aiming to draw attention to its products.

It was not until I got the invitation to the opening you organized that I got the first hint, although I did not yet suspect what it was all about, that I understood some of the background to the gift shirt. The whole thing became clear to me with the subsequent letter, to which I am now responding, as you wished. I appreciate your imagination and the idea behind the whole project, in which I take it the shirt with the conspicuous design you made on it was supposed to link the inhabitants of New Líšeň together. In my view, wearing a "uniform" like that, considering my age and taste (please do not be offended), would seem rather extravagant for the general public. That is my strictly personal opinion, but I think I would not alone in expressing this critical view.

Similarly, if your project and efforts aim at forming closer contacts and perhaps bringing the neighbors living in the New Líšeň housing development closer together, I am very skeptical and it seems to me your project – with all due respect to you, is a really big utopia.

It appears to me that the situation is the same as it was before, for as you yourself pointed out, it really is truth in the title "For Every Dog a Different Master" and it will be very difficult to change anything about that state of affairs.

I regret that I have not yet found the time to go to your exhibition in the atrium of the Prague Palace, but I will definitely do so before the end of September.

Once again, excuse me for my late response and my critical and perhaps pessimistic remarks on the intentions behind your project, which evidently merits a more extended and decidedly more profound personal treatment.

With friendly greetings from,

B r n o – Líšeň 628 00