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PHAINOMENA

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND ACTION ART

A SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION TO PHENOMENOLOGY FROM THE CZECHOSLOVAK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The aim of the contribution is to present one of the distinct examples of the development of phenomenological philosophy in Czechoslovakia against the background of dissident activities of intellectuals and artists in the second half of the 20th century. Although the situation in the Czech and the Slovak environments differs, some common tendencies involving phenomenology in the interpretation of artistic production can be seen; specifically, this concerned action art, performances,

and happenings. In the text, I trace two areas of investigation. Firstly, we can find a range of common features between the phenomenological and the artistic practices that emerged in this period, concerning the exploration of the Self as well as issues of historicity. Secondly, the texts of the Czech philosopher and student of Jan Patočka Petr Rezek lead us to a phenomenological interpretation of these artworks. His contributions, dating from 1976 to 1981, can be counted among the very original and still today rare discussions of action art from the phenomenological perspective.

Keywords: Petr Rezek, action art, Czechoslovak environment, phenomenology, exploration of the Self, historization.

Fenomenologija in akcijska umetnost. Poseben prispevek k fenomenologiji iz češkoslovaškega okolja

Povzetek

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Namen prispevka je predstavitev enega izmed odlikovanih primerov razvoja fenomenološke filozofije na Češkoslovaškem na ozadju disidentskih dejavnosti intelektualcev in umetnikov v drugi polovici 20. stoletja. Čeprav se situacija znotraj češkega in znotraj slovaškega okolja razlikuje, je mogoče razločiti nekaj skupnih tendenc, ki se tičejo fenomenologije pri interpretaciji umetniške produkcije, zlasti akcijske umetnosti, performansov in happeningov. V besedilu načrtam dve področji preučevanja. Prvič, najdemo lahko vrsto skupnih potez med fenomenološko in umetniškimi praksami, kakršne so se pojavile v tem obdobju in so zadevale raziskovanje Sebstva in probleme zgodovinskosti. Drugič, besedila Petra Rezeka, češkega filozofa in učenca Jana Patočke, nas pripeljejo do fenomenološke interpretacije takšnih umetniških del. Njegove prispevke, napisane med letoma 1976 in 1981, je mogoče prišteti k zelo izvirnim in še doslej redkim obravnavam akcijske umetnosti s fenomenološkega vidika.

Ključne besede: Petr Rezek, akcijska umetnost, češkoslovaško okolje, fenomenologija, raziskovanje Sebstva, historizacija.

“It is the author’s wish that these texts evoke in everyone such questions that correspond to their current situation, thus resonance, not resignation.”

Petr Rezek: *Tělo, věc a skutečnost*

I. Introduction

The intertwining of phenomenology and art, the phenomenological analysis of artworks, creativity, and expressivity has, since its beginning, undergone intense developments and taken on distinctive forms, as the works by phenomenologists of all generations indicate (Sepp and Embree 2010). In the present text, I want to focus on a specific segment of this discourse, which is the contribution that emerged under the complicated circumstances of the development of phenomenology and free artistic activity in the former Czechoslovakia during the communist regime. Specifically, I will address action art as well as the situation of its emergence that placed both phenomenologists and artists from this period together in the unofficial sphere and in the search for alternative activities. I will thus trace the question: to what extent were these artists’ achievements close to phenomenology and how can this art be interpreted phenomenologically?

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In the first part of the text, I focus on the shared historical context of phenomenology and artistic creation, and on their intersections in this period within this milieu. The affinity and synergy of phenomenology and art that developed in the Czechoslovak space is represented by distinct achievements. In addition to the comprehensive contributions to phenomenology and art made by Jan Patočka in several volumes of his collected writings and their contemporary interpretations,¹ there are, for example, works focused on the synergy of phenomenology and structuralism, as in the case of Zdeněk Mathauser and Fedor Matejov in the field of literary science, or the work of Marie Bayerová and Tomáš Vlček in the case of the phenomenological interpretation of cubism.² In this discourse, a particular position is occupied by original analyses focused on the phenomenological interpretation of the art

1 Cf. works of I. Blecha, M. Šefčík, D. Blahutková, J. Josl, and others.

2 I have dealt with these themes in: Vydrová 2016 and 2024.

of the 1960s and 1970s, such as pop-art, land-art, body-art, and happenings, written by Petr Rezek (1948–2022), one of the most prominent figures of the Czech dissident milieu. The second part of the text focuses on the phenomenological possibilities of interpreting action art as elaborated in the collection of his texts from the years 1976–1981.

The aim of the text is to follow selected examples of artistic work and phenomenological topics and analyses in Czechoslovakia of this period, which offer both historical material as well as their own philosophical treatments. The paper does not aspire neither to provide an “art-theoretical” or “art-historical” analysis of action art nor a comparative analysis of the specificity of the development of phenomenology in the Central and Eastern European context. On the other hand, we can see that there have been individual achievements and intersections whose circumstances of origin, motivations, and forms make an original contribution to the development of phenomenology in this space.³ These initiatives were linked together not only by a common historical context, but also, as I will try to show, by some fundamental overlaps and starting points.

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II. Remarks on the historical background

When the exhibition *Jan Patočka – Philosoph und Staatsfeind* (*Jan Patočka—Philosopher and Public Enemy*)⁴ was held at the Czech Centre in Vienna in late 2022 and early 2023, its conception was based primarily on the last period of Patočka’s life, connected with “Charter 77” and the tragic events that led to his death on March 13, 1977. In addition to Patočka’s texts devoted to the care of

3 Research into the specific development of phenomenology in Central and Eastern Europe has been progressing in recent years, gaining new insights and methodological results. They point to the specificity of the phenomena of Central and Eastern European intellectual history, one which should not be seen only in relation to the Western European tradition, but one which to some extent lost the possibility of direct contact with it and free space of development with institutional support due to historical circumstances, at the same time creating distinctive local narratives (Ivančík 2023, 3–4; Kundera 2023, 29 f.). On thematic, methodological, historical, and political backgrounds see: Płotka and Eldridge 2020; Varga 2023, Gubser 2014; Tucker 1996; D. Želinský 2020, and others.

4 Tschechisches Zentrum Wien, 15. 9. 2022–2. 12. 2022. The exhibition was curated by Lenka Kerdová and co-organised by Ludger Hagedorn and Jan Frei.

the soul and the idea of Europe, examples of art from the 1970s, such as works by Václav Havel, Jan Mlčoch, Milan Knížák, Věra Nováková, Jindřich Přibík, and Petr Štembera, were exhibited. The beginning and the end of the exhibition were accompanied by performances of the contemporary artists Tomáš Vtípil and David Helán. Although Patočka was not involved in this kind of art, did not focus on it theoretically, or extensively followed such artistic production at that time,⁵ this connection presented at the exhibition did not seem accidental, but, conversely, was significant in several ways.

Philosophy was very close to the artists' work during this time, and so we see similar tendencies here. This period is divided into two stages, the "Golden Sixties" (1961–1968) and the normalization and rebuilding period (1969–1989),⁶ and was marked at first by a burst of creativity, but then by its limitation, causing a gradual or sudden transfer of actors from the official to the grey or unofficial sphere. Here, people from different fields, ideological platforms, and genres came together, and different kinds of contrasts and synergies emerged, creating a strange plurality that was intrinsically productive. There were environmentalists, writers, poets, philosophers, and painters who were linked by where they found themselves. These forms of thought and creation were in sharp contrast to official production, which was subject to institutional censorship, prescribed writing (in the case of philosophy) and production (in the case of art), according to the expected uniform criteria of both ideas and forms, which thus required a self-censorship of the author. In contrast, there

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5 A reference to this topic can be found in Josl's article (2024, 58, 65) who mentions Patočka's reflection on the exhibition of American painters against the background of Josl's phenomenological analysis of pop-art. He refers also to a reading of P. Rezek, whom I will follow in the second part of my text. Pop-art as well as action art points to specific or exemplary appearance of the things, showing and addressing everydayness, not only as its critique, but revealing structurally much more (Rezek 2010, 20).

6 The used periodization divides the period 1945–1989 into the following phases: the three final years of the democratic Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1948), the building of the bases of the communist regime (1948–1953), the softening and the new firming up (1953–1960), and the two phases mentioned above in the text. Cf. Passia, Barborík, *et al.* 2023, 113. Conceptually, there is a distinction between alternative creation for works before 1972 and unofficial creation, when after this year artists could no longer create freely, but found themselves in the forbidden zone (cf. Bartošová 2011, 321–322).

were examples of diversity and creativity in the unofficial sphere with the so-called “suitcase” exhibitions and happenings as well as *samizdat* writings. As an example among many initiatives, we can mention the magazine *Kontakt*, whose summer supplement *Contact to Water* in 1981 published Erazim Kohák’s text “On Life in Truth,” Robert David’s experimental poetry, and an anonymous excerpt from the prose of the later well-known Slovak writer Pavel Vilikovsky’s *Forever is Green*. Issue 4 published Patočka’s text “The Spiritual Man and the Intellectual.”⁷

46 It must also be mentioned that the situation in the Slovak and the Czech environments was different. While in the Czech environment there were distinct philosophical initiatives—Jan Patočka was a student of Edmund Husserl and developed his own phenomenological philosophy, which may have been followed by other scholars—, in the Slovak environment art theory, artistic production, and later ecological themes prevailed, and some initiatives were also based on religion. Phenomenology in the 1970s and 1980s in our countries developed either in the unofficial sphere, in seminars in the flats of philosophers, in texts that were kept hidden, or in other areas, which were not, so to speak, exposed to the public eye. For example, it penetrated literary science and appeared in implicit forms in the works of artists (painters, sculptors, writers). There also existed a mobility between the Czech and the Slovak environments, which contributed not only to the exchange of ideas, but also to the formation of the local environments themselves.⁸ However, the exchange of ideas was often done through personal contacts rather than

7 Cf. Pastierová 2022, 35–36, 42.

8 For our topic it is interesting, for example, that the sculptor Marie Bartuszová, who lived in eastern Slovakia, repeatedly visited Prague and, among other things, attended Petr Rezek’s lectures on phenomenological aesthetics. Her works can be interpreted phenomenologically, because they share with phenomenology explorations of bodily experiencing, especially connected to touch or breathing. Heidegger was read at flat seminars of forbidden Slovak intellectuals and artists (Kralovič 2017, 53). In the Slovak context, it is also relevant to mention O. Čepan and I. Mojžišová, who deepened the possibilities of the phenomenology of perception and corporeality in the analysis of artworks; there were attempts to bridge phenomenology and structuralism; phenomenology appears within literary studies in the works of Z. Mathauser, F. Matejov, P. Zajac, and others supported by mutual exchanges between Czech and Slovak milieu.

by any theoretically elaborated affinities. Thus, we can find here specific marginal or local phenomena, distinct philosophical practices and positions of intellectuals.⁹ Among these initiatives action art had a special position.

III. Possibilities of rapprochement

Action art¹⁰ is oriented to the process, its flow, the physical act. It is directed towards pure action, its distinction, release, and performance. It breaks out of the expected, presupposed forms of art and thinking, it thus is not restricted to anything, and creates its own field of expressivity, brings its own examination of the action. However, it has to be connected with some specific performance of action, in order to distinguish this action as art. The affective situation, in which the actors find themselves, participates in this action. Here, we could speak of the presence of contents and forms (of a very diverse nature) that, in interplay with the living presence of the actor, transform affective relief and result in action.¹¹

Some rapprochements between phenomenology and this kind of art at their core can be preliminarily observed, which means the living presence of subjectivity as a starting point, to see/make an action itself, artwork in its original being. Similarly, the artist encourages an original and new contact with the artwork by making the action. Both for phenomenology as well as action art during the communist regime there was a kind of commitment to action itself as expression of free thought and agency. This is apparent in Rezek's approach, too, who does not draw on chosen phenomenological aesthetic texts to interpret this art, but is concerned, in accordance with the

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9 Cf. Želinský 2020.

10 The art of action and performance was initiated by A. Kaprow's work. This is often connected with related art forms—such as body-art, land-art, conceptual art, etc.—, photography, music, plays, and takes on very different forms. It was developed especially around the 1960s, but had built on earlier performance initiatives as well.

11 By the examination of the action we can refer to the insight into the course of the act, the concrescence, the motivational circumstances as analyzed by Husserl, for example, in his texts on active and passive syntheses: “the affective relief can arch out more prominently or become more flattened depending upon the alterations of the living present”; “within every present there are relative differences of vivacity, differences of more or less affectively efficacious data” (Husserl 2001, 216, 217, etc.).

phenomenological attitude, with the experience and action itself, with what is really at stake in making them happen. However, this is still an overall statement that needs to be examined in greater detail.

Let us look again at some motives in the background, from which this affinity might grow in a specific way here. Marginalization, to which they were subject, affected the form of production and influenced distinctive ways of thematization. We can find here two areas of rapprochement: these are reflection on the creative Self and its relation to historical situatedness. The first of these was a question of subjectivity and problematization of authorship addressed on a scale, reaching from erasure, anonymization, writing “for the drawer” (i.e., to be hidden), and the ephemerality of creation to autobiography and self-thematization, to an archaeology of the Self. The first-person perspective was present here as in-depth studies of subjectivity and its experience were manifested in all its breadth and complexity, for example, in “the unconscious and conscious processes of perceiving, imagining, dreaming, hallucinating, reflecting and acting in [...] shifts and transformations, but also in the radical fractures of life, in all its contradictions, heterogeneity, disparity, discontinuity [...]” (Zajac 2020, 196).¹² On this basis, e.g., the literary scientist Peter Zajac developed his thinking about a distinctive poetics of creation, which culminated in his book *From Aesthetics to the Poetics of Trembling*. The distinct topic represents issues of perception, body, movement, gestures, and their observations in achievements. Implicitly as well as intentionally, there is a space for phenomenological analyses, as artists often invited theorists to interpret their actions. This has given rise to various typologies and distinctions, such as total action, open action, action with a shift in meaning, action and pseudo-action, individual and collective action, etc.¹³

In the second case, it was a specific self-historicization (here, we can refer to the Slovenian curator and art historian Zdenka Badovinac, who dealt specifically with the relationship between historicity, preservation, and the self-thematization of the artist in marginalized spaces).¹⁴ A distinct materiality

12 Cf. Grůň 2011, 79.

13 Cf. Rusinová 2001, 10 f.

14 Cf. Grůň 2011, 69.

emerges as expressivity and performativity are accompanied by an awareness of one's own historicization: the tension between big and small histories (Milan Šimečka), reflexions of meaning in history, and the symptomatic emergence of the themes of the philosophy of history (Elena Várossová, Jan Patočka).¹⁵ These tendencies appeared in various forms much earlier, as well. It can be said that work with subjective temporality and historicity is intrinsically linked to avant-garde and neo-avant-garde initiatives, which appear here not only as historical examples, but have a wider significance for the actualization of/in creation as the re-framing of programmatic goals, the need for constant renewal in creation, deconstruction, and construction.¹⁶

How can we interpret these findings in connection with phenomenology further? From the above-mentioned perspective, the exhibition on Patočka can be seen through the lens of this intrinsic interplay of divergent milieus, linked by performativity and the interconnectedness of phenomenology and art, which shared interest in the creative possibilities of the Self, its analyses, and experience. That also became a subject of interest from a phenomenological point of view in Petr Rezek's studies, as we will see in the next part of this paper. The theoretical background for his contribution and overview in art is wide—from psychology and philosophy to art. He also dealt with various artworks, genres, and initiatives in art of the 1960s and 1970s: land-art, body-art, happenings, pop-art, photography, document, kitsch, and especially

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15 One concrete example is the text “The Machine of Time,” where the writer and translator Marta Frišová-Šimečková returns to Asimov’s “The Last Trump” and problematizes the passage of time in relation to thought, happiness, and pain: “We are powerless against the passage of time and perhaps that is why it is the most real reality for us.” (1988, 41.)

16 We can point to artistic as well as theoretical connections. On the one hand, the exhibition in Bratislava City Gallery in 2024–2025 entitled “Haptic Echo. Nature, Body, Politics and Art in Former Yugoslavia” presented a shared transregional phenomenon: “Parallels and mutual exchanges are presented in thematic cross-sections beginning with localities, enabling us to confront specific elements: for example, Belgrade /SRB/, Bratislava /SK/, Brno /CZ/, Liptovský Mikuláš /SK/, Košice /SK/, Kranj /SI/, Lyublyana /SI/, Novi Sad /SRB/, Olomouc /CZ/, Prague /CZ/, Subotica /SRB/, Šempas /SI/, Zagreb /HR/, among others.” (Grúň 2024, 12). On the other hand, a deep theoretical analysis of modernity and the avant-garde in philosophy and science, anchored in the first half of the 20th century in Czechoslovakia, is elaborated, e.g., in: Bakoš 2006.

sculpture.¹⁷ He was led by different motivations, but concentrated on the artwork itself and wanted to learn to see what is at everybody's disposal.¹⁸ Thus, the essential question arises: What do these kinds of art, of artistic performance, really convey?

IV. Phenomenological interpretation by Petr Rezek

In the texts of Petr Rezek, we find thematically and methodologically insightful and innovative contributions to this topic. He had already started writing about action art in 1976, although it can be said that phenomenological texts on this subject have still not been extensively elaborated within the phenomenological discourse.

50 Rezek draws on short reports regarding performances, conversations with the actors, or his own participation in happenings, to which he was invited. The first thing that can be observed is that the performances make a strange, disturbing impression when one is present at them; when one reads the accounts of the performances, too—they are only a strict record of the event, verbally modest and contain nothing more; the action only happens, but its “why” is not justified or it simply does not arise from the context of everyday life.¹⁹ They thus act as a strange redirection of expectations in the flow of ordinary experience. It should be pointed out that what is at stake here is not a definition of this art as such, but the interpretation or, better, the manifestation that the events themselves call for, thus their primary description—the first phenomenological step can be captured here. Unlike the art theorist, who starts from the fact of the work, which he or she analyses and defines, the phenomenologist, according to Rezek, should uncover or open up and not presuppose, not bring anything to the analysis, but start from the experience

17 Among other contributions, in his book *On the Theory of Plasticity*, Rezek discusses Patočka's text about Read's book on sculpture and develops a deep analysis of touch, material, and an echo of the world presented in the work of artist: “The becoming of the statue is an image of the becoming of the world.” (Rezek 2011, 64.) This text was written in 1992 and published in: Rezek 2011, 55–64.

18 In the motto to his book, he refers to Gadamer.

19 Rezek confesses: “It took me two whole years to understand this strange kind of narration.” (2010, 119; cf. 124.)

of the work, which is both irreducible and unique. This primary analysis may repeat itself, but it can look different each time. However, unlike Walter Biemel, with whom Rezek otherwise shares the distinction between primary and secondary descriptions of the work of art (2010, 14), in pop-art, for example, Rezek does not base his analysis of the natural world on the critique of it (“averageness,” repetition, stereotyping), but rather on experiencing—specifically, the experience of fascination with the natural world as a special opening up of presence, of the thing announcing itself in its various kinds of presenting and showing. Thus, instead of criticism (of consumerism, for example), this kind of art lets the thing appear in its “how.” In Oldenburg, it is the monstrosity as the presence of the object. “We are fascinated by the strange presence of things.” In Lichtenstein, for example, Rezek sees the revealing of the essence of the whole, aptly described as *the uncovering concealment and the concealing uncovering*, as selected and enlarged parts of the comic shows (2010, 23). Rezek also writes:

We find that the fascination that dominates in pop-art demands that the natural world should be conceived in a deeper way than as a mere set of references [...] From the insight of the anchoring of the human natural world in something even deeper, then, follows the turn in art to the elements (e.g., in land-art), to that which gives all things. (2010, 32.)

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Action art and performances were distinctly developed genres in the Czechoslovak environment. Let us mention a few examples from the Slovak environment to complement examples of artists mentioned by Patočka’s exhibition in Vienna,²⁰ such as the events *Bratislava Championship in the Shifting of the Artefact* (1979–1986), that focused on the reinterpretation of the artefact by actively entering into the experience of communication with prominent artists. In the words of Vladimír Kordoš, the initiator of these events, the idea was to pay respect, but at the same time not to take oneself too seriously; great art does not have to be a closed affair, but can find itself in a living communication between artist and artist. Other distinct performances included the *The School of Athens* (which took place in 1981 in the lobby

²⁰ For Czech action art cf. Morganová 2014a and 2014b.

of the art school in Bratislava, and in which Kordoš's colleagues and pupils arranged in such a way so as to correspond to figures in Raphael's fresco; he let them identify with the School of Athens, saying nothing more and leaving the "piece" to spontaneously disintegrate) and *Hommage a Messerschmidt* (1989; three interpretations assisted by a hairdresser, ammonia, mimics, and sneezing powder). Playful elements of this works help to manifest experience in its evolution—manifestation of the exposed gestures in their ambivalence, the joy of creating a scene, the re-creation of the situation of the artwork.²¹ Phenomenological description can thus take place repeatedly in contact with a work of art; the experience is unique in its course.

52 However, participation in artwork, presented experiencing is not simple here. In a 1979 text "Naked Presence (Prolegomena to Performance)," Rezek (2010, 145–154) points out that what is at stake is a specific presence, the bare presence of the situation, which, in the case of performance, shows itself, but apart from that nothing else, and does not allow the other to enter into its flow, to actively participate in the situation. The bare presence of a body, a gesture, an action, a movement, or a thing point to the rupture of ordinary life mediated by art through showing that it is a thing and nothing else, a thing in its appearance, and only in its appearance. The performer or artist is the performer of this rupture, which, according to Rezek, bisects reality into the ordinary and the exceptional. Here, as in his other texts, Rezek also draws attention to the riskiness of this art, which may become merely an ordinary movement, without becoming or achieving art. According to him: "The presence we call bare/naked cannot be found simply and at once." (2010, 151.)

Performance brings a very strong experience, such as that of precariousness, of the intensity of a presence that usually passes us by—but performativity can return us to the present as a non-trivial expressive experience of the moment, of the Self, of the event. The intervention in time that it causes makes it a historical event. In this way, it presents historicity, the passing, the being in time—both the experience of temporality of the subject as well as of historicity

21 We can point to some other significant pieces: Caravaggio/Kordoš: *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* and *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, as well as Rembrandt/Kordoš: *Return of the Prodigal Son*.

itself. Rezek points out that here, performance acts in the same way as a mask or a festivity, where the mask conveys an intense gaze without the possibility of reciprocation, or is a mediator of another world in its otherness, which we cannot grasp in our imagination; at the same time, though, we are, in a special way, “there” in the performance. Festivity points to the possibility of its re-living—it is present only in it (Rezek 2010, 124). This statement has perhaps a more universal validity, concerning art as realization, action as creativity.

We can mention one more example referred to in Rezek’s text: he (2010, 117 ff.) interprets the performance through Medard Boss’s interpretation of dreams²²—this idea was initiated by the artists Jan Mlčoch and Petr Štembera, who asked Rezek for help to understand and to interpret a dream, which was in fact a real-life action called *Hanging—The Big Sleep*.²³ The use of Medard Boss turns out to be appropriate here, because Boss rejects symbolic interpretations. In Rezek’s words:

One thing does not represent another, but from *what* and *how* it appears it is possible to see what the dreamer is open to, what possibilities his world is constituted by. [...] First, then, it is necessary to know what makes the thing that the dreamer encounters... that thing... to find substantive essential references. (2010, 119.)

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In the case of this action, Rezek interprets the essential characteristics of the loft, in which the artist’s performance took place as follows: the loft is the place that the house encloses, covers, and at the same time connects it to the sky—connects the inside and the outside; the loft is not inhabited, but rather is a shelter for play, a hiding place for lovers, for those who want to find a retreat. By being in the action of hanging in the air, without contact with the floor, it is a kind of being out of place, a particular here that is actually nowhere and represents the opening up of the world as a whole. The performance ends with the announcement of pain in the hands and thus returns to bodily situatedness.

22 Petr Rezek is also an author of distinct works in the field of phenomenological psychology. Besides his *Phenomenological Psychology* (texts from 1971–1977 published in one volume in 2008), his translation of Erwin Straus’s *Psychiatry and Philosophy* from 1973 (2023) has also been published.

23 Cf. Morganová 2014a, 129–131.

Here, Rezek's interpretation stops, because to continue, as he states, would already be an intervention into intimate realms. Rezek learned that it was a real action only after his interpretation. The brief record of the performer, which makes understanding difficult, sometimes even impossible, was thus complemented by a phenomenological explanation.

54 Rezek's interpretations are often critical, pointing out that art does not have to take place, that averageness remains averageness, or that the specificity of the situation does not reveal any essential phenomena. However, considering these examples, we could say that action art here has relevance for phenomenology: as the material for phenomenological interpretation and as a certain fundamental insight into the reality and the course of experience. As with the phenomenological procedure of uncovering layers of experience, action art opens up reality in its unfolding by shifting from the factual, by suspending everyday occurrences, and at the same time opening up that reality in its structure and in its presence for the experiencing. And it is an experience of a special kind, a modified, significantly purified one, open to things in their bare appearance. In other words, in a phenomenological way, it means to be without supplements, derivations, and secondary meanings, but in the manner, for example, of pure movement. Although this is an experience of the impossibility of participating in a work or action, which is either too strong and forceful or too minimal in terms of agency, of an intense presence/absence, it does not go against the principles of phenomenology. On the contrary, it points precisely to the unfolding of the action, on the one hand, and to a position similar to Husserl's uninterested observer, to shifting the natural and phenomenological attitudes, on the other. Action art redirects the focus of time and space, and thus turns out to be an effort to return to things, to the events themselves, similar to the way that a phenomenologist always looks anew into the structure of experience, reflecting on the stream of consciousness and intentional curvature. What happens in actions, then, does not represent or mediate some other, secondary meanings or notions, but simply shows.

V. Conclusion

For Husserl, as he states in *Ideas I*, the realms of fantasy, variations of imagination provide a fertile ground for phenomenology, which is sufficiently free from transcendent obscurities and layers of meaning, dealing with various states of reality and reference. There are several possible starting points through analysis of the intertwining of phenomenology and art.²⁴ That which is close to Rezek, is present also in H. R. Sepp and his analyses of what is going on in cubist paintings, which likewise deconstruct representations and “modify” how we think about objects and appearances. As he states, both the phenomenologist and the artist face the same problem: “How do things (in their being-perceived) appear in the medium of an image?” (Sepp 1995, 303.) In this context, Rezek can follow up with action art, because it offers “the shift from the imaginative reality of the classical image to the real reality” (2010, 70).

However, action art is very complex, manifold, and risky, and places great demands not only on its author, but also as on its audience, requiring them to free themselves from expectations, which are, however, often influenced by presuppositions. To be prepared to perceive such art means to change one’s attitude. It also places great demands on the artist who may be able to create an artwork, but may also not be so successful and may produce only an ordinary action or replace pure action with other meanings and representations, even achieve simply nothing. According to Rezek, for example, pop-art was not successful in the Czech milieu.²⁵ But it turns out that both action art as well as phenomenology, which emerged historically together and appeared in the same milieu, also share thematically and programmatically to some extent the same questions. Both initiatives were intended to be an active return to things, the Self, to movements, and to events.

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24 Cf. Embree 2010.

25 Cf. the particular part of his text “Excursion about Pub, or Pop-Art in Bohemia” (2010, 30 f.).

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Phainomena 33 | 130-131 | November 2024

Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev
| Petar Bojanić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024

Marcations | Zaznačbe

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan
| Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić



Phainomena 32 | 126-127 | November 2023

Demarcations | Razmejitve

Damir Barbarić | Dragan Prole | Artur R. Boelderl | Johannes Vorlauffer | Cathrin Nielsen | Virgilio Cesarone | Mario Kopić | Petr Prášek | Žarko Paić | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Emanuele Severino | Jonel Kolić | Jordan Huston

