

## OHO – FROM REISM TO CONCEPTUAL ART

In 1964, while writing an essay on Sartre's novel *La Nausée*, the critic and philosopher Dušan Pirjevec, together with Sartre's hero Roquentin, suddenly noted things. He was astonished and shocked to discover that a thing (e.g., a stone I hold in my hand) is not a kind of projection of our ideas and notions, but that it has its own, independent existence which remains secret to us. At about the same time, Tomaž Šalamun in his cycle of poems *Stvari* (Things) expressed a similar astonishment over things: "Things are inscrutable in their craftiness / unattainable to the rage of the living / invulnerable in their endless flight / you can't catch up with them / you can't seize them / motionless in their gaze." (Translated by Michael Biggins.) In his essay, Pirjevec still used the Marxist concept of alienation to explain the experience of things as independent beings, but he described the experience itself with an emotional intensity that surpasses this explanation and indicates the further development of his thought toward the Heideggerian concept of "Sein-lassen" ("letting-be"). This important essay is therefore dramatic evidence of the end of the humanistic world, the world of Man, and of the new meaning and importance of things. It indicates the world which could be called "post-humanistic"; and this world (including phenomena such as the philosophy of existence, structuralism, post-structuralism and semiotics, the peculiar type of description of the "Nouveau Roman", etc.) was the context of OHO. The basic concept of the first period OHO (the one usually referred to as the "reistic" period) is therefore that of "the thing". The notion "reism" (from Latin "res", "thing") was coined by the critic and philosopher Taras Kermauner; he first used it in an essay on Tomaž Šalamun's poetry. Reism later became one of the basic concepts in Kermauner's interpretations of contemporary Slovene poetry; for him, it denotes the leading role of the world of things, and sometimes also the process of "reification". However, the more precise meaning of Kermauner's notion differs according to the role which the things play in the works of different poets. The members of OHO – above all the leading "ideologists" of the OHO reism, Iztok Geister and Marko Pogačnik – accepted the notion of "reism" as the name of a complex, theoretically based system which does not only define a specific aesthetics and approach in art, but also affects even the smallest details of everyday life. (It is

worth mentioning that Geister and Pogačnik, while laying the theoretical basis of reism, used writers like Wittgenstein or Husserl, but transferred their ideas into a quite different context. Husserl's demand "To the things themselves!" is of course as decisive for the reists as it is for Husserl himself; still, the "thing itself" in the context of reism means something completely different from what it means in the context of phenomenology.)

One may notice that Pirjevec's experience of the thing was very dramatic; for him, the experiences of the thing's independence and of human finality and mortality are inseparably connected. The OHO members, on the other hand, approached the thing much more calmly. For them, such an experience does not lead into an existential crisis, but discloses an endless range of possibilities offered by the liberated thing. The poetical pathos (to a certain extent also present in Šalamun's first book of poetry, entitled *Poker*, from which the above quoted verses are taken) is therefore replaced by an attentive looking into the world, by fondness for surprising details and by love for a peculiar "reistic" paradox. The basic attitude towards the world is a looking-at, a vision, which is extremely attentive and is not internally hierarchic. The reists thus wish to reach a kind of mirror consciousness which reflects the things or, more precisely, their appearance and factuality regardless of the hierarchical and functional relations and meaning projected by man into the world of things. However, this does not mean that the reistic consciousness is inwardly undifferentiated; quite the opposite, noting the differences is essential for the reistic attitude. But these are differences in the appearances of things, differences in forms, colours, scents, tactile qualities, etc. These are the very differences which define the thing as it is. (This attitude was most clearly expressed in the reistic "series". The OHO members were collecting things of the same kind, e.g. knives; in such a series it was possible to perceive, beside the generic characteristic of a single object, also its individual features, its specific difference.) Briefly, for such a consciousness there is no difference between a man and an empty bottle, except the difference in their appearance. The reistic man is therefore determined as a viewer; this position, however, is no longer a privileged one, as it was in the humanistic world. As there is no hierarchic difference between man and other things, man looks at the things, but also the things look at him. The subject – object relation has lost its hierarchic meaning, as it is general and mutual. All different reistic activities may thus be understood as a path leading to such a reistic consciousness.

Also the avant-guardistic impulse of OHO acquired a particular meaning in the context of reism. Undoubtedly, this impulse was already present in the very beginnings of the future OHO movement, i.e. in the issue of the school bulletin *Plamenica* (The Torch) written and edited by Marjan Ciglič, Iztok Geister and Marko Pogačnik, then pupils at the Kranj High School. The provocativeness of *Plamenica* and the demand for a "merciless destroying of fusty peace" in the manifest-like editorial written by Pogačnik should most probably be understood as a wish to break through the established conventions in order to make possible a living experience of the arts. It is, indeed, only such a break-through that enables

an immediate, genuine response, unaffected by crude scholastic schemes. In the context of reism, provocation (i.e. a radical non-conformity with the “horizon of expectations”) has a similar role; it serves as a way to point out the differences and the reality usually hidden under conceptual and functional conventions. It is here that reism agrees with the so-called “hooliganism”. In the mid-sixties, the term “hooligans” was commonly used to denote young people who wore long hair and unusual clothes, listened to rock music and behaved unconventionally. Naturally, the “hooligan” movement involved a strong existentialist element of dissatisfaction with the developing consumer society and of protest against it. Reism, on the other hand, aimed towards an open and attentive approach to the world and not a social or even political protest. A reist, therefore, understood the unconventional clothes of the “hooligans” primarily as a way of turning attention towards the fact that not only individual “caps” exist, but also “different caps” (i.e., they wished to stress the individual features that would normally disappear in the generic notion); and he interpreted the “hooligan’s” existentialist protest as a sign of dissatisfaction with the world in which man’s interests claimed things and superimposed a will upon them. Reism therefore – unlike most of the avant-garde movements – did not begin with a project of changing the world, it just wanted to transform the consciousness into the permanently open and attentive reistic vision. For example, reists had no intention to destroy museums, they just wanted to change the museum’s context so that it would break the established conventions and throw light onto things as they are (and this is the case not only with the museum but with any institution).

And if we understand Marx’s eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach as the basic principle of all avant-garde projects, we will have to recognize that the aims of reism are the opposite: the point is not in changing the world, it is only necessary to see it. This also explains the radical un-politicity of OHO.

Such a new attentiveness has of course far-reaching consequences, which also have a direct effect on everyday life. A reist tries constantly to make himself and others aware of the things and the differences between them. At home, he collects series of everyday objects, he sometimes even cooks following a serial pattern. The interior decoration of his living space differs to a great extent from a conventional one; and the contradiction between the intended function of the things in his room and the way he uses them (e.g., he might use a traffic sign as a table, etc.) stresses things themselves (while they could become “invisible” if they just served their normal function). With all his life and actions, a reist becomes a “total work of art”, a “Gesamtkunstwerk”. The aim of reism is to establish the identity between art and life, however not as a realization of a utopian project represented by art, but as the diffusion of the attention and contemplation – which is possible inside the field of art – to life as a whole. We might say that reism is a kind of missionary work, i.e., an attempt to persuade people to look at the world around them in a different, more immediate and vital way. The wish of this art to be “popular” is certainly connected to these intentions. Reistic “items” (“artikli”) do not spread around themselves an aura of precious, unique

objects, attainable only to an elite. They always behave as things among things; the genuine space of reism is clearly among things, especially among the objects of industrial and consumer society as things par excellence. Anyone can afford them. Pogačnik used to sell his plaster casts on the market in Kranj, one could buy OHO editions in bookshops and on a stand under the arcades of the “Kazina” in Ljubljana, Matanović wanted to persuade some gramophone record shops to sell his visual gramophone records. They used cheap materials and very often mass production techniques (printing, impressing, casting), the bases for their “items” are often very usual everyday objects; they also used mass-culture forms such as comic strips. This is very precisely expressed by the very notion “artikel” (“item”) which, during the first period of OHO, replaced the notion “work of art”. The word of course refers to mass production and consumption (i.e. to the world which is the genuine context of OHO activities), but it also includes the stem-word “art” referring to the artist’s as well as the artisan’s way of work. An “item” therefore connects the world of everyday consumerism with the world of art; with it, art enters into everyday life, and everyday life enters into art. Pogačnik often named his products “pop artikli”. The prefix of course refers directly to Pop Art and the so-called “pop culture” in general. Pop Art (as far as the OHO members knew it in the mid-sixties) was indeed one of the motivating forces behind the OHO activities (e.g. Pogačnik’s plaster casts are also partly connected to Segal’s plaster sculptures), but the OHO members understood it literally as “popular” art, i.e. art belonging directly to everyday life, as a possibility to make true the “popular thinking of the world”. Since the reistic ethics understands the humanistic approach to the world as claiming and denying things, a reist work has to minimalise or, if possible, exclude any expressive dimension. A work (“item”) is an independent thing, not a vehicle of the artist’s thoughts and emotions. (However, this does not necessarily mean that it excludes any mimetic aspect; this is perhaps best seen in the characteristic reistic drawing. Such a drawing always consists only of line, or shape, and may even be done in a single stroke; it is therefore explicitly a mere “line on paper”, but this line, in its course, follows the form of another thing, usually a small everyday object. Reistic drawing has thus a double function: it points out not just the appearance of the “depicted” thing, but also its own independent presence. Using a reistic paradox one might say it is like a light bulb illuminating not only other things, but also itself.) Methods of printing, impressing, casting etc. (e.g. Pogačnik’s plaster boards and objects, Aleš Kermavner’s prints of gutters, Matanović’s imprints of different objects on cards, etc.) are very appropriate to ensure the un-expressiveness and “impersonality” of reistic works, as they exclude the expressive “touch” of the artist’s hand (which is an arranging and therefore violent intruder into the world of things). If a hand, in spite everything, appears, it is only an imprint like all the others, a thing among other things. Similarly, subjective arbitrariness in arranging and constructing a work has to be excluded. Therefore, the rational programming of works gains great importance: it is now an abstract logical or mathematical matrix (sequence, permutation etc.) which defines the structure of a work and not a subjective expressive will. Programmed work (appearing as a text, visual poem,

film, installation or a mere concept) was one of the basic ideas for OHO and it reached its most radical (to a certain extent already manneristic) form in a special issue of the magazine *Problemi* (“Issues”) called PU. (Nevertheless, we have to mention the opposite pole of the rational programming, the principle of play and game; the element of “ludism” – a concept, also introduced by Taras Kermauner – plays an important role in the OHO activities. One might say that even a strictly programmed work includes the element of game, as the rational programme can be taken as a set of rules for a game. After the projects of changing the world proved themselves to be violence against the world and were given up, game and play remain a possible way of existing. But a play with things is not an anthropocentric play of an exceptional subject with objects at his disposal; in reism, the relations of game and play, just as the relation of looking at, are mutual.)

OHO, in its first period, was not a “group” but (as called by Bora Ćosić) a “movement”. Its membership was not very strictly limited, and it accepted different initiatives. Members and friends of OHO were writers and poets, visual artists, film makers, critics and theorists; its character was, therefore, one of “multi-media” or “inter-media”. (A lot of OHO works in fact represent a “medial form” between different arts or genres.) The range of OHO activities was thus very wide; it included poetry, visual and concrete poetry, “OHO Editions”, visual works (“items”), films, happenings, etc. The OHO visual artists of that time were Marko Pogačnik, Milenko Matanović and Andraž Šalamun (a little later, David Nez joined them). While Matanović and Šalamun still worked with objects and paintings, following the traditions of Hard Edge, coloured sculpture etc., Pogačnik developed an intense and radical reistic production; it includes drawings, “pop items” (plaster boards with casts of different objects, later also three-dimensional casts of objects, e.g. small plastic bottles), perhaps the first installation in Slovene art (environment with a sculpture and mirror, installed in an exhibition in Kranj in 1965) and the “exhibition of himself” (in the same year he intended to participate in a group show, but his works were removed before the opening; as an act of protest he displayed himself – his own body – and thus anticipated the later OHO body art). Pogačnik and Geister together produced witty comic strips and books in which texts, drawings and graphic design form an inseparable whole.

The OHO book, perhaps the most interesting achievement of this period, also of course follows the basic demands of reism. A book is usually understood as a mere vehicle for a text and, so to say, disappears within it; an OHO book, on the other hand, is designed in such a way that the text does not have a privileged position (some of the books, as Pogačnik’s *Artikel Knjiga* – “ItemBook” – one of the most beautiful of all OHO works, have no text at all); the text is only one of the elements of which the book consists, and it is the book itself which is now the object of our attention. For example, Geister’s and Pogačnik’s book OHO (the work which gave the name to the entire movement) is a kind of complicated circular space; the reader leafs through it, discovering texts and illustrations. With the “book on ring” we notice only the mere appearance of pages and letters while the text is

completely dispersed and can be reconstructed only with difficulty. In the so-called “topographic series”, the book became completely independent and the text cannot be separated from it at all.

Literature (above all, poetry) played an extremely important role at that time. OHO poetry can be generally divided into two streams. The first is the so-called “topographic” (i.e., concrete and visual) poetry; its main representative, as a writer and theorist, was Franci Zagoričnik, while “topographic” poetry was written also by Matjaž Hanžek, Milenko Matanović, Iztok Geister, Marko Pogačnik, Naško Križnar, Vojin Kovač-Chubby, and others. Visual poetry undoubtedly conforms with the principles of reism in its understanding of the text not as a medium through which the reader has to grasp the message, but as an independent self-identical entity. A typographic sign, for example, which normally disappears in the word and its meaning, becomes important for its own sake and attracts our whole attention. While we, in the early “topographic” poems, still find plays and inventions which can be understood as their “content”, the further developments follow the way exemplified by Zagoričnik’s *Tapete* (“Wall Paper”) – these are pieces of paper, completely covered by patterns of typographic signs. Only, now, the signs themselves are important, their arrangement on the paper, their rational pattern, the angle of the paper in the typewriter, the strength of the stroke on the key, etc. The other current of the OHO poetry could be named reistic in a narrower sense of the word. It includes e.g. factographic description of everyday objects (e.g. descriptions of preservatives by Vojin Kovač-Chubby) or “appropriation” of texts, real (as in Tomaž Šalamun’s text *Jonas*, composed completely from different ready-made texts) or just simulated. In this context we should mention Šalamun’s book “*Namen pelerine*” (A Scope of a Cape) where he came nearest to the OHO reism. A particularly radical and interesting type of reistic poetry was developed by the leading theorist of the OHO movement, Iztok Geister (who, as a poet, used the pseudonym I. G. Plamen – after Plamenica). Geister was writing characteristically minimalistic poetry based on word-play and the various possible free relations between words and their meanings. The difference between Geister’s poetry and the above-mentioned works is based on his initial perception that “the things in the world are not the same as the things in poetry”. Reism searches for the mere, meaningless appearance of things; but the word – because of its very nature cannot be separated from the meaning, a “mere word” does not exist. Geister disagreed with Taras Kermauner’s interpretations of his poetry; while Kermauner understood his poetry as a noticing of a mere existing, Geister stressed that its sense lies “in finding mutual relations of the meanings of the written words. I stress, relations of meanings, since the relations of words are indeed only existential relations. Grasping the meaning of a word means nothing other than its relation to another word.”

The OHO films must also be mentioned here. They were shot mainly by Naško Križnar (who also documented several OHO projects, happenings etc.) and Marjan Ciglič; but also Geister, Pogačnik, Nez, Matanović and others worked occasionally with film. Similarly as in literature, we can trace two complementary

tendencies here. The film camera often functions as a representative of the reist attentive eye, which notes and contemplates things; some of these works, e.g. Nez's film *Zogica* (The Ball), demand quite a lot of discipline from the audience. On the other side, OHO films also explored the interior possibilities and the nature of the medium itself; films of this kind are not "transparent" any more, nor do they "represent" the eye, but instead become "things" themselves. Some of Križnar's films, for example, have a severe rational structure (some of them even consist only of written texts) and are thus "things" in a similar sense to that of a "topographic" poem. We might also have to mention projects (among them, Križnar's film *Beli ljudi* – White People – is certainly the most characteristic) which could be understood as a kind of film equivalent to a happening. As for the documentary films, it is important to say that they are often more than just a document. As with the so-called photoprojects, the film camera often offers the only possibility to transmit an action to the audience (the action would be otherwise limited only to its participants and would lose the dimension of communication, essential for art); sometimes such a project even includes the camera as its integral part (this is certainly the case with some conceptual projects from the seventies).

At the end of 1968 and at the beginning of 1969 an important change took place in the OHO movement. In this time, Pogačnik and Geister as the leading personalities of OHO reism were in the army, and the poet Tomaž Šalamun started to work with OHO as a visual artist. Šalamun knew well the contemporary currents in the arts (in Rome he also met the Arte Povera artists). He started to work with the visual arts because of an experience when he suddenly saw an everyday object (a bookcase, a stack of hay) as a sculpture. As opposed to the reistic attentive looking, Šalamun with a poetic arbitrariness chooses and isolates singular things or events and transposes them into the context of art; this transposition can take place in reality – as in Šalamun's installation of a stack of hay in the gallery – or through photography which represents the artist's eye and his act of selection (as is the case with the so-called photoprojects). Šalamun did not accept the methodical approach of reism nor did he use the rational programmes for his works; he stressed the poetical effect of the chosen materials and their unusual connections or a witty invention. In late 1968, he joined the OHO visual artists (Matanović, Nez and his brother Andraž) and established with them an avant-garde group which then separated from the former OHO movement and replaced the severe reistic demands with experiments inside contemporary trends in art. This change was very clearly demonstrated at a display in Zagreb in February 1969, entitled *Pradedje* (Great-grandfathers). This show was the first adequate demonstration of Arte Povera principles in the art-world of the former Yugoslavia. It deliberately introduced specific, "poor" (often organic), materials like hay, husks, hemp, steel-wool etc. The effect of these materials is "immediate", i.e. they have no firm interior structure, they often appear just as a haphazard, "amorphous" and often very temporary conglomeration. The other important aspect of the show is the fact that the objects interact essentially with the gallery space. Šalamun's stack of hay gains its specific

effects from the very fact that it is placed in a gallery space; and Nez's installations *Streha* (Roof) and *Džungla* (Jungle) deliberately included the rooms where they were installed and are no longer merely objects, but environments. In the context of reism, the art gallery was not different from any other space where one can turn the attention of people to things as they are, and it had no privileged position by comparison with e.g. a bookstore or a gramophone-record shop. But for the Great-grandfathers, the OHO artists needed exactly a gallery of contemporary art; it now became, in a sense, the basic and defining context of their art, even after they had started to work directly in the landscape. In short, if the aim of Geister and Pogačnik, during the first period of OHO, was to see a stack of hay – it is now the aim of Tomaž Šalamun, on the Great-grandfathers show, to see it as a sculpture.

Further shows in the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana and Galerija Prešernove hiše (Prešeren House Gallery) in Kranj even radicalised the new aesthetics of an “arbitrary” and poetical act of selection and combination and the “romantics” of materials; Nez displayed a heap of soil with two planks, leaned against the two opposite walls of the room (this was certainly one of the most successful “poor” works in Slovene art), Matanović an old airplane tyre, old springs etc., Andraž Šalamun a heap of sawdust, wheelbarrows and real rabbits. Tomaž Šalamun covered a whole space in the Kranj exhibition with wood, but the most poetic and “anarchic” was perhaps his installation *Morje* (The Sea): six boys, wearing some kind of theatre military uniform, lay on the floor, and on them was written in dough the word **MORJE** (The Sea).

Srečo Dragan exhibited with OHO at this time and he displayed ludistic and ironic objects using materials offered to him by consumer society. Also Marko Pogačnik returned to OHO and he reintroduced the rational approach of programming the works (he displayed an environment for which he used cards with drawings arranged according to a strict numeric key). He therefore reintroduced a conceptual basis into the OHO works, and this approach gradually made possible the development of OHO conceptual art.

With the so-called “summer projects” the OHO artists left the gallery space (where they had redefined their activities) and started to work in the open air, at the beginning in the city and then in the landscape. They developed a peculiar type of Land Art; its characteristics are defined by the experiences of the OHO tradition (e.g. by reistic attentive looking which does not claim the things, or by the aesthetics of “poor” art and its “romantic” materials and human-like measures) as well as by the features of the landscape itself. It is illuminating to compare the OHO actions in the landscape with the contemporary and a little later American Earthworks. The genuine space for American land artists are huge deserts or industrially devastated areas, and they use for their gigantic works all the possibilities of industrial technology. The tradition they follow is the tradition of America “sublime” art (this is evident not only from their choice of the desert and its extreme conditions, but also from their admiration for technology and its destructive power), but also the American ideology of endless open space which

is at man's disposal. On the other side is the space where OHO artists work a cultivated, relatively limited landscape, e.g. a field, wood or meadow. Such a space demands relatively small works, the use of relatively simple, even preindustrial hand tools and technology, and it is very important that such a work does not affect the landscape irreparably (in fact, after the action these works have no consequences for the space). The artist's contact with the natural surroundings is personal, direct and sensual, corporeal; the artist tries to introduce himself and his work harmonically into the space, into the balance and circulation of natural energies and processes. (It is certain that this approach follows the tradition of reism and its renunciation of the subject's claiming of the world, but it also anticipates the wish for harmony with the circles of natural and cosmic powers, which was later characteristic of the Šempas Family.) An excellent example for such an approach is Matanović's project *Wheat and rope*: it consist only of a taut rope, drawn across a wheat-field and gently bending the wheat. This minimal action included in the work, so to say, the whole surroundings, the emotional content of the scene, but also the conceptual and art references connected with it. Of course we also have to mention Nez's installations of mirrors in the landscape, works which are very similar to Smithson's *Mirror Displacements* and were produced literally at the same time.

A group of Pogačnik's projects entitled *Family of Fire, Water and Air*, is a synthesis of the rational conceptual approach and the new role of the materials in the OHO art. The basic principle of these works is no longer a series or a numeric sequence, but the principle of "family"; it means that the elements are connected in dynamic, functional and mutually defining relations. The real "subject" of these works is thus not their immediate materiality, but the relations and transformations of the materials used. Even the materiality itself is, to a certain extent, "abstract"; Pogačnik made use of the theory of the four elements and therefore these works represent not so much the direct sensual effects of the chosen materials but different aspects of materia as such. Other artists too began to work with interior relations and processes demonstrated by the work's appearance; Matanović's *Snake* makes the currents in the Ljubljana river visible, his projects with wooden sticks in a forest talk about tension, balance etc. The works installed by Pogačnik in Novi Sad and Belgrade are simply a demonstration of general relations of weight, measure and position; it is, in principle, possible to re-install these works any time or even replace them with a sketch since they are those basic relations which form the "content" of the works, and they can only be grasped conceptually. With these works, OHO art reached the very beginning of conceptual art.

The OHO art could in fact be understood as a development of parallel, interconnected and complementary tendencies. The material and sensual side of the works, for example, was still important even at the time when conceptual aspects took the leading role in OHO art. Andraž Šalamun's objects made of plaster, iron and glass should be mentioned here. However, this sensual presence of the works was continuously becoming dynamic; the material began to demonstrate its interior tensions and relations or else it was a material process itself that was the "subject"

of the work. (A characteristic example of this is Nez's stactometer dropping drops of water onto a hot aluminium plate at certain intervals). Another important aspect was the role of the body in art. It was anticipated by Pogačnik who – on the occasion of the “exhibition of himself” in Kranj in 1965 – stressed that ancient artists depicted the body, while he uses it. David Nez's *Cosmology*, installed in Moderna galerija Ljubljana in 1969, is perhaps the purest example of OHO body art; the artist was lying on the floor in a circle of neon tubes taken from the ceiling lights, with a stone on his stomach and breathing in a particular way; above him, a burning light bulb was hanging. The sensual, erotic element of Body Art was most clearly present in Andraž Šalamun's work; he sometimes performed during the openings of OHO shows, as for example at the Greatgrandfathers show in Zagreb, where his work (an environment entitled *Forest*) became meaningfully completed first when the artist's body was included. This tendency brought him logically to the aesthetisation of direct erotic sensual experience (in the *Kama Sutra* series). These aspects were, as I said above, connected with the strong conceptual basis of the works. When a work demonstrates relations and processes, it in fact turns the attention to something that manifests itself in the work's appearance, but cannot be understood except conceptually. One may often see that such a conceptual “ground plan” of a work forms a logical, internally completed and balanced whole, a kind of “primary structure”. In later works it is often this “primary structure” that becomes the main content of the works – e.g. the geometrically correct relationships between the movement of the sun, a stick and its shadow in an Andraž Šalamun project. Some interesting OHO projects even deal with such abstract questions as is the relationship between space and time. Nez for example used a light trace on film to “transpose” the time-space relations into an instantaneous image; he therefore transformed a diachronous movement into a synchronous shape, e.g. straight movement into a line, a circular movement into a circle, etc.

Also, we must not forget another dimension we could call the esoteric. I have mentioned already the wish to reach a harmony with the natural surroundings in OHO Land Art; this wish, however, implies not only an “ecological” attitude in the narrower sense but also a wish to reach a total, bodily and spiritual harmony with the universe. Nez's *Cosmology* could, for example, be understood also as a demonstration of man's identification with the universe through meditation and spiritual concentration. Also Pogačnik's use of the four elements system could be interpreted as a demonstration of the interdependence of the aspects that, in their balance, form the completeness of the world. The basic conceptual forms or “primary structures”, as I called them (Nez's diploma work at the Academy of Visual Arts in Ljubljana is a particularly interesting example of this approach), are often some kind of conceptually-visual demonstration of this universal harmony. The OHO members with an increasing intensity searched for spiritual unity and were gradually transforming the “group” (i.e. an operative, functional unity) into a “community”. This wish for a spiritual unity was stressed by their telepathic projects; and they tried to reach the harmony of the community in itself and

with the surrounding landscape, its history and nature and with the universe in general through the so-called “schooling” in the Zarica valley, on Sorško polje and in Čezsoča. Tomaž Brejc therefore speaks about the last period of OHO work as one of “transcendental conceptualism” (we could perhaps call it “esoteric conceptualism” to escape the possible references to transcendental philosophy).

The stressing of the community and its harmony with the universe of course could not stay limited only to the field of art as a closed, “fictional” world which is – according to the Western tradition – separated from “real” life. The tendencies that found their expression in the OHO conceptual projects and in the “schooling” were total, and demanded – according to their very nature – a total realization in life. Following this logic, the members of OHO at the end of 1970 decided to give up the world of art and then founded a community in Šempas where they wished to make true the ideas of such a harmony. Still, the denial of the world of art as a separate area (institution) in modern Western culture did not mean the denial of the art itself. For the Šempas Family, art was an essential part of everyday life; and what was even more important, all their life was in fact an endeavour to “realize” the possibilities preserved in art as something “fictional”.

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