

# Magdalena Radomska

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## Journeys by Central-Eastern European artists in the seventies

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

## **Magdalena Radomska, Journeys by Central-Eastern European artists in the seventies”**

The totalitarian communist regime, which fell in Europe in 1989 was totalitarian also in how it had appropriated the semantic field constituting meaning. Travels undertaken by artists outside of the geographical borders of communist countries had therefore the status of an attempt to construct works outside of this semantic system of gravitation, which seemed to control the meanings of notions in use behind the iron curtain. Simultaneously these travels could be called hazardous as they misled the traveller towards the utopia of a free and universal language or - towards misunderstanding – loss and imperfections which appeared when those notions were translated for the Western receiver. Travels were of various kinds - from emigration and from outside the system of references, to trips enabling the relative mobility of notional categories constitutive for the meaning of works. An interesting phenomenon was established with artistic travels to other countries of the Eastern Block, undertaken often within the official framework of international cooperation. They revealed inconsistencies in the language which although propagated as common and readable, appeared as a language appropriating notions.

Particularly significant were those works, which problematized the status of travel undertaken within the fame of the Soviet Block - such as art works created as a result of cooperation by Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian artists concerning artistic commentary on the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia, or performances created in Budapest by Yugoslavian artist Bálint Szombathy.

Another crucial form of travel was established with trips away from the Capital cities identified with the particular control of the censorship apparatus such as trips by Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists to outside Budapest or those leading out of Moscow practised by the Russian group Collective Actions. These have a particular status of reflection, a semantic distance from the notional structure.

The issue of the translation of codes relating to both the creation and reception of the art work created during artistic travels to the West as early as in the seventies are problematized by Hungarian artist Endre Tót and Yugoslavian Braco Dimitrijević. The art created by them was readable both in the Western and non-Western idiom (E. Tót) and it is rooted in various semantic systems enabling the critical attitude towards historical formation and their discursive practices (B. Dimitrijević).

The last and often ultimate way of travelling was designed by emigrations - both inner and outer. Crucial works on the subject were created by Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists - such as András Halász - equipped with particular sensitivity towards the political context, who, beside the importance of the destination of emigration, emphasized the importance of its context, which functioned as a peculiar baggage dragged by these artists during each and every journey.

## **Julia Sowińska-Heim, „Artistic and scientifically documentative journeys around Manhattan in Łódź”**

In 1991, an innovative and original artistic space was created by Krystyna Potocka-Suwalska on the ground floor of a block of flats in Łódź's Manhattan district (which is a housing estate dating from the 1970s). Since the very beginning, a significant part of the program of the Manhattan Gallery, which presents trends important to modern art as well as artists linked with alternative culture (including music, literature and activities from the borders of various artistic disciplines), has been joining or in many cases initiating a discourse on the city. Importantly, projects run by The Manhattan Gallery have not been limited to activities closed within the gallery space, provoking artists to set off on a peculiar, real and conceptual journey around the city and around a specific area within its structure, namely a communist housing estate, whose name was borrowed from the very heart of capitalist New York, Manhattan, and transferred to worker's Łódź.

The question of a place's context and its artistic penetration has always been an important element of the Manhattan Gallery's functioning and artistic establishment. One of the first activities of that kind was an educational and social project *A guide to Manhattan (Przewodnik po Manhattanie)* carried out at the end of 1995/beginning of 1996. It provoked both audience and authors to make a unique journey promoting a new outlook - discovering, interpreting and understanding Łódź's city space, namely the Manhattan housing estate. After ten years, the same people made a journey around Manhattan once again. Another confrontation with the city provided a strong impetus to a new self-reflection and resulted in the project *A guide to Manhattan. 1995-2010. Continuation (Przewodnik po Manhattanie. 1995-2010. Ciąg dalszy)*.

As far as art and science are concerned, the journeys around Łódź's Manhattan fosters a divulging memory and identity of the place through creating multi-layered micro-narrations. Creative activity