

Moravian Gallery in Brno, Czech Rep.
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Good News. A Spelling-Book

Filip Cenek, Jiří Havlíček, Magdalena Hrubá

Is the name “Spelling-Book” supposed to suggest that your films communicate through the deconstruction of the fundamental signs of film language or is it a reference to children’s art that you often fall back on? (F.C.) To call the exhibition *Spelling-Book* is an effort to consolidate a concept for selecting the videos; seeking another theme for the exhibition seemed superfluous to me. Spelling-Book does not refer to any kind of grammar or syntax, unravelling images into lines, descriptions, and definitely no “searching for words by pursuing images” as Raymond Bellour would put it. Spelling-Book is a very simple implication of a feeling that the exhibition may prove to be a good moment to see different types of moving images that speak in a single (film) language, although several specific forms of it, dictions. It is an intuitive selection of pictorial appendices to a spelling-book which is important to me and which is a little peripheral; in general not clearly seen. Which does not matter at all: I prefer the border areas, the periphery (where the most important things happen to every shape, the exchanges and movements that define shapes and, in this sense, are more important than what is in the middle, comprised of mediocrity and compromises). Peripheral vision is more sensitive to movement than central vision, since it is related, as Purkynje among others said, to survival. And this selection, from my point of view, gives life to the area of moving images. For me these videos really are *good news* from one great friendship. — (J.H.) A spelling-book is something that everybody (bar a few exceptions) had to deal with in childhood, ordinary family tales without a point, kitchen haiku, etc. A reference, if there is one here, is not so much to children’s art as to a child’s perception and the function of text and image in their elementary form. It could be something like a summary of the basic elements (a foundation) of a personal system of signs which enables us to read our own story. Linking the individual elements gives rise to a language-object, which may resemble film language. However, I would not call it deconstruction, even though it is true that Filip had done several before. Instead I would prefer reconstruction or stolen-and-returned, it is a stolen and returned film language. Although not returned to exactly the same place and it is to create this minor shift that it was stolen. — (M.H.) Spelling-Book, because we still have not learnt much, in my case. “Majda makes films, Majda trashes straw.” — **What is your relationship to a (film) story, the literary plot?** (F.C.) When you create you must always fight it out with the technology. By this I do not mean exactly cables but the procedures of how to arrive at a message and its arrangement so that it is not artificially conceived but meets with the message and the whole meaning of the story. If you are hinting at some of our stuff where the storyline becomes the theme itself, they are my favourite ones; and in those which are computer-based, – all those hypertexts and hypervideos which I had found so fascinating for such a long time – they are a necessity enforced by the environment (it took me two years to find out by practicing). It sounds especially funny in connection with film: “films that see their own vision,” as works by Godard, Nekes or Baldwin have been described by many. To return to the literary plot: the videos here are rather carefully selected moving images which convey some message but purely thanks to our concentrated vision especially as they themselves did not come about by transcribing or transforming any pre-written letters. And that, I think, can (only) be seen. — (J.H.) I am quite fond of stories, but watching a film in an original version without subtitles, in a language that I do not understand, is often more thrilling. — **In your works you are inspired by films for children. Does nostalgia play a role, a recollection of your own**

childhood or do you look into them for a general expression of presenting naïve innocence? (F.C.) As you mention the children, the innocent ones, I feel that I should come forward with my attitude towards such perception of our animations. By this I mean all those remarks about “children’s art that we draw upon” which then lead to questions of this type. What may impress you as childish is the balancing and indecision. You yourself called most of our production “sophisticated helplessness,” which I like a lot and I often return to it, but that is almost the total opposite of what we do as children: without knowledge, but with self-confidence and convincingly. With due care and consideration we simply attempted to draw something with the “left” hand (Jirka is a southpaw, I am not); it looks like a child’s drawing but it is not. Also, then you were interested in “something”, now you prefer a relationship “to something”. Children are joy, they are an inspiration for trying, playing around with something. I remember quite a lot from childhood but it is my memory now. I do not feel nostalgic for what there was, when what there was is now. And I consider our animations progressive, not nostalgic. — (J.H.) Partly both, I think. Private recollections, or the memory, is a relatively frequent subject of our animations and sometimes determines the formal and technical aspect but nostalgia is a bit of a misleading word, I would prefer calling it something like visual sentiment. On the other hand, searching for a more general term represents an attempt to communicate this subjective system of signs but naïve innocence is much too strong, too ideal, isn’t it? — (M.H.) We are naïve and innocent. — **Can the slow pace of your films be interpreted as a reaction to so-called video clip culture?** (F.C.) That would seem a logical conclusion but I never put it like this to myself. I actually like the form of the clip and I do not mind quick cuts, down to the level of a few photograms. The fact that we have recently presented videos filmed in a single long take, that look dilettantish, straightforward and childish (going back to the previous question), does represent for me a bit of the silent, childish “defiance that makes you younger”, it definitely does; and today I consider dilettantism, in the positive sense of the word, along with ambiguity, to be a good means for sensitizing perception (even the clip culture, where a lot of things are churned out using a formula, without relationships, love?). — (J.H.) It is not a reaction. It is an impulse, that is action. — (M.H.) I love video clips. — **It seems to me that a certain elimination of the story while preserving some illusion of “story-telling” (in Petr Strouhal, for example, carried through to a mere reflection of unknown movement outside the field of vision, the meaning of which can only be guessed at by the viewer) is related to the particularities of children’s memory, defined as the “thing in which I forgot myself”. The result is then a principle or method of sticking in/on the image while most of what is essential for building a concrete meaning has been left out. Do you consciously work using that principle? Do you explore the possibilities of the film as a metaphor of the memory?** (F.C.) As somebody once put it: the past has not even passed, and it is no longer what it used to be. I approach the past as something we will not recreate. What remains can only be reworked. “This tomorrow is not of the day that was yesterday.” When the blind Borges says: “Memory and oblivion – and we call that imagination,” I know just what he means by that. But in my case specifically, with regards to the “omissions” in the latest production, it is something else. Five years ago I found an article by Bohuslav Blažek in Souvislosti titled *The Unreadability Principle* and I realized what joy can be experienced from the pure desire to read something (“activity which follows the act of writing: it is more flexible, civil, intellectual,” to return to Borges). I am trying to suggest the “comprehension of what is half-said” situation when a look, or sense can still remain complete. This is only possible in a state of closeness, in a relationship; automatically pushing aside the world of distrust and monologue delivered through forms, bureaucracy, indifference, where there is no room for any active coexistence, not even in a projective manner. I am exaggerating but to put it simply it is exactly what I call, according to White, “stop seeing *the end* in every

beginning.” And what I miss around myself. I find, for example, in Toník’s videos from Morocco, videos which viewers find especially difficult, I am personally attracted, apart from the visible beauty, to the skirting around indications of the direction of the story which otherwise gives sense to an experience (and his is a fairly documentary video); as if he restarted telling the same story in every cut, flaw, gap (preconditions of perceiving a change, a change of perception). Even this film, here without a cinema, is a metaphor for memory. (“Through an engine’s whistle to recall the whole railway station.”) — (J.H.) That is exactly what we were trying to achieve with the lotus, an attempt to use animation as a metaphor for memory. Animation is essentially reviving, that is something like memories... And regarding what is left out. I quite like your theory but for me, leaving out (Filip calls it omission) is what I find substantial, what builds a concrete meaning. It is like a dialogue where often what the other person will not say is more important. And when the communication is to be more intimate, it is actually quite logical that we prefer silence to words. A word is a social construct, while a feeling is physical, that is individual. — **Ambivalence, a hiding principle, deferral of possible meanings and ways of perception is something that all the authors share in common, to a certain extent. Can you find a characteristic that is common to all the selected works? Is the common denominator either technology, theme, idea, method of processing visual impulses, or some iconographic unity?** (F.C.) It could be a situation when we are captivated by the gaze of a man opposite us who is looking somewhere behind us and when whatever we do with it is not merely a reaction but creation (provided we, the visually illiterate, do not trustingly turn around to follow his gaze). — (J.H.) You have just put your finger on it. For me, what is common is the ambivalence (both in terms of technology and theme), or even the deferral of possible meanings ...

Antonín Koutný

Do you approach your videos more as documents or visually (graphically)? Visually, but if I approach them...I rather attack them. — **Do you base them on a given linear structure of the filmed footage or do you try to cancel it and replace it with an external rhythm?** I take the filmed footage to be the building material where image and sound are the basic compositional element in the musical sense of the word. — **Do you work with a pre-conceived story or do you attempt to create an atmosphere “from nothing”?** Again, the end of the question is the answer. In the filmed footage you can intuitively search for a story, this goes for me as the author, and for the viewer. I hold it that working with a story is working with images in an aesthetic context. — **Do the particular time and place play a role in your films?** They do not but as there are actually no actors playing in them, the leading part will probably be taken by time and place, although not in the sense of the particular location and time when I filmed it. Experiences from a particular time and place are naturally the content of the video, but that is not the essence of its perception where I expect the viewer’s participation in the images that I present and through that perception the viewer finds an image of their own.

Petr Strouhal

Is your animation with a pudding more of a painted still life brought to life or a film with a mini story? For me, it is a film, an ordinary, amateur, telepathic organ (a joke); but from the technological viewpoint it is clearly a revived painted still life. — **The theme of your last works is sweets (Delisa, pudding), do you have a special relationship to them or did they appeal to you visually?** I love them and they love me (especially Delisas, after I have brought them in from the street in a desolate state). And pudding, Champions League,... and above all the incomparable allomorph. — **Do you see “jelly” as a metaphor? For what?** 1987, The Visitors TV series.

Jan Žalio

Your animations are a free juxtaposition of the figurative and abstract element, are those categories (abstract – figurative) of any significance to your work at all? They are, absolutely! — **Your animations also mix the expressive forms of comics with some sort of chaotic psychedelia. What is the role of existential contents for you, or is it an effort to portray some psycho-physiological states?** My animations are records in a diary, pictorial scripts, something I intend to further elaborate on. I am not interested in comics as an art form. What I go for is the inner, playful, automatic, subconscious dialogues with myself and computer programs. A transfer of energy. Being surprised at whether some of those psycho-physiological states laced with existential contents will be fulfilled in time. Long live chaotic psychedelia! — **How important for you is experimenting with different animation techniques?** Really important! Not just animations. Communication in free flow.