

Active Gaps and Absences in Artist Archives

Stano Filko and Dóra Maurer

Daniel Grúň

The Global Networking of Artist Archives

Over the past twenty years, the hitherto marginal position of the “neo-avant-gardes” in Eastern Europe has conspicuously changed through the globalization of Eastern European art, the work of museums and galleries on the national and international level, and the art market. Today, works by the artists thus categorized are well established in art history and accessible to the public through the collections of private and public institutions. We need to ask for what purposes and for what tasks artist archives are used in the metabolism of contemporary institutional workings, and whether their distinctive mission can be sustained in the dynamically changing spectrum of cultural practices. Currently, many art historians and researchers are highlighting the issues involved in artist archives, presenting both enthusiastic and skeptical points of view.¹ This essay is intended as a contribution to the discussion about an “archival turn,” and questions the role of artist archives as key instruments in the renewal of art history. Since they constitute a source of information about art movements functioning under authoritarian political

1 This paper follows on from my previous research for the book *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Daniel Grúň (Bratislava: Veda, 2020) and summarizes some of the theses introduced in cooperation with the Institute of the Present in Bucharest for an essay collection with the working title *Unpaged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*. The paper results from my current research supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under contract no. APVV-19-0522, titled “Creation and Critique of Values in Contemporary Arts (Visual Arts, Theater, Film).” I would like to express my gratitude to Dóra Halasi, who provided me with digitized catalogs and information on Dóra Maurer’s works located in Artpool Art Research Center.

regimes, artist archives contribute to the canonization and establishment of originally forbidden alternative forms of art. This initiative by artists, often referred to as “self-historicization,”² reveals a variety of creative methods of documentation, careful preservation, diffusion, and foundation of communicative platforms. Frequently, we encounter a critical treatment of the material, economic, institutional, social, and political conditions of creative work precisely among those artists who throughout their working lives were voluntarily or forcibly marginalized, where their information access was limited and communications controlled.

Alongside the globalization of art history in the former Eastern Europe, one can observe a remarkable shift in art history of the recent decade, from the interpretation of artworks or the artist’s career to a reconstruction of the role of artistic initiatives in society and an empowering of transnational and transregional networks.³ The flexible condition of artist archives, accentuated by the institutional interests of museums, by the influence of private capital and commerce, and, furthermore, by initiatives aimed at facilitating access to artist archives and digitalizing them, gives an opportunity for the creation of international research platforms and other means of opening up these resources to the public.

Based on all of this, researchers are frequently making acquaintance with the complicated fates of archives and their founders. Over the course of decades, many such archives have changed their status from private to public or, conversely, they have been lost and it has been necessary to reconstruct them.⁴ The change in the status of artist archives to artworks, created by the artists themselves in their sustained and long-term efforts to present their collections of documentation, leads to an accumulation of symbolic capital to be used for the representation of alternative memory, given that the artists are themselves taking on the researcher’s role as interpreter,

2 Zdenka Badovinac, “Interrupted Histories,” in *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 99. Originally published in: *Prekinjene Zgodovine = Interrupted Histories* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2006), unpagued.

3 Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 410–12.

4 Katarzyna Cytlik, “Transculturation, Cultural Transfer, and the Colonial Matrix of Power on the Cold War Margins: East European Art Seen from Latin America,” in *Globalizing East European Art Histories, Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (London: Routledge, 2018), 162–74.

historian, and activator.⁵ Together with the change in the status of archives, we need to think freshly through the idea of art as an open communicative platform. As opposed to an art history that foregrounds the idea of art as an aesthetic object, the artist archives challenge us to redefine art as a process that involves a dissolution of the hierarchies between document, archive, art, and social activity to the point where they become interchangeable.

Along with the redefinition of art as a process, an expanded concept of communication is another, highly challenging, legacy of the artists who have given their work in the form of archives. This expanded concept is based on active forms of contact and partnership. It creates alternative spaces as meeting places and initiates relationships between participants wherever the situations play out, and the interaction of all involved subjects establishes a profound sense of community.⁶

The Idea of the “Active Archive” and the Expanded Concept of Communication as Art

When we think about the archive as a medium of art and about art as a medium of archivization, Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest has long been a model example. This archive, constructed over decades, was founded by György Galántai in partnership with Júlia Klaniczay, and together they have conducted it as a communicative space and an instrument for the democratic diffusion of knowledge. The thinking behind this alternative organization is motivated by the artistic aims of György Galántai, who stresses the fact that Artpool’s mission is not only the collection and storage of documentation related to artistic activities: of equal importance is the principle of democratic access to information, anchored in the horizontal approach of the Fluxus movement, founded upon sharing, exchange, and cooperation. “The Active Archive does not merely amass material that is ‘out there’: its mode of func-

5 Tomasz Załuski, “Going through and beyond Artists’ Archives: A Need for Another Archival Turn,” in *Unpaged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*, ed. Alina Șerban (Bucharest: Institute of the Present, forthcoming).

6 Henar Rivière, “The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca and Graciela Gutiérrez Marx’s Inmost Art” in *Unpaged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*, ed. Alina Șerban (Bucharest: Institute of the Present, forthcoming).

tioning also generates the very material that it has to archive.”⁷ For the concept of an active archive such as Artpool, information has value above all in the relational sense, and the institution keeps itself in constant movement in a variety of forms of interaction. “The Active Archive is a vital institution, which may be interpreted as an organic and open artwork or as an activist kind of artistic practice. Its workplace is the entire world; it works with a precise goal and direction, sensitively detecting changes and adapting itself accordingly.”⁸ Galántai’s theoretical framework of the “active archive” works with the seemingly contradictory ideas of autonomy and cooperation, and represents a dialogic work of institutional art that is uninterrupted in motion. This model of the institution is distinguished from classical archiving work in that it not only collects documents it regards as experimental art and stores them for the future, but it also acts proactively.⁹

Here I would like to address the question of Galántai’s conception of the active archive in comparison with communicative models of art, and the archive as a medium of art, in selected works by Stano Filko and Dóra Maurer. The work of these two artists is closely connected with the creation of alternative institutional frameworks in the context of the power systems and ideological structures dominating the sphere of art during the period of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. I will try to show that, despite the fundamentally different media employed in the works selected, namely film and painting, both of these artists expand communication (by means other than those which Galántai has used) around a performance-oriented or processually directed artwork, and they redefine the very concept of communication in relation to art. Here I understand the concept of expanded communication in the sense of a connecting of elementary forms, tactile resources, and extra-verbal methods for mutual understanding. In Dóra Maurer’s case, the context of expanded communication was the art course she conducted jointly with Miklós Erdély, and occasionally also György Galántai, in Budapest between 1975 and 1977, in the Cultural Center of the

7 György Galántai, “Active Archive, 1979–2003,” in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, https://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html

8 Galántai, “Active Archive,” 15.

9 Emese Kürti, “Underground Realism: György Galántai’s Institutional Strategies,” in *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-East Europe*, ed. Daniel Grúň (Bratislava: Veda, 2020), 50.

Ganz-MÁVAG engineering works. Maurer, like Erdély, was a member of the Béla Balázs Studio, the unique center of avant-garde film production in state-socialist Hungary which had a direct influence on her film work.¹⁰ Contrastingly, Stano Filko, by entirely different means, first in tandem with fellow artists Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský and later independently, established an open, communicative cosmological system into which he projected the entirety of his art. As the title of this paper suggests, I will deal here with the active role given to the gap, absence, and void by means of white paint and white surfaces, which occupied the thoughts of these artists beyond the basic prerequisites of visual representation.

Measuring the Absence: A Comparison of *White Space* in *White Space* and *Timing*

In the year 1973 three young Slovak artists, Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, began collaboration on a project that has since gained a legendary, almost mythic status in post-conceptual art. Entitled *White Space in White Space* (*Biely priestor v bielom priestore*), its first instantiation, in 1974, was installed in the Brno House of Arts (Dům umění), where it was not publicly accessible. It was “exhibited” on a Monday, when the gallery was closed to the public, existing only for a few hours between the dismantling of the previous show and the installation of the next.¹¹ This first realization of *White Space in White Space* could therefore only be seen by selected friends of the artists and the organizers of the gallery—a fact that contributed early on to making it a legend (fig. 3.1–2).

Another locus where the project gained momentum (in meetings and private discussions) was the Bratislava apartment of Miloš Laky, which at the time was designed all in white and recycled certain elements of the Brno installation. According to witnesses, most visitors experienced a kind of sensory shock upon entering this peculiar environment. However, with its enigmatic

¹⁰ Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, and Franciska Zólyom, “Introduction,” in *Creativity Exercises: Emancipatory Pedagogies in Art and Beyond* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 12.

¹¹ The first part of this text section was published in the introduction to the book and further elaborated on in my essay “Notes of a Belated Viewer,” in *White Space in White Space / Biely priestor v bielom priestore: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, Ján Zavarský 1973–1982*, eds. Daniel Grúň, Christian Höller, Kathrin Rhomberg (Vienna: Schlebrügge Editor, Kontakt Collection, 2021), 31–38.

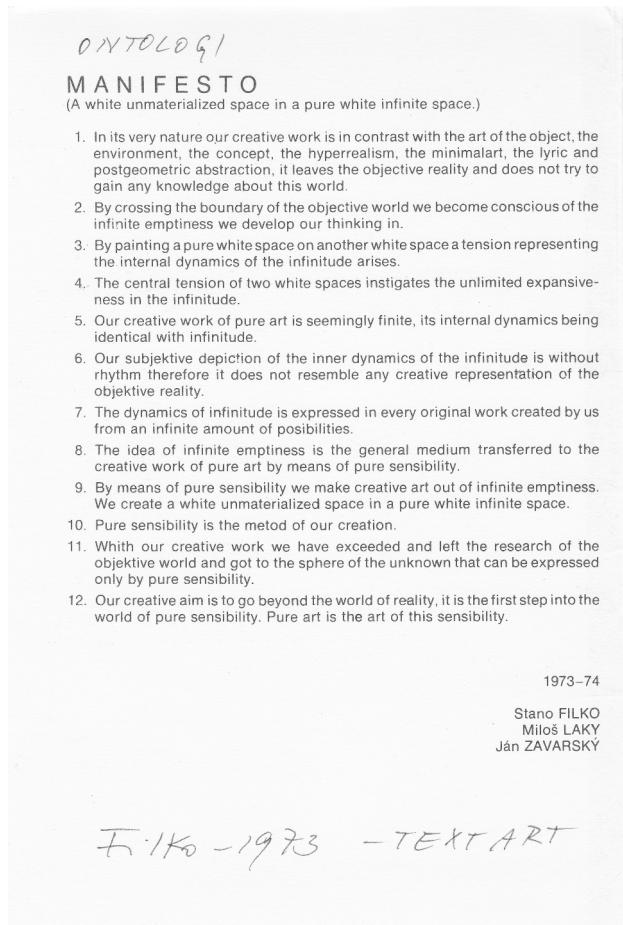
Figure 3.1-2: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, “White Space in White Space,” House of Arts Brno, 1974.



Photo: Štefan Tamáš. Courtesy of the Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

history of origin and its manifestation in odd places such as Laky's apartment, the *White Space in White Space* project soon gained a reputation as a focal work of the Eastern European neo-avant-garde. The artists themselves started to nurture this reputation by compiling a small catalog, based on carefully prepared documentation of the project's first realization in Brno; they then

Figure 3.3: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, "White Space in White Space—Manifesto," 1973—1974, self-published catalog of the exhibition in House of Arts, Brno.



distributed this through the postal network, which enabled them to gain attention internationally. The self-published catalog took the form of a folder, which included their *Manifesto* (*White Non-material Space in a Pure White Infinite Space*), photographic documentation of the exhibition, and an accompanying

essay by the curator Jiří Valoch. The manifesto, signed jointly by Filko, Laky, and Zavarský, is an independent artistic text, hence it is neither a description nor an explanation of the artistic realization of the spatial installation. An explicit polemic against contemporary avant-garde modernism is launched in the *Manifesto* (fig. 3.3). A crucial point is entry no. 9, where the authors declare: "Via pure sensibility we are creating an infinite void."¹² Alongside the manifesto, the project was later accompanied by a number of noteworthy texts published in catalogs, magazines, and samizdat literature. The contributing authors were important representatives of Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, and Yugoslavian art criticism, including Jiří Valoch, Tomáš Štrauss, László Beke, Grzegorz Sztabiński, and Ješa Denegri. Reading their texts makes it perfectly clear that *White Space in White Space* was not accepted in an unambiguously positive spirit and indeed provoked plenty of controversy.

Explorations of the philosophical, poetic, and spiritual associations of white monochrome painting culminated in international art in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even though there are obvious links to monochrome painting, such as the use of non-color, unconventional formats, and materials and techniques not commonly associated with painting, it would nonetheless not be adequate to interpret the work of the three Slovak artists solely from the perspective either of the Western art canon or of Eastern European art.

In his essay Jiří Valoch points out that the painting with white paint is performed by anonymous mechanical means, using a roller, thereby excluding any individual signature. Apart from that, the method of applying the paint to the surfaces with a mechanically rotating cylinder fulfills another of the artists' aims: to underline the potential infinity of the impressed surface, where the individual realizations are only fragmentary records of a surface that is boundless. It will not escape the perceptive reader of Valoch's text that, instead of the concept of an artistic "collective," he uses the designation "team."¹³ Communist collectivism was ideologically loaded and widely abused in official propaganda; the artists were therefore, on the one hand, attempting to update the collectivism of the radical interwar avant-garde and, on the other hand, evoking the work of international scientific cooperation

¹² Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, *Biely priestor v bielom priestore = White Space in White Space = Un Espace Blanc dans l'Espace Blanc = Weiser Raum in Weisen Raum 1973–74* (Brno: Dům umění, 1974), unpagged.

¹³ Jiří Valoch, "Untitled (White Space in White Space)," in Filko, Laky, and Zavarský, *Biely priestor v bielom priestore*, unpagged.

projects. Collective work, where an individual signature does not play a role, redefines the very concept of authorship by painterly means. Valoch also states that collective work has no constructive but only a speculative character. This statement needs to be clarified. The layering of paint, applied by a roller to strips of fabric or hollow tubing, generates tension, which (according to the second point of the manifesto) represents the inner dynamic of the infinite. Valoch avails himself of the term “metaspace,” which he understands as a means of describing an infinite space. Since a real space between the layers of paint does not actually exist, this involves a fictive concept of, or approach to, space. “I cannot demonstrate metaspace, but I can work in space in such a way that the viewer approaches its purpose or identifies with it.”¹⁴ Valoch understands that the individual presentations are above all a demonstration of possibilities—not, however, an enclosed whole with its own binding ethical rules and pre-established significance. And it is precisely on this point that certain essential differences become apparent when *White Space in White Space* is compared to the works of interwar constructivism, or to similarly radical solutions in the postwar period (Robert Rauschenberg, Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Ad Reinhard, etc.). According to Valoch, the speculative system practiced by the team of artists represents the very opposite of a closed whole; the individual artefacts therefore represent the creation of various possibilities of concretizing this system and, at the same time, also their process of inspection and documentation. Here we arrive at the core of what is at issue, namely a performative creation, which the artists designated as a “demonstration.”

White Space in White Space produced a “space” that gradually changed over time (almost a decade). In a certain sense, one might speak of a processual and performative dimension of a surface unfolded infinitely in coherent, individual stages: *Sensibility* (1973–74), *Sensitivity* (1974–76), *Emotion* (1977), and *Transcendence* (1978) (the final two stages being executed by Stano Filko independently). The paradox here resides in the contradiction between disciplined presentation, the automation of creative work, and pure sensibility as a method of creation, via which “an infinite void is artistically expressed.”¹⁵ The automation of artistic execution, directed by a disciplined repetition of white strips of paint on diverse bases, does not lead to the production of identical results but rather to incessant variability, difference, and deviations, all

14 Jiří Valoch, “Untitled,” unpaged.

15 Jiří Valoch, “Untitled,” unpaged.

of which being programmatically employed in the scenic composition within the gallery's white cube space.

During preparations for an exhibition at the Club of Young Artists in Budapest in April 1977, Ján Zavarský made contact with Dóra Maurer, who helped to arrange the publication of a catalog for the exhibition.¹⁶ Earlier, in 1973, the same year Filko, Laky, and Zavarský's project was initiated, Maurer began working on the ideas for a 16 mm black-and-white silent film, entitled *Timing*, which she finally completed in 1980. The time span of the film's production corresponds to the period when the project of the three Slovak artists took shape. Both works emerged in parallel, drawing upon different sources and responding to the different conditions of cultural practice in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. This notwithstanding, both works engendered cooperation (Dóra Maurer cooperated with the cameramen János Gulyás and Károly Stocker) and stimulated analytical thoughts on the time-space qualities of the media of depiction, namely painting, film, and photography. In a catalog published on the occasion of an exhibition in Pécs of her collected films, Dóra Maurer characterized her artistic approach as follows:

Time is measured by folding a piece of white linen in front of a black background: I fold it altogether seven times, one fold more each time, always starting anew. The proportions of the cloth correspond to the [projected] picture size of a 16 mm film, its length is that of my two outstretched arms. It is not only the object of folding/transformations, since its projected picture is (at gallery shows the film is projected on the piece of linen that was used in the action) both a picture and the "carrier of the picture" at the same time. It shrinks and almost disappears in the process, while structuring and determining the time of the film.

Four variations were made: The film described above was the first. In the second, a mask was placed before the objective to halve the picture. Rewinding the negative in the camera to the beginning, the process was recorded twice: first through the left, then through the right mask hole. In the third and fourth variations, the mask was divided into four and eight, resp. The

¹⁶ Stano Filko, Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský, *Senzitivita / Sensitivité / Sensitiven / Sensitivity* 1974–1975–1976 (Budapest: Fiatal Művészek Klubja [Club of Young Artists], 1977). Artists' self-published catalog with a manifesto by the artists and theoretical texts by Jiří Valoch, Tomáš Štraus, László Beke. The exhibition itself was open from April 29 to May 5, 1977.

system of folding, the constant divisions of the mask, interfered with and often swallowed up the image.¹⁷

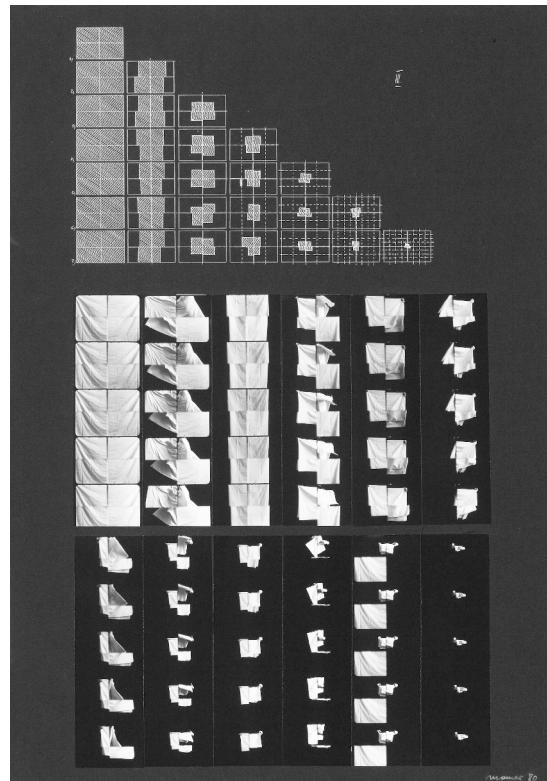
While Filko, Laky, and Zavarský apply, to areas of varying extent, white synthetic paint to the surfaces of a linen canvas in relation to the proportions and folding of the material, Maurer uses the proportion of the canvas in relation to the measure and span of her outspread arms. Maurer gives visibility to (women's) work by the performative action of folding, and thus one of the stereotypes of the patriarchal division of labor (care of the household and folding of linen) makes its way into the subtext of the work.¹⁸ In contrast to the open set of variable horizontal and vertical canvases of the installation *White Space in White Space*, Maurer lays emphasis on the geometrically constructive analogy between the folding of the canvas and the division of the film image using the mask of the camera lens: first on two, then on four, and finally on eight fields. A further structural analogy between the folding and the (modernist) grid is emphasized by Maurer in her black-and-white contact prints entitled *Timing—Analyses I–IV* (1980). In four phases the artist arranged beneath her a geometrical sketch of a graduated folding in regular fields, with the division of fields by a grid expressing the process of folding. The system of the grid is repeated in a regular arrangement of the photographic records of folding. The folds of the white canvas come to the forefront through being folded, thanks to the scene being shot against a black background, where the figure of the black-clothed performer is lost, so that along with the canvas we perceive only the gestural language of palms grasping the folded canvas. (fig. 3.4)

László Beke has pointed to the importance of the work *Timing* in Dóra Maurer's artistic practice, emphasizing the analogy between the screen and the projection of the film image on the one hand and the folding of the canvas and measuring of the pictorial field on the other:

¹⁷ Dóra Maurer, *Filmek = Films 1973–83* (Pécs: Pécsi Galéria, 1983), 7.

¹⁸ Although Dóra Maurer resists straight connections to feminism, Beáta Hock has found traces of the artist's interest in 1970's feminist art. However, Maurer was a mediator between international and domestic art. She was living partly in Vienna during the 1970s and also transmitted contemporary feminist ideas to fellow Hungarian artists. Beáta Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 191–3.

Figure 3.4: Dóra Maurer, "Timing—Analyses I-IV," 1980.



Photographs from the negative strip of *Timing* mounted on cardboard, 100 x 70 cm. © Dóra Maurer. Courtesy of the Vintage Gallery.

But we must not forget that this canvas is the same size of the cinema screen, and the metaphor “the canvas of the painter = the canvas of the filmmaker” is particularly emphasized by the fact that while folding the canvas, the screen is also dividing itself: into two, into four, into eight... FOLDING becomes a special case of MEASURING [...]. The cinema-like specialty of *Timing*, how-

ever, was given by the fact that this way she measured space and (film-)time at the same time.¹⁹

Both in Maurer's and in Filko, Laky, and Zavarský's projects, a key element is the gradation of the surface in space and time: as against the regular numerical gradation in *Timing*, the gradation of *White Space in White Space* is accomplished from the center to the sides, with the areas of the individual strips of white paint on the canvas contracting or narrowing. While for *White Space in White Space* photos of the installations, together with the accompanying manifestos and other texts, were included in the method of distribution and subsequent archiving of the work, the contact prints of *Timing—Analyses I–IV* serve rather to photographically record, explain, and clarify Maurer's working procedure. There is a basic difference between the two works to this extent: the first tends toward both an unpredictable pictorial area and an intuitive resolution of its limitlessness; the second concentrates on the predictability of the geometrical composition of the pictorial area. While Filko, Laky, and Zavarský elaborated the analogy between the conceptual declaration in the text of the manifestos and the unbounded pictorial surface in the exhibition space, Dóra Maurer established an analogy between the pictorial surface of the folded canvas and the projection of the film image. In the first case, the graduated transcription of the initiatory idea, and the varied phases of its demonstration by painterly means, laid the basis for its further reinterpretation by Stano Filko in the active form of his personal archive. This archive is today an integral part of the spectral holistic system created by the artist in the early 1980s, composed of three categories, corresponding to three degrees of being, which Filko named (1) red—biology; (2) blue—cosmology; (3) white—absolute spirituality and would later elaborate further (fig. 3.5–6).²⁰

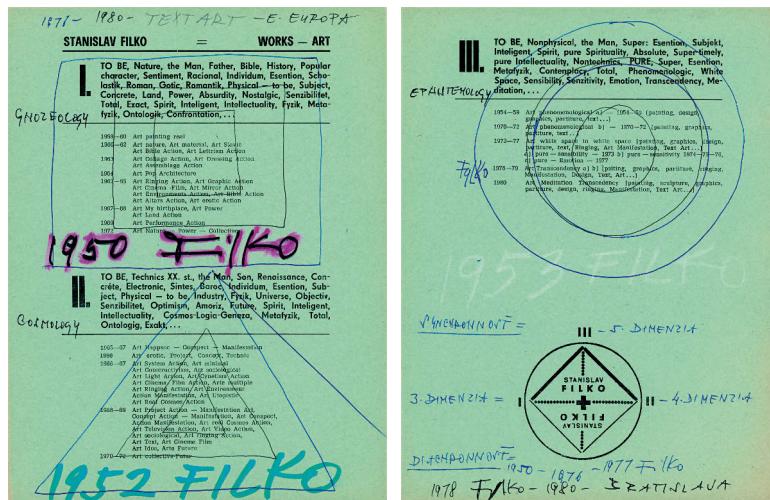
Dóra Maurer's *Timing*, by contrast, takes the position of a nodal point, because it integrates the important motive forces that are essential to her work. The film stands at the crossroads of all the endeavors the artist had thus far undertaken.²¹ Indeed, the film's organizing principle is contained in the mea-

19 László Beke, "Objective Tenderness," in *Dóra Maurer: Arbeiten = Munkák = Works 1970–1993*, eds. Dieter Ronte, László Beke (Budapest: Present Time Foundation, 1994), 107–8.

20 Aurel Hrabušický, "Stano Filko—tvorba 1964–1980," in *Stano Filko 1*, eds. Lucia Gregorová Stach, Aurel Hrabušický (Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 2018), 341–342. The editors use the terms "Filko's cosmology" and "psycho-philosophical system SF."

21 László Beke, "Objective Tenderness," 107–8.

Figure 3.5–6: Stano Filko, “Works—Art,” 1980, self-published leaflet.



suring of the compositional make-up of the pictorial surface as a time axis of the events of folding. The organizing principle in *Timing* is based on a transposition of the canvas to the projective surface of the film and a displacement of the counting of the foldings of the canvas to the film cutting location. Gábor Kaszás writes on this principle in his essay on the collaboration between Dóra Maurer and her partner, Tibor Gávor:

The displacement is always visually present—joining the initial and final states—in her works, with which she transposes the created visual phenomena into purely qualitative and quantitative variables. Maurer's works based on the permutation and interchange of the elements of displacement and dislocation thus, with their vocabulary and their structure, also result in shifts in their visual sense. The revelation of the essential message of the mutating artwork-structure, pointing beyond itself, meanwhile relies upon the creativity and imagination of the recipient in every instance.²²

22 Gábor Kaszás, "An Artist Couple: Dóra Maurer—Tibor Gáyör: The Outline of Two Artistic Careers," in Maurer—Gáyör: Párhuzamos Életművek = Parallel Lebenswerke = Parallel Oeuvres (Cvör: Városi Művészeti Múzeum, 2002), 83.

Maurer's media-specific interventions amplify this displacement effect in her structural approach to the film image: "This not only brings the approximate sameness of the repetitions to light, but also reveals the many inextricably related deviations and anomalies inherent in the impression of constant sameness."²³ Behind shifting the meaning of measuring the time to measuring the absence, there are precisely these deviations and anomalies present in gaps between regular folding of the canvas. In other words, the film measures subjective time rather than clock time.²⁴

Maurer's film might be compared (though not directly) to her teaching work at the Cultural Center of the Ganz-MÁVAG engineering works. According to Éva Forgács, Maurer's emphasis on a visual education in elementary forms and processes of perception comes from the spirit and methodology of Bauhaus:

Maurer composed a systematic teaching process to drive her students away from copying into freely conceived re-creation of a visual experience. [...] Taking a fresh look at the simplest forms leads to re-considering fundamental concepts; and reassessing basic concepts of forms opens up the road to reconsider other views, beyond visual expression. This prospect was the actual purpose of introducing the study circles' participants into visual literacy and lucid, systematic thinking.²⁵

In an essay on her teaching work during that period, Maurer emphasizes the moment of concentration and cleansing of the space from all disturbing influences; collectively, she and the course participants painted all of the furniture and equipment white.²⁶ The concept of expanded communication was developed still further by her coworker Miklós Erdély, who placed communication at the center of his artistic and teaching theory, as the communication of a specific enlightened state of mind.²⁷

23 Christian Höller, "Displacement Effects," in *Maurer Dóra: Hajlított idő—Filmretrospektív = Folded Time—Film Retrospective*, ed. Zoltán Prosek (Budapest: Rómer Flóris Művészeti és Történeti Múzeum / Flóris Rómer Museum of Art and History, 2018), 67.

24 Judit Király, "Timing, 1973 (1980)," in Prosek, *Maurer Dóra*, 84–5.

25 Éva Forgács, "The Bauhaus Paradox: Creativity, Freedom and the Long-Lasting Legacy of Bauhaus in Hungary," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 213.

26 Dóra Maurer, "Outline of an Essay on Visual Education, 1978," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 111.

27 Sándor Hornyik, "Creativity, Collaboration and Enlightenment: Miklós Erdély's Art Pedagogy," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 186.

Discontinuities, Absences, Gaps, and Artist Archives

What the two projects examined here have in common is the absence of an object of depiction and a resistance to the spectacle. Both are fully focused on a performative self-referential process. But gaps and absences also occur on the level of successive order of images, whether it is photographic documentation of the *White Space in White Space* installation or the film *Timing* (elements of displacement and dislocation forming vocabulary and structure of the work as discussed above). From this comparison, can we deduce something about the organizing principle of the archive? Sven Spieker claims that archives are less concerned with memory than with the necessity to discard, erase, and eliminate.²⁸ According to Spieker, analysis of archives requires resisting a linear narrative, which means to treat gaps or absences as functional elements in the analytical process.²⁹ Postsocialist artist archives could be the kind of places that materialize discontinuities, absences, and gaps in narratives on the transformation of Eastern Europe's former socialist societies. Their significance consists in self-historicization and self-contextualization,³⁰ because artistic and archival practice have combined in a method of constructing statements whose purposes are realized independently of established institutional practice and give visibility to extruded levels of social reality.

We may define the artist archive as an organizing structure that is, in principle, non-discursive and non-narrative, whose inner temporality is fully bound up with the material and method of archivization. As the critical theory of postcommunism, overlapping with thinking on decolonization, has demonstrated, the archive as a medium of artistic practice may be an active

28 Cited from Wolfgang Ernst, "Discontinuities: Does the Archive Become Metaphorical in Multimedia Space?", in *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 113.

29 Sven Spieker, "The Big Archive," in *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Ana Janevska, Roxana Marcoci, and Ksenia Nouril (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 151–3.

30 Here I would like to indicate a parallel with the concept of "a living archive of the diaspora" outlined by Stuart Hall: "The moment of the archive represents the end of a certain kind of creative innocence, and the beginning of a new stage of self-consciousness, of self-reflexivity in an artistic movement. Here the whole apparatus of 'a history'—periods, key figures and works, tendencies, shifts, breaks, ruptures—slips silently into place." Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (Spring 2001), 89.

source of communicative memory (of the gaps, absences, and extruded and suppressed places, in public and collective memory) encompassing three periods of historical experience: actually existing socialism; the revolutions and fall of socialist regimes; and, finally, the postcommunist transition to capitalism.³¹

As the archives demonstrate new methodological procedures for the archaeology of media, this may then (provided our reading of them is freed from a reductive subordination to the discourse of (art) historiography) lead to an acknowledgement of the archive as an agent with a “tempo-reality” all its own.³² Such a methodology, on the one hand, points to the resistance of artist archives to historical time and may be productive in disclosing a system of arranging documents as a construction that inherently has an essential testimonial value. On the other hand, every archive is connected to a complex sequence of historical events, on the level of personal episode as well as on that of political action. In the case of the archives of Eastern European artists, which have been distinguished by contra- or para-institutional concepts, what is important is not only their subversive aspect, undermining the state’s totalitarian power of direction during the times of real socialism; equally significant is their resistance to reductive views of the socialist past.

31 Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, “Decolonizing Eastern Europe: Beyond Internal Critique,” in Janevski, Marcoci, and Nouril, *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe*, 194.

32 Wolfgang Ernst, “Radically De-Historicising the Archiv Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse,” *L’Internationale Online*, February 2, 2016, https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/50_radically_de_historicising_the_archive_decolonising_archival_memory_from_the_supremacy_of_historical_discourse/.

