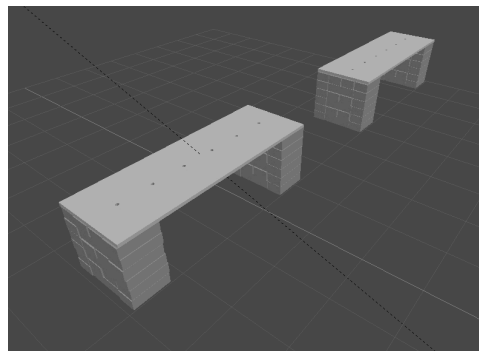


**Jiří Kovanda and Richard Nikl**  
Encounters

**Vernissage 27.02.2015, 19h**  
28.02. – 20.04.2015

Project and introduction: Victoria Dejaco



“The profanization happens by means of deritualization and desacralization. Nowadays we increasingly lose ritual spaces and acts.”<sup>1</sup>

“The digital swarm is not a mass in as much as it doesn’t have a *soul*, it is not inhabited by a *spirit*. The soul is gathering and unifying. The digital swarm consists of single individuals. The mass has a very different structure. It has characteristics that cannot be traced back to the individual. The single person blends in with the new unit and doesn’t have his/her *own profile* anymore. An random gathering of people is not a mass yet. Only a soul or spirit binds them together to a homogenous mass. The digital swarm does not have the human soul or spirit at all. The individuals joined in a swarm do not develop a *We*. They do not have the unison that allows them to be an active mass.”<sup>2</sup>

The series of exhibitions developed for Galleria Doris Ghetta is part of a bigger corpus of exhibitions, focusing on interpersonal relations between the curator, the artist and the viewer intensifying the level of closeness these involved parties can share. To me this is of major importance in a time when the individual loses all connection to the real physical other and in extension to a concrete community. In his introduction to *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) Richard Sennett describes how after the emperor Augustus there was a trend to retreat to the private sphere and see the public responsibilities (*res publica*) as inconvenient duties. ‘The other’ became increasingly estranged and uncanny in as much as the exchange with strangers within the community outside of family and friends decreased thus dissolving the feeling of reciprocal commitment in the society. The indirect consequence was the fall of the Roman Empire. “To take initiative, to bear responsibility, the feeling of being useful or even irreplaceable, are vital needs of the human soul.”<sup>3</sup>

The time to indulge, to create places of discourse and spaces to be human again is what I expect from the sanctuary of art and culture. The exhibitions planned over the next two years are supposed to result in new experiences for the viewers. Making them part of a common experience should create a foundation to relate to one another again. Those ties are meant to give back a reciprocal feeling of identification

<sup>1</sup> Bjung Chul Han, *Im Schwarm*, Berlin 2013, S. 20. [author’s translation. Original: „Die Profanisierung vollzieht sich als Entritualisierung und Entsakralisierung. Heute verschwinden zunehmend die rituellen Räume und Handlungen.“]

<sup>2</sup> Ebd., S. 45. [author’s translation. Original: „Der digitale Schwarm ist schon deshalb keine Masse, weil ihm keine *Seele*, kein *Geist* innewohnt. Die Seele ist versammelnd und vereinigend. Der digitale Schwarm besteht aus vereinzelt Individuen. Die Masse ist völlig anders strukturiert. Sie offenbart Eigenschaften, die auf die Einzelnen nicht zurückzuführen sind. Die Einzelnen verschmelzen zu einer neuen Einheit, in der sie kein *eigenes Profil* mehr haben. Eine zufällige Ansammlung von Menschen ist noch keine Masse. Erst eine Seele oder ein Geist verschweißt sie zu einer in sich geschlossenen, homogenen Masse. Dem digitalen Schwarm fehlt die Massenseele oder der Massengeist ganz. Die Individuen, die sich zu eine Schwarm zusammenfügen, entwickeln kein *Wir*. Ihn zeichnet kein Einklang aus, der die Menge zu einer Handlungsmasse zusammenschweißt.“]

<sup>3</sup> Simone Weil, *Die Verwurzelung. Vorspiel zu einer Erklärung der Pflichten dem Menschen gegenüber*, Zürich 2011 (Erstpubl. Paris, 1943), S. 18. [author’s translation. Original: „Die Initiative zu ergreifen und Verantwortung zu tragen, das Gefühl, nützlich und sogar unentbehrlich zu sein, sind lebensnotwendige Bedürfnisse der menschlichen Seele.“]

GALLERIA  
**DORIS GHETTA**

between the group and the individual. I develop my exhibitions in close exchange with the artists who for the most part are friends, friends of friends or close acquaintances, people I trust and know. I invite them to invite an artist they connect and want to develop a project with.

Richard Nikl's artistic practice could not be closer to my approach. His way of producing art is very dialectic and in great exchange with peers often in close collaboration with them. He likes to keep all ends loose in order to have an open field of permanent potential. Also, he could not be more an artist of his time. He instinctively deals with material, technique and context in a very post-internet manner without slipping into the boring aesthetics of it. Curators working with Richard get 3D-renderings of the show, before the works even exist and the post-exhibition-documentation is a work on its own, giving credit to everything that is important in digital reproduction (legibility, sense of space, detail, surface) while at the same time defying the reproduction's lack of aura (Walter Benjamin) by giving it autonomous value and aesthetic.

It is in his collaborations and conversations that Richard analyzes and defines his own position and thoughts. In the case of artist Jiří Kovanda Richard found a congenial interlocutor.

Jiří Kovanda (1953) has been one of the outstanding conceptual artists of the Czech art scene. He organized his first performances in public environments in Prague in the mid-1970s. His performances appear slightly off-key, allowing us, through the combination of apparent simplicity and imbalance, to grasp a grain of what remains real and human in today's society. In his discrete and poetical installations, collages, paintings and performances he strives to find beauty in everyday life and to map a space where the individual can actually exist. His art is accessible to many types of audiences always bearing a nucleus of deep understanding of the human condition often in a provocative and touching manner. His works have been shown internationally in institutions such as the Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Tate Modern in London and the New Museum in New York.

Richard and Jiří have had a close relationship since 2008 when they met as student and teacher at the FUD Usti nad Labem, the Faculty of Art and Design in Prague. The university employed few professors for fine arts and only had a small number of students; the perfect conditions for a good one-on-one-time between teacher and student. Jiří and Richard took long walks together where they would discuss their practice, their aims, the local and international art scene, the role of the artist (in society). In 2011 Richard finished his BA and moved to Vienna to study in the class of Heimo Zobernig at the Academy of Fine Arts. From 2012 onwards I was in close contact with many students from this class. There was a buzz around them in Vienna at the time.

For their collaboration at Galleria Doris Ghetta Richard and Jiří sat down together with their sketchbooks those old-fashioned sources that are still so often the production's point of departure for both artists. Taking into consideration and using as inspiration the alpine context of the exhibition they let their works be in conversation with each other. A stencil-like procedural work developed by Richard gives the show its language and structure. It evolved around the Plexiglas-works that Richard has been working on during the last two years of which some new versions will be shown in the exhibition. These structures have always had the potential to integrate their environment quite literally by incorporating practical things around the exhibition like sponsors' logos or press texts held by flyer-pockets. This time they hold new collages by Jiří created specifically for this exhibition. The central sculpture can be used to sit and linger in the space, referencing the central seating facilities typical for big national museums thereby slowing down the pace of the gallery where people usually spend less time indulging in the aesthetic experience. By sitting together and discovering the detailed works step by step the visitors might start a conversation, might make a connection, might share a smile, might fall in love.

Victoria Dejaco