

**Sabine
Hänsgen**

Polaroid – Link – Means for a Series

**Three Performances from
the Videotheque of the
Collective Actions Group:
Dedications to Inspection
Medical Hermeneutics**

The German art historian and curator Sabine Hänsen has been involved with the conceptualist performances of the Moscow-based Collective Actions Group in various capacities since 1985. Among other things, she introduced the use of video into the group's documentary practice and set up their video archive, or videotheque, as a space not only for housing videos and other related materials but also for exploring the artistic aspects of documentation. Her contribution here is a "secondary" journey through the layers of documentation of three performances from the videotheque in which reception and interpretation are seen as part of the performance and aesthetic process. The performances took place in the early 1990s and were dedicated to another Moscow conceptual group, Inspection Medical Hermeneutics.

Since the late Soviet era, the performances of the Collective Actions Group have made an important contribution to the development of an alternative space of communication. The Collective Actions Group creates an intimate public of its own, beyond state culture and also beyond the market economy and mass media circulation. *Trips out of Town*, an ongoing project of the group since 1976, share the common objective of collaborative journeys made by a number of participants to the countryside around Moscow – often to a field far from the intensive semiotic sphere of the metropolis, that is, to an “empty” zone in nature. A field of untouched snow at the edges of the city, a park, or a forest have all served as stages for the group’s minimalist actions, which delve into the elementary spatio-temporal structures of perception, and whose enigmatic nature provokes a range of different interpretations. The white field – referencing the Suprematist tradition of Kazimir Malevich, Martin Heidegger’s *Lichtung* (clearing), and the Buddhist conception of *shunyata* (void) – becomes a demonstration zone creating new perspectives of contemplation and reflection for the participants. These journeys are a kind of experiment that allows for the exploration of the mind in relation to changing mythological, cultural, and political contexts.

The performances of the Collective Actions Group cannot be reduced to the immediate perception of a situation. Visible phenomena are always related to an invisible dimension of meaning, whereby the performative gesture in the situation more closely corresponds to a new impulse in an endless interpretative spiral in which situation and documentation enhance each other again and again. The process of aestheticizing extends into documentation, commentary, and theoretical discourse. In a later stage of development, the group began to compile documentary volumes about its actions in which a range of materials – descriptive texts, narratives by the participants, theoretical commentary, discussions, diagrams, photographs, video, etc. – form a descriptive-narrative-interpretive artwork of documentation.¹

In the mid-1980s, I introduced the medium of video into the documentary discourse of the Collective Actions Group. At a time when the Soviet state strictly controlled all media of technical reproduction, I managed to bring a Blaupunkt video camera from Germany into the Soviet Union. From my point of view, video was the ideal medium for archiving aesthetic practices that were usually excluded from official cultural memory.

1 The first five documentary volumes of the Collective Actions Group, which first appeared in *samizdat*, were republished in the volume *Kollektivnye deistviia: Poezdki za gorod (Collective Actions: Trips out of Town)*, Ad Marginem, Moscow, 1998. Further reading in English: *Empty Zones: Andrei Monastyrski and Collective Actions*, ed. Boris Groys, Black Dog Publishing, London, 2011; *Collective Actions: Audience Recollections from the First Five Years, 1976-1981*, trans. and ed. Yelena Kalinsky, Soberscove Press, Chicago, 2012. Documentation of the performances of the Collective Actions Group can be found on the website: <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-ACTIONS.htm> (accessed on August 17, 2016).

In this respect, it was important for me to build up a video archive or a videotheque – a space in which not only video recordings as such are collected and preserved, but also the accompanying materials, texts, and images.² The intention of the videotheque was for the meditative recordings of the Collective Actions Group, in which almost nothing happens, to allow viewers to go on a “secondary” journey through the multiple layers of documentation, and thus to be able to reconstruct events and explore their own attitudes towards them.

The following selection from the videotheque is comprised of documentation from three performances by the Collective Actions Group dedicated to members of Inspection Medical Hermeneutics, a group of artists from the next generation of Moscow Conceptionalism whose practices were characterized by hyperbolizing principles of commentary and interpretation, as well as by play with discourses from East and West, psychedelia, and pseudo-scientific methodology.³ These three performances and the related documentation date back to the time of transition when a shift from a specifically Soviet to a global context was taking place in the art world. For the Collective Actions Group, it was also a time when the *Trips out of Town* were expanded to include travel abroad, a change that provided a new impulse to reflect on the perception of other cultures, one’s own culture in contact with other cultures, and the processes of translation between the cultures.

The video recordings also offer a reflection on the potential of various other media to represent these processes. *Polaroid: For Pavel Pepperstein* focuses on instant photography, thus emphasizing the moment of presence, i.e. contemporaneity. *Link: For Sergei Anufriev* demonstrates the use of new digital media, the structure of the video recording being determined by the course of a computer game. *Means for a Series: For Yuri Leiderman* represents a restaging of the *samizdat* typescript book, a medium that was characteristic of the hermetic communication among members of the Soviet underground.

2 Individual videos were included in many exhibitions on Moscow Conceptualism. A selection in the form of the videotheque was shown for the first time in the exhibition *M.A.N.I. Museum Video Archive* at the Gallery Obscuri Viri, Moscow, 1996, and is now part of the collection of the National Centre for Contemporary Arts (NCCA) in Moscow. See also <http://artkladovka-ru.1gb.ru/ru/artists/10/kollektivnye-deystviya/works/185/> (accessed August 17, 2016).

3 The art collective Inspection Medical Hermeneutics came into being in December 1987 in a squat in Furman Lane in Moscow. The founding members were Pavel Pepperstein, Sergei Anufriev, and Yuri Leiderman. The group produced texts, installations, and performances dealing with questions of language and meaning during *Glasnost*, an era when Soviet culture was going through a process of transformation. The term *glasnost* has several meanings in the Russian language. In the 1980s, the meaning of *glasnost* as “publicity” in the sense of “the state of being open to public knowledge” was revived and made popular again by Mikhail Gorbachev as a slogan for increased government transparency.

I would now like to invite the reader on a journey through the documentation. The process of reception should be understood as part of the performance. In terms of ways of making meaning, I would emphasize the open-endedness of interpretation: interpretation as movement, as being-in-transit between languages, cultures, and media, interpretation as an event more rather than as a final result.

Conceptualizing interpretation as a performance between artists and spectators enables us to recognize that, in contrast to the complete world models of any ideology, interpretation as aesthetic process is always fragmentary, contingent on personal interests and motivations, giving us the opportunity to reflect on how meaning is made through language between and across subjects.

Documentation of the three performances *Polaroid*, *Link*, and *Means for a Series*

Each performance is documented by a short descriptive text, information about the performance, a dialogue/recollection by the authors and participants, and a series of video stills and photographs of the performances.

I.
POLAROID
For Pavel Pepperstein



fig. 1

Collective Actions Group,
POLAROID – For Pavel Pepperstein, 1990,
Polaroid photography.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.

We asked Pavel Pepperstein to lie on a hill by the Yauza River in the vicinity of Losiny Ostrov. He lay down on his back and we arranged six bread buns around his head to form a “nimbus”. We then took a photograph of him in this position using a Polaroid camera. We attached the Polaroid image to a long string, which we tied around his finger, and hid the picture under an umbrella at the foot of the hill. At the conclusion of the action, he was supposed to pull the string and thus the photograph toward himself.

We next handed him the score of the action, which was comprised of two identical children’s books of Russian fairy tales sewn to each side of a piece of cardboard. The books were attached in such a way that you could read only one of the fairy tales: *The Terrible Goat*. We glued the pages from a book about Johann Gottlieb Fichte over the beginning of the second fairy tale.

We asked Pepperstein to read the fairy tale into a radio microphone and then to comment on the texts about Fichte. After communicating these instructions to him, we walked over to the video camera, located on another hill about forty to fifty meters from the hill where Pepperstein lay. Andrei Monastyrski would receive through a set of headphones the trans-

mission of Pepperstein's reading and commentary and repeat aloud what Pepperstein said while standing next to the video camera. In other words, the video camera would record Pepperstein's text as performed by Monastyrski. However, the radio microphone did not work, probably because of a high-voltage electric power line running between the two hills.

Nevertheless, Pepperstein read the fairy tale and made his commentary on Fichte in his assigned position, and afterwards, he pulled on the string and thus retrieved the Polaroid photograph, discovering an image of himself surrounded by a "nimbus of bread".

Moscow

22. 8. 1990

Sabine Hänsen and Andrei Monastyrski (with Joseph Backstein)

Performance and video Sabine Hänsen – Andrei Monastyrski

Sabine Hänsen: The performance *Polaroid: For Pavel Pepperstein* was designed for one participant, Pavel Pepperstein, and used elements that took into account a single viewer's aesthetic tendencies and interests.

Taking this performance as a model, it would be interesting to trace how the plot unfolds at various stages, and what relationships emerge between these stages. Specifically, there is the conception stage, which is a bit like an "ideal" plan, then comes the action, and finally, the documentation, which could also be considered a stage of the performance. It is mainly between these stages that a coherent picture of the aesthetic phenomenon emerges. In my view, the interpreter, in order to obtain this coherent picture, needs to know how to read "between" the stages of the action, since the phenomenon of performance is not depleted by having occurred in the field of vision. It is in these "in-between" intervals that we find hidden the thing that has not yet become text in its informational completeness: the live impression of the event as a whole.

Andrei Monastyrski: Yes, these intervals exist. They have a cascading character, and gradually, step-by-step, they are filled with interpretation. In the case we are discussing, one final "cascade" is the actual video recording, which is processed in a certain way and thus is open to outside interpretation. It is this ultimate aesthetic outcome that the external viewer faces. But still, we must consider all the different stages of the work.

Sabine Hänsen: The first stage is the conception. We devised the project together. I saw a volume of Russian fairy tales with the title *Kolobok*⁴ in a bookstore window. The cover featured an illustration of a scene from the fairy tale: a *kolobok* running away from home. On the one hand, I was attracted by this book simply as a collection of Russian fairy tales that I wanted to read, while on the other hand, I knew that the term *kolobok* is frequently invoked in the Moscow Conceptualist school's discourse as a metaphorical term signifying a particular image of the author-character, i.e. the author distancing himself from his or her position by taking on the perspective of a character. But I had never read the fairy tale itself. It was then, in that moment, that I had the impulse for the idea. I immediately purchased several copies of the book. The same day, I stopped by the bakery and bought two or three small round buns. I placed them in the bag where I had the books. When I got home, I took the books and buns out of the bag, and I saw that the buns resembled the *kolobok* that appeared on the cover of the book of fairy tales.

A connection formed between these objects as elements of the performance. It is worth noting that the addressee of the intended performance was immediately imagined to be Pepperstein, probably because his work features the theme of children's books and their characters, including the *kolobok*, and Inspection Medical Hermeneutics' has done various actions with bread. A plot quickly developed from these elements and took on a specific arrangement: to lay Pasha⁵ down on the ground on his back, to arrange six *kolobok* buns into a "nimbus" around his head without him noticing (the book had exactly six images of *kolobok*), to photograph him in this position using a Polaroid camera, and to ask him to read the score of the action in this same prone position using a wireless microphone so that the reading could be recorded by a video camera some distance away. The score consisted of a two-sided object sewn together from the two books of Russian fairy tales. Each side allowed you to turn the pages of only one fairy tale: *The Terrible Goat*. The beginning of the next fairy tale, located further down on the same page, was covered over with pages from a book about Fichte. Pasha was invited to read the entire tale of *The Terrible Goat* out loud, but not to read the text related to Fichte, rather to just add some improvised commentary after the fairy tale. Then, with the help of a string tied to his finger, he had to pull the Polaroid image toward himself and look at it. That's when he would discover in what kind of "nimbus" he had been arranged while laying on the hill and reading the fairy tale. In other words, on the event-level of the performance, the most significant thing

4 *Kolobok* "refers to a baked dough ball, a character in many Russian fairy tales. *Kolobok* rolls down the road, running away from everyone who wants to eat it: the fox, the wolf, the bear, etc. *Kolobok* is a good image for someone who does not want to be identified, named, or regarded as attached to a particular role or place, for someone who is slipping away from all of this." From *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*: <http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/page?id=198&lang=en> (accessed July 21, 2016).

5 Pavel Pepperstein's nickname.



fig. 2

Collective Actions Group,
POLAROID – For Pavel Pepperstein, 1990, video stills.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.



for Pasha should have been the discovery of his own image in this rather strange arrangement. This is what took place by the Yauza River in the vicinity of the Rostokino Aqueduct.

Andrei Monastyrski: When you watch the video recording of Pasha's preparations for the action – where we are wrapping him in a blanket, surrounding him with bread buns, photographing him using the Polaroid, tying the string to his finger, etc. – an image emerges of some kind of ritual activity around a dead body, a folkloristic image, archaic in its vividness and specificity. This archaic vividness is easily discernible in the Polaroid picture in which Pasha assumes the form of some kind of Bread God. Then, after a pause in the action (in the video recording, this takes the form of Pasha lying motionless on the hill for fifteen to twenty minutes), the scene changes abruptly. Pasha lifts himself up, holding the umbrella, and suddenly, there emerges a figure of a person seated on a hill beneath an umbrella clothed in some sort of ancient Chinese dress garb – that's how the blanket that initially resembled a funeral shroud appears. We then approach this figure, carrying our own umbrellas, sit down beside him, and converse about something. In any case, the video recording of this scene is very reminiscent of the meditative spaces of strolling in old Japanese engravings: tiny figures beneath umbrellas, stripped of the vividness and serious event-ness of archaic, folkloristic subjects. In other words, I discovered the stylistic transgression from a folkloristic space to a meditative-cultural one in the documentary stage, beyond the borders of the action itself, at its margins. And this is when the meaning of the score, already present at the moment of conception, became clear. A not entirely comprehensible juxtaposition of two contrasting texts – one folkloristic and vividly emotional, the other philosophical-cultural and distanced – was aesthetically articulated through the stylistic transgression in the documentary material of the video recording. However, the meaning that revealed itself in the video recording did not immediately become apparent when provided in such direct documentary form; it did not yet consolidate itself into a genre. This stylistic transgression, as a live aesthetic impression, needed to be fixed on a new level of documentary elaboration. We had to introduce the element of freeze-frames into the documentary recording, making the recording aesthetically open and self-sufficient, and introduce the still pictures, already completely generic in their character, during the preparation and post-action stages. Thus, some parts of the video recording are transformed from documentation into work of art. And it is only in this state that the work transcends the frame of the three stages of performance about which you spoke and can be considered open to outside interpretation.

Sabine Hänsen: It turns out that the end result, or the aesthetic resolution, takes place simultaneously through the performance of the idea laid out in the score and through the unpredictable “marginal” effects that

appear in both the action and the documentation. Specifically, I have in mind the fact that it was raining during the action and so umbrellas had to be used. In some sense, the umbrellas turned out to be the main protagonists of the stylistic transgression from archaic-folkloristic imagery to the freely meditative non-necessity of images in the Japanese style. And another unpredictable detail that influenced the documentation turned out to be the presence of a high voltage electric power line at the place of action. It blocked the transmission of Pasha's reading into the radio microphone for the video camera that was located on another hill. And since the audio series didn't work, the treatment of the video material focused entirely on visual documentation and, in my opinion, your idea of introducing freeze-frames was to some degree determined by the wish to correct the failed audio series, to transform it into a background of rhythmic noise background. The use of the freeze-frame device introduces a significant change into the temporal regime of the documentary event. By itself, the documentation reflects the real time spent at the place of action. The freeze-frame permits the emergence of pieces of "arrested time" relative to the event. In the rhythmic series of "arrested" time and real time, in their interplay, we discover the effect of free aesthetic time, the very *Luft* of live impression, directed toward the external viewer who does not take part in the action. In other words, this free time is one of the genre-generating factors that transform documentation into artistic material. On the one hand, the freeze-frame produces a framing effect and a kind of falling-out of the constant flow of video into a static tableau; on the other hand, the freeze-frame takes away the framing of the action event itself, refocusing the viewer's attention on incidents that were completely foreign to the plot. In other words, they take away the frame provided by the action's plot and discover the aesthetic self-sufficiency of the event before the start of the performance and after its conclusion.



fig. 3

Collective Actions Group,
LINK - For Sergei Anufriev, 1990, photography.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.

II.

LINK

For Sergei Anufriev

This action took place in the Botanical Garden of the Ruhr University in Bochum on a small wooden bridge that spanned a pond in the ancient plants section.

At one end of the bridge, we assembled a structure out of a light blue vase set on a tape recorder with a pile of little cards placed on top of the vase. Glued to the cards were pictures with scenes from various computer games that had been cut out of magazines. On the other end of the bridge was a video camera switched on to play. A scene from the Nintendo computer game *Zelda 2*, which had been recorded the previous evening, could be observed in the viewfinder. The tape recorder beneath the vase contained a cassette tape of music from the same computer game and was also switched on to play.

We handed Anufriev a purse and invited him to walk back and forth between the vase and the video camera, where he could watch the recording in the viewfinder, but for no more than one minute. Each time he reached the vase, he had to take one of the cards and place it in the purse. Beneath the twentieth card was a set of instructions inviting Anufriev to take a hammer out of the vase, shatter the vase, and gather the broken pieces into the purse. And that is what he did.

Bochum

21. 9. 1990

Sabine Hänsen and Andrei Monastyrski

Abroadness

Sabine Hänsen – Andrei Monastyrski

Sabine Hänsen: The action *Link* serves as an example of how technology from abroad has influenced the aesthetic development of Moscow Conceptualism. First we turn our attention to the location of the action, the botanical garden of the Ruhr University. It is not a “hot” place like the border zone in Berlin that attracts artists. In other words, the botanical garden is not a part of the local artistic infrastructure. There is no illusion of culture in this place, but neither is there an illusion of pure nature, since the garden is artificial. Thus, the chosen location simulates a primitive biotope – horsetails, fiddlehead ferns, etc. equipped with scientific labels and plant classifications. The action took place on a little bridge

over a pond. In essence, the action came about exclusively as a result of the spatial separation of the representations of sound and image of representation in the computer game. It was within this split that Anufriev ran back and forth. How can this action be related to minimalist aesthetics? Anufriev performed movements analogous to those of the computer game character, walking back and forth like the Link character in the transitional periods in the game, which made up the majority of what was presented in the video recording.

Andrei Monastyrski: Minimalism is always relative. In this case, the “margins” of minimalism were heaped with two piles of complicated combinations of different forms and meanings. I am talking about the video camera and the structure with the tape recorder, vase, hammer, pictures, and instructions. Each of these piles contained hundreds of details. In this way, minimalism is organized by the most maximalist means in this action. It is hard to say whether Anufriev was more submerged in the visual and auditory information, or in his own walking back and forth.

Sabine Hänsgen: Let’s take a closer look at the game. In a certain sense, we discover in it a continuation of the action for Pepperstein. Pepperstein read aloud a Russian fairy tale. Here we also have a fairy tale. And also, the purse that Anufriev carried while he walked back and forth had a picture attached to it of the place where Pepperstein’s action took place. In the plot of the game, Link’s task is to save the kingdom of Hyrule. Along the way, he battles with the forces of evil – in a forest, in a field, in a desert, etc. This game contains not only dramatic episodes related to the plot, but also purely meditative, rhythmic ones that are related to earning points. The more points earned, the more successfully you have submerged yourself into the rhythmic program embedded in the game. In the action, we placed an accent not on the old-fashioned fairy tale episodes of battle and drama, but rather on the transitional periods of rhythmic time-passing.

Andrei Monastyrski: Yes, that is exactly right. The start of the game was magnificent. It always contained two levels that transitioned smoothly from one to the other: the meditative earning of points and then, with new powers, a battle on a new level. These meditations in the course of a lighter battle were a kind of analgesic and did not permit excessive jolts or dramatics during the task. In the concluding parts of the game, when I encountered Link’s double in the form of a shadow, I experienced the game with greater discomfort due to the absence of the meditative level – the analgesic – and it seems to me that the game’s creators somehow miscalculated this concluding step. The simplification of the game’s structure, the bringing together of the two levels into one, exclusively battle, has an extremely jolting and dispiriting effect. A new level of archaism seems to arise, not at the level of the image, but on a structural level: the convergence of all of this into the dull dramatism of confrontation without the

gentle intermezzo of meditative practice, which normally makes a greater degree of resistance to new dramatic conflicts possible. The meditative phases were a kind of game with oneself. The last, dramatic step, on the other hand, is no longer a game with oneself, but with the game's creators who are hidden behind the figure of the player, in his own image: Link's shadow. Here, the creators of the game seem to have become confused. It is possible that they got carried away by the successful image of the "double" and forgot the strategic structure of the entire game, i.e. the necessary presence of two levels of action, the meditative and dramatic.

Sabine Hänsgen: Let's put aside the discussion of the game for now. If we consider the video recording of the action as a whole, we can see that a framing of live action has materialized around the video game that Anufriev watches like a film through the camera's viewfinder. The first image shows the vase on top of the tape recorder where Anufriev collects the little printed cards. The last frame shows the shattering of the vase and Anufriev's recollection of the action as an immediate impression that was produced right there on the garden bridge. The weather is important in this part of the recording, its abrupt changes from sun to hail and back again. These changes were unpredictable, and within this unpredictable, unmediated frame there is the contrasting computer game. This contrast and collision reveals that the screen is not all. That the game is finite. In other words, the contrast reveals the boundaries of simulation and focuses attention on the physical articulations that are outside the frame of the game.

Andrei Monastyrski: Nevertheless, the jolts of physical articulations, much like the jolts of dramatic obstructions in the game, caused me a great deal of discomfort. The hail was entirely unpleasant for me, as was the strong rain. I perceived it in the same way as the poor planning in the game, a disturbance in the balance of comfort and discomfort in the direction of the latter. I cannot value this as an image for imitation. And anyway, the psychic bleakness that I began to experience starting around 1988 was very rarely balanced by positives. One positive experience was going out skiing along the Zvezdnyi (Star) Boulevard in Moscow after eleven at night when the streets were virtually empty. I would first improvise for forty-five minutes on the piano and then get dressed, take the skis, and go to the boulevard. I would go out on the skis there, counting the laps I made, for probably about an hour. Then I would climb the staircase by the hardware store and walk along the courtyards past that strange tower on Tsander Street. Arrive home. It is nice after this kind of exertion to take a cold shower. It is a kind of glance off to the side, where there is nothing but snow, trees, stars.

Sabine Hänsgen: Perhaps it is with the same kind of curative aims that Anufriev suggested the action's title, *Link*. After all, Link is not just the



fig. 4

Collective Actions Group,
LINK – For Sergei Anufriev, 1990, video stills.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.



fig. 5

Collective Actions Group,
LINK – For Sergei Anufriev, 1990, video stills.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.

name of the main protagonist in a computer game, but “link” in English means “connection”. Perhaps Anufriev meant to imply the schizoanalytic method in which different systems of thought are randomly associated by chance, blurring the boundary between different systems of movement “there and back,” like a unique kind of feedback when a microphone is held up to a loudspeaker. This is the beginning of a game on academic territory, and just as there were unexpected changes in the weather, there may be unexpected results.

Andrei Monastyrski: For me, unexpected results are only tolerable within the confines of tradition. They can only be tolerated to a certain point. The principle at the heart of the idea cannot be limitless tolerance. In my beloved *Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, Castorp also undertakes an important outing on skis. We all also loved *Journey to the West* and certain episodes of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. For example, the stroll of Bao Yu in the garden with his father and entourage, and the dragging of Bao Yu along the snowy field by two monks. It is these snowy fields that are somehow unusually effective. There is in them some kind of not-yet-beginning, a constant newness and possibility. It seems to be here that we get Ilya Kabakov’s love for empty white surfaces and Heidegger with his “possibilities”. All of this is rooted in my childhood impressions of living in the north.

Sabine Hänsgen: Now we should make a postscript relating to the end of the *Zelda-2* game. The end of the game produced a kind of unexpected turn from fairy tale to film, a real Hollywood happy ending. Link saves Zelda. Zelda comes alive and rises from the sheets. The curtain falls and from behind the curtain – a kiss. And then the words “The End” appear.

Andrei Monastyrski: Exactly right. I also found it interesting to suddenly discover the names of the team that made the game, to feel the disclosure of anonymity as the most erotic event of the entire game structure.

Sabine Hänsgen: I would prefer not to speak right now about the game, but rather about the perspective of computer games in general. For you, it was important to discover the names of the authors at the end. But if we take into account the more complex possibilities of computer games, the text-generating capacities of the computer keyboard, and the capacity of the viewer to participate in the composition, then in these interactive computer games, the player becomes the author and will already experience authorship as an erotic event. He can, for example, take pieces from different existing situations and use them to arrange new episodes or entire sequences. He can construct a scene of the romantic meeting from *Gone with the Wind* or the farewell from *Doctor Zhivago*. Moreover, the viewer can become not only the author of his own composition, but a character as well, if we take into account the possibilities of new technical

methods for creating virtual reality – gloves, headphones, headsets with two small screens.

Andrei Monastyrski: I view this with less psychologizing and more detachment, as in the realm of literature, video, film, etc. Everything takes place somewhere in the distance, including everything inside the computer game regardless of its degree of virtuality. It has nothing to do with me.

Sabine Hänsen: Why are you so interested in the names of the authors?

Andrei Monastyrski: Naming is an important discursive figure. That's why I perceive it as part of a series of traditional points of contact with worked-out situations already recorded in history. Neither the booklet, nor the game's opening titles make any mention of the authors. It is possible that they consider themselves a kind of gift similar to what players get for other achievements, the receiving of various magical items in the course of the game as a result of the battles, and finally, the magic of their names, the names of the creators of the entire game as the concluding and most significant gift at the end, when the player is victorious. Only then does the player partake in authorship, what you spoke about earlier. In other words, the discursive partaking comes before the technological. In any case, it is in this way that we can interpret the appearance of the authors' names only after the game's conclusion.



fig. 6

Collective Actions Group,
MEANS FOR A SERIES – For Yuri Leiderman, 1991, video stills.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.

III.

MEANS FOR A SERIES

For Yuri Leiderman

We arrived at the snow-covered Kievogorsky Field and invited Leiderman to move through the field while dragging a heavy plaster rosette on a strap behind him. In this way, he would trace a line in the snow indicating the zone from where the hangars, located in the north-west corner of the field could not be seen (see the preface and “Hangars in the North-West” from volume five of *Trips out of Town*).⁶ As he occupied himself with this tracing, Leiderman carried in his other hand a sealed cardboard box. Each time it tilted, a subtle tingling of bells could be heard from within.

After marking out the prescribed zone with the trace of the rosette in the snow (this was possible due to the sloped form of the field), Leiderman was instructed to approach us. We were standing closer to the centre of the field with the hangars in the background, and Monastyrski gave him a large black notebook with the inscription “For Yuri Leiderman” on the cover.

Inside the notebook was a set of magnified images from a small notebook entitled “On the Roof” (from Hänsen’s videotheque), as well as two photographs. One was of Hänsen standing on the pedestal of the Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina’s 1937 sculpture *The Worker and the Collective Farm Woman*, beside the heel of the collective farm woman, to which she had affixed cards with Chinese hieroglyphs. The second was of Leiderman’s briefcase placed on the pedestal of another one of Mukhina’s sculptures, entitled *We Demand Peace*, located on Prospekt Mira in Moscow, not far from *The Worker and the Collective Farm Woman*. Also inside the notebook was a sheet containing a fragment of Monastyrski’s letter to Hänsen concerning ideas of tradition and continuity in NOMA, the circle of Moscow Conceptualists.

Then Hänsen posed several questions to Leiderman as he stood before the camera. Monastyrski asked him to step away from the place of action (i.e. to leave the field). Monastyrski placed the rosette down on the snow, removed a plastic doll containing a musical mechanism from inside from the box (Leiderman did not know what he had been carrying in the box, or what the part of the action described here entailed), placed the doll on top of the rosette, and read the text of the Hrdaya-Sutra aloud into the camera’s microphone while the video image showed the doll on top of the rosette.

Moscow Region, Savyolovskaya Railway Line, Kievogorsky Field

26. 12. 1991

Andrei Monastyrski and Sabine Hänsen

6 See *Kollektivnye deistviia* (*Collective Actions*). Hangars in the North-West are storage depots built at the end of the 1980s on the edge of Kievogorsky Field. They were used [by the Collective Actions Group] as figures for initiating an architectural discourse in the empty field, which then started being covered in dachas.



fig. 7

Collective Actions Group,
MEANS FOR A SERIES - For Yuri Leiderman, 1991, photography.

Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.



Indian Lotus and Chinese Shield
Yuri Leiderman's Recollections of the
Action Means for a Series

We came out to the edge of the Kievogorsky Field and Andrei explained to me what my task would involve. I was somewhat nervous at first, since my near-sightedness and the difference in our heights made it difficult for me to see the hangars. Or more precisely, I could see them, but their white roofs looked like another snow-covered hill. Still harbouring some doubts, I took the box and rosette that were offered to me and started walking across the field with them, dragging the rosette on a strap behind me. I should say right away that the moulded ceiling in the form of a decorative rosette with a hole in the middle immediately reminded me of an ancient Chinese shield.

Everything became much clearer when I entered the field. I could see the edges of the hangars, and, following the instructions and trying not to tear my eyes away from them, I traced their outline across the field. In principle, this was supposed to make a more or less ideal arc, but, due to irregularities in the field, my path turned out to be complicated, more like a wobbly line made by a shaky hand with all manner of small loops and zigzags. I should say that the walking was pleasant and the simple yet engaging task brought me a lot of pleasure. I understood this thing as a kind of return to Collective Actions' pure, topographic, vector-like actions such as *Gazing at the Waterfall*, or, for example, *Description of Action*, which held a lot of significance for me. It was the first action of the third volume when Kabakov observed as Panitkov used his "peripheral vision" to direct the movements of Monastyrski and Romashko along the edges of a field, a special kind of "walking hangars". It was precisely in observing these movements that Kabakov had the illusion of a non-existent rope connecting Monastyrski and Romashko, an illusory rope that accepted with it all the intensifying discursive ascensions and stabilizations of actions in the third volume.

However, to return to my itinerary, it would probably be more correct to speak not of a retrospective return, but of a distinction: I seem to have separated an earlier, paranoid-topographic section of the field from a later "hangar-related" schizoid-interpretational one. This separation coincided completely with my prognosis of that time, according to which "our situation" in the future would appear less interpretational and more graphic, and simultaneously, more existentially charged, as its graphism would be based not on collective analysis, but on certain individual states and affects. As I moved along the field, a zone of hangar visibility appeared to my left like a zone of an already fading situation, while to my right was the zone of the past, half-forgotten, but sure to return to us "on a different level." Occupied with these ruminations, I scrupulously observed the hangars, always trying to walk in a way that I could see the edge of their rooftops, all the while mumbling to myself about "the return to lineari-

ty!” When I stumbled in the snow, a soft jingle-jangle wafted up from the box that I held in my left hand. I supposed that there must be some sort of German music box hidden inside. I was also absorbed by the constantly changing position of my own head. At the beginning of my journey, I was looking straight ahead and to the side. Later, my head was turned sharply to the side. Finally, I ended up having to walk backwards in order not to lose sight of the hangars. It was amusing that, despite the meanderings of the completed path, in the end, I nevertheless came out exactly at the far right corner of the field at the termination of the recently built fence.

When I reached the edge of the field, I heaved the rosette onto my back, partly so that it would more closely resemble a shield, and went in search of Sabine and Andrei. Due to certain circumstances, my mind was constantly occupied in those days with the subject of the battle between the ancient Chinese Wu and Yue kingdoms described in the book *Guoyu*, an ancient Chinese text from the 4th century BC that describes the history of various warring states. I imagined myself as a Yue warrior, wandering around with my round shield on my back. Several days prior to the action, I’d had a strange idea for a plot for a video that would feature a young woman wearing a Yue cap while I read an excerpt from *Guoyu* off-camera. There is a wonderful convergence between this idea and the third part of the video shot on the field. There turned out to be, inside the box that I had been carrying around the field, a wobbly figurine wearing a strange little cap (identified later by Andrei as Sariputra, the recipient of the *Hrdaya Sutra*). In the third part of the video, Andrei reads the text of the *sutra* off-camera while the figurine stands in the centre of the rosette, associated here with the Buddhist lotus. Everything happened roughly the way I had imagined it, the only differences are the forms of the caps and the traditions of the texts read off-camera: Buddhism and Confucianism. The key similarities are the traditionalizing allusions to the round ceiling rosette (the Indian lotus and the Chinese shield) as a “means for a series,” which I used to separate the fading schizoidness of references and glances from the renewed paranoia of experiences and affects.

The documentation sections translated from Russian by Yelena Kalinsky.



fig. 8

Collective Actions Group,
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Courtesy of Collective Actions Group.

