

Inspection "Medical Hermeneutics"
(S. Anufriev, V. Fjodorov, P. Pepperstein)

SWITZERLAND + MEDICINE

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Sergei Anufriev, Vladimir Fjodorov, Pavel Pepperstein

The baggage which Inspection "Medhermeneutics" brought with them to Switzerland for the realization of their project showed what they consider the focus of their artistic work. It wasn't, as had been expected, mostly pictures, photographs or drawings, but an opulent bundle of texts on the theme of "Switzerland + Medicine" which they had composed as part of the preparations for the exhibition. These texts plot the foundation of the exhibition.

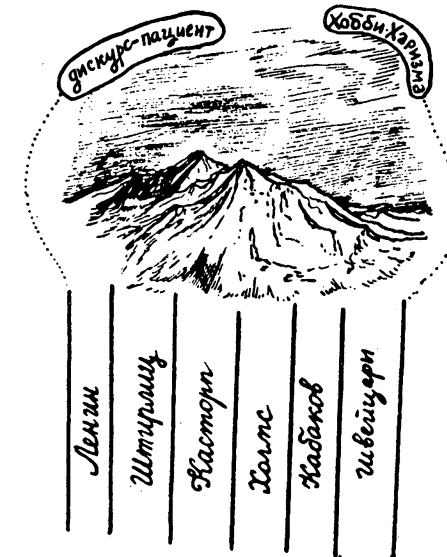
Various themes relating to and forming the group's very own image of Switzerland are addressed in five corridors. These corridors lead to a central object composed of two flags hanging side by side-- the red cross and the Swiss cross. The red cross takes the form of a winged altar-piece and can be folded together and lowered into the Swiss cross fastened onto the wall, so that both emblems fuse into a red monochrome plane. The resulting red flag suggests an ideological as well as an erotic union.

With this project, brought to the attention of Swiss institutions through the artists' own initiative, the Medhermeneutics created an identikit of a country they had not visited prior to the exhibition. They found inspiration in literature, in the pre- and post-glasnost Russian media, in diffuse clichés, and in other somewhat accidental and not always reliable bits of information circulating in their direct environment. They connected these pieces of information in a spontaneous way, not wanting to reconstruct a historical or cultural context, but trying to create from these fragments of information a container for radically personal perceptions and thoughts. Medhermeneutics did not attempt to build a logical narrative chain from these concepts, but to create a network of discourse from which new associations could be drawn continually. They put to a halt potential dogmatism and ideologization into which one slips so easily--on no matter how trivial a topic--by focussing on generalizations and by diluting complex ideas into handy units.

In a sense, the artistic approach of Medhermeneutics relates to that of Thomas Mann, who wrote in the foreword to his novel The Magic Mountain that he was convinced that "only the exhaustive can be truly interesting." The Inspection Medhermeneutics group also places wide-ranged eloquence above pragmatic stringency. They try to ferment the process of identification to the point where it develops its own dynamic, so that aside from the major strands of story line an unending number of other narratives arise and assert themselves, increasingly questioning the autonomy and orientation of the narrator in charge. Suddenly, what is of interest is not what the artist does with these concepts, but rather what the concepts do to the artist.

The Themes

References to Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain are a central part of the installation "Switzerland + Medicine." In this novel, the Medhermeneutics have found numerous analogies to their own situation. Life in a sanatorium--similar to the existence in a hermetically sealed environment--in which individual concepts of time and space rule and verbal and mental realms are more real than actual experienced reality, offered the group an identification matrix for their existence on the Moscow art scene, which before 1987 was also completely isolated. Concepts or themes presented in the other corridors include:



Желаю Вам хорошего стюкаса и
скорейшего выздоровления!
Ваша заграм.

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- Sergei Anufriev, P. P. Text in:
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- S.A. Inspectors' Notes, in:
"The Green Show" (exh. cat.), New York (Exit Art), 1989
- Yurii Leiderman, P.P. Apples in the Snow, in:
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- Vladimir Fjodorov. *The Effects of Absence*, in:
Iskusstwo (Moscow), no. 10, 1990
- S.A. Pantagruel of the Backside View, in:
Iskusstwo (Moscow), no. 10, 1990
- P.P. Zone of Incrimination, in:
Iskusstwo (Moscow), no. 10, 1990
- P.P. Personen, die Lenin gesehen haben, in:
Schreibhefte, 1990
- S.A., Y.L. Stages in a Brief Voyage, in:
"Artisti Russi Contemporanei" (exh. cat.), Prato (Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea), 1990
- S.A., P.P. The Apiarist, in:
"Katalog" (exh. cat.), Moscow (Sintez Fine Arts Museum), 1990
- P.P. Five Disguises, in:
"Over Here and Over There" (exh. cat.), Moscow (Avtosavodskaja Hall), 1990
- S.A., P.P., Yurii Leiderman. *Empfängnisverhütendes Gespräch über die Freiheit*, in:
"Auf sechs Büchern" (exh. cat.), Dusseldorf (Kunsthalle,) 1990
- P.P., Yurii Leiderman. *Das gefleckte Band*, in:
"Auf sechs Büchern" (exh. cat.), Dusseldorf (Kunsthalle), 1990
- S.A., P.P. *Orthodoxie, Die Vergangenen Schönen, Über das Kleine*, in:
"Auf sechs Büchern" (exh. cat.), Dusseldorf (Kunsthalle), 1990
- P.P. *Die Entfernung des Kleinen, Die metaphorischen Körper des Uljanows*, in:
"Auf sechs Büchern" (exh. cat.), Dusseldorf (Kunsthalle), 1990
- S.A., P.P. *Introduction to Recreation; a dialogue*, in:
"For Cultivated Leisure Time" (exh. cat.), Moscow, 1990
- P.P. *Front Cycle*, in:
Spazio Umano (Milan), 1991
- P.P. *The Editor's Syndrome*, in:
"Soviet Art circa 1990" (exh. cat.), Dusseldorf (Kunsthalle), 1991
- S.A., P.P. *Old Illustrations in the Black Jelly*, in:
"Mother-Cosmos" (exh. cat.), Moscow, 1992
- P.P. *Grandfather and Grandson from the Sixth World*, in:
"To Moscow, to Moscow" (exh. cat.), Naples, 1992
- P.P. *Poems*, in:
The Third Wave; Modern Russian Poetry, 1992

- Sherlock Holmes' last fall at the Reichenbach waterfalls in Rosenlauri
- "Shtirlitz," a popular Soviet spy film set in Switzerland
- Lenin vacationing in Switzerland where he supposedly contracted syphilis while preparing the February Revolution
- Artist Ilya Kabakov's first exhibition in the West--held at the Kunsthalle Bern--and a portrait of this irreverent father figure of unofficial art, his eyes twinkling
- The concierges or doormen, called "Shvaitsar" in Russian (in German, "Schweiz" means "Swiss") who guard the reception desks at all first-class Russian hotels

All of these themes reveal metaphors for the artistic self-image and motives of Medhermeneutics, for example: the artist as detective and tracker; art as therapy; doors and transitions between East and West; art and ideology as different symptoms of side-effects of pathological (in Lenin's case syphilitic) delirium and hallucinations; the different ways of making a portrait; the East as a pre-pubescent child's world or as the unconscious of the West, where fears and hardships still present themselves in chaotic circumstances.

The white of the Swiss cross is used in analogy to the white of the Alpine peaks. This white represents an open mental space, a blank sheet of paper on which a text can be written or a thought reformulated.

The radical individualism which makes any insistence on a predetermined standpoint impossible is not only a critique of ideology, but at the same time a very basic general questioning of the possibility of objective documentation of history. Truth proves intangible and is uncovered as a fiction bound to time and culture. This insight, however, does not release us from the task of searching for truth. In order not to lose themselves in the randomness of postmodernism, the Medhermeneutics concentrate on themes relevant to them personally. Herein lies their moral commitment to themselves and others. They remain credible at least to themselves, because events in the lives of individuals are always comparable, but in the end never interchangeable. If one wants to use these events as measuring sticks in making one's decisions, then one has to take them seriously. Experiences are not transferable, but methods of analysis of past situations seen from constantly changing viewpoints are. This kind of analysis of the past creates a fluctuating basis for the spontaneous understanding of the present. In this sense, themes like Lenin, Sherlock Holmes and Shtirlitz are mandatory for the artists, but interchangeable and exemplary for the observer. Here lies the difference between Medhermeneutics and other Moscow artists of their generation. The Medhermeneutics group takes Soviet history not only as an iconographic source of key words and phrases which it then treats ironically or from which it distances itself entirely, but attempts to recognize these key words as a part of its identity, to accept them and to exploit their analytic potential. Thus, the specific evolves in the artists' works, and it could not have been produced in such a manner in another context.

The Artistic Application

In the work of the Medical Hermeneutics group, the works of art become a catalyst of discourse. The discourse must be endless, since the ultimate truth, the final goal, is missing. That is why their work always has the character of a connecting link, a fragment. Repetition in representing various themes makes it clear that we stand before a kind of film still which belongs to a whole unit, but which we can and should see only partially. The objects in the various corridors are connected by black arrows painted on the walls and floors. These arrows allow the installation to appear as a topographical guide, where we must decide how to take our bearings and what directions to take at every juncture. In so doing, Medical Hermeneutics dispenses with cementing single images as complete units, instead making them into paradigms which assert themselves in many different contexts. It is just this understanding of the dependence of the individual object which gives the art works their relaxed autonomy and allows their makers a directness and looseness in their language of images and graphics.

All of the works in the exhibition were created during the artists' three-week stay in Switzerland. Improvisation played an important role during their production. For example, the photographs of Russian doormen at their reception desks turned out to be unusable in the corridor of the doormen. Stamps found by chance in a children's hobby shop proved to be adequate substitutes. These unexpected trades in aesthetic elements created unplanned but fruitful links to other corridors: The motifs of the roller stamps represented not only a childlike fascination with uniforms, but also served as a link to the children's fabrics on which the ink images of Sherlock Holmes were fastened. And they were further linked to the grimacing images of Max and Moritz or the childlike pictograms (from a letter by the young Lenin) in the paintings of Lenin. Other chains of association led from the repetitive landscape images in the Sherlock Holmes corridor to the Japanese block prints and engravings (for example, the one hundred images of Mount Fuji by Hiroshige).

Thus, unending associations can be linked. However, viruses are added to these images and these viruses consume the narrative continuity and lead the viewer on to other areas. This meandering discussion and interpretation of images and signs (to which the name of the group alludes) are existentially important artistic strategies, means of survival and therapy for the Medhermeneutics. Thanks to this self-imposed drifting, they intentionally counter a product-oriented, commercial artistic activity and delineate and activate the existentially important spiritual realm. Up to now, at least, they have been able to maintain and intensify their creativity, while remaining relatively anonymous and within a protected zone that the collaborative group process offers them--not a small feat in these difficult times for both East and West.

Claudia Jolles
Zurich, December 1992

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EXHIBITIONS / BIBLIOGRAPHY

1987 Inspection "Medical Hermeneutics" founded in Moscow

Solo Exhibitions (selected)

- 1989 Prague, Mladych Gallery. "Three Children" (cat.)
(installations "Child with One Leg" and "Child with Big Steps")
- 1990 Dusseldorf, Kunsthalle. "Orthodoxe Ablutschungen--Umschläge und Abschlüsse. Zwei Installationen der Gruppe MH" (cat. title "Auf sechs Büchern")
- 1991 Cologne, Krings-Ernst Gallery. "Military Life of Small Paintings"
- 1992 Vienna, Grita Insam Gallery. "Blickwinkel Das Sakrale in der UdSSR" (cat.)
Moscow, MANI Museum. "Drawings on the Fields" (project by Andrei Monastyrski)
Zurich, Shedhalle. "Switzerland + Medicine"
Zurich, Walcheturm Gallery. "19-91" (cat. forthcoming, in collaboration with Swiss Institute, New York)
- 1993 New York, Swiss Institute. "Switzerland + Medicine" (cat. forthcoming, in collaboration with Walcheturm Gallery)

Group Shows (selected)

Since 1983 participation in APT-ART, Moscow

- 1988 Moscow, Klava. "2nd Exhibition"
Moscow/Berlin. "Iskunstwo", Part I
- 1989 Moscow, Klava. "Expensive Art"
Moscow, Klava. "Perspectives of Conceptualism"
Moscow/Berlin. "Iskunstwo", Part II (cat.)
Cologne, Krings-Ernst Gallery. "Jenseits des Streites--Neue sowjetische Kunst"
Warsaw. "Furmann-Lane" (cat.)
New York, Exit Art. "The Green Show" (cat.)
Aachen, Neue Galerie. Sammlung Ludwig. "UdSSR Today" (cat.) (also travelled to Saint Etienne, Musée d'Art Moderne, and others)
Vienna, Messepalast. "Moskau-Wien-New York" (cat.)
- 1990 Prato, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. "Artisti Russi Contemporanei" (cat.)
New York, Phyllis Kind Gallery. "The Work of Art in the Age of Perestroika" (cat.)
Milan, Sala Umberto Boccioni. "Mosca, Mosca, Mosca"
Boston, ICA. "Between Spring and Summer" (Tacoma Art Museum) (cat.)
Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum. "In de USSR en Erbuiten" (cat.)
Moscow, Sintez Fine Arts Museum. "Katalog" (cat.)
Moscow, Avtosavodskaja Hall. "Over Here and Over There" (cat.)
Moscow, Klava. "Schizo-China"
Moscow. "For Cultivated Leisure Time" (cat.)
- 1991 Frankfurt, Carmelite Cloister. "MANI Museum--An Exhibition of Avantgarde Art from Moscow in the Eighties" (cat.)
Dusseldorf, Kunsthalle. "Soviet Art circa 1990" (cat.)
Nürnberg, Zentrum Industriekultur. "Unter Null (Kunsteis Kälte Kultur)" (travelled to Stadtmuseum, Munich) (cat.)
Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum. "Soviet art from the 60's to Perestroika" (cat.)
- 1992 Bratislava. "Rooms" (cat.)
Naples. "To Moscow, to Moscow" (travelled to Bologna) (cat.)
Moscow. "Mother-Cosmos" (cat.)

CORRIDOR OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN / FALSE QUOTATIONS

- 1 Well, did you find your Daphne?
- 2 Patiently Castorp waited for the familiar banging of the doors. And indeed, when everybody had already gathered in the dining room, (the funny Marusja as well as the sad Rasmussen), a rumbling was heard, and Madame Chauchat entered. Obviously under the influence of the occupants of the brocade suite, Castorp reflected on the resemblance between banging doors and applauding hands. Applause seemed to be but an assimilation of the hands with the clapping myriads of angels' wings that form the "hallelujah" for the comfort of the Lord.
- 3 He asks for a pen.
- 4 - They listened to a particular record especially often.
- 5 When the ghost appeared, all participants in the seance realized they were done for. These were no longer the graphomantic little rhymes from Holger's realm, that failed poet. The appearance of the ghost was commonly known as "the golden pot" since nobody had ever quite brought themselves to speak of the passed-away Ziemssen as one with a "golden head."
- 6 Sometimes, when the patients confessed to Doctor Krokowski, they noticed in the psychoanalyst's hands a heavy, forest green book with "Kenia 1906" written on its cover. A telephone in the colors of mourning, that would usually be at hand on such occasions, would lead to the idea that different versions of life--before birth and after death--were calling each other to compare one or the other risqué detail.
- 7 - Now look at these faces expressing such satisfaction. Everything has been left behind, down below, has been forgotten. Even the content of the book just read dissolves.
- 8 - You, however, Staatsanwalt Paravant, you're gaining weight, said the Hofrat. Just yesterday I observed how you stuck the chicken knife into the slice of cake. Soon we will discharge you.
- 9 - A certain person would comment that there is something not quite "human" in the exaggerated size of these chess figures. Ah, but you blush, dear Castorp, I notice!
- 10 Eventually spring arrives even here, in the Alps ...
- 11 - This is what we should prescribe to this model patient: He should spend more time in the company of nice people.
- Absolutely correct, Herr Hofrat, the company of little, white, rotund, friendly people.
The doctors burst into laughter.
- 12 - To rock an infant ... to rock a farmer ... In the end it is all the same. An infant is always the farmer of being. Settembrini wrinkled his forehead and left these imprudent words unanswered.

1 3 She returns the pen to him.

1 4 Little by little the scenes of Naphta's suicide and Peeperkorn's last speech melted and overlapped in Castorp's memory. In a sense, he was now able in his mind to squat next to one or the other of the "Death Masters." Behind their collapsing bodies, promising works began to appear--oilwell towers, pepper plantations ...

* *Naphta = crude oil*

1 5 - I would suggest, Herr Castorp, that you tear yourself away from observing your esteemed saliva. It may serve Blue Henry* as nourishment. Better direct your attention to the pattern of your handkerchief. Did it never ignite your interest, why so often on handkerchiefs one finds a pseudo tartan pattern?

* *In the slang of the The Magic Mountain crowd, this is the name given to the spittoon.*

1 6 - ... First I was in Spain, then in Moscow. The Kremlin is much more beautiful than this dark castle down in the valley, not far from Madrid.

- The Escorial?

- Yes. That doesn't look human at all.

1 7 - ... This is it, dear young friend, ... exceedingly! ... above all ... yes ... absolutely! Totally agreed!

1 8 - And yet, eventually they cross!

1 9 More and more often our hero sneaked secretly and with bated breath to the holy cabinet ...

CORRIDOR OF SHTIRLITZ

1 The Canon of Sentimentality

In the zone of the Canon of Sentimentality, the Agent lost his bearing and was killed by an avalanche of falling tautologies: Tautologies like the flowers in "Flower Street," or the little bears in "Bear Town."

4 The window is wide open ... Small glass panes with two transparent crosses ...
-Professor, you are losing the game.
He had forgotten! He had completely forgotten what flowers mean.

5 - Grandfather, I cannot watch this any longer!
-The main thing is that he chew very quickly!

6 In Switzerland, in Flower Street, near the store "Singvogel," Pleishner fell. For us, this sentimental detail plays the role of the sign for paradise. You will see the screen through the refraction of tears, that is, again and again cultural still images become hallucinative little icons of the Canon of Sentimentality.

7 Just now, Shtirlitz realized that PASTOR SCHLAG DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SKI AT ALL. But Shtirlitz had only selected old marasmic intellectuals for the most important and dangerous tasks.

- In them lies the force of the undivided Sunyata*, Shtirlitz thought.

* *Sunyata: Sanskrit Hindu term for the absolute void*

8 - Grandfather, where is our sweet pastor?

- Live as long as I have and you'll know.

9 - Katinka, do you remember Blok's words, "I love but art, children and death?" I, however, love only children and old people. Do you know what I mean?

1 0 - Well, then, Shtirlitz, will you talk or go no further than a flirt with your eyes?, Müller asks.

- You know, dear squad leader, in the commentaries to the Upanishads * it is said that Atman ** built its body of immateriality. It even built eyes. ***

- I have to say, Shtirlitz, you're a good pal! Müller exclaims.

* *a collection of speculative treatises in Hinduism*

** *In Hinduism, the World Soul from which all souls derive and to which they return as the supreme goal of existence.*

*** *Russian idiom meaning to flirt*

11 Lion

In any depiction of the game of matches, on the match box you can always see the fascist eagle. Shtirlitz composed animals that were inside the body of the eagle, and that destroyed its body from the inside out. The eyes of the lion resemble a five pointed star that isn't quite finished yet. In this way, the schizophrenic Agent, who behaved like a shaman, illustrated the battle of the Totem.

15 - Grandfather, if you don't turn off the TV, I'll cry!

- There you go, dear grandchild. I created a protective shield like a hedgehog.

16 The Little Hedgehog

All around him, Agent Shtirlitz has assembled a number of deputy agents whom he'll plant "under the skin" of the proponent of Nazi esthetics. (rf. match box with eagle)