

S.O.S.:

SOCIALIST OCCUPATION  
OF THE SUBJECT

**Klara Kemp-Welch**

In the opening pages of his novel, *The Polish Complex* (1977), Tadeusz Konwicki wrote that he hoped his book would

reach the hands, antennae, or computers of other intelligent beings who may happen by our galaxy, intelligent beings from the central regions of the universe, from the more elegant neighbourhoods of the Lord God's metropolis, better beings and wiser than we, the noble supermen of man's imagination.

**He explained:**

I write with such an ambitious, indeed unusual intention, only because I am bored with communication with my fellow men, my fellow wise men and idiots, my fellow prophets and scoundrels, my fellow torturers and victims.<sup>1</sup>

As it happens, Konwicki's 'unusual intention' may have been more widespread among Central Europeans than he realised.

Július Koller, working in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, felt much the same way. 'Up to 1968 we still had the impression that [...] "democratic Socialism" [...] — could work better than it had done so far,' Koller recalled.<sup>2</sup> But after the invasion of Prague by the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968, this form of communication 'ceased functioning in the normal way.'<sup>3</sup> Censorship, suspended under the Prague Spring, was restored, and an extended period of repression known as 'normalization' began. Like Konwicki, Koller despaired of human beings, and turned to extraterrestrials for support.

He announced that there had been a 'Socialist Occupation of the Subject.' Issuing a signal of distress from earth, he called for assistance from other beings in the universe.

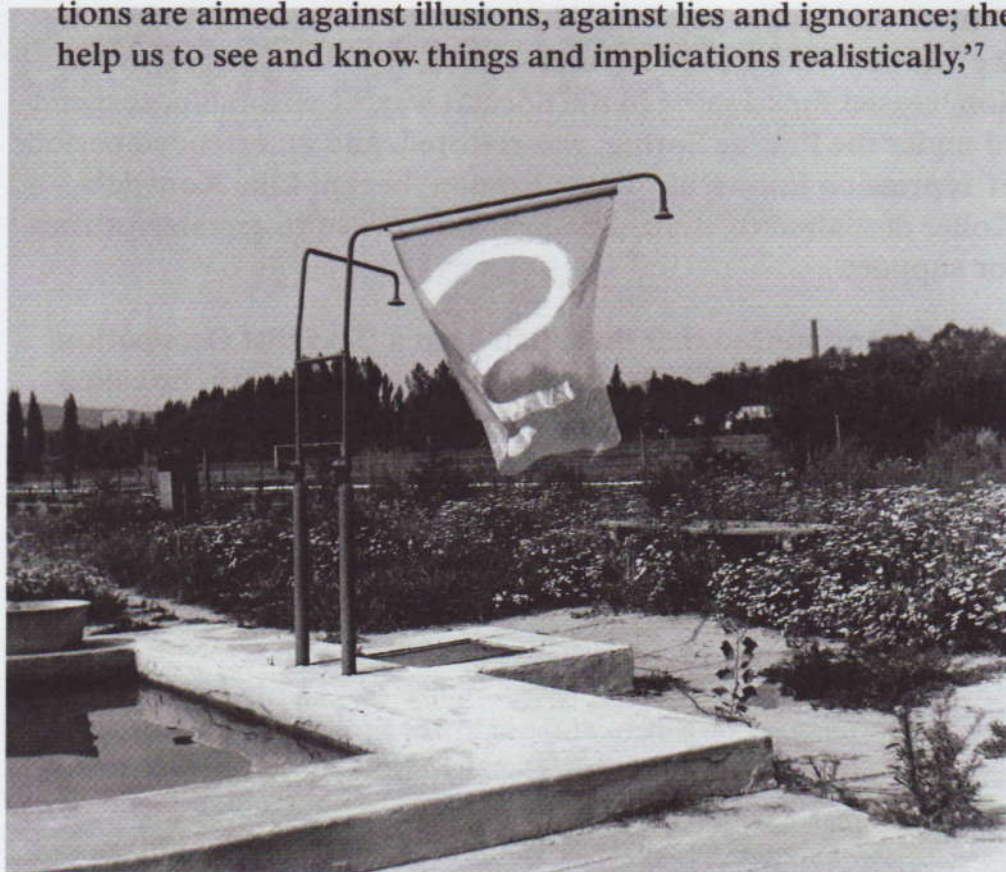
JULIUS KOLLER 1971

oznámenie



SOCIALISTICKÁ OKUPACIA SUBJEKTU

He painted question marks in public spaces as democratic invitations to universal questioning.<sup>4</sup> ‘I have so many questions, so much unsatisfied curiosity that the very question mark symbolizes the quantity of those questions as a whole,’ Koller explained.<sup>5</sup> Amongst these was the question of ‘the cultural and political situation in Czechoslovakia at the time,’<sup>6</sup> ‘The question mark is a symbol of doubt,’ he said; ‘I doubt everything [...] But not in a pessimistic sense, in a realistic sense. Questions and asking questions are aimed against illusions, against lies and ignorance; they help us to see and know things and implications realistically.’<sup>7</sup>



The ‘Socialist Occupation of the Subject’ entailed an official monopoly on truth. But Koller longed for another truth — equivalent to that of human beings, civilization and nature. In the summer of 1971, he announced the founding of a ‘Truth Compound.’ This would be a place to wait ‘for the arrival or anticipation of

something to come, for example, from the cosmos, from some extraterrestrials who might become our partners — perhaps in a more communicative way than our terrestrials, our society of the time.’<sup>8</sup> He raked the surface of a tennis court into a series of piles resembling craters and set up a *Universal Futurological Observatory (U.F.O.)*. Keeping watch at the site, sitting on the steps of the hut beside the court, he waited for the arrival of a new form of truth. An extraterrestrial occupation would surely be preferable to a socialist one.



Koller redefined himself. He took on the alter ego ‘U.F.O.-naut J.K.’, becoming a human extraterrestrial — ‘a being that travels in time through the universe.’<sup>9</sup> His mission was to promote ‘cosmo-humanism’ based on ‘a non-anthropocentric principle of understanding man in nature, in the cosmos,’<sup>10</sup>





A jungle condensed to the scale of a balcony. 1893/1983. Koller screams silently in this suburban wilderness, reworking Edvard Munch's experience of the 'infinite scream of nature', 90 years on.

'I'm interested in the transformation of everyday situations in life into 'cultural situations,'" Koller said.<sup>11</sup>



Inexplicably, the photos Koller took of a small green U.F.O.-naut popping out of the heap of sand beneath his balcony did not come out. But the monotony of the view from his window exploded into an adventure. The indifferent language of photo-conceptualism proved ripe for some low-key extraterrestrial intervention.



V DÁVNEJ MINULOSTI UFO-CIVILIZÁCIA KOMUNIKOVALA S ATLANTÍDOU...

UFO-CIVILIZÁCIA BOLA UŽ VTEDY UČITEĽKOU ĽUDSTVA...

KDE SA MOŽNO DNES STRETNÚT S UFO-CIVILIZÁCIOU ?

**ZNAMENIE Z DEJÍN :**

VEĽKOHORAVSKÝ ŽIVOT KONŠTANTÍNOV  
SPOMINA JEDEN Z TZY. BLUDOV, KTORÝ JI-  
RILI FRANSKÍ KŇAZI - ... POD ZEMOU  
ŽIJÚ ĽUDIA S VEĽKOU HLAVOU ! ...

**ZNAMENIE V SÚČASNOSTI**  
POD OKNAMI NAŠHO BYTU



**UFO-EXPEDÍCIA SA USKUTOČNILA,**  
V LETE 1982, CEZ DÚBRAVKU A DEVIN-  
SKU KOBYLU K SANDBERGU

**SANDBERG (PIESKOVÝ KOPEC),**  
SVEToznÁNA PALEONTOLOGICKÁ  
LOKALITA - TERÉN BÝVALÉHO  
TORTÓNEKEHO MORA.

TU SOM SA DOSTAL DO KONTAKTU  
S UFO-CIVILIZÁCIOU !



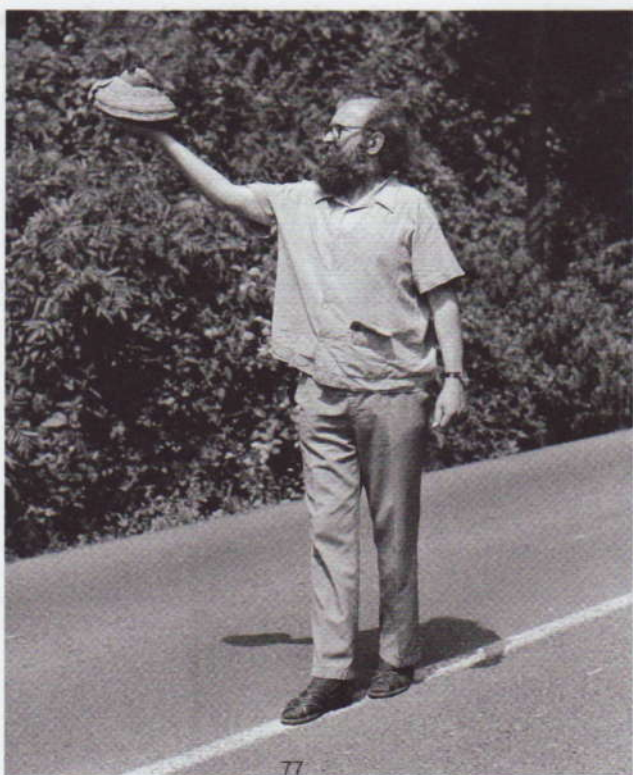
NA UFO-EXPEDÍCIÍ SOM FOTOGRAFOVAL  
NAJZAJÍMAVEJŠIE FAKTY NAJDÔLEŽITEĽ-  
JIA FOTO-DOKUMENTÁCIA VĽAK NEEKIS-  
TUJE, PRETOŽE (NEVEDNO PREČO ?) NA FILME  
SA NEZAZNAMENALA KOMUNIKÁCIA S UFO.

DRUHÁ KOMUNIKÁCIA : VRCHOL SANDBER-  
GU SA NA CHVÍĽU VZNIESOL DO URČITEJ  
VÝŠKY NAD OSTATNE PIESKOVISKO A  
JAVIL SA NI AKO LIETAJÚCI UFO PRÍSTROJ

**KRESBOVÁ**  
**DOKUMENTÁCIA :**

Z DIERY V PIESKOVISKU  
JA VYNORIL MALÝ ZEĽ-  
NÝ UFO-NAUT S VEĽKOU  
GUL'OVITOU HLAVOU, S OK-  
RÚHLYMI OČAMI A TEN-  
KOU POSTAVOU, PRIBLÍŽIL  
SA ZVLAŠTNÝMI PŇVYBNÍ  
KU MNE A BEZ ZVUKU  
MI ODOVDAL Z OČÍ DO  
OČÍ UFO-POSOLSTVO;  
POTOM ZMIZOL OPÄŤ V  
SANDBERGU.  
TO BOLA PRVÁ KŇU-  
NIKÁCIA.





For Koller, toeing the line put him on a collision course with many mysteries. Koller's photodocuments tell stories of his encounters with the unknown.

'My activity rests on a recognition of the struggle of antithesis, on an admission of the world's insolvability. Why should we receive an answer from nature, from God, from People? I don't mind the unknown,' he said.<sup>12</sup>



Art documentation is narrative. It is 'the art of making living things out of artificial ones [...] a bio-art that is simultaneously biopolitics,' Boris Groys writes. 'We are no longer able by visual means alone to make a firm distinction between the natural or organic and the artificial or technologically produced.' In such a situation, 'documentation inscribes the existence of an object in history, gives a lifespan to this existence [...] the difference between the living and the artificial is, then, exclusively a narrative difference.'<sup>13</sup>

- 1 Tadeusz Konwicki, *Kompleks Polski*, 1977, published in English as *The Polish Complex*, 1996, trans. Richard Lowrie, Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois
- 2 'Conversation between Jülius Koller and Roman Ondák', in Kathrin Rhomberg and Roman Ondák, eds., *Jülius Koller: Unverzähne Futurologické Operácie* [exhibition cat.], 2004, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, trans. Fouad Asfour, Stefan Barmann et al, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, p.145
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 Jülius Koller, 'From an AntiHappening Question Mark to the New Seriousness of the Wavy Line', in Aurel Hrabušický, ed., *Jülius Koller* [exhibition cat.], 1999, SOGA, Bratislava, p.45
- 5 Aurel Hrabušický, *Jülius Koller. Sondy* [exhibition cat.], 1991, Galeria Súčasného Umenia Slovenskej Národnej Galérie, Bratislava, n.p.
- 6 'Conversation between Jülius Koller and Hans Ulrich Obrist', in Kathrin Rhomberg and Roman Ondák, eds., *op. cit.*, p.144
- 7 *ibid.*, p.147
- 8 'Conversation between Jülius Koller and Roman Ondák', *op. cit.*, p.138
- 9 *Jülius Koller. Sondy*, *op. cit.*, n.p.
- 10 'Conversation between Jülius Koller and Roman Ondák', *op. cit.*, p.136
- 11 'From an AntiHappening Question Mark', *op. cit.*, p.45
- 12 *Jülius Koller. Sondy*, *op. cit.*, n.p.
- 13 Boris Groys, 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics', in Boris Groys, *Art Power*, 2008, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass and London, pp.66-7