

Stano Filko  
1937–2015. Lived and worked in Bratislava.

## The Telescopic Psycho-spaces of Stano Filko

12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, start. To approach the work of Stano Filko means to disengage from the fixed point upon which one is standing. If we take up this invitation to dizzying travel, we may be driven into the telescopic dimensions of his psycho-spaces. Very early in his career Filko elaborated on the transformative potential of the cosmos which he projected into urban exteriors or a bare everyday existence. In his associative and reflective plan-projects a transport of ideas progresses, covering fictive as well as real distances. Balancing between a utopia of futurist technology and a universalist myth of creation, Stano Filko's work was driven since the early 1960s by the motor of avant-garde progress. This enabled him to free himself from the confinements of the local setting and not only to surpass the parameters of the contemporary aesthetic but, quite literally, to expand beyond the limits of space-time and thus extend the horizon of the perceptible. Impossibility is one of the very foundations of Filko's work. This cosmological complex is full of ruptures and contradictions. Filko was constantly making forays beyond the bounds of rational creation, beyond the semantics of language, beyond the utility of technology, beyond the dichotomy of body and mind and beyond the conventions of spirituality.

The dynamics of ordinary local objects and the anonymity of the urban milieu became elements of a sociological happening called *Happsoc I.* in 1965, when Filko, together with Alex Mlynárčik, invited the public to participate in the activities of the city of Bratislava between the principal political holidays of socialism, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of May. In 1968–69 Filko created sets of graphic, object, and spatial works based on technical reproducibility, multiplication, and easy distribution.<sup>1</sup> The mental activity of the viewer is situated in the images and sounds of a new planetary epoch of humanity. Thus, diagrams, texts, technical drawings, geopolitical maps, vinyl recordings, and transparent spatial constructions become the bearers of his artworks. For him, the boundary between possible and impossible was not securely fixed. His works had equal value, whether realised as architecture or remaining unrealised in the ephemeral forms of conceptual art. Stano Filko's *Happsoc IV.* literally invites participants to travel the cosmos. A universalist utopia of the cosmicisation of the terrestrial world is included in works on paper and also environments which he produced in 1968–70. The artist's international career, which had a promising evolution after his participation in Expo 1970 in Osaka, was interrupted for a lengthy period by the social and political consequences of the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Filko almost exclusively devoted the 1970s to exploring the limits of perception by means of pure art. Using a radically reduced act of painting with white acrylic paint and the mechanical motion of a roller, he abandoned the individual signature of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Restany, 'Architecte de l'information', in: *Stano Filko II. 1965/69*, Bratislava 1970.

artist. *White Space in a White Space* (1973–74) emerged in collaboration with Miloš Laky and Ján Zavorský. The mechanical work of the paint roller created a potentially infinite surface, which was meant to evoke a non-material white space in an infinite white space.<sup>2</sup> The inner dynamic of the infinite was expressed in the individual stages of realisation. The project was documented for the first time in a one-day exhibition at the House of Arts in Brno in which the project matured to a transformation of the gallery space. Stano Filko subsequently continued working on *White Space* independently between 1977 and 1980. The manifestation of the absolute in the recurring sequences of white surface was an antithesis to the ideology of materialism and an act of defiance towards the conventions of art. He subsequently interpreted the entire project anew in a three-colour system – White (Ontology), Blue (Cosmos), Red (Biology) – and later ‘zoned’ his works and concepts into the colour spectrum of the chakras.<sup>3</sup>

The artist’s ‘newspeak’ is full of contradictions. In fact, contradictions are a defining feature of the entire set of works exhibited at documenta 7 under the title *Love of Ontology* (1981–82). His subsequent American anabasis (1982–90) was a sign of a return to painterly expression. He produced often large-format works dominated by an extravagant detail or a one-word slogan, and the individual canvases or objects were assembled into intricate spatial structures. Following his return to Slovakia, Filko worked tirelessly on a cosmological system into which he fused the timeless complex of his work, unpredictably swaying between past and future, the Big Bang of the world’s inception and states of clinical death. The mythomaniac computer of Filko’s mind manufactures seemingly senseless text-art and organises idea-clusters into psycho-spaces. The product of expanded schizo-analysis is inscribed in an object archive and cosmological diagrams. It engenders a labyrinth-monster system in which the cloned identity undergoes a cyclical process of mutation: Filko, Fylko, Philko ... Filko is an eternally disquieted, feral (wild, vagabond) child: naïve, innocent, obscene, egocentric, altruistic, inscrutable, uncontrollable, systematic, vertical, destructive. Stano Filko outlined what one might call a spatial psychogeometry, inviting us to reconstruct the reality of his inner and outer universe. The innate symmetry, the order in disorder and the business of world-making evoke a Joycean laboratory of language from which a new cosmos is born.

English by John Minahane.

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<sup>2</sup> The self-published catalogue documenting the exhibition was accompanied by a manifesto in four languages and a text by Jiří Valoch.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Verwoert, ‘World as Medium: On the Work of Stano Filko’, Journal #28, October 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/28/68020/world-as-medium-on-the-work-of-stano-filko/>, accessed on 6 June 2017.