



Miklós Erdély



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László Beke's essay

The work of Miklós Erdély, a chrono-logical sketch with pictures up to 1985'

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László Beke

The work of Miklós Erdély, a chrono-logical sketch with pictures up to 1985'



Suspicion. Saturated Liquid, 1981

The work of Miklós Erdély has been assessed and explained incorrectly so many times that in one of his last works he not only formulated a self-justification, he also tried to use the awkward situation as a kind of “aesthetic catalyst”. The inscription on the wall of a battered tin barrel reads: “*Suspicion. Saturated Liquid*”. Like a string suspended in sugared water onto which rock-candy slowly hardens, here too a string is dangled into a barrel. We could think of it as the hook used by anglers “fishing in troubled-waters”, only that it snags aesthetic quality. The suspicion that saturates the medium surrounding the artist and generates the work of art presumably derives from the fact that Erdély’s works, because of their penetrating presence, stubbornly resist conceptual classification, thus giving rise to a sense of uneasiness. People expect something tangible from art, while Erdély considers *intuition* or *conjecture* more important.

Once upon a time a thin thread was fixed at one point in the sky at a height beyond reach. The other end of the thread almost reached the surface of the earth. Now and then, if they felt like it, people would grab the dangling end of the thread and pull it vigorously. They noted with gratifying satisfaction that the thread did not yield, its upper fastening was remarkably secure. The thread was not subjected to any unusual load tests, so it remained intact. All that came to pass over the course of time was that the lower end became dirty from being handled so much. This is how people’s concept of tangibility developed.

(M. E.: *Intuitions, II., 10/a*)

I can illustrate the mechanism of suspicion that gives rise to misunderstanding through my own example. During our first encounter, more than ten years ago, Erdély and I were talking about works that had been published in the anthology *Dokumentum 69–70*. In these photos Erdély is lying on his stomach on the floor and a strange cloud flows from his mouth with the inscriptions “error” and “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, mollusk.” There were those who, not knowing the artist’s name, presumed it to be some Transylvanian action (the family name Erdély means Transylvania in Hungarian). I myself understood the whole as a dadaist absurdity. I was ashamed to learn that “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth...” is a quotation from the Gospels (St Matthew, 15,11), mollusk is the so-called “quivering coordinate



Intuitions, c. 1967–1969



Preparatory Photo to the Seance and Happening, 1971–72

system” that figures in Einstein’s theory, and the cloud is the “ectoplasm” observed by some parapsychologists emanating from the spiritist medium around the mouth or ears when the patient is in a trance. (At that time, around 1971, Erdély was preoccupied with comparison of the formal characteristics of the happening and those of the spiritist séance.)

The “arbitrary” association of “ill-sorted” elements – we could refer to his peculiar montage theory or his “self-assembling poetry” – is characteristic of Erdély’s work: the confusion of immeasurable quantity and quality constricted by measures; he creates similar connections and combinations in the strikingly wide range of genres and branches of art that he cultivated. And while the example of the mollusk might prompt us to reflect that we will go considerably farther in understanding Erdély’s work if we unravel its meanings than if we are led by suspicion, we must also recognize that the artistic creation of connections aims at an even higher level, where the meanings of individual elements extinguish one another.

- 0 *The work of art is, as it were, saturated with extinguished meanings and as such acts as a “meaning-repellent.”*
- 0 *The message of a work of art is its inherent emptiness.*
- 00 *The receptive mind receives this emptiness.*
- 000 *The work of art creates a space within the recipient’s mind when the latter “understands” its message.*
- 0000 *Then the recipient says, “beautiful” – which is another empty statement.*
- 00000 *This is followed by a feeling of freedom, which is nothing other than emptiness, a break in the chain of “recognized necessity”: a place.*

000000 *A place for the not-yet-realized.*

0 *By speaking of the things of this world, a work of art makes them disappear.*

0 *By speaking of the things of this world, a work of art makes discourse about these things disappear.*

(M. E.: *Marly Theses, 1980. Trans. by John Bátky*)

Thus, when writing about Erdély, one must face two fundamental difficulties: classification and interpretation. If in the future someone undertakes the task of compiling a catalogue of Erdély's oeuvre, he will be dismayed by the incredible variety of works and the overlaps in genres: poems, studies, lectures, radio plays, musical compositions, actions, films, concepts, drawings, paintings, statues, objects, montages/collages, photographs, environments, stage projects, interior furniture, photo mosaic walls, architectural works, art courses, etc. As to interpretation, I too am trying to dodge this task, particularly with regards to the principle of "extinguishing meaning", or rather I offer the following biographical commentary as a substitute.

Erdély was born in Budapest in 1928, son of the architect, István Erdély (who had his first painting exhibition – at the same time a retrospective – in 1980 at the age of 83). His mother, Aranka Óriás, was a well-known spiritist medium between the two world wars. In addition to his blood brother, Miklós had three brothers who were born by his mother's first marriage, among them a pair of twins, later killed in all probability in a concentration camp. Decades passed before he realized the extent to which his Jewish-spiritist family background itself contained every essential element of his art.

1946-47 Erdély studies sculpture at the Academy of Fine Art in Budapest under Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl. However, it was Dezső Bokros Birman, who taught him how to model, who was his real teacher.

1947-51 He is awarded a degree in architecture by the University of Technical Sciences in Budapest.

1956 He discovers the possibilities of action art: *Unguarded Money*.

1960 He is admitted to study directing at the Academy of Theater and Film in Budapest. However in the end the program of study was not launched that year.

1962 He composes a tetrahedron–octahedron construction which however went unused, though American architect Buckminster Fuller presented a similar work at the World Exhibition in Montreal in 1967.

1963 He is admitted to the Academy of Theater and Film again but expelled before the beginning of the academic year.

1963 He pursues studies in Paris for six months. A plan for a money-action arises again: to sell money at a price lower than its nominal value until it runs out. Money appears as a means of aesthetic communication in international pop art at this time as well.

1965 He studies film editing at Hungarian Television.

1966 He develops the technique of photo mosaic, which can be used to create decorative wall-surfaces, hyperrealistic in effect, inside public buildings. It is a coordinate system in which irregular "living" material is distended.

1966 His essay entitled *Montage-Hunger* (in: *Valóság* [Reality] No. 4), the first formulation of his theory, which becomes his ars poetica and which will pervade his films and eventually lead to a new collage technique and the use of materials characteristic of his work in the early 80's. The study considers various fields of the manifestation of the montage principle, and some of its contentions (e. g. the symbol infiltrates the montage, making it sick) portend the principle of "extinguishing meaning".

1966 The year of the first happening in Hungary (*The Lunch. In Memoriam Batu Khan*). Contrary to the opinion accepted in domestic and international literature, Erdély felt it necessary to add subsequently that he was never a "happener", and did not participate in the happening of Gábor Altorjay and Tamás Szentjóbby. He only suggested the scene and a few of the ideas. He awaited the participants, among them Altorjay, author of the *Golden Sunday*, the second Hungarian Happening organized at his place at the end of the year, with a megaphone, saying: "Go away!" Altorjay nailed beef to the head of a dummy and they fastened a meteorological balloon above it and affixed bread to the wall and sprinkled it with wine. Finally Erdély advised Altorjay to go to bed and sleep with a dog – the audience would then go away.

1967 Actions at the Hungarian Writers' Association. Sándor Altorjai, a painter friend, recites *Donkeys*, Gábor Altorjay throws chess-pieces onto his own head, and Szentjóbby manipulates sulfur. Erdély's poem *Strange Sobbing* is played on a tape recorder. The final repetitive lines, "provides it with radiance, provides it with radiance" (Trans. by John Bárti), are accompanied by rhythmic "Rákosist applause" as sound effects (a reference to communist leader Mátyás Rákosi, who was met with perfunctory applause as part of choreographed public appearances).

1967 *Recruitment*, action-poem with Sándor Altorjai and György Lendvai at the University Stage. The text is accompanied by the sound of a racing motorcycle engine in accordance with a given score.

1968 *UFO*. Arriving in Budapest from Yugoslavia Katalin Ladik receives a message: she is told to get in a car. She is taken to the Danube bank at Szentendre, where she is met by an unusual scene. Erdély is sitting on a stool a few steps away from a body wrapped in aluminum foil (Tamás Szentjóbby) having one of his hands manicured above a wash-basin and whipping his bare back with the other.

1968 *Wall Action*, Nuremberg, Altes Künstlerhaus. Erdély and Gábor Altorjay build a wall out of sponge. A pair of trousers is also placed among the “bricks”.

1968 *Three Quarks for King Mark*, IPARTERV, Budapest. The three actions that took place were described by Erdély twelve years later:

1. *Clip*. I prepared a folding bed for a night's sleep. I washed a white truncheon and a head of cabbage with a nail-brush in a wash-basin. I powdered both and put them under the eiderdown. I placed a radio on the pillow. I intended to switch it on for the evening news. I would have listened to it start to finish sitting by the bed with two 5 kilogram weights fastened to my ears. Unfortunately, due to time-lag, I had to play a tape recorded beforehand instead. The bed was illuminated by an out-of-focus color motion picture.



Wall Action, 1968

2. *Dirac in Front of the Cinema Box-Office*. Standing single file (me, Miklós Urbán, Tamás Cseh, and Tamás Szentjóbby), we recited previously written texts resembling a dialogue. Whoever uttered a sentence took a step forward, and thus we gradually proceeded forward in the direction of the exit. At the same time space proceeded backwards, hinting at Dirac's theory of holes. There was a large inscription and an arrow pointing in the opposite direction as we proceeded to mark “the direction of the flow of truth”.

3. *Intuitions*. I read out previously written sentences again, throwing a needle-tipped paper missile into a large photo portrait of a woman after each sentence.

The text of *Intuitions II*. acquaints us with Erdély's established thesis mechanisms. He recites statements that can be scientific–philosophical ascertainties, metaphysical, lyrical thoughts, or even tautological and paradoxical chains of sentences:



Dirac in Front of the Cinema Box-Office, 1968



- 31 *I repeat my sentence.*
 32 *I repeat my sentence.*
 33 *I will not repeat my sentence after all.*
 34 *I will not repeat my sentence after all.*
 35 *I will repeat my sentence after all.*
 36 *I did not keep my promise.*
 37 *I kept my promise amply.*
 38 *I did not keep all of my promises.*

With regards to what follows, the emphasis on the principle of repetition, or rather on the relation between repetition and change, is important, and all this – in accordance with the “rules” of happening – is combined with unusual objects and series of actions in preparation for the “extinguishing” of meanings. Erdély’s aim with his recital is to create “mere quality”. The disturbing elements “sustain the level” of the performance, as no one is able to pay attention to the difficult text.

1968 *Hidden Parameters*, movie premiere in the Kossuth Club in Budapest. It is a montage film made of found scraps of films. One of the scenes – one snake devours the other – rhymes with one sentence of the text: “The flatworm ate its mate and took over its memory” (cf. “Not that which goeth into the mouth...”). Sándor Altorjai is among the performers with whom Erdély maintains close ties until Altorjai’s death (1979).

1969 Parallel action with Tamás Szentjóbby at the moment of touch-down on the moon. Using his room as a camera (and his window as the lens), Szentjóbby exposes a roll of film. At the same time Erdély buries a coffee-maker filled with caraway seed.

1969 *Action for Foreign Guests*. Visitors can witness surprising scenes in the rooms of Erdély’s home: his thirteen year old son is painting blue and pink flowers on the butt of a bear rifle in the attic; poet István Kormos is trying on innumerable ties in one of the rooms; Erdély’s wife is lying in bed with a large T-square,



Intuitions, 1968



Action for Foreign Guests (Bathroom scene), 1969

then she presses eggs through the strings of a warping-frame, the eggs plop into her lap; in the bathroom the guests have to insert their heads into openings in a horizontal sheet of cardboard together with a girl, while the girl undresses under the cardboard; in the garden they would be able to eat clusters of grapes hanging from the branches of the trees and sweet-smelling ears of cooked corn handed to them, except that the wide cardboard collars around their necks make this impossible, etc. (Later the "creativity exercises" will be comprised of similar scenes.)

1970 *Pro-Test I-II*. A modeled head wrapped in newspaper hangs on a chain from a gallows-like stand – which incidentally is a flower-stand as well. Epoxy (a two component adhesive) flows from its left eye. The photograph, infamous worldwide, of a Cambodian soldier holding a severed human head in each hand sneers from the newspaper.



Pro-Test I., 1953–1970



Pro-Test II., 1970

One morning while meditating on the moral relativism which exudes from the photograph, it struck me that the [...] old clay head [made in 1953] had a certain inner affinity with the all too familiar photo. I thought that the head's served-up appearance – its defenselessness – would be amplified if I hung it up just as the severed heads were hung in the photograph. To hang it up on a chain I had to coat the inside of the head with epoxy. This was difficult because of the eye-hole, but it gave me the idea that the white glue coming out of the eye could evoke the horror of a burst eye-ball. I wasn't satisfied with the modeling of the hair, so I plastered it over with the newspaper – stiffened with glue – in which I had found the photo. I didn't mind a bit that the drapery-like result gave the head a Düreresque effect.

*Later the newspaper covering the right side of the head broke off. That didn't bother me either.
There is esthetic utility in what has happened so far: the pleasing effect of combined dry clay and white epoxy can be attained in other works too.*

(M. E.: Unfinished Work. Manuscript)

In the case of *Pro-Test II*, we can observe the systems of meaning of various suspended structures as well as scales, as in the second version the pair of "numerical scales" hanging from an enlarging stand proclaims the equality of 1 and 3, thus hinting at the peculiar scale of the Cambodian photograph lying on the board of the enlarging apparatus: one living – two dead.

1970–71 Anti-Standpoint. At the beginning of the film, which is recorded on an infinite loop, figures can be seen balancing on a plank in a flooded town with the recurring text "anxiety and trouble". The section beginning "I saw a large furry animal" was recorded to tape being read backwards and then played in reverse again. The texts serving as the bases for the "montage-film" provide further information about Erdély's material and object (as well as language and event) structures.

Female Voice: How can someone be cured?

Male Voice: He must be put on tracks, you must blow into his hair, he must be fanned with a cool rubber sheet, you must make flower tea, you must have a white jester's dress designed for him, you must rattle sticks by his bed at night, you must press pieces of cotton soaked with rum to his temples, you must flutter a strand of thread on his mouth, you must love him directly around his liver.

[...]

MV: How can someone be punished?

FV: You must force him to dissemble.

MV: You must force him to sophisticate.

FV: You must force him to dissemble.

MV: You must force him to feign dissembling.

[...]

FV: And how can you save someone?

MV: Draw on his back!

(M. E.: Anti-Standpoint, c. 1969–71)

Judging from the magical and enchanting tone of some of the above pictures it is not incidental that in 1976 Erdély published a study entitled *Superstition as Folk Art*.

1970 "R"-Exhibition. Erdély exhibits objects as part of a major show of the avant-garde held in the "R" building of the Technical University: a thermos with the label "Last Year's Snow" containing real snow from the previous year that was kept in a refrigerator; *Prop for Boy Shirt*, made out of matzos; and *Vase with Flowers*. He also exhibits an environment, *The Pool of Gentleness*. Unleavened bread and yeast (the lack

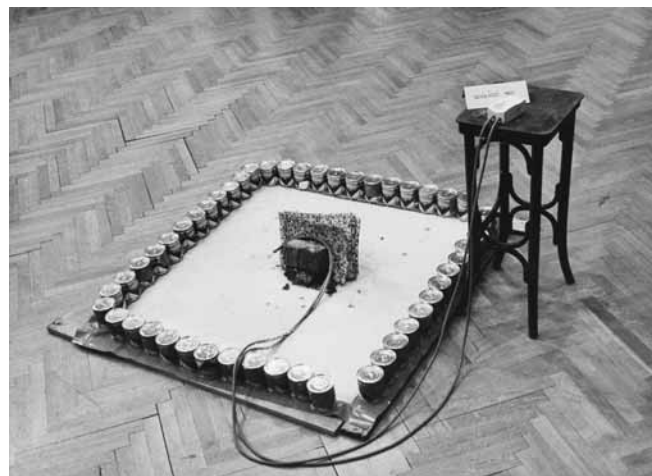
of which is what makes the bread unleavened) float in condensed milk in the middle of a blue plastic pool. Crystal-clear water flows from a tin hung above the pool. The "gas" produced by the interaction of the substances can be perceived through a special "smelling spot" – a rubber tube ending in plaster nostrils. This manner of bringing the chemical and symbolic characters of the substances to consciousness at the same time qualifies the spectators as outsider-onlookers. Around this time another object was realized (*Dust for a Baby*) as an illustration for his poem: *Neums*, a sand-bag with breast-pumps.



Last Year's Snow, 1970



Vase with Flowers, 1970



The Pool of Gentleness, 1970



Prop for Boys' Shirt, 1970



Neums (Dust for a Baby), 1970–73

1971 In February he visits one of his best friends, Hungarian painter and poet Béla Kondor, at the artist colony in Kecskemét.



About Female Viciousness, 1971



1971 The various objects and environments composed by Erdély over the course of the year “expand” both the physical characteristics of the materials and the functions of the objects employed, extending them in space and conveying them into the cognition of the viewer. *Cotton Soaked with Goose Fat*, a work given to the author of these lines for his collection *Idea* (“The work = the documentation of the idea”), not only has a direct effect on its environment, i.e. the neighboring pages of the collection, but – like fat or margarine in the sculpture of Joseph Beuys – also refers to the capability of a work of art to penetrate consciousness. The embarrassing anxiety of being unmasked sticks to it: a piece of cotton soaked with goose fat (Kosher!) was substituted by deceitful mediums for ectoplasm. With its ability to absorb, the artist’s tie hung into

the bowl of soup during the recital at the Angela Davis solidarity evening (*About Female Viciousness*). As the opening of Sándor Altorjai's exhibition he disinfects the spectators' eyes with a piece of "healing" cotton dipped in chamomile tea. Before this he places pieces of cotton dipped in chamomile tea on his own eyes and reads out – more precisely, repeats the whispers of Altorjai – the *Manifesto of Gyagyaism* (a pun on Dadaism that could be translated into English as Dodoism). He then breaks the black glasses shading his own eyes with a hammer.



Opening of Sándor Altorjai's exhibition, 1971



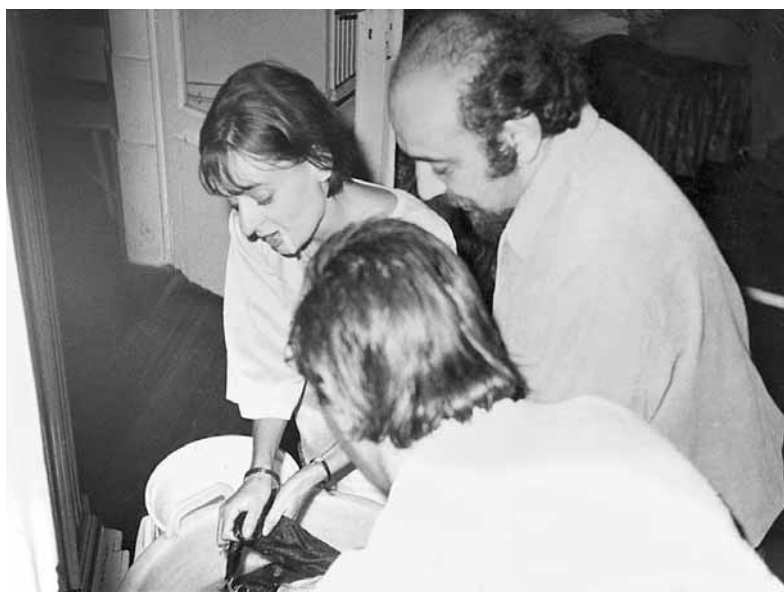
Private Police and Penal Action, 1971

1971 *Private Police and Penal Action*. Erdély posts small notices at the Kunstzone in Munich: "No loitering here", "No smiling here", "No stumbling here". "No crossing here", etc. "I will impose a fine on you if you do".

1971 *Flag Action* in Vaeshartelt, the Netherlands, in the program of the Kelemen Mikes Circle. The soiled Hungarian national flag is washed.



News About the Revolution, 1971



Flag Action, 1971

1971 *News About the Revolution* in the Paris Biennial. A china service covered with a sheet of glass, above it a sheet of tilted corrugated iron with an iron ball which, apparently, may roll down at any minute. From time to time a tremendous, unexpected clatter can be heard (from a tape-recorder).

1971 *Anaxagoras: The Snow is Black*. He writes this snow-paradox with fixing agent on a huge sheet of photo paper daubed with developing solution. When he reaches the word "black" the writing washes into blackness. Afterwards he reads out his theses about the language of film, the last of which is:

*"We make existence into language and speak it.
We make language into existence and live it."*

(Trans. by Adele Eisenstein and John Bátki)

We should make mention here of *Last Year's Snow* and another photo made two years earlier, *Self-Illumination – Light Eats Man* (Erdély used the flash of a camera to illuminate his own face at a close distance), as well as *Evening Action*, made around 1970 (the glass-shade of a lamp was painted until the light disappeared).



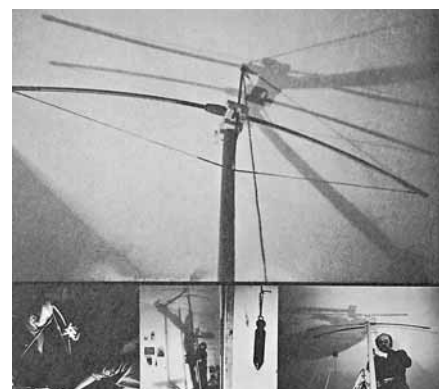
Anaxagoras: The Snow is Black, 1971 and 1981

1971 Supplement to György Jovánovics's "machine for pressing against the ceiling": "I paid my respects before (under) ambition and its uppermost bounds by pressing a bow against the ceiling; the more the structure presses the bow upwards and the weight fastened to the arrow pulls it down, the more the bow tightens.

1972 *A New Cafe was Opened in Szamuely Street*, a "montage-film" with two female voices and that of the author.

1972 Erdély demonstrates the possibilities of the formation of metaphors as well as the basic poetic situations of film composition through various series of photographs.

1972 *Moral Algebra*. Solidarity Action in the Hungarian joint exhibition at the Foksal Gallery (Warsaw). The photos displayed, among them the Cambodian head-hunter once again, illustrate an astonishing but sensible calculation: if everyone kills two people, the population of the Earth can be eradicated in 32 steps.



*Supplement to György Jovánovics's
"machine for pressing against the ceiling", 1971*

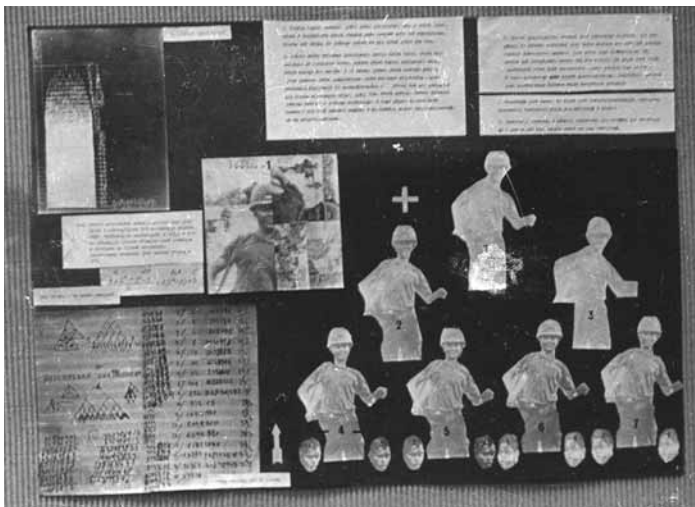


Metaphor I., 1972

The diagram of massacre is like a reversed genealogical tree. The last killer alive could not have been the cause of the chain reaction of massacre, as the whole process is over by the time he appears on the scene. It looks rather as if the numerous innocent victims (...) are those who start and cause the murderous process. This is the reverse of the genealogical tree, where the ancestral progenitor is obviously the cause of all the descendants. [...]

If everybody marks only two persons without using any institutional and communicational means, all people in the world can be warned in a very short time and they will be able to defend themselves collectively.

(M. E.: Solidarity Action. Manuscript)



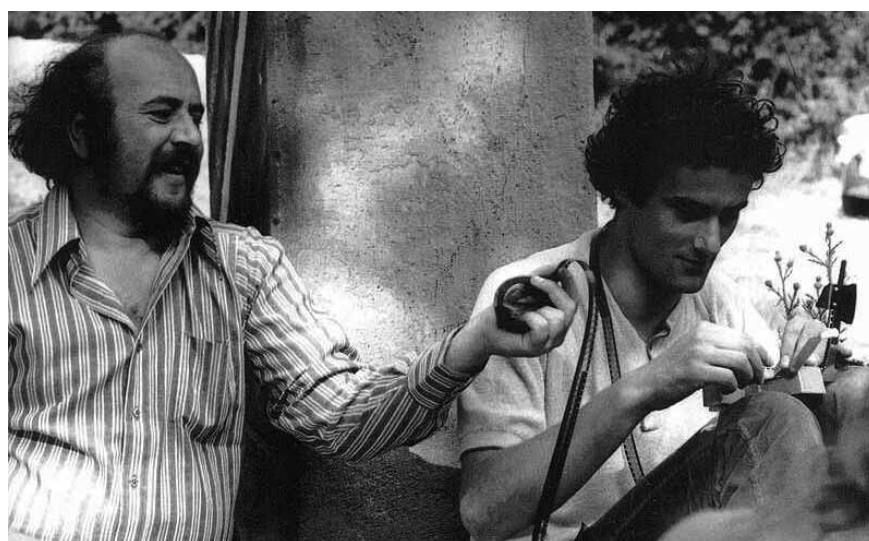
Moral Algebra, 1972. The last tableau of Moral Algebra is the presumed date of the action, covered with a fabric that the visitors were asked to palpate

1972 "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." (Luke 19:40.), the inscription in the pavement in front of Saint John's Hospital in Budapest. For the slide show action entitled *Paving Stones and Tomb Stones* by László Beke at the Chapel-Studio in Balatonboglár Erdély originally wanted to photograph a stone dropped from Béla Kondor's window in memory of the writer Imre Sarkadi, who committed suicide by throwing himself out of a window. One critic tried to turn Kondor's dismissive opinion against the avant-garde in general, even as late as 1978, several years after the project, at the time of Béla Kondor's death. Erdély's response to the attack was presented in the *Photograms* exhibition (1979) in the Gallery of Józsefváros: *Black Necrology* in memory of Kondor. The page of the insinuating review is covered by its negative, thereby creating a uniform black surface.



"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out", 1972

1972 *Möbius-Projection* in the Chapel Exhibition at Balatonboglár. The film, which is on an endless Möbius strip, shows heads of state shaking hands and continuously "changing places" in this manner. *Brushwood Exhibition*, also presented at the Chapel Exhibition at Balatonboglár. Using twigs of brushwood with various captions Erdély demonstrates that the meaning of a work of art depends on the context – and as in the case of *Last Year's Snow*, on its title: *Brushwood is the Proletarian of Fuel*, *Stone Stricken Brushwood*, *Brushwood Against Demagogy*, *Miscellaneous Brushwood*, *Brushwood that Confounds the Bourgeois*, *Semi-Brushwood*, *Packed Brushwood*. *János Major's Coat*, exhibited together with György Jovánovics and János Major, has a similar function. In 1973 at the Hungarian exhibition in Utrecht he displayed the photograph of a murderous Bangladeshi soldier. Various objects were placed beside it: "a hat similar to the murderer's hat", "a shirt similar to the victim's shirt", "sunglasses



With Gábor Bódy at Balatonboglár, 1972

similar to the murderer's sunglasses", "blood similar to the victim's blood" – thus bringing dry information closer to the spectator with the assistance of compassion. In contrast with these works, *Vase with Flowers* (1970), which was on display in the "R" exhibition, shamelessly offered nothing but itself: it indeed consisted of nothing other than a vase and flowers and it resembled a bouquet painted in a still-life.



Brushwood Exhibition, 1972



János Major's Coat, 1972



Objects Similar to the Objects of the Murderer and Those of the Victim, 1973

1972–73 *Studies in the Theory of Identification* and *Theses on the Theory of Repetition* illustrated by photo series. Each piece in the series consists of three subjacent photos the second of which is a kind of (industrial, astronomical, psychological etc.) duplicate of the first, while the third is a copy of the original picture. The most astonishing one is the “biological duplicate”:

[...] The existence of human duplicates, twins, is a depressing absurdity and a metaphysical scandal for the individual consciousness, because it increases the feeling of the accidental. [...]*

** In the words of Ms. X. Y. “I do not represent my twin sister.”*

(M. E.: Theses on the Theory of Repetition. Trans. by Zsuzsa Gábor and John Bártki)

The danger of duplication is that quality cannot be *many*.

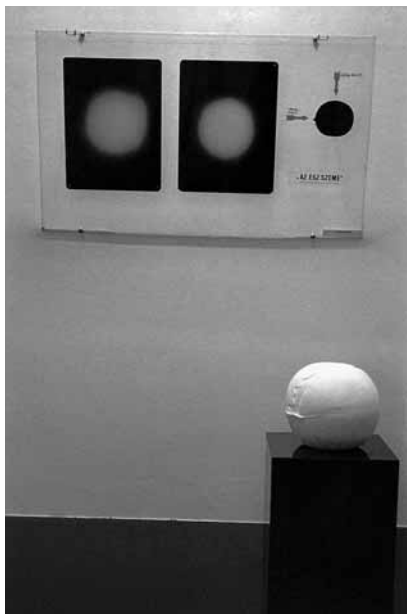


Theses on the Theory of Repetition, 1972–73. Detail: Human Duplicate



Theses on the Theory of Repetition 1972–73. Detail: "I do not represent my twin sister"

1973 *The Eye of the Mind* was displayed in a collective exhibition held in honour of Copernicus (Technical University, Budapest). It is a sculpture the essence of which can only be revealed by an X-ray made of it.



The Eye of the Mind, 1973



CETI, 1973

1973 *CETI*. Ganz-MÁVAG Cultural Centre. Budapest. Various “touches” follow each other on the screen while a female voice splutters the resolutions of a conference on interstellar communication. A Gipsy girl dressed in Indian clothes holds a six-meter long paper funnel in front of the projector. Erdély recites his writing entitled *Mondolat* (Untranslatable play on words combining the elements “Thought” and “Sentence”. A word that was invented during the language reform of the early 1800’s as a translation of the word “oratio”. The neologism, however, was never adopted into the Hungarian language.) If it is truly elementary, every elementary particle contains the whole. The whole is always one, absolute – the many debases the quality of the absolute with quantity.



Poetry as Self-assembling System and the Less Light
for Matzoth at Balatonboglár, 1973



Blasphemy Against Size:
“God is Tiny”, 1973

1973 *Blasphemy Against Size: “God is Tiny”*, Chapel Exhibition, Balatonboglár. Erdély’s “concept of God”, an enormous photo of the globe and the “blasphemous” subtitle, illustrates the impossibility of the positivistic approach of transcendentalism. The other work exhibited is *Poetry as Self-assembling System*, which extends the principle of montage to the poetry of incidentally juxtaposed objects. “In the midst of their free (incidental) movements, objects, texts, etc. like the molecules in the ‘original soup’; find their own ‘geometrical place’ in the poetic sense. It falls on man to take notice of the poesy that has come into being on the one hand and to make it poetical on the other, adding his set of concepts and projecting into it the formal-sensuous beauty (pebble, landscape, etc.) that is being created anyway.” The third work exhibited was a photogram series of matzos.

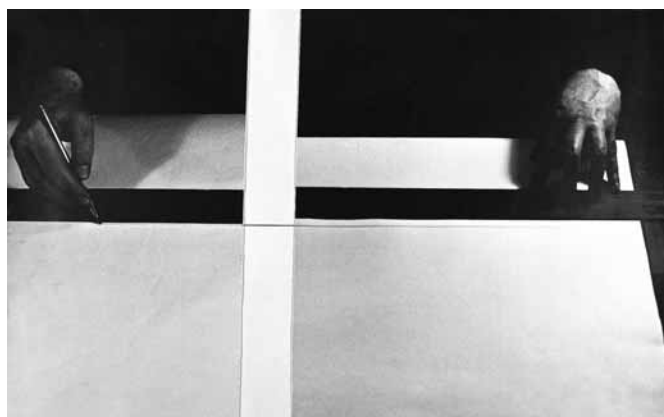
1974 *Event Horizon*. Erdély organizes a series of lectures at the Young Artists Club in Budapest dealing with scientific problems that concern the arts (Zoltán Perjés: *Black Holes*, Árpád Szabó: *Verification in the Sciences and in Mathematics*). The series is introduced by Erdély's theses entitled *An Investigation of Possibility*. The initial premise is that "It is possible to return to the past and in some way intervene in the course of events, for example, I can prevent my own birth, and then return to my own present time." (Trans. by John Bártki.) A few years earlier he was preoccupied with the possibilities offered by the future: "Imagine what art will be like in 60 years, amend your imaginings according to the extent of your already evident misconceptions, and work accordingly." (M. E. *Extrapolation Exercises* on the basis of the book *The End of the World* by Flammarion. Manuscript. Trans. by Adele Eisenstein and John Bártki.) The actual opening of *Event Horizon* is cancelled. Erdély would have tried to confine the soft "mollusk" quality of an eiderdown to the coordinate system of a T-square.

1974 A picture is taken of the sign "No photographs" as a pragmatic lapse from the rules in the semiotic sense.

1974 *A Straight Line Meeting Itself through the Dimension of Time, Parallels Shifted in Time* and the *Original and Copy on the Same Surface* in the 4. International Drawing Triennial in Wrocław. In the case of the first two of these works, which combine photographs and drawings, the straight lines attained with photography and those drawn onto the photographic paper appear to be in different "planes of time". In the third a formation scrawled with a pencil on photosensitive paper ("Original") and a photograph of it can be seen on the same surface. Erdély is increasingly occupied with the problem of identifying what is represented and what is representation (i. e. signified and signifier in the most general sense). This is one of the antecedents of the subsequent range of problems concerning indigo (= carbon paper) drawings.



No photographs, 1974



A Straight Line Meeting Itself Through the Dimension of Time, 1973

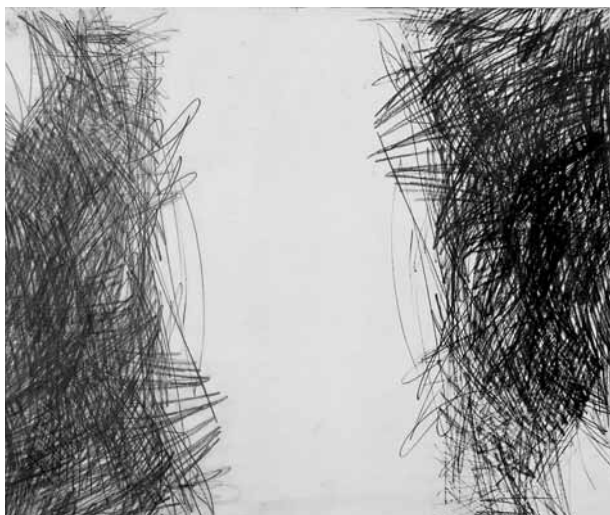


Parallels Shifted in Time, 1973

1974 The periodical *Magyar Műhely* [Hungarian Atelier] issued in Paris awards Erdély the Kassák Prize and his volume entitled *Collapsus med.* is published on the occasion:

90-100. *Miserere rel.: Have mercy on us*
Miserere med.: excrement vomit
(*Med. abbr.: medical, rel. abbr.: religious, abbr. abbr.: abbreviation.*)

(*M. E.: Miserere med.*)



Original and Copy on the Same Surface, 1974

1974 *Partita*. This film is a beautiful realization of the principles of an earlier study: *Moving Signification. The Possibilities of Musical Organization in Film* (in: *Valóság*, No. 11., 1973). According to Erdély the montage series of film as a polyphonic mechanism stirs different levels of association in the spectator which often cluster around some “unspoken” central element. As parts of a hologram the montage elements bear the entire film obscurely in themselves, and this obscurity only lifts at the end of the film, without “meaning” anything: the film is the “communication of state” between the author and the spectator. In *Partita* the “hologram structure” is symbolized by an Indian dancer who performs incredibly intricate movements. In the span of a single second she makes innumerable facial expressions, these are seen as stills. The totality of the movements is one “white movement” that erases all that had come to pass until then. (White also unites every color in itself.) During the archaic series of pictures, which are rhythmically repeated many times, we can hear obscene jokes from time to time. The charge of desire accumulated in the punch line is released in montages.

1975–77 Together with Dóra Maurer Erdély conducts *Motion Planning and Execution Actions* at the Ganz-MÁVAG Cultural Centre. In late February 1976 the name of the course was changed to *Creativity Exercises* lead by Erdély alone from the end of that year. The results of the course, which shares a great deal with the intellectuality of Fluxus, are on display in the Gallery of Józsefváros. Standing in the corners, the participants try to draw one another’s contours with lengthened pencils; their task is to come as close as possible to the cameras filming them or to stay beyond their range. During the opening of the exhibition flour is poured and glue dribbled onto black paper. The final shape on the surface is fashioned by using a vacuum cleaner.



Drawing each other standing in the corner, 1976

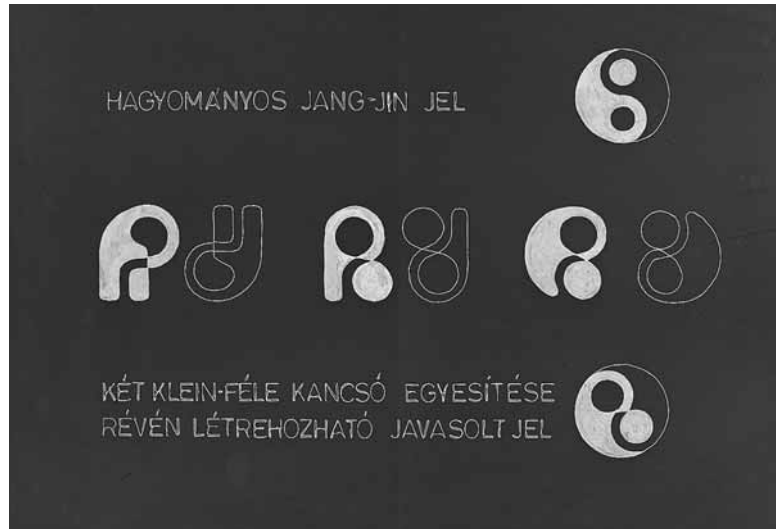


Vacuum Cleaner Action, 1976

1975 *The Story of Creation (Pencils Drawing One Another)* in the *Comic Strip* exhibition at the Young Artists Club. As Swedenborg said: "The universe is human in shape" because creation makes the Creator and the Creator "created man in his own image". This inward-twisting cosmogony is illustrated by the story of pencils drawing each other out of nothing with the help of a point without any extent.



Klein-Jug, 1976



New Yin Yang Symbol, 1976

1976 He organizes the *Möbius Exhibition* at the Young Artists Club, where alongside other works he presents the “three dimensional Möbius principle”, that is, the so-called Klein-Jug. He also realizes his plan from 1971, *Mutual Feeding*: the participants cannot lift food to their mouths because a pole inserted through the sleeves of their coats makes their arms rigid. They can, however, feed their partners. *Time Travel*, which appears in the exhibition *Series* held in Székesfehérvár at the end of the year, while it reaches back to the ideas of *An Investigation of Possibility*, can also be linked to these works. With the help of photo sequence (and montage) Erdély appears in the company of his long-deceased relations, his youthful father, or of his former self. As stated in the *Time-Möbius Theses*:



Time Travel, 1976. Details: 1934, 1955, 1961

6. The more highly developed reaches back in order to be more highly developed.
7. Thus it determines itself reciprocally (back and forth).
8. Therefore freedom is a twofold determination in time.

(Trans. by John Bártki)

1976 In the Galeria Najnowszej Sztuky in Wroclaw Erdély tries to “speak” to a Polish radio receiver. The precondition of communication is assimilation - as the radio is both deaf and blind, Erdély also blindfolds himself and plugs his ears. His other action: he projects his own film through a crowd of people onto the opposite wall as they hurry to the premiere of a great film director (Andrzej Wajda). He also exhibits his series of theses entitled *Law-Chance Möbius* here, some of the contentions of which are illustrated by a blue photocopy-photogram.

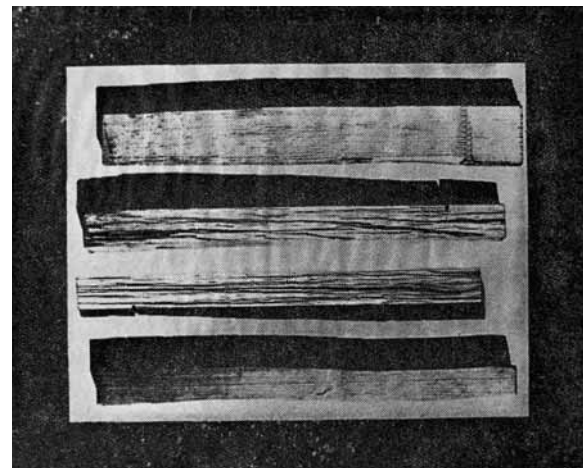
1976 The opening of György Galántai’s exhibition in the Studio Gallery, Budapest also refers to impossibility and communication: lighting a fire with Stone Age tools and giving signals using flag code.



Law-Chance Möbius, 1976 (detail)



Opening of György Galántai's exhibition, 1976



Shadow Anomalies, 1976

1976 *Shadow Anomalies*, a photo of four sticks, one of which is casting a shadow in a different direction.

1976 A montage series entitled *The Human Being Is Not Perfect* displayed in *Exposure (Photo/Art)*, an exhibition held in the city of Hatvan, and then the first version of his film *Heraclites Fragment* are the most rigorous summaries of Erdély's earlier principles and theories to date. After the lectures on montage theory given at the Academy of Fine Arts and the exhibition entitled *Montage* organized by Erdély in the Young Artists Club the previous year, he now displays four tableaus which are almost as simple in structure as bulletin boards. These tableaus consist of portraits of spiritist mediums, lunatics, and twins, spoilt photos, or simple, rectangular sheets of paper. The relation among the elements of the montage is neither associative nor constructive – their effect-mechanism aims at a direct and profound "communication of state" between the author and the spectator. The *Heraclites Fragment* and then its final version, *Dream Reconstructions* (first presented in 1977), both of which exploit the montage possibilities of film and the principle of

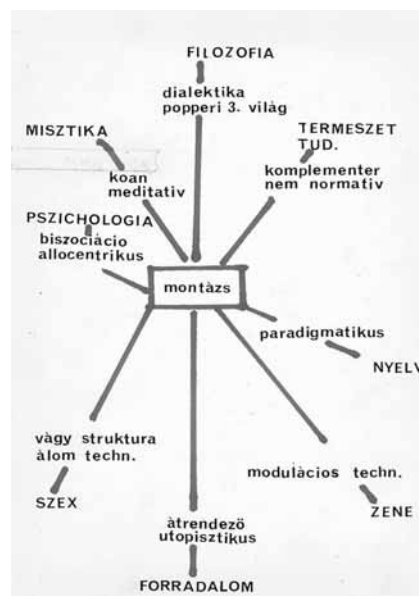
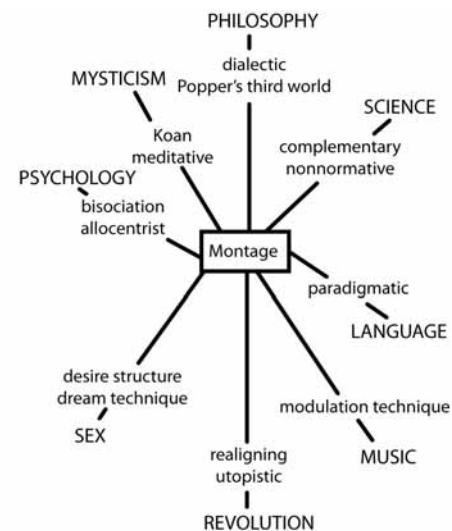


Diagram for a lecture on the Theory of Montage, 1975 Translation of the diagram





The Human Being Is Not Perfect I-IV, 1976

repetition, are “journeys in time” as well, in so far as every dream deals with time. In many ways it is therefore a film about film on multiple levels, since the performers of *Dream Reconstructions* recount their dreams and reenact them for the camera (we can bear witness to this in the film as well). Erdély rearranges these evocations, as well, using *par excellence* dream-like methods of the film medium, even creating a filmed, private dream-world for one of the dreamers. We can see a man on the screen who tries to reply to a young girl’s questions with tense politeness, and only after some time has passed do we realize that the man is talking to a projected figure. The film as a collective dream splits the individual journeys in time into layers and allows them to be experienced segment by segment.

1977 *Hidden Green*, Mór Jókai Cultural House, Budaörs. Upon entering the spectator struggles through the glare of a spotlight trained on him in the entranceway, and if he has not forgotten the title of the environment, he will involuntarily seek out the "green". At first he finds only hay – which once was green – in which a circular shape has been swept away (even the broom has been left propped against the wall): it is a circle on which one can *only* reflect. A strange hodgepodge rises up behind it: a white slab of wrapping paper like some cloud on innumerable wooden rods. Any of the rods could be removed without disturbing the floating "cloud" at all.



Heraclites Fragment, 1976–77 (?). Frame from the film

At the far end of the room we might well find the "green" if we look under a suspended screen. Probably this work can only be *misunderstood*, as no adequate "explanation" exists. When closing the exhibition, Erdély tried to make a donkey eat the hay.



Hidden Green, 1977



1977 Video etudes are made within the framework of creativity exercises. Erdély, exploiting the possibilities of the feedback from the camera pointed towards the monitor, creates *Prayer* and *Cross*.



Cross, 1977



Drawing Copied Apart, 1978

1977 Creativity exercises entitled *Fantasy Developing Exercises* are conducted in the Vízvárosi Club for a year.

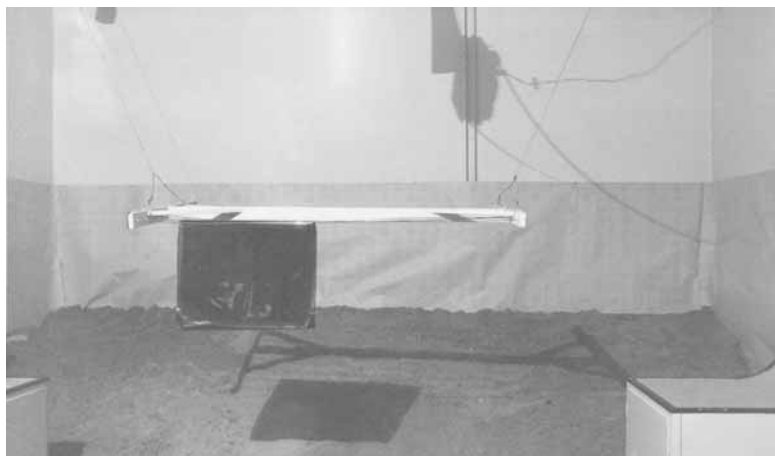
1978 *Experience Communication*, IPARTERV, Budapest (with the participation of Ákos Birkás, András Halász, Zsigmond Károlyi). The spectators are taken one by one behind a screen where they have to make some kind of statement; the audience can hear their voices amplified. A cross of flour is drawn on their foreheads, thus they "become the wounded", as it were. Two angel-like creatures roll them up in blankets and take them upstairs into a room lined with a parachute. This is "heaven", where they share in everything that is good (tea, biscuits, etc.). The time of each person's treatment is indicated with drumbeats (there is flour on the drum), the number of which is recorded on a board.

1978 *Indigo* (used in the sense of carbon paper). Erdély works out a new creative principle with the help of carbon paper. If a sheet of paper is rolled up together with a sheet of carbon paper and we draw on the surface of the resultant cylinder we will get a continuous but nevertheless broken line rhythmically fading away. Essentially it is the principles of sameness and repetition that again present themselves here - the two principles literally cover each other. In the International Drawing Triennial in Wroclaw Erdély was awarded 2nd Prize for his *Drawings Copied Apart* made with carbon paper. "Copying apart" should also be understood literally because, using carbon paper, Erdély "copied out" one detail of the same drawing in another place with the same gesture. Through a brilliant pun on words the INDIGO (Hungarian abbreviation for 'interdisciplinary thinking') Group was formed by the participants of the former "creativity exercises", who over the course of two years held successive thematic exhibitions of their collective works: *Coal and Charcoal Drawing* (in Hungarian the words for coal, charcoal and carbon are one and the same, the title therefore plays off the pun inherent in the term charcoal – carbon – drawing), an environment in which a nude drawn with charcoal was placed in a corner and illuminated with a stove pipe; hachure was drawn around the illuminated spot; *Sand and its Forms of Movement* (a sheet of carbon paper covered with cellophane and hung on a clothing line casts a shadow on the sand: the image of wind-swept sand is projected on the patch of shadow);

Weight (a quilted jacket and boots filled with refuse oil are balanced suspended from pulleys); *Painting* (while Ákos Birkás's idea – "the painting as an absorbent surface" – was realized with the use of pumps adhering to a sheet of glass, the collective work of the group characterized the distinctive features of painting with heaps of powdered paint scattered into frames for stretching canvases rolling on wheels and fastened to the wall.); *Faith / Loyalty* (a combination of a white stick for blind people and a sheet of carbon paper, knives wedged into each other, scissors that are striving towards their own incisions in a piece of paper, etc.); *Artists' Exit* (one detail: milk is dripping from a plastic bag on a plate of glass propped against a pool of curdled milk).



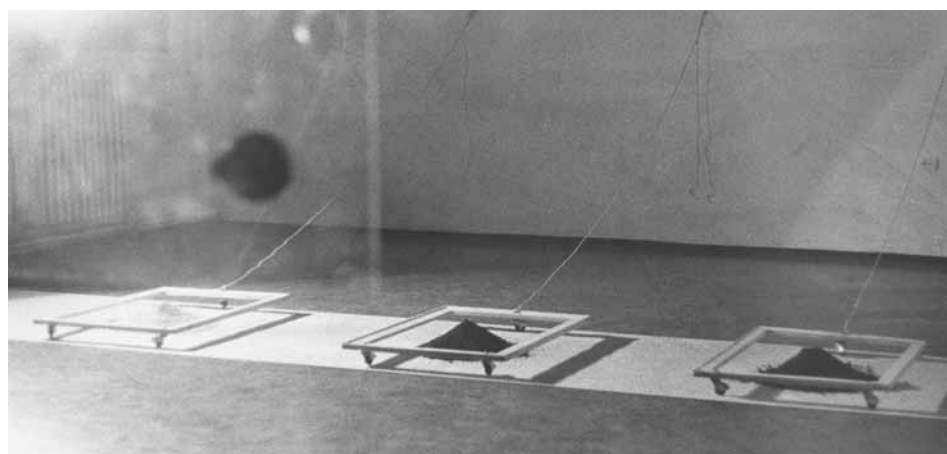
Indigo Group: Coal and Charcoal Drawing, 1978



Indigo Group: Sand and its Forms of Movement, 1979



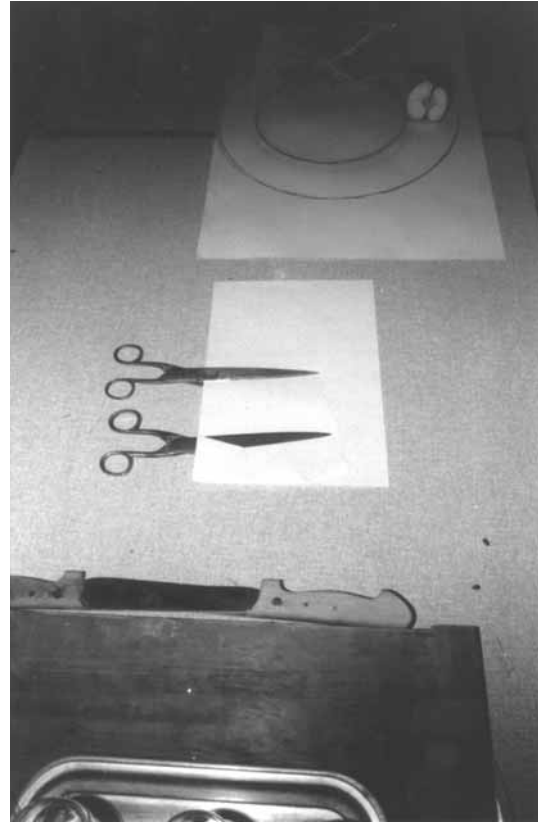
Indigo Group: Weight, 1979



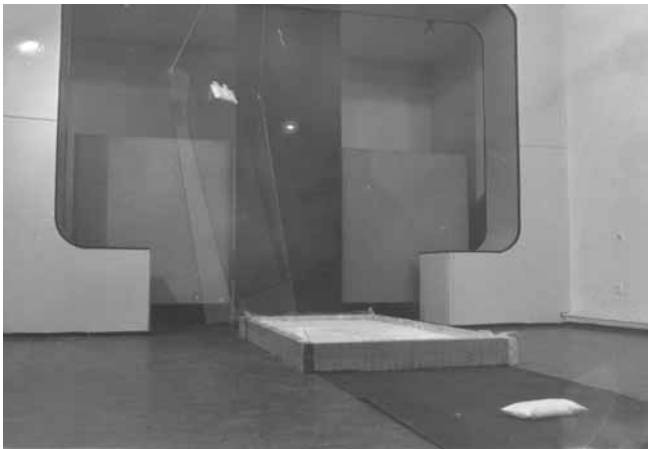
Indigo Group: Painting, 1979



Faith / Loyalty, 1979



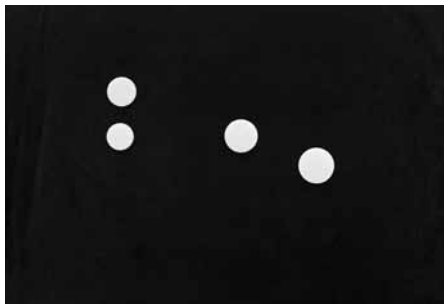
Faith / Loyalty, 1979



Indigo Group: Artists' Exit, 1979

1978 *Memory Model*, as the closing action of the "I am" Performance Festival in Warsaw. Erdély gathers the signatures of artists on a roll of paper and a roll of carbon paper, the layers of which symbolize the succession of the days of the festival and the gradual fading of memory. – He exhibits a huge stone and two inscriptions: "God created the world in six days, and its whole past on the seventh"; "God created this seven-billion year-old stone this morning." His photo series on the theory of repetition is also exhibited.

1979 *The Price of a Pack of "Fecske" cigarettes* is exhibited in the *Photograms* exhibition in the Gallery of Józsefváros. (*Black Necrology* was also made for this occasion.) However, the photogram that remains the most significant in his oeuvre to the present day was "painted" for a TV performance three years later: the silhouette of Erdély standing on a ladder is illuminated, while – with the same technology as in *Snow is Black* – duplicating it he "develops" it with a brush on a sheet of printing paper stretched behind him.



The Price of a Pack of "Fecske" cigarettes , 1978

1979 As the opening for Károly Kelemen's exhibition in the Studio Gallery, Erdély throws white chess-pieces on the chessboard and "symbolizes" them with black chess-pieces set up symmetrically (*Balance of Powers*). Instead of ordered sets he repeats the incidental.



Balance of Powers, 1979



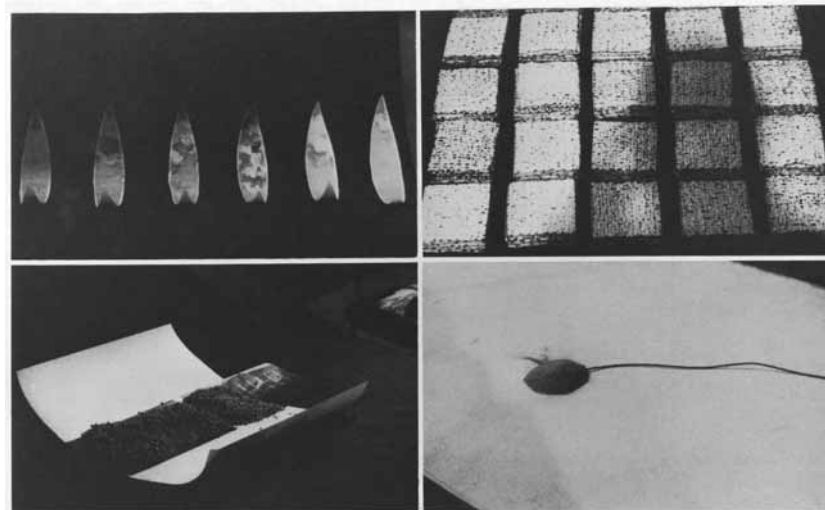
Photogram with Ladder, 1981

1979 *Eszter Solymosi of Tiszaeszlár* (*Version* is its final title), a film based on a documentary novel by a similar title by Gyula Krúdy. This film is also a "dream reconstruction", the revival of a story submerged in the collective unconsciousness of Hungarians and Jews. (We are dealing again with the subject of unleavened bread, according to the infamous blood libel Jews mixed the blood of a Christian girl into the dough.) Acute problems can only be solved through unusual propositions, which is why Erdély could say of Coppola's *The Conversation*, "the detectaphone is in the saxophone", and situate Móric Scharf's attraction to the disappeared maid in the axis of the "Hungarian Dreyfus affair".



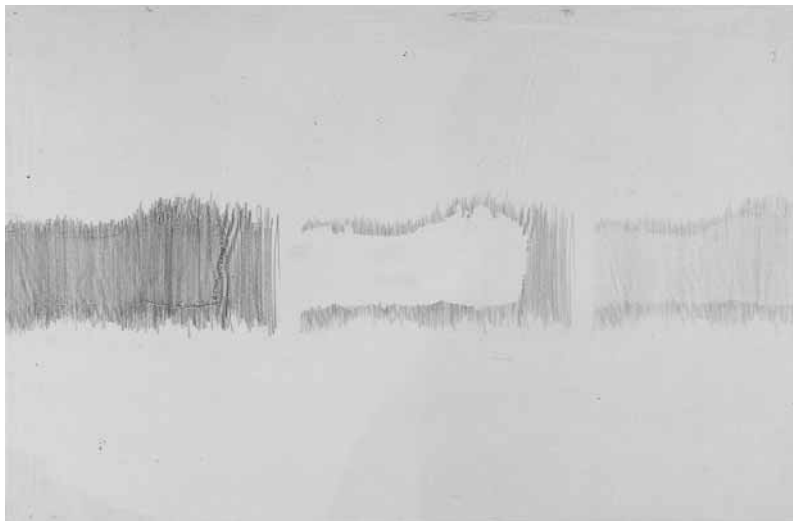
Verison, 1979. *Frames of the film*

1979 *Eskaton – Exit* for Tibor Hajas, *Works and Words* Festival, Amsterdam. Erdély's use of material (tarpaper, unleavened bread, etc.) and the burning of magnesium on the instructions of Hajas as a part of the action anticipated the great series of environments and collages beginning in 1980. The plan of a globe turned inside out that enfolds the entire universe in itself.



Eskaton – Exit for Tibor Hajas, 1979

1979 *"Threadworks"* (which in Hungarian is a pun meaning both a work stitched together and a shoddy work) is fittingly exhibited at the exhibition entitled *"Textile Without Textile"* held in the Young Artists Club. *"Threadworks"* unites the principles of frottage and drawing with carbon paper; the individual works are the immediate precedents or the first examples of a new type of collage.

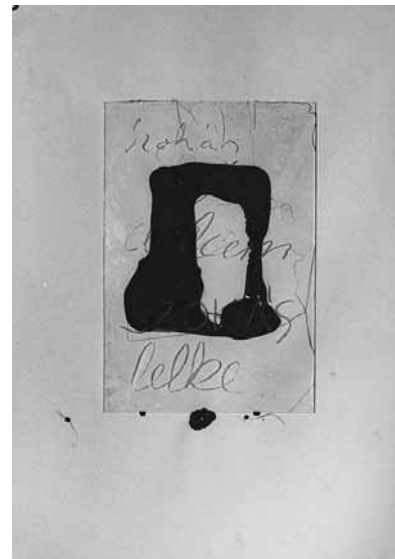


Threadwork Copied Apart, 1979

1980 *Boris Godunov*. The environment erected at the exhibition entitled *IPARTERV 68–80* depicts the quotation from Pushkin, "Custom is the soul of states", with the help of a few objects. The meaning of the aphorism is given by the place-value of the inscriptions: the word "custom" appears on a plate of glass the upper corners of which lean against the corner of the room, clipping a sheet of carbon paper to the wall, the glass-plates of "state" are kept from sliding by a fur coat (the cloak symbolizing power), while the glass-plate bearing the word "soul" balances on one corner on an evergreen leaf.



Boris Godunov, 1980



Sketch for the Boris Godunov, 1980

1980 *In Memory of the Council of Chalcedon*, environment in the Bercsényi College, Budapest and in the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Gent. The Council of Chalcedon (451) proclaimed the dogma of the full humanity and full divinity of Christ in a single person. This significant event in the history of Christianity is referred to by multiple figures of the cross placed on the floor of the room (made of tarpaper, glass-plates, matzos and cast lead). This installation not only allows Erdély to bring Judaism and Christianity into confrontation with each other, but also to reflect on Creation with a visual metaphor. There is a sheet of blue telex paper (which also works as carbon paper with its copying capacity) running along the walls on the surface of which important information has been written in ever fainter numbers: "99,99999 ...% of the universe is redundant". Erdély commented on his work as follows:

Here another dimension executes a counter-motion, which causes the fading. Thus we may understand this to mean that everything in the universe that is not redundant causes the percentage to fade.

(Trans. by John Bátky)



In Memory of the Council of Chalcedon, Budapest, 1980



In Memory of the Council of Chalcedon, Gent, 1980 (detail)

To rephrase, this means that the existence of human intelligence is due to the infinitesimally tiny fraction of probability missing from 100%. Standing on an overturned aluminum baking-pan at the end of one of the lines of the cross, Erdély delivered a lecture on this while his untied shoelaces were on fire.

1980 Participation in the *Drawing* exhibition in the Gallery of Pécs and in the II. Photo Biennial of Esztergom. The use of new material obviously stimulates the understanding of the more traditional mediums of the fine arts. Just as the scroll-like shape plays a part in the use of tarpaper and telex paper, in Esztergom this principle appears in *Roll (An Irreproducible Object of Exhibition)*:

We can see a scroll of photosensitized paper symmetrically rolled by its ends. The rolling is real at the right end of the scroll, occurring in the given space, while at the left end it is only represented, merely a photo appearing in a plane. There is an indeterminate borderline between the two ends of the scroll where real is transformed into representation. Reproduction would destroy the difference between these two qualities.

(M. E. in the catalogue of the exhibition)



Roll (An Irreproducible Object of Exhibition), 1980

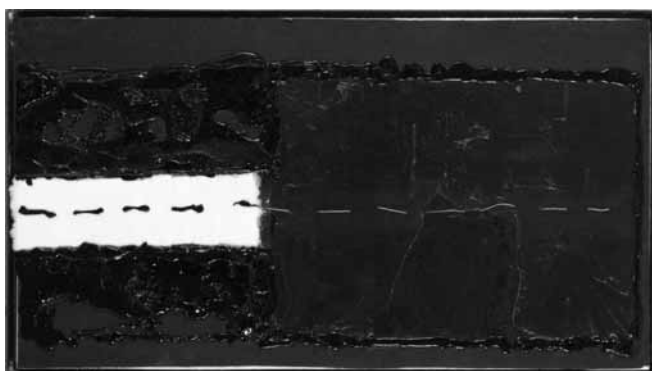


Südstrand. Without Horizon, 1980

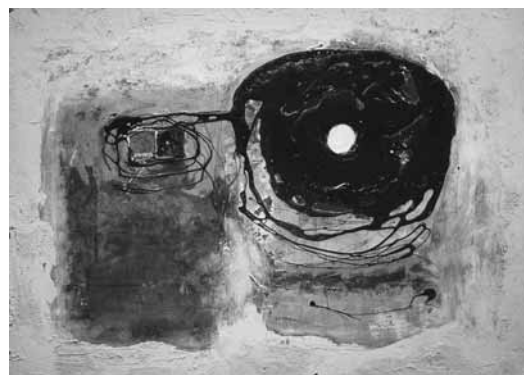
And in the same way as dripped tar and strings that have been glued down emerge as lines in material-montages, sewing can figure as drawing (*Threadworks*) in a textile exhibition or an incredibly banal inscription (the nickname "Pista" on the drawing *Context I*, "as if it evoked the soul of stupidity", Erdély notes) among the drawings for the *Drawing* exhibition as a symbolic summary of the principle of materials emptied of meaning.

1980 *Südstrand. Without Horizon*. The environment of the Wilhelmshaven Kunsthalle consists of plates of glass obliquely leaning against the wall and pieces of matzos also obliquely leaning against the wall balanced on top of them. The drops of tar on the glass secure the pieces of matzos. The choice of title was made subsequently thanks to the sudden realization that Erdély's situation in his hotel room looking out onto the "Southern Beach" of Wilhelmshaven and his position in a deck chair whose principle of support is "oblique upon oblique" can be thought of as corresponding to the essential features of the work. *Jeremiad, Multiply, From the Highway to the World Beyond, Wounds and Sins, Coll-Montage (adhering montage)* and the other montages that were made around the exhibition in Wilhelmshaven mark an unprecedented mature period in Erdély's oeuvre. The materials he used had rarely been utilized in

the fine arts before: adhesive, sealing wax, tar, matzos, cast lead, carbon paper, tissue-paper, flour, glass-plates, string, wire, blades of grass, etc. The everyday and symbolic meanings of these materials are pushed to the background, while at the same time abandoning the conception of "material for the sake of material" of art informel. The materials balance halfway between these two spheres, on a peculiar and meaningful "as if" boundary of meaning (merely perceivable but unutterable) that is demarcated by the principles of montage (assembly). Each combination of tarpaper, tar and carbon paper can be analyzed as the aggregate of the meanings of the individual components, but the meaning is determined by use, and these materials destroy each other's value in use, thus the literal extinguishing of meaning comes into being. Such a montage is a "neutral zone" that however will later "grab" newer meanings again. For example, the sphere of thoughts surrounding the tar-bitumen gives rise to the possibility of making the so-called *Road-roller-type*.



From the Highway to the World Beyond, 1980



Bitumen Picture, 1979–80



Making the Road-roller-type, 1980



"Papacs", 1979–80



Feri's Home, 1979–80

1980 The Indigo Group holds a *Watercolor* exhibition in the Bercsényi College in November. Works by Erdély on display include *András Böröcz Does Not Resemble Franz Kafka*, "*Mesa*" (the realization of a commission by Sándor Altorjai) and *Faithlessness* (inscription, breathalyzer tubes fastened with Scotch tape).

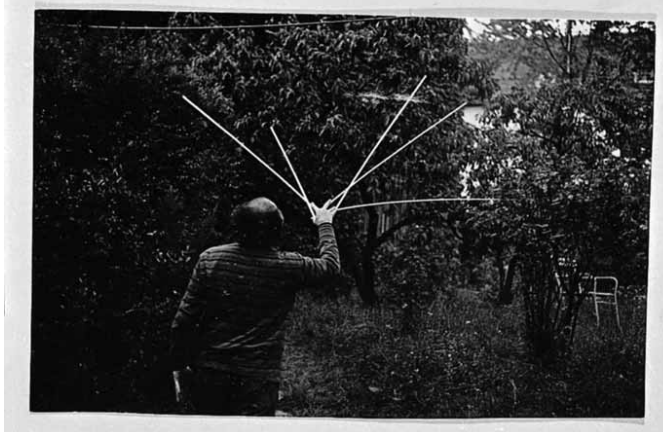
1980 "*An Attempt to Pick Fruit with Elongated Fingers*" was also carried out around 1980. The positions of the "fingers" produced very extraordinary linear combinations in the photo-series.

1980 *Stabilization*, Galerija Savremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb. Erdély erected a fragile "fortification" of glass-plates patterned after snow-fences found by the sides of train tracks over a layer of cement powder. Then he passed a long pole with a burning newspaper attached to it – which contains some "news" – behind the "fortification". Another glass-plate crashing down onto the fading ashes immobilizes the remnants of the event. This environment, which also contains action elements, is constructed in such a way so as to "solve" (any) current political tension in compliance with the principle of entropy.

1981 *Train Trip*. Erdély takes a trip with the Indigo Group to Hatvan to see the Kondor exhibition. (Hatvan is 60 kms far from Budapest and it takes an hour to get there by train. In Hungarian the name "Hatvan" also means 'sixty'.) He intends to shoot a one-hour-film during the trip. The first shooting failed because of technical difficulties. The second was successful, and a film with extraordinary time structure was



András Böröcz Does Not Resemble Franz Kafka, 1980



"An Attempt to Pick Fruit with Elongated Fingers", 1980

made with the help of a complicated editing principle. Clips cut in succession from the end of the film and gradually spliced together are wedged into the real time of the shooting. Thus, when we reach the end of the recorded event (and the projection of the film) we arrive at the same time at the beginning. "The film remembers and foretells."

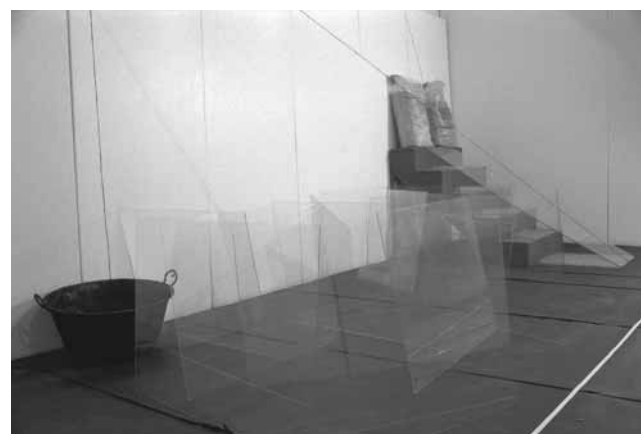
1981 *Crystals of Libel. One Should Reflect on Artificial Fertilizer. Tendencias 6*, Óbuda Gallery. Artificial fertilizer – the latest substance transfiguring the environment – pouring from sacks onto the steps of a wooden-stairway is covered with a plate of glass which is kept from slipping by a black string the other end of which hangs into a cauldron used for boiling tar. There is a row of glass sheets leaning against the cauldron like dominos or houses of cards. The slightest outside impact could cause the structure to collapse. Once again the probable fate of the structure is decided by entropy – and indeed this is what happened, as it was Erdély himself who knocked it down. It is the same force, if you will, mentioned in the introduction that upsets the balance – the slight change in quantity that turns a liquid into a "saturated liquid". Erdély is preoccupied with the motif of glass sheets. In the summer he sticks them into the sand wall of Szigliget under the title *Mastersingers*. In the exhibition of the Indigo Group entitled *My Fondest Summer Memory* he uses glass sheets as empty frames and projects a motion picture onto them depicting skiers. In Krakow he erects an installation entitled *Danger*. He constructs glass cabinets out of sheets of glass placed together like a house of cards, into which he places bottles wrapped in carbon paper and a few heads of red cabbage.



Stabilization, 1980



Train Trip, 1981



Crystals of Libel. One Should Reflect on Artificial Fertilizer, 1981



My Fondest Summer Memory, 1981



Mastersingers, 1981



Danger, 1981



Sacred Line, 1981

1981 *Line* exhibition, Pécs. In addition to his earlier line drawings and carbon paper drawings, the *Sacred Line* was also exhibited here – “sacred” in the sense that the drawing produced by him though independent of him is determined and undetermined at the same time. Erdély fastened a piece of heavy lead to the sharpened end of the pencil and tried to influence the development of the line being drawn by a string attached to its other end. As a result of the double transmission an irregularly regular, self-regulatory graphic sign was created.

1981 The *Optimistic Lecture* delivered in April is followed by the *Apocryphal Lecture* in November. He recites from *Ecclesiastes* and comments on what is read by drinking mineral water, spilling the water, watering flowers



Open Book – Closed Book, 1982

or hurling the bottle to the ground. (Mineral water is used because due to its circulation water is approximately as old as the Bible. "Spring-water is old rainwater.") One week later Erdély volunteered to interpret the events in the course of another lecture, something unprecedented in the history of happenings and actions.

1982 Two significant works of photography are created, *Ideal Plane* and (based on similar principles) *Open Book – Closed Book*, which is submitted to the Photo Biennial of Esztergom. Erdély composed *Ideal Plane* by sawing a wooden beam into pieces and making photonegatives of the surfaces thus created, then by copying these "planes" photographically onto one another, he "unified" them. The book – also by way of photography – became closed by remaining open: placing them next to one another, Erdély developed the photonegatives of the spine and the covers of the book.

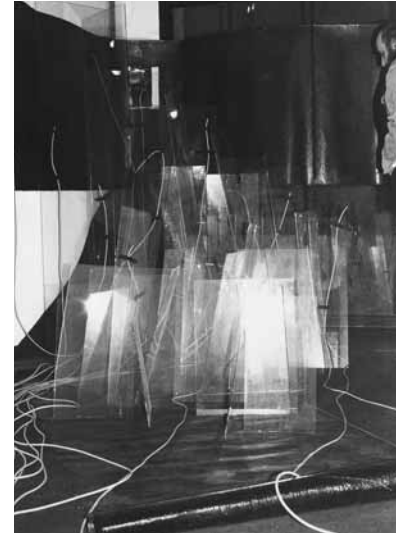


Apocryphal Lecture, 1981

– He continues to appear in public: in February he writes in gold paint on a long roll of wrapping paper supported by chicken gizzards in the *Table Action* of the Indigo Group; in March he participates in Katalin Ladik's evening, where he whips the water in a wash-basin (reference to the 1968 UFO) and in January 1983 he paints a large-sized picture collectively with the Indigo Group. The surface is divided among them according to how long each of them can whistle.



Indigo Group: Collective Painting, 1983



*Detail from the exhibition in Genova:
"Bitumen Cake", 1983*

1983 February–March: large exhibition at the Arte Verso Gallery in Geneva (a lot of "dumpling pictures", glass sheets, tubes leading into a "bitumen cake"). At the same time in the *Film/Art* exhibition of the Budapest Gallery a heap of flour mixed with strips of film can be seen in a corner formed by glass sheets and next to it a bucket of water. On one of the walls above the corner there is a horizontal line drawn on a six meter long sheet of telex-paper: *Linear Canon*, which means that the line created on the principle of carbon paper drawing continuously recommences, becoming ever fainter, eventually disappearing. On the surface of the other wall, which is left bare, Erdély projects *Still-Life in the Morning*, a well known painting by the famous



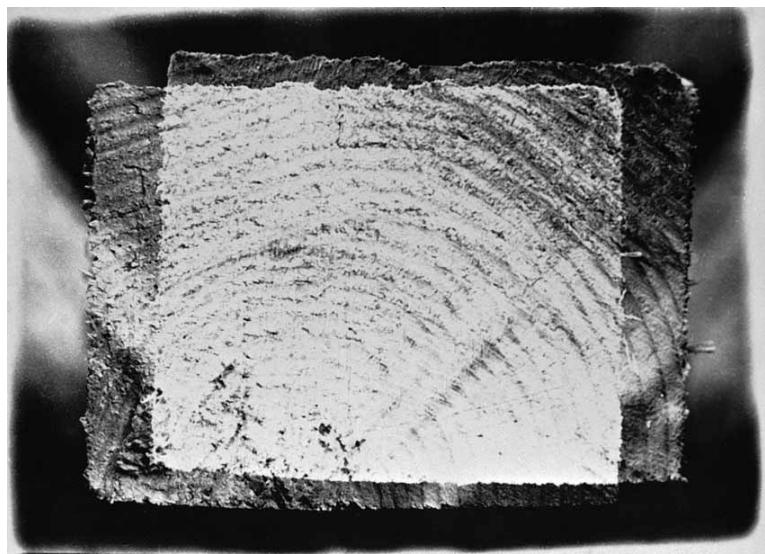
Installation in the Film/Art Exhibition, 1983



Textured Line (Linear Canon), 1980

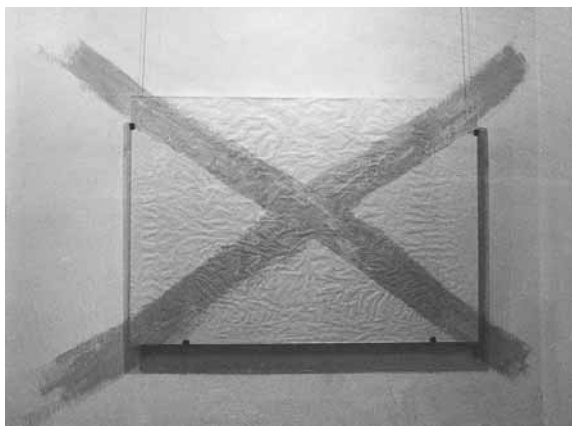


Table Action of the Indigo Group, 1982

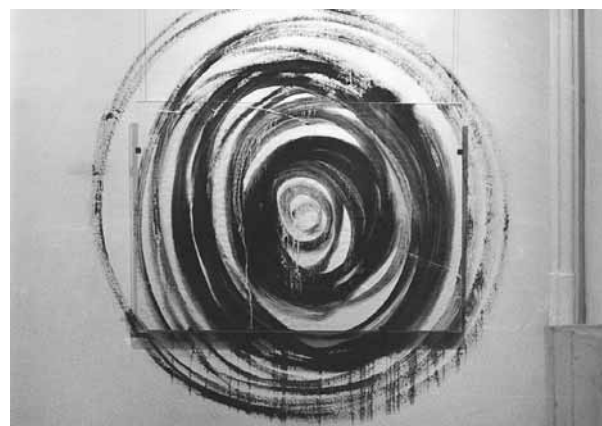


Ideal Plane, 1982

academic painter Aurél Bernáth (who died a year earlier), on an infinite loop with shadows recorded on the film sometimes obscuring the picture. In December Erdély exhibits pictures in *The Avant-garde is Dead*, an exhibition held in Bercsényi College, that are painted on paper affixed to the wall and on the wall itself, and then placed in front of the wall between two sheets of glass (*Cross* and *Spiral*).



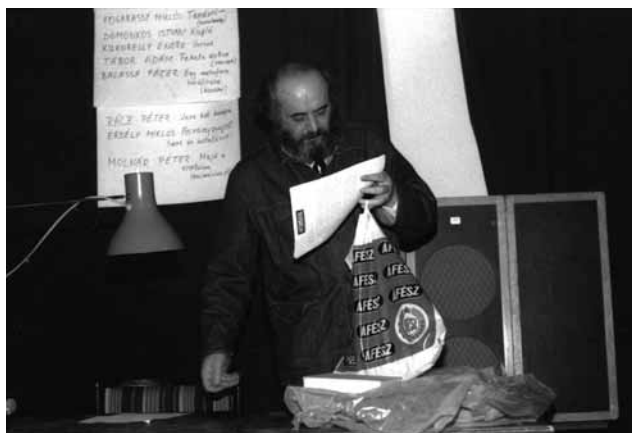
Cross, 1983



Spiral, 1983

1983 May: Exhibition of the drawing course of the Indigo Group in the Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibits are the solutions of special tasks (previously discussed collectively): "Beautiful, but poor drawings", "Ugly Drawing", "Good subject poorly done", "Mirage", "Embarrassing techniques", "Drawing for Galleries", "Tortured (excessively labored) drawing". The last ones in particular had significant liberating effects on the subsequent pictorial work of the members of the group.

1984 At the beginning of the year Erdély recites his poem entitled *Mineral Wool* at the evening of the Breath Poets' Group (then using mineral wool as a stamp pad, he stamps his manuscript with a volume by Proust). Throughout the course of the year he works on *Springtime Execution*, a film that is partly autobiographical in nature but can be thought of more as a "dream reconstruction". At the same time, in a very personal manner, keeping his distance and maintaining his reservations, he gets into contact with the new wave in painting, which is conquering ever more ground internationally and in Hungary. Together with Ákos Birkás and Lóránd Hegyi he guides the *Democratic Painting Evening* of the Kossuth Club, where they paint a picture as "requested by the audience". He participates in the *Picture '84* exhibition of the Fészek Club. He works on making geometry "picturesque", painting psychological illustrations, geometrical figures and absurd mathematical expressions on canvas and paper. In the "1984" – *Orwell und die Gegenwart* exhibition in Vienna he erects a huge installation with a built-in digital display on which captions appear (*Military Secret*). The audience can see this work together with two other pictures in the "Wet Paint" exhibition of the Ernst Museum. Digital displays figure in other works as well, e. g. in *Déryné* (Mrs. Déry) displayed in the musical festival *Plánium '84* (later he repaints this picture as *Réginé* – 'Mrs. Antique' –, that is, in accordance with the artist's conception it presents its fragments of folk art motifs, popular songs and operetta lyrics as fraying memories) or in his installation presented as part of the *Disc* performance-program, which was held in the spring of 1985. Here the captions appeared in the aperture of an enormous mouth: "Silence, please. We can hear the bird-calls of the downcast eye ..."



Erdély recites his poem entitled *Mineral Wool*, 1984

1985 At the beginning of the year Erdély delivers a lecture on the time structure of *Train Trip* at the modern musical festival in Zagreb. (John Cage, who also wrote a train-trip composition, is present.) In February he gives a recital in the House of the Hungarian Writers' Association accompanied by an action (*My Golden Fascists*). In June he has a



Springtime Execution, 1984. Frame from the film



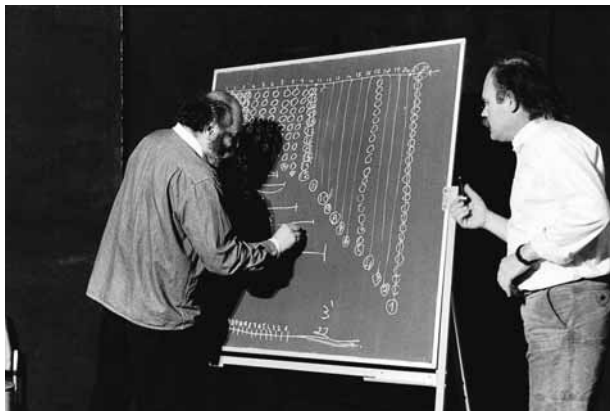
Mrs. Antique, 1984

1985 At the beginning of the year Erdély delivers a lecture on the time structure of *Train Trip* at the modern musical festival in Zagreb. (John Cage, who also wrote a train-trip composition, is present.) In February he gives a recital in the House of the Hungarian Writers' Association accompanied by an action (*My Golden Fascists*). In June he has a



Military Secret, 1984

joint exhibition with Magdolna Csutak in her apartment in Vienna. Their show is based on the analogy of matzos, paper and paper-thin porcelain. Finally, his pictures are exhibited in the Hungarian exhibitions in Graz and Glasgow.



Erdély delivers a lecture on the time structure of Train Trip, Zagreb, 1985



Democratic Painting, 1984

It is difficult to describe Erdély's art as a continuous system because his works are one-time situations and states that on the surface pass easily into another situation, and they are only connected with one another in the depths, like communicating vessels. However, we can observe special states in his use of materials and objects,



UFO, 1985

such as leaning, suspension, and plasticity. Each of his works is balanced instantaneity, uncertain certainty in the material and metaphorical sense as well. (According to his philosophy even laws are only what they are by accident.) Being suspended can be profane "dangling into" (such as the tie dangling into the soup) or the vertical leading us to the transcendental sphere: its form of manifestation is an immaterial line or a material string, "sacred" or rigid linearity. His action-objects made in 1979 entitled *Faith / Loyalty* attest to his manifold uncertainty: a white stick presses a piece of carbon paper with a piece of white paper under it against the wall, but it may fall down at any minute, or in another work carbon paper hangs on a string between two rolls

of paper in such a manner that it cannot be used for copying, as it would immediately move away. Making it impossible to copy is Erdély's "revenge" against reproduction – in the interest of unity.



Joint exhibition with Magdolna Csutak, 1985



Performance in the House of the Hungarian Writers' Association, 1985

However, unity is not the offspring of reason, but rather of state and level, not of the measurable quantity, but of quality, the site of its manifestation is not a rigid coordinate system but the mollusk. The equivalent of the "quivering coordinate system" is the materialization of the intellect: the ectoplasm. The ectoplasm of the spiritists is a stream, a flow, the most ethereal substance among all malleable and liquid substances. "It comes out of the mouth" like its "rigid" counterpart, the kosher food, Jewish unleavened bread "goes into the mouth". Matzos encased in tar, formed into a cross and doused with lead: a new coordinate system. String hung into tar: a line leading from the material to the dimension of the supernatural. Following it upwards: linearity becomes a state (time – becoming a state – "stops" near the speed of light). Downwards: "the more developed utters promptings", "the last dream interprets all previous dreams". This applies to his last paintings as well: while they acquire their conceptions from their antecedents, they repaint and reinterpret all the earlier works through their clear pictorial qualities. Such lines connect the communicating vessels of material qualities and states, objects that have acquired symbolic meanings, and social, mythological, spiritual and scientific references in and among Erdély's works.

Translated by Katalin Varga and Judit Pokoly (1986)

Revised by Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszák (2008)



Exhibition view, Kisterem, Budapest



**Miklós Erdély and the Indigo Group.
Photoworks from the 70s and 80s**

Exhibition at the Kisterem, Budapest, and at the Georg Kargl BOX, Vienna, 2008





Exhibition view, Georg Kargl BOX, Vienna

Miklós Erdély and the Indigo Group. Photoworks from the 70s and 80s

Miklós Erdély (1928–1986), architect, artist, writer, poet, theorist, filmmaker, was an important catalyst in the unofficial Hungarian art scene during the 1960s, 70s and early 80s.

Hailed as “the father of the new Hungarian avant-garde”, Erdély was a charismatic personality, always provocative and often irritating, especially to the authorities. From 1975 until his death he ran three conceptionally and methodically related courses in art – *Creativity Exercises* (in 1975–1976, together with Dóra Maurer and György Galántai), *Fantasy Developing Exercises* (FAFEJ) and *Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking* (Indigo) – which were conceived as experimental teaching studios or workshops drawing on avant-garde artistic processes, new theories of creativity, educational methods influenced by Eastern philosophical traditions and many other sources. By his own admission one of the aims of his art pedagogical activity was to “create a milieu in which it might be worth working at all”. He regarded his students as the most suitable critics of his own works.

The Indigo Group grew out of the third course, which Erdély led from 1978. The name Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking refers, as Erdély put it, to the fact that they “did not give up the promising idea of working on the borderline of two cultures – science and art”. They were interested in questions concerning the functions and possibilities of art and considered these inseparable from creative thinking in society and life as well. The Indigo Group arranged numerous thematic exhibitions and group actions between 1978 and 1986, which were centred around either some artistic medium (*Coal and Charcoal Drawing, Sand and Its Forms of Movement, Painting, avant-garde or experimental Film, Watercolour, Paperworks*, the one-year drawing course at the Museum of Fine Arts, 1982–1983), an abstract concept (*Weight, Faith / Loyalty, Artist' Exit, The Poetic Avant-garde*), or other personal experiences and activities (*My Fondest Summer Memory, Biography, Table Actions*). Among the socio-political manifestations, it is worth highlighting the Indigo *Peace Call*, the *Founding Certificate of the Voluntary Legislative Body* (1982) and the *Pax Action* (1983).

In the initial period, they regarded their presentations as joint works: they would pick a theme, gather an enormous sum of individual ideas around it (which are also exhibited sometimes), select the best ideas together and modify these during the working process so that it became impossible to determine who had contributed what to the final version. From about 1980, however, it was first and foremost works of individual artists that were exhibited at group shows.

Among these was the March 1984 exhibition *The Personal and the Sacred* (*Ami személyes és ami szent*), which was inspired by the ideas of Simone Weil's essay *Human Personality* (*La Personne et le sacré*). Simone Weil (1909–1943) was a writer of Jewish origin who viewed the world in a holistic way and was opposed

to the division of knowledge into separate branches of study. According to Weil, people regard science, art and religion as separate territories because they are incapable of believing in a coherent world order. She believed in the accessibility of a higher, mystical knowledge characterised by unity and universality. "In science, truth is sacred. In art, beauty is sacred. Beauty and truth are always impersonal." "That which is sacred is by no means our personality; on the contrary, it is what is impersonal in our human being. Everything that is impersonal in man is sacred. And that alone is sacred," she wrote. Members of the Indigo Group produced photographic works treating the subject for the exhibition *The Personal and the Sacred* the majority of which has been preserved within the Erdély estate, and a selection of these was on view in the Kisterem (Budapest) and at the Georg Kargl BOX (Vienna).

The method for the exhibition of photographic works follows the installation of the original, which was determined by the group as a whole in 1984: each photo was uniformly set under a 70 × 100 cm sheet of glass and the artists placed their "personal" doormats beneath some individual works. Erzsébet Ambrus exhibited photograms that she made while standing on her head, entitled *Everything is Upside-Down*. Bálint Bori referred to the sanctity of nothingness with three – a black, a grey and a white – fragments of photographs glued alongside one another. The photo of András Böröcz depicted the bathroom mirror and the objects on the shelf in front of it, and drawn on the tile alongside the mirror is a couple dancing: he and his beloved at the time. Mária Czakó placed a family photo depicting her with her husband András Böröcz and their son Menyus alongside a drawing of the figures in the photo outlined in red paint. Dániel Erdély's photo, in which a plastic mess-kit full of food and a slice of bread are visible, concerned the sanctity of eating and the everyday. Two slices of bread placed symmetrically on the floor beneath the artwork and reminiscent of the soles of shoes represented the everyday bread necessary for life as an everyday "entry". Miklós Erdély exhibited a collage of paper, bitumen, carbon paper, a newspaper cut-out, a photo and a print made with an airbrush. The work could be thought of as bearing an affinity with the sentences from Simone Weil's *Human Personality (La Personne et le sacré)* that concern the sacred as the impersonal in man: "There is something that lives deep in the heart of man, from earliest childhood, from the cradle to the grave, which, despite every sin committed and suffered, and every bad thing experienced and ingrained, invariably awaits something good to be done and not something bad. And it is this something that above all is sacred in every single person." Erdély placed three figurative depictions at a distance from one another on a white sheet of paper the largest part of which was covered by a dark-coloured material. A newspaper cut-out is embedded in a thin, brown pulp of bitumen along the upper edge of the work, in which he left a smaller and larger part uncovered. On the left-hand side the caption "Messiah" appears and to the right of this one can read a news story, illustrated with a photo, entitled *The Absolution of Ali Agca*. Visible in the photo are "the Pope and his would-be assassin", while the text in the space left free around the photo is as follows: "John Paul II met in private with Ali Agca, who on 13 May 1981 attempted to murder the Holy Father. Yesterday morning in Rome, the meeting took place in the cell of the Turkish terrorist. The Pope entered the cell alone. He embraced the convict and forgave him. The two men spoke softly for 20 minutes. As the minutes passed, Ali Agca drew increasingly closer to the Pope. They spoke in whispers. Most probably he told the truth about the attack in Saint Peter's Square. At the conclusion of the conversation, which appeared to be a confession, John Paul II [said:] 'What we discussed will remain our secret. Ali Agca is a brother whom I have forgiven,

and *he has my full trust.*' Before Ali Agca was left to himself in his cell, he kneeled before the Holy Father and kissed both his hands. The scar from the attack is still visible on one of them..." Erdély emphasised the italicized part of the text in the newspaper cut-out in purple. On the right side, outside the band of bitumen, there is a print made of a child's hand, the lower edge of which borders a dark blue sheet of carbon paper that takes up most of the surface of the artwork and was once folded into eight parts, leaving the traces of the folds still visible. Erdély has placed an old family photo at the lower right-hand corner of the carbon paper with the following explanatory caption: "I dance the czardas with my grandmother in 1937". In 1977 Erdély began to use carbon paper regularly in many of his works, and it was at this time that he fashioned his carbon-paper-drawing technique using carbon paper or transfer paper in connection with the Möbius strip, by which the "original" drawing and its copy are rendered on exactly the same surface. The word for carbon paper (indigó) in Hungarian corresponds with the name of the Indigo Group, and although this may have been a coincidence, the technique of "copying" or "reproduction" could also be seen as a metaphor for his "teaching technique". The primary motif of Zoltán Lábás's 16-part photo series was the shadow cast on a wall of the figure of the digits six and seven cut from a piece of paper and suspended (though not visible in the pictures). Tivadar Nemesi's four-part photo series depicts the artist himself engaging in some sort of magic activity, which could just as easily be a performance as a shamanistic ceremony. László Révész showed a found photo that depicted objects – a pair of scales, a coffee-grinder, a language book and an alarm clock – that could have been found in the flat of Révész's grandmother. János Sugár's photo portrays two bright spotlights mounted on stands and turned towards each other that were compared to human figures made of rods. The picture appears on the backing surface viewed slightly from below, which served to accentuate the "personal perspective". In his work *Our Home is Earth* János Szirtes glued 16 photos side by side to the upper half of a white cardboard sheet, creating a 4 × 4 matrix out of them. Thirteen of the photos depict trees and bushes, while the other three show skinned animal pelts, Coptic reliefs marked with a cross, and a wooden altarpiece (Pièta). One of the possible interpretations of the artwork could be that the personal and the sacred become inseparably intertwined in our everyday milieu, whether it concerns pantheism, shamanism, or ecology.

In addition to the works of the Indigo Group, a small selection of photographic works made by Miklós Erdély before 1984 is also on exhibit. From the late 1960s Erdély, who made sculptures, graphic works, paintings, objects, collages, environments, conceptual works, actions, films and videos, used photography and photograms as autonomous tools of expression and as creative elements of individual works. An example of the latter is his work entitled *The Personal and the Sacred*, which was the last such work he made. Erdély himself did not photograph, but either found his photos ready-made or had someone (most often, his sons) photograph what he needed. He often illustrated his artistic-theoretical-philosophical-poetic texts with photos or photo-actions and used photos in his vivid but conceptual examination of the phenomenon of the picture, the practice of creating photographic images, and depiction. According to László Beke, in Erdély's conceptual use of photography the photo can be understood as a metaphor for art. At the same time, in many of his photographic works he placed one or another element of photographic technique, for instance, light, at the centre, as in the case of *Evening Action* (1969) or *Self-Illumination (Light Eats up Man)* (1969), from among his exhibited works. The "mistake" of "flash overexposure" in the latter work became the departure point for a metaphor-making

process. His 1972 *Metaphor Studies* are similarly poetically charged, while his *No Photographs* shown at the exhibition organised on the occasion of the 1974 conference *Culture and Semiotics* touches on the question of the interpretation of symbols: it concerns “pragmatic mistaking of rules taken in the semiotic sense” – in the words of László Beke. The conceptual origins of his 1980 *Sacred Line* can be traced to a conversation with Gábor Bódy on film as material, on which Erdély commented: “I was arguing with Bódy in a pub about what obscene material film is. [...] I explained how much more the concrete meeting of graphite with paper is worth, what a transfigured moment it is when one puts the graphite pencil on a pure white sheet, or anything at all. [...] Afterwards I tried to think of ways to make it even more ethereal. It was then that I came up with that ‘sacred line’ thing: I put a piece of lead on a pencil, tie a piece of string on the end and then draw the line. And indeed, this is an absolute moment of leaving a trace, such a noble compromise of interference and the independent behaviour of material, the likes of which exists perhaps in the divine world. To leave matter alone a bit to do as it pleases, yet still guide it. Sometimes I have the feeling that with a method like this one cannot draw an unattractive line.” His photographic work *Relaxation* or *Work* is the visual recording of an idea performed as an action in 1983 which, according to one of Erdély’s sons, can be traced to the following Biblical citation: “And He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark, 2:27).

The first presentation of the exhibition arranged from the photographic works of Miklós Erdély and the Indigo Group was held at the Kisterem Gallery in Budapest in May and June of 2008. The show was realised in collaboration with the Miklós Erdély Foundation. It was given an unusual timeliness by that fact that concurrently the exhibition *Fluxus East – Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* was on view at the Ludwig Museum Budapest, the exhibition *Kontakt. Works from the Art Collection of Erste Bank Group* at the Dunaújváros Institute for Contemporary Art, and the exhibition *Concept, Conception – Extracts*, organised by Dóra Maurer (Open Structures Association), in the Vasarely Museum, in each of which individual photo-works of Miklós Erdély figured, embedded in context. In parallel with these, the volume presenting the art pedagogical activity of Miklós Erdély was published, in which Indigoworks visible in the exhibition were published for the first time: *Creativity Exercises, Fantasy Developing Exercises (FAFEJ) and Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking (InDiGo). Miklós Erdély’s art pedagogical activity, 1975–1986*. Compiled by Sándor Hornyik and Annamária Szőke. Edited by Annamária Szőke. Gondolat Publishing House – Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – 2B Foundation – Miklós Erdély Foundation, Budapest, 2008.

*Written and compiled by Annamária Szőke / Miklós Erdély Foundation
Translated by Ágnes Csonka and Adele Eisenstein*

List of works

Erdély, Miklós:
Self-illumination (Light Eats up Man), 1969
(Photo: Gyula Zaránd), silver gelatin,
Forte Dokubrom Photographic Copy Paper,
29,5 × 21 cm, Spengler–Somló Collection



Erdély, Miklós:
Evening action, 1969
silver gelatin, each: 21 × 14,5 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Erdély, Miklós:
Metaphor I., 1972
(Photo: Dániel Erdély),
silver gelatin,
each: 26,2 × 18,8 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Erdély, Miklós:
Metaphor II., around 1972
(Photo: Dániel Erdély),
silver gelatin,
each: 9 × 12 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



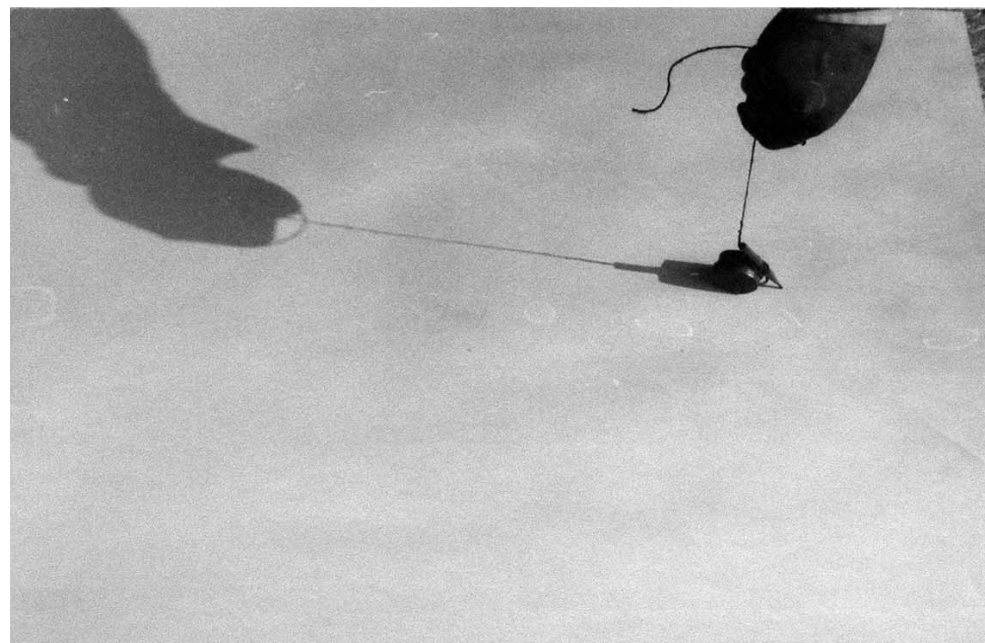
Erdély, Miklós:
Metaphor III., around 1972
(Photo: Dániel Erdély),
silver gelatin,
each: 9 × 12 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



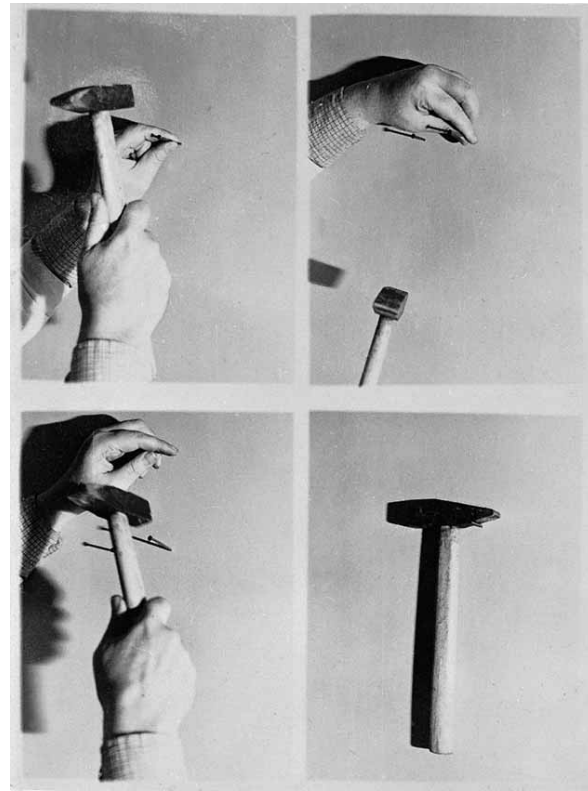
Erdély, Miklós:
No Photographs, 1974
silver gelatin, Forte Dokubrom Photographic Copy Paper,
29,5 × 21 cm, Miklós Erdély Bequest



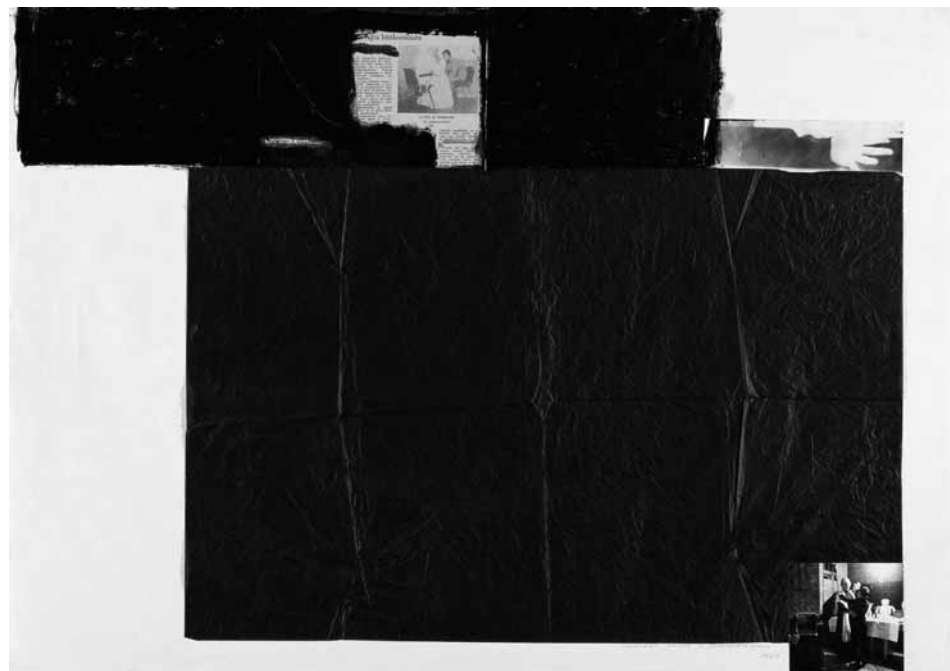
Erdély, Miklós:
Sacred Line, 1980
(Photo: Dóra Maurer), silver gelatin,
Forte Dokubrom Photographic Copy Paper,
20,8 × 29,5 cm, Miklós Erdély Bequest



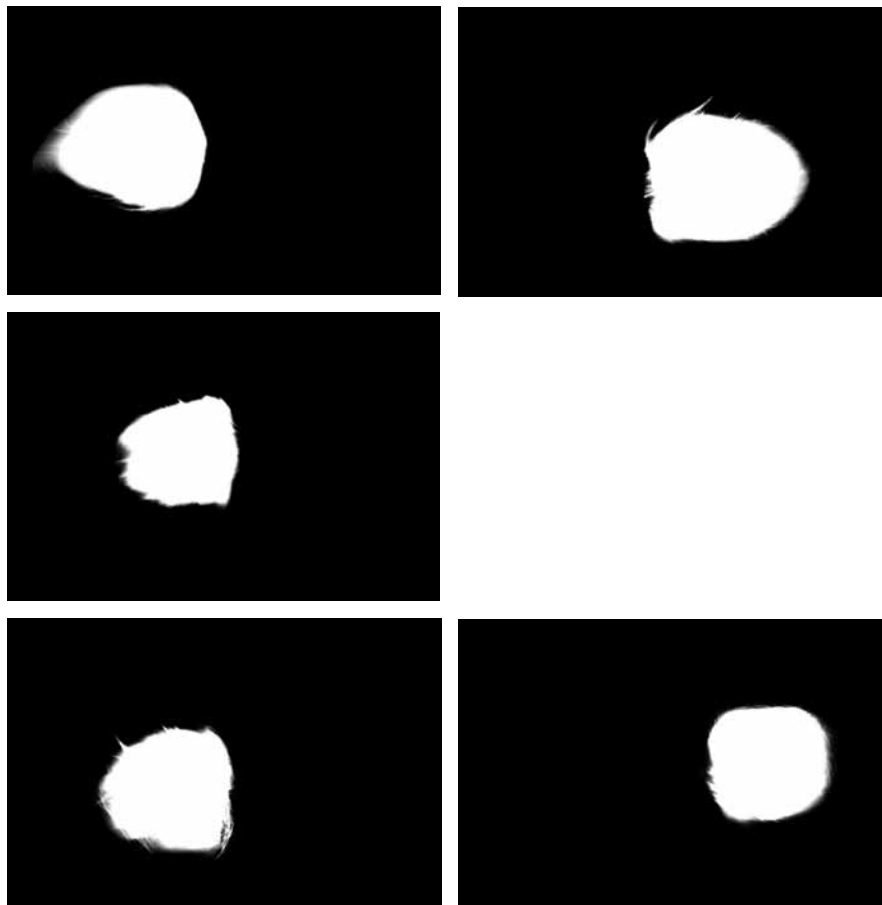
Erdély, Miklós:
Relaxation (Work), 1983
(Photo: György Erdély), silver gelatin, 24 × 18 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



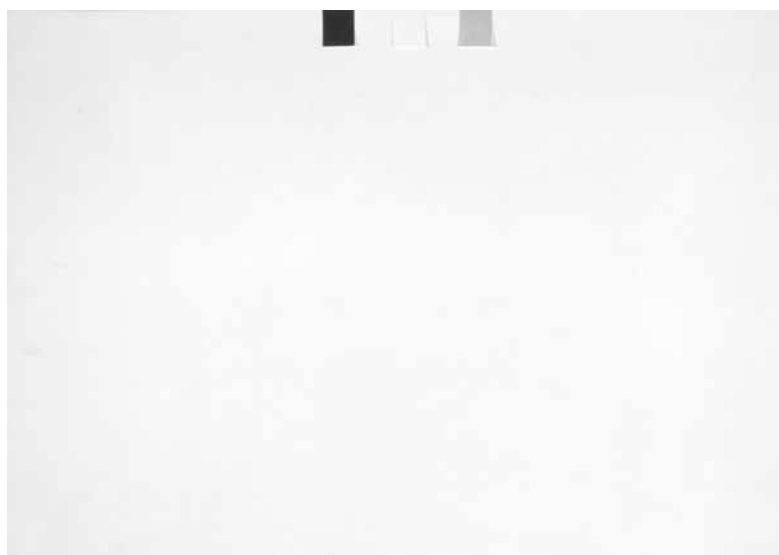
Erdély, Miklós:
The Personal and the Sacred, 1984
paper, bitumen, photo-, carbon paper-, newspaper-collage,
70 × 100 cm, property of Mátyás Erdély



Ambrus, Erzsébet:
*Everything
is Upside-Down*, 1984
5 photograms, silver gelatin,
each: 24,5 × 35,5 cm,
property of the artist



Bori, Bálint:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, paper, 42,2 × 61,3 cm,
3 photos, silver gelatin, each:
2,8 × 2,5 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Böröcz, András:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, silver gelatin,
Forte Dokubrom Photographic
Copy Paper, 21 × 30 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



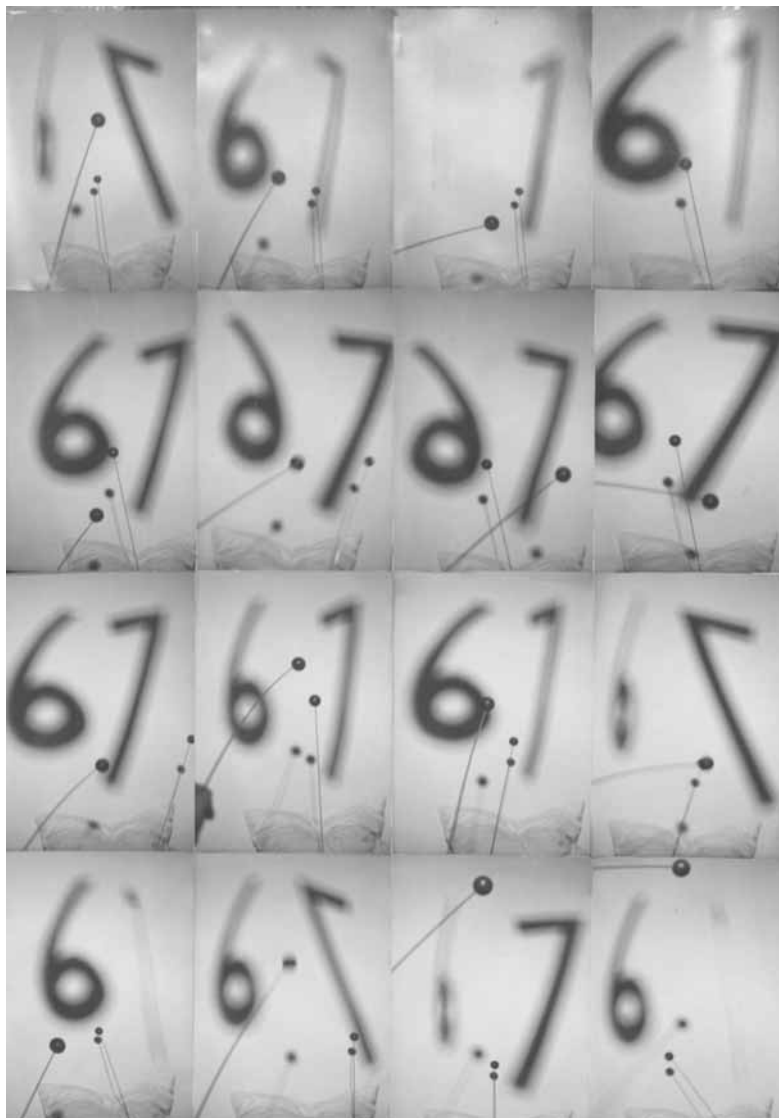
Czakó, Mária:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, photo, silver gelatin,
painted ceramic tile,
each: 10 × 15 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



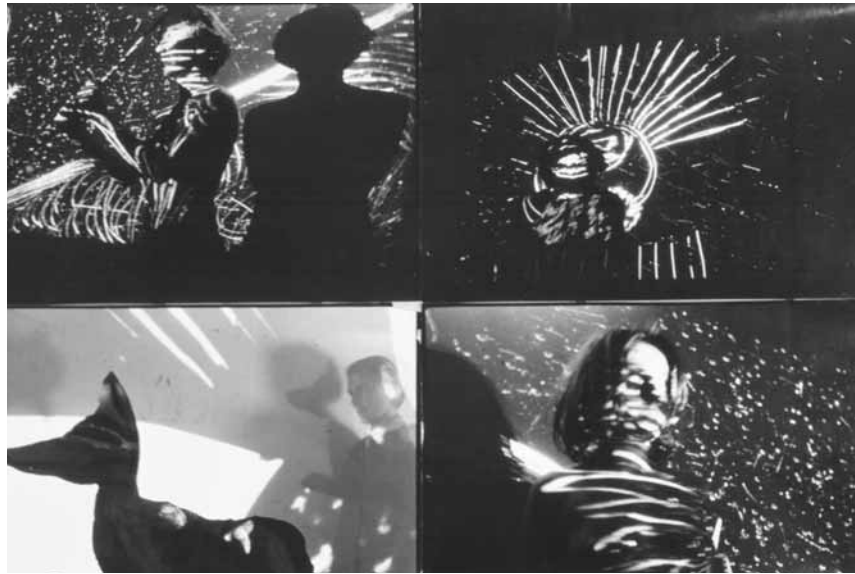
Erdély, Dániel:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, silver gelatin,
6,5 × 9,5 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Lábas, Zoltán:
The Personal and the Sacred, 1984
16 silver gelatin photos,
each: 35,5 × 25,3 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Nemesi, Tivadar:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, 4 silver gelatin photos,
each: 26,6 × 39,4 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Révész, László:
The Personal and the Sacred,
1984, silver gelatin,
11,7 × 17,2 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Sugár, János:
The Personal and the Sacred, 1984
silver gelatin, 30 × 24 cm,
Miklós Erdély Bequest



Szirtes, János:
Our Home is Earth, 1984 (detail)
cardboard sheet, 100 × 70 cm, 16 silver gelatin photos,
each: 13 × 18 cm, Miklós Erdély Bequest

