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FROM UNCERTAINTY TO QUIESCENCE

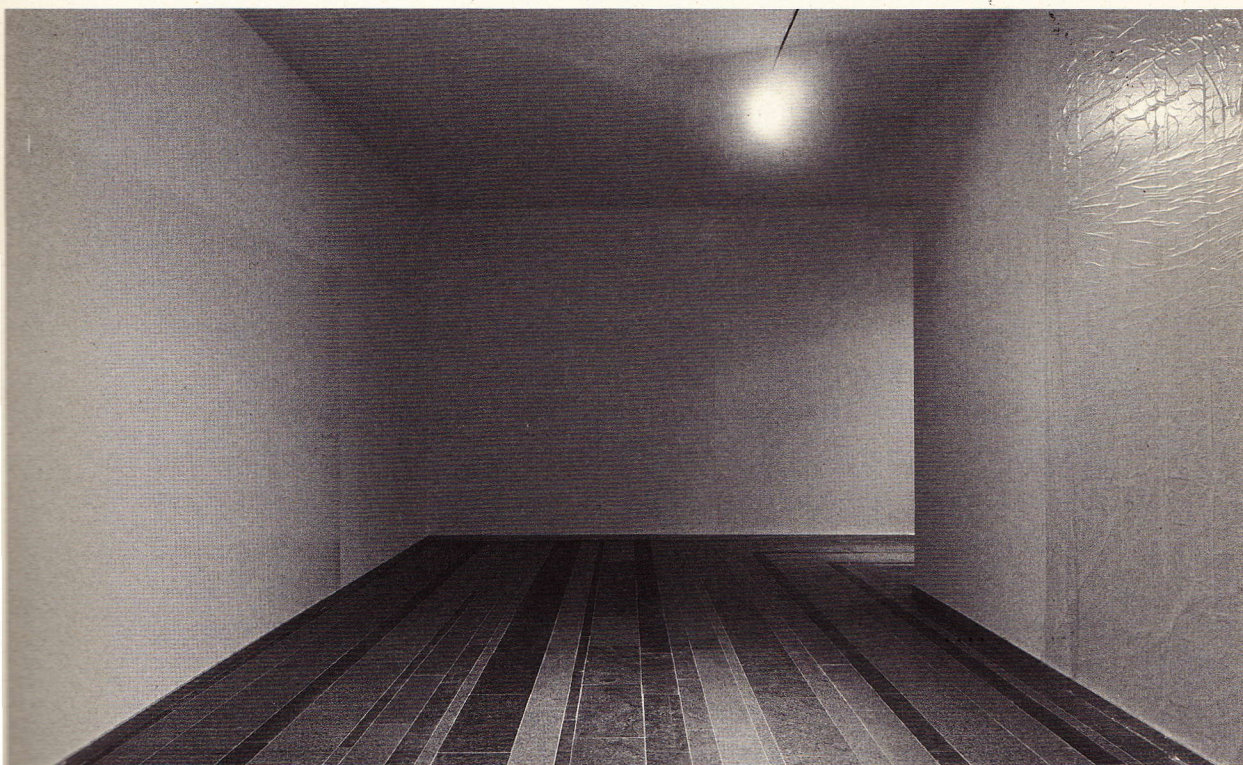
'Silence – or more precisely, quiescence – requires distance. The act of quiescence both takes and demands time. When quiescence takes hold of us, our senses become more responsive and we are flooded with a feeling of peace that is both certain and discrete. This quiescent state redefines our experience of the space and our ability to absorb the things around us.'

This is a description of my first encounter with the work of Michał Budny. It was an encounter during which I was moved by the capacity of his work to demand the silence and quiescence of the viewer, and of myself in particular. This forms the starting point for this essay, in which I shall attempt to discover the strategies within his complex practice and his consistent, challenging artistic research by looking at the two Michał Budny solo exhibitions that I have experienced. The first exhibition was the one staged at the PinchukArtCentre in Kiev in 2012, where I had myself invited Budny to exhibit. I saw the second a year later at the Schwarzwälder Gallery in Vienna, Austria.

For his exhibition in Kiev, Budny presented a site-specific installation that transformed the L-shaped exhibition space thanks to a series of minimal and subtle interventions using adhesive tape, acrylic paint and plastic film. Each of his interventions sought out the boundaries of the exhibition space and all but blended into the existing interior architecture.

The modest materials used for the interventions interacted with the surfaces of the walls, bringing the viewer into a state of confusion and uncertainty, and transforming his perception of the surroundings. With a modest voice, the materiality of the artistic intervention forced the spectator to consciously question every scratch and irregularity in the space. This caused the viewer to enter a state of quiescence in which every detail, whether applied consciously or unconsciously by the artist, became part of a dialogue between the space (its history), the artistic intervention (its materiality) and the viewer (his or her presence and state of consciousness). All through this dialogue, the viewer was tracing an unspoken, abstracted history of the space, while Budny was engaging him in a subtle game of discovery and concealment, a central theme when you experience and contemplate his work.

Budny's architectural inventions, particularly those at the PinchukArtCentre, are often aimed less at how the architecture of a space is changed, but more at how the intervention has changed the way in which the space is experienced. Another



Ausstellung / Exhibition *Transfer*, PinchukArtCentre, Kiev / Kiev, 2012

clear example of this is the work *Empty Space*, in which Budny imbues an empty space with meaning through an architectural intervention. It is difficult to grasp the meaning literally: it does not necessarily lie within the confines of the work, but can only be unveiled when the space is experienced in its entirety. The work exists thanks to the viewer, who is guided by Budny's interventions and thus no longer sees the emptiness merely as emptiness, but instead focuses on the space as a meaningful place; a place that expresses a human presence in both a historic and a contemporary sense.

On the one hand, Budny's spatial acts are astonishingly anti-spectacular, thanks to their minimal, conceptual form, and on the other hand, they are radical, thanks to their sense of impermanence and deep poetic strength. This impermanence is equally apparent in his choice of materials and in the impossibility of recouping the interventions. It is an essential component of his architectural interventions, and together with the minimal nature of the action, the work's abstract language hints at a preoccupation with humanity.

This notion of humanity (as a presence, a history and a concept) is a second central theme in Budny's work. Although always articulated in different ways, it continues to grow insuppressibly throughout his oeuvre, evolving from a rather immaterial form into a materiality, which at unguarded moments, is testament to a personal engagement that rises above conceptual thinking.

This substantive movement was perfectly illustrated at the 2013 exhibition *Ashamed and Shameless* at the Schwarzwälder Gallery. In this exhibition, Budny brought together topics that were already powerfully present in his work: humanity, quiescence and the tension between concealment and unveiling. By comparison to the work in the PinchukArtCentre exhibition discussed above, the confrontation with the viewer in the exhibition *Ashamed and Shameless* was considerably more complex.

In it, Budny combined his architectural interventions with more traditional, 'materialised' work. The exhibition space comprised three rooms. When entering the first room, the viewer was confronted with a perfectly-executed stepped stage, constructed from green MDF panels, which covered over two thirds of the original, traditional parquet floor.

However, these explicit allusions (shameless) are limited to within the formal decisions made about the work. Indeed, the recycled materials are enveloped by other materials. Budny draws attention to what is hidden, thus suggesting an unveiling, whilst simultaneously opting for concealment in the work's final form. This is where 'shame' comes into play and at the same time, quiescence overcomes both the work and the viewer. The enveloping materials conceal the aforementioned shamelessness and shut away any unveiling within the work.

In Budny's oeuvre, there is a consistent dialectic between showing and hiding. The minimal, simple form of his work engages the viewer, whilst the uncertainty introduced both in the work and in the exhibition architecture demands his quiescence. This feeling of uncertainty is augmented by the instability of the materials that he opts to use (cardboard, tape, paper) and these firmly anchor the concepts of transience and instability in the viewer's interpretation of the work.

Budny's concentrated artistic strategy obliges the viewer to be silent and quiescent and is a combination of engagement, uncertainty and a continuous balancing act between concealment and unveiling. His work is characterised by a consistent formal language with a penchant for visual poetry, a complex relationship with materiality and an essential understanding of spatiality. Although his formal language and his thinking about exhibition architecture are meticulously and keenly conceptual, beneath the surface the work remains deeply human and personal. This is an unveiling that is continuously being re-hidden.

Here, visiting the exhibition also meant stepping onto the stage, and the dramatic impact of this intervention cannot be overestimated. Just like the PinchukArtCentre exhibition, Budny forced the viewer into a state of confusion and uncertainty. But in contrast to 2012, he used his intervention to claim ownership of the space and was more inclined to underplay its history than to emphasise it.

On the other hand, thanks to its stepped construction, the stage defined the relationship between the viewer and the work in an explicit and 'shameless' manner. This architectural intervention also suggested that every single work in the exhibition was part of a minutely balanced dramaturgy. At the same time, the stage's stepped construction created a one-to-one relationship between the viewer and the work. Because of this, every (wall-mounted) object in the exhibition retained its unique individuality within the dramaturgy as a whole.

Beyond the first room, Budny minimised the explicit nature of his intervention. The stage now only took up a third of the space, was low to the ground and no longer had a stepped construction. The dramatic impact of the first room gave way to individual works that concealed their explicit content just as the architectural intervention did.

As the title had already disclosed, this exhibition moved between shame and shamelessness. In other words, between hiding and explicitly unveiling. The spirit of shamelessness was present in this exhibition at two different levels: firstly in terms of the architectural interventions, and secondly in the individual works, which traced a human presence in the broad sense by using recycled materials such as blankets and fabrics from Budny's direct environment.

Every individual work in the exhibition became an archaeology of hidden histories and stories in which the recycled objects took on a human dimension and betrayed the deep involvement of the artist. Without clearly expressing this, Budny provides an insight into his personal world, and thus the individual works become abstract portraits of a place or an undefined person. Something that was always tangible in his earlier works, a personal involvement and engagement in the space, shifts to an 'explicit allusion' to his own story that is separate from the context in which the work is exhibited.