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Long Term Autonomous Zone

Analysis of A Vision for a New Culture and Its Place by Sráč Sam

A Vision for New Culture and its Place is a project that was formulated by artist Sráč Sam at the end of the 1980s. It is an open and complex system of principles containing temporary and long-term solutions to the questions that arise during a period of transformation, such as the transition from totalitarianism to democracy in former Czechoslovakia.

In 1989, Sráč Sam was a twenty-year-old artist who had experienced life under a totalitarian regime with no evidence of future, in which the influence of superpowers was absolute. As a consequence of this, she was determined to arrange conditions in which she could ensure a free development of her work as much as possible, escaping the control of external forces. She decided to live and work under a genderless name Sráč Sam (in translation “Sam the Fucker”) and to never use any outside funding. Thirty years ago, she founded what we can now describe as a long-term autonomous zone in Česká Bříza, a small village in west Bohemia, a space specifically designed to be a platform for the free development of culture. Subsequently, *A Vision for New Culture and its Place* there were settled Sam83 Gallery (2006), Residential Center heARTbreaker (2013), independent magazine PÍŽMO (2010) and publishing house culture83 (2010). The *Vision* is divided into four themes: social projects, socio-cultural projects, ecological-economic projects, and visual art. At the present moment, there is no analogic project in the Czech Republic.

Outside of the Czech Republic, the project can be compared to the concept of social sculpture as formulated by Joseph Beuys.

The project shows a strong influence of the pre-democracy period, when, owing to the lack of certain types of goods in Czechoslovakia, there was a burgeoning DIY culture. The approaches of Sráč Sam in more contemporary projects also contain this aspect. For example, Sam83 Gallery has historical roots in the unofficial exhibitions that took place in Czechoslovakia before 1989, such as Chmelnice Mutějovice (1983), Malostranské dvorky (1981), etc. In her art, she thematises events from this time, such as her own encounter with work in a textile fabric as a thirteen-year-old girl.

A consideration of *A Vision for New Culture and its Place* raises several questions.

Was the impact of communist totalitarianism so strong that it created this vision? Or is it just an expression of free will? Furthermore, how effective is it to avoid public or grant funding?