

Kiesewalter's Story: For G. Kiesewalter

George Kiesewalter, April 3, 1980

Around the middle of March, I received a letter with a proposal to independently carry out the next thing in the series of our "individual" actions; it was indicated that this one was designed expressly for the conditions and specifics of my Yakutian life.²⁷ The first accompanying letter was already included in the envelope. I was naturally happy about this invitation and began to wait for the package. From the contents of the first letter, I surmised that I would have to hang or set up either a slogan like the works of 1977–78 or some kind of soft construction on the edge of a field.²⁸ My conjectures were in large part based on the volumetric possibilities of a package, since what else can be sent through the mail, be suitable to long-range viewing, as stipulated in Point 4 (of the first accompanying letter), but not be cumbersome or heavy? Soon, from a telephone conversation with A.M., I learned that I would have to climb up several trees, so my suspicions were partly confirmed, and A.M. suggested that I find a suitable pair of trees ahead of time.²⁹ Having found a field of the required diameter outside the city and inspected the trees growing along its edge, I discovered that it would be practically impossible to climb up almost any one of them. The tall trees of the region have, as a rule, a tall canopy with a nearly bare trunk, so the branches begin to grow only at a height of six or seven meters above the ground. Thus, before the package arrived, I had to solve a technical problem: how to get into the tree and secure myself in it for the work that awaited. A solution was soon found: metal spikes around 30 centimeters in length were prepared on my specifications at the local factory. While they



Fig. 74

27. At the time, Kiesewalter was living and working as an English teacher in the industrial town of Mirnyi in the far northeastern Soviet republic of Yakutia.

28. See Collective Actions works *Slogan-1977* and *Slogan-1978*, in which banners resembling official Soviet propaganda slogans were hung in the countryside.

29. Monastyrski is sometimes referred to as A.M.

were being made, I received the package with two more accompanying letters and sent a telegram confirming my readiness. The package was soft to the touch and all one piece, so I assumed definitively that it was some kind of slogan. On April 12, I set out with all of the equipment, including the package, letters, camera, hammer, spikes, and so forth. At the edge of the forest, I found the trees I had selected, 25 meters apart, and began to hammer the spikes into their trunks. At this point it became clear that I could only hammer while standing on the ground. When I tried climbing onto the ones already hammered in and holding the hammer in one hand and the next spike in the other, I could not maintain my balance to work—either a belt or a rope would have been necessary. On top of this, the weather suddenly worsened, and it began to snow. I decided to return later and left the backpack with all the things in it in the forest beneath the snow. My mood, of course, was ruined, all the more so since I had gotten tired and wet; I had had to work knee-, if not waist-deep, in the snow. On the following day, April



Fig. 75

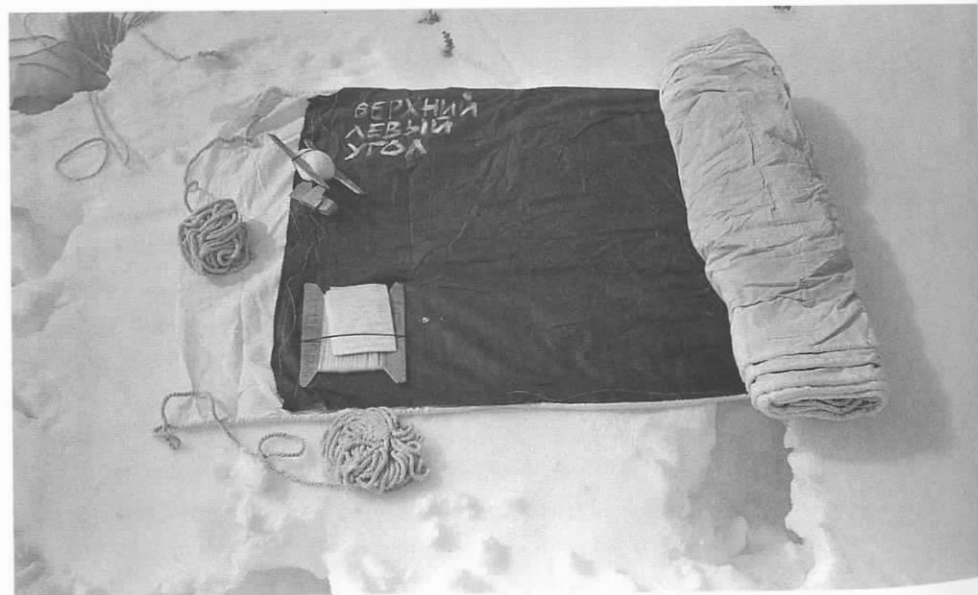


Fig. 76

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April



13, I grabbed a solidly durable rope and set out once again for the field. This time I managed, though even with the rope tied around my waist and the tree trunk, the work was very difficult. Having climbed up in this way to a height of six meters or more, I opened the package and read the second letter. The package did indeed contain a slogan, whose text was covered by a black cloth, which was sewn using fishing line along the edges and the fishing line wound onto four bobbins. (I had been warned ahead of time that I should handle the package carefully and not damage any of the fishing lines—which is why at first I began to imagine some kind of light-weight, web-like construction that I would have to hang in the forest.) Now I was to hang this slogan on my own, evenly and symmetrically, not to mention that the weight of the damp fabric was now considerable and the gusts of wind were at times fairly strong. More than anything, I feared, along with the “makers” (the package contained a mass of instructions, pieces of advice, and recommendations) that the black sheet would fall off during the hanging and the goal of the action would not be realized. However, everything came off successfully even without any kind of advance planning or calculations. The slogan hung quite evenly and beautifully. But when I began to pull out the vertical fishing line, the right one got caught on something and crumpled the entire edge, so that I had to remove the whole right wing, take out the fishing line, and hang the slogan all over again. With this, the right edge of the black cloth peeled back, revealing the red letters at the end of the slogan. But to deduce which words these letters belonged to was impossible, and I did not even try. It was getting late, and I still had the journey through the “virgin field” ahead of me. Taking everything with me and unwinding the two bobbins simultaneously, I walked away into the field the entire distance of the fishing lines (130 meters). I thus had to cross this distance of deep snow three times. At the final position, standing in the field before the slogan, I read the third letter. The tiredness and even irritation that had built up after all my troubles were replaced by surprise, a kind of cathartic laughter, understanding, and agreement. Following the instructions, I pulled out the fishing lines, moving in line with the bobbins to the



Fig. 77



Fig. 78

left and to the right of my position. Here everything went smoothly, despite the distance. All I had left was to photograph the unveiled slogan and leave it there, never having learned its message. However, looking at the slogan through the viewfinder, I suddenly realized that I could, if I wished, make out the text even at this distance! The temptation, of course, was great, but I had managed to defeat it earlier, upon receiving the package and letters, while hanging the slogan, etc. And so, in order not to ruin the idea of the piece in which my vision had not been taken into account, I simply tried not to look too closely at the slogan, took several photographs, and left.

Kabakov's Story: Te
Ilya Kabakov, February

I will now try to
last Sunday. It was
be participating in
presence of anyone
from the outset, th
situation, consider
to us, and so they h
now, these strict co
the rest of life. Th
present in our imp
us on our ride and
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and even distance f
gravitating toward
pants. It was a flat
into it with bobb

continuous movement from the entire group of participants according to some particular plan, but one that was not intelligible to him.

10 minutes after the start of the action came the first command for Monastyrski, which invited him to move from the "zone of observation" to a predetermined position located on the line where the participants had originally been stationed. In this way, the prescribed temporal distance (10 minutes) between the start of the participants' movements and the start of Monastyrski's movement was preserved for the duration of the entire action and made evident at the end of the action, when each participant, having gone through his or her route, had already disappeared into the forest and Monastyrski still continued to move for 10 more minutes in the field following the instructions recorded on the tape. (Accordingly, the temporal intervals between the commands, now meant for Monastyrski alone, were increased.)

Movement through the field was accompanied by significant physical effort, since the depth of the snow had reached 50–60 cm.

The participants' tracks, which should have fairly clearly reproduced in the snow the "general schema of movement," naturally changed its design.

The action lasted 30 minutes.

March 16, 1980

Paveletskaya Railroad Line, Rastorguevo Station

N. Panitkov, N. Alekseev, E. Elagina, I. Makarevich, V.D., S. Romashko, I. Yavorsky

For G. Kiesewalter (Slogan-1980)

IN THE SPRING, ON THE EDGE OF A FIELD, IN THE TREES, G. KIESEWALTER HUNG A WHITE BANNER (950 x 80 CM) WITH AN INSCRIPTION IN WHITE LETTERS.

April 13, 1980

Yakutskaya ASSR, near the city of Mirnyi

A. Monastyrski, N. Alekseev, E. Elagina, N. Panitkov, V.D., S. Romashko, I. Yavorsky, I. Makarevich

Ten Appearances

10 participants, together with the organizers, arrived at the action in the middle of a large snow-covered field surrounded by forest, knowing neither its title, nor what was to take place.