„If I would briefly characterize Július Fujak as a scholar and musician, he is a truly avant-garde personality who never applies directly any ready-made and fixed methodologies, but instead always transforms them into even radically new manifestations. Thus, he willingly plays with neologisms such as comprovisation, correla(c)tivity, (un)consciousness of creator, pseudotics, transPOPsitions, hypholophony, etc. He is a kind of esprit contestataire *in science and in music.“*

Eero Tarasti

“Fujak is one of the key musicologists, organizers, and performers of new and experimental music in Eastern Europe. (...) As with all the fans and practitioners, such as Julius, who make this kind of music happen, the world would be a much poorer place without such commitment, and in particular his commitment.”

Jon Rose

The book includes a digital music 4-album *Other Musical Discursors*

~HEVHETIA

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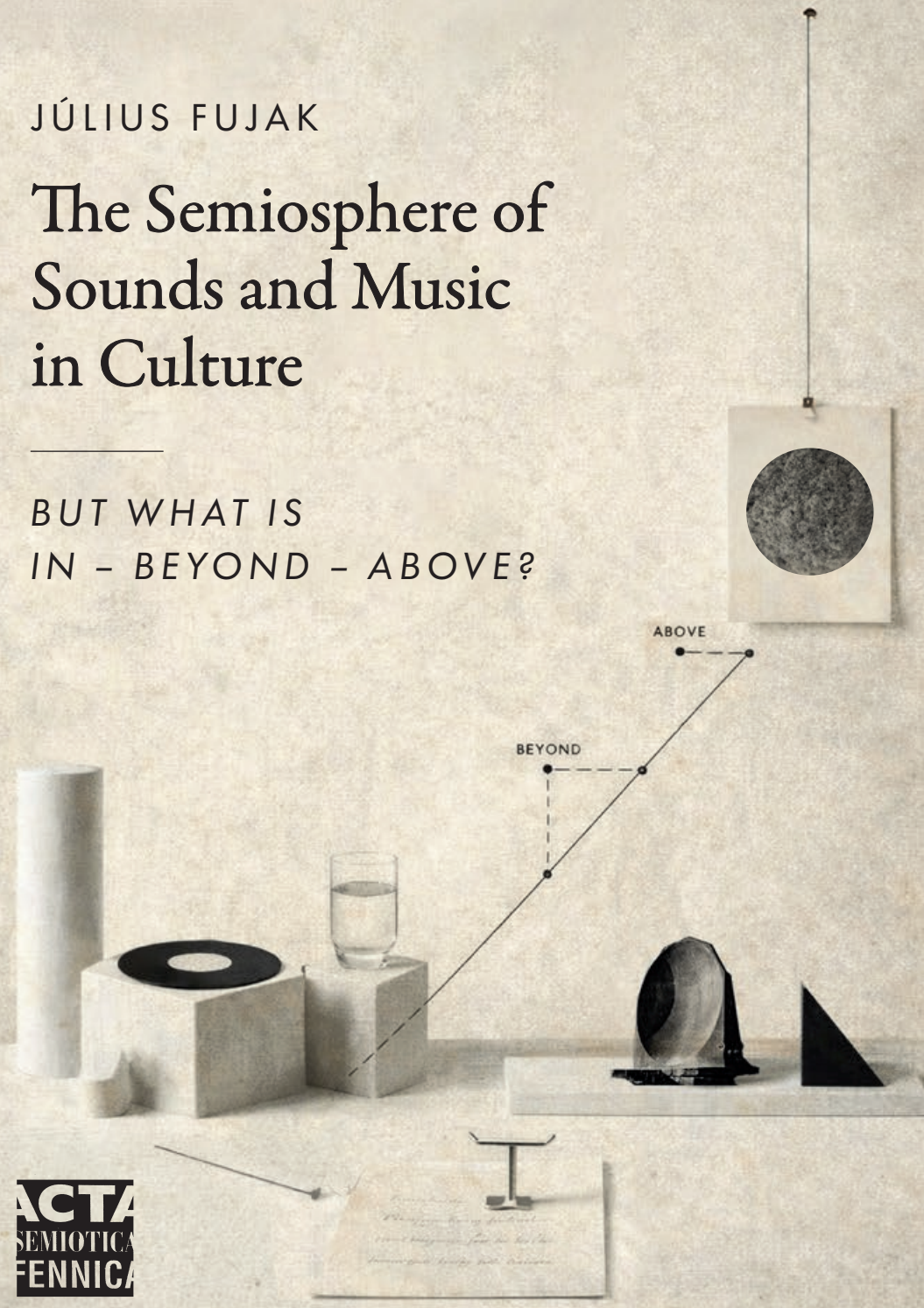
JÚLIUS FUJAK: The Semiosphere of Sounds and Music in Culture

LX

JÚLIUS FUJAK

The Semiosphere of Sounds and Music in Culture

BUT WHAT IS IN – BEYOND – ABOVE?



The Semiosphere of Sounds and Music in Culture.

But What is In-Beyond-Above?

Július Fujak

Acta Semiotica Fennica LX
Approaches to Musical Semiotics 27
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2026

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Contents

Preface (Eero Tarasti) 2
Introduction 4

The Ambivalence of Creative and Inner Freedom in Our (Independent) Culture 9

The Intermedial Quality of the Verbal Dimension of Adamčiak's Graphic Scores 25

The Spectacular "Suchness" of Milan Adamčiak's Performances. 41

Sonic (and Other) Environments as the Mirror of Society (and as the Challenge for Artistic Testimony) 61

Notes on Sonic Photography as a Trace of Kairos (and Transparent Sonic Sculptures in Site-Specific Contexts) 77

The Life-giving Sap of Music and Tree (From Resonance to Existence: Tree in Music) 95

The Variability of Comprovisational Methods in Contemporary Music . . 107

Transgression of Mortality in the Discourse of Unconventional Music . . 119

Afterword 141
References 145
Summary 151
The Other Musical Discursors (electronic 4-album). 157

Preface

I have known Július Fujak for about 20 years; I think it was when he searched for contact in the project Musical Signification that led him to attend its several symposia from Rome to Vilnius, Kraków, Louvain/Bruxelles, etc., and to visit the Department of Musicology at the University of Helsinki, a.o. He organized an international symposium on existential semiotics in Nitra in 2007 and edited and published its papers, entitled Convergences and Divergences of Existential Semiotics (Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, 2007). A friendship was created between us due to our rather similar opinions and approaches to the foundation of any musical activity.

However, if I would briefly characterize him as a scholar and musician, he is truly an avant-garde personality who never applies directly any ready-made and fixed methodologies, but instead always transforms them into even radically new manifestations. Thus, he willingly plays with neologisms such as comprovisation, correla(c)tivity, (un)consciousness of creator, pseudotics, transPOPsitions, hypholophony, etc. He is a kind of *esprit contestataire* in science and in music.

His theoretical reflections link him to his own musical practices as a pianist and improviser, with his acousmatic compositions, and choreia expressions. There is also a lot of Cagean humour in those performances, which I have once been able to testify in Nitra. However, this is not all. Fujak's work foregrounds the richness and inventiveness of the Slovakian avant-garde from not only modern thinkers and artists but also those highlighting Slovakian philosophy and aesthetics from Peter Faltin to Vladimir Godár and Frantisek Miko. The semiotician Jan Mukařovský is also included when Fujak transforms his model of performative gesture (which evokes the counterfactuality in modal logics) to fixed performatives. Yet, typically then the achronic categorical "box" model turns into dynamic, moving circles.[1] So temporality is essential, and moreover, Fujak is also in touch with such continental philosophers and writers as Deleuze, Barthes, and Marcel Proust. Accordingly, it is no wonder he also felt proximity and soul-mate feelings with existential semiotics in its earliest phases.

If we would ask what is his "philosophical style" – which is the term once used by the Peirce scholar Nathan Houser – it is certainly a mixture of John Cage, Slovakian philosophy, existentialism, and semiotics. Therefore, his aspirations evoke the great French philosopher and musicologist Daniel Charles, a friend of Cage, as his thought blends together with Zen and Heidegger.

Fujak's contribution to all his fields is characterized by the freshness of his thought without any prejudices. So, it was no wonder that he became a full professor at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, and now continues his work as an internationally recognized composer and scholar.

Eero Tarasti

1 These are references to theoretical concepts, primarily in Július Fujak's work *Various Comprovisations. Texts on Music (and) Semiotics*. Helsinki: Semiotic Society of Finland – Acta Semiotica Fennica XLVII, 2015.

Introduction

My life journey has been influenced by the fact that music accompanies me at almost every step. This is not surprising, I was born in a musical family, have been a musician since childhood, later became an artist working in intermedia-musical contexts, a researcher in the field of musical aesthetics and semiotics, and have organized various artistic and scientific events for several decades. While studying aesthetics and musicology at Comenius University in Bratislava, I co-founded and played in one of the best Slovakian alternative rock groups, Teória Odrazu (Theory of Reflection), and during among other composers, I started to recognize some of remarkable works of art and extraordinary poetics of Frank Zappa (1940 – 1993 – it was a kind of U-turn on my path. The older I become, the more I agree with his thought that *"Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is the best"* (F. Zappa). Yes, it is true, but I started to ask, why music?!

Then, either in person or through reading their books, I met other important figures who greatly influenced me and had similar views. For example, my great teacher and doctoral thesis supervisor, František Miko (1920 – 2010), one of the leading linguists in Central Europe and co-founder of the Nitra Semiotic-Linguistic School, used to say: *"Art elevates us"*. On the other hand, Slovak semiotician Peter Faltin (1939 – 1981), exiled in West Germany after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops, is the author of the sentence: *"Musical syntax is a process of spiritual assignment of meanings"*. As we know, Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Proust and Signs* (1964), interprets in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* the multilayering of different temporal levels (the time we are losing, the time we lost, the time we find again, and the time we found), and art (music included, of course) can combine, include, and cover them. However, he also identifies a special hierarchy of signs: worldly ones, signs of love, and the final, the highest, supreme class: the signs of art – their materiality is most spiritualized, because they allow for the grasp of "essences" beyond the material world, which is transcended…

Over the past decades, the world-renowned Finnish semiotician and musicologist Eero Tarasti played and still plays a key role in my search for an answer to the question "why music?!". His books, studies, research, lectures, and, finally, his open-minded, human approach to us, his followers, are invaluable and admirable. In the context of this publication, I can mention a few of Tarasti's important thoughts and impulses.

Eero Tarasti, for example, in his magnum opus *Sein und Schein (Explorations in Existential Semiotics*; 2015), explores the "ontological-transcendental" questions of existential semiotics on a large thematic scale in the resonant tension of the central categories of *sein* and *schein*. He allocates the existential modus of semiotics (not only) of the music to a space of relations between the reality of *Dasein* and something that goes beyond it in potential transcendence. He builds the bridges over *Dasein* and transcendence and connects also in an innovative way the categories of Being-in-itself and Being-for-myself into one notion of Being-in-and-for-myself (which can meet the You, or Being-in-and-for-yourself). Moreover, he developed Greimas' model of *Moi/Soi* in his original Zemic model, to express the directional relation of the particular apexes of Greimas' square. Tarasti finds in this Zemic model many impulses to contemplate, to consider, and reflect upon the questions of the subject (of its being as well as of its becoming) and the many consequences of our varieties of subjectivity. According to Tarasti, semiotic forces in the universe act in two opposite directions: from the body to values, from the concrete to the abstract, and from values and norms to the principle of *khora*, as illustrated by the quoted scheme.

Tarasti emphasizes also that the real (together-)being of the text 'in me/for me' is enacted between the two poles of the world, where there is no sharp border line between the *Dasein* and its transcendence. According to him, the transcendence is situated outside of reality (in absentia), but it is present (via *Dasein*) in our consciousness, i. e., not only in mine but in the consciousness of "the Other" as well. In these coordinates he also interprets *mimesis* as the realization of transcendental meaning by the dialogical modelling of a certain new artistic reality *sui generis*. And all of this is directly related, I think, to the search for a possible answer to the question "why music?!".

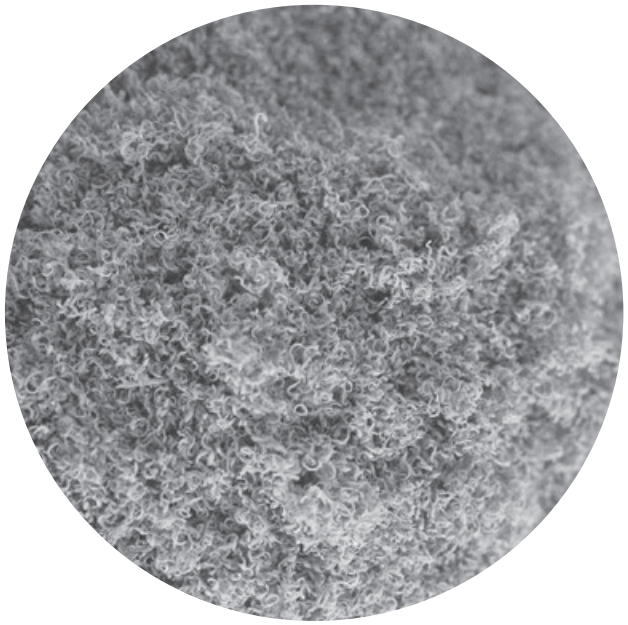
Furthermore – and I appreciate it – Tarasti, from the methodological perspective of an existential point of view, analyses the semiotics of resistance in the era of globalisation in the 21st century, as well as the semio-crisis. He stresses that the current semio-crisis lies in the fact that the observable signs of life and society do not correspond to their immanent structures anymore. They have lost their isotopes, or connections with real meanings, and mass media exploit, support, and co-create this crisis state, while faking the exact opposite in a simulacra way.

You may have noticed that the terms "spirituality" and "transcendence" appear frequently on these pages in connection with music and art. Do not take this the wrong way. It has nothing to do with traditional metaphysics. They express the correla(c)tive process and state of inner elevation and aforementioned spiritual dematerialization, especially when listening to music and perceiving art.

The title of this book *The Semiosphere of Sounds and Music in Culture* was not chosen randomly, as well as the important (multi-)question in the subtitle *But What is In-Beyond-Above*? Besides a certain connection with Deleuze's triad of sign classes (worldly ones, signs of love, and signs of art), it refers to the notorious triad of Charles Sanders Peirce: icon, index, symbol. The icon expresses the presence of meaning *in a* sign (which refers at first glance

or first hearing to external reality), the index establishes a causal link of meaning *beyond* a sign (which we have to investigate it in "cooperation" with our inner reality), and the symbol refers to the meaning that is *above* a sign, because it transcends it…

The texts and essays collected in this publication were written in the last decade by different occasions, and were elaborated, sometimes modified, and developed for the purpose of it. They are divided in three sections: the first one is focused on the ambivalence of creative and inner freedom and dedicated to my "guru" of Slovak conceptual intermedia art and music, Milan Adamčiak; the second deals with sonic art in cultural contexts (sonic photography, sonic sculptures, and sonic environment as the mirror of our society, as well as music in relation with the ecological dimension of tree), and in the third part, you may encounter the issues of transgression of mortality in contemporary, often comprovised music. I hope that my search for the answers to these questions, what everything is and could be *in-beyond-above* all these topics, can enrich you at least in some way.



The Ambivalence of Creative and Inner Freedom in Independent Culture.

The modes of independence and freedom in society, culture, and art are understood in very diverse, often contradictory and conflicting ways, with their material-economic interpretation and ideological connection to certain historical-political doctrines coming to the fore. In this article, however, they will be viewed from slightly different angles and perspectives, in which the existential quality of both modes of being, transcending these interpretations and doctrines, will appear more important. But first, allow me a seemingly unrelated digression in the form of an excerpt from Samuel Beckett's play *Fin de partie* (Endgame; 1957):

NAGG (clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble): *Our Father, which art…*
HAMM: *Silence! In silence! Where are your manners?* (Pause.) *Off we go.* (Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.) *Well?*
CLOV (abandoning his attitude): *What a hope! And you?*
HAMM: *Sweet damn all!* (To Nagg.) *And you?*
NAGG: *Wait!* (Pause. Abandoning his attitude.) *Nothing doing!*
HAMM: *The bastard!! He doesn't exist.* (Beckett, 2014)

According to Paul Foster, author of the book *Beckett and Zen* (1989), the statement "It doesn't exist!" is not as clear-cut as it might seem at first glance. It is not even an expression of absolute conviction about the non-existence of God, but rather of deep frustration. And it is not about contempt, either – after all, how can one despise something that does not exist? Rather, it is a torturous awareness of a dilemma that consists of the

recognition of the meaninglessness of life (especially if we admit the non-existence of God), the inability to change the situation of helplessness in which people find themselves, and finally the terrifying suspicion that even death may not bring relief. We try to repress the torment and unbearability of this awareness, or at least endure it for a while, wait it out, postpone it indefinitely, or forget about it, but in the end, we cannot get rid of it... (Foster, 2002, p. 27).

So how can one be freely independent, or internally free, given the torment of this awareness of a triple existential dilemma? Is it even possible? And if so, what paths can lead to coming to terms with this oppressive awareness of the possible meaninglessness of existence, the possible impossibility of changing the situation of powerlessness, and the real doubt as to whether all suffering ends with our death? Before I attempt to find answers to these very difficult questions, I will try to draw attention to certain complementary definitions of the concepts of independence and free self-creation in exploratory references to some of the theories listed below. Not so long ago, I referred to them out of a need for argumentative interpretation and defence of a specific understanding of independence and the related status of freedom, but now I am approaching them a little differently. I place imaginary, hidden question marks behind them, implicitly reevaluating them in the context of other considerations so that new connections can gradually be revealed and other questions arise.

Michel Foucault, within his concept of the archaeology of knowledge, refutes the notion of the human subject as something essentially constant and universal. He interprets the subject rather as variable, as it is a function of discourse, i.e., the result of the influence of various discursive practices. The formation of the subject is explicitly determined by discursive practices of division (and exclusion), discursive practices of scientific classification (constant surveillance, institutional expertise), and practices of subjectification (e.g., in religion, psychoanalysis, sex therapy) (Foucault; Harrington, 2008,

pp. 280–285).). An individual may or may not be aware of this multiple determination or mode of self-establishment and formation through the tripartite relationship formulated by Jacques Lacan. He reminds us that we create our self-image through concepts/constructs of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. According to him, the first of these lies in the mental images we create of ourselves to navigate through the maze of [our] feelings, emotions, and desires. The second, the concept of the Symbolic, which influences us to a much greater extent than we are willing to admit or even imagine, represents the normative order of society and its culture, i.e., the set of practices of public order, norms, and standards that we are expected to accept, for example, in the acquisition of gender roles. However, the very concept of the Real—linked to unpredictable ruptures of traumas, serious illnesses, great suffering, or the shock of the death of a loved one—fundamentally and radically relativizes, disrupts, and transforms the previous two constructs. What may be of interest to us in this context is the fact that Lacan also addresses, among other things, the well-known thesis of the so-called mirror stage of forming the idea of the wholeness and integrity of a person (from the external image) already in the developmental stage of a toddler (who is excited to understand that the image in the mirror is his/her own and in a previously unknown completeness – but identifies it with the idea of his "I"), which Lacan calls the Imaginary trap. He even considers this false, confusing idea of oneself to literally be a pathological way of self-creation of the subject (Lacan; Harrington, 2008, pp. 248–250).

Are there ways to become aware of and subsequently break free from the "invisible cages" of these practices, mechanisms, and concepts, which greatly influence how and whether we are truly independent and free in our own self-creation? If we ask about other, freer alternatives to self-creation, Michel Foucault offers a solution related to the concepts of *metanoia* and *parrhesia*. In ancient Greece, *metanoia* referred to a certain type of turnaround, reversal, or change of mind closely linked to a transformation

of one's attitude toward life. It is the principle of changing one's attitude towards oneself, which, however, can only occur after viewing problems from a distance (including from oneself) and understanding everything that limits us in independently establishing ourselves as (especially internally) free beings. However, we do not acquire this status "for free", but through *parrhesia*, i.e., the ability to speak openly, to make statements associated with accepting the risk of loss. This ability to speak freely and truthfully, which is usually not easy to acquire and often brings with it not only danger but also real harm, is, according to Foucault, a way in which a person can freely relate to and establish themselves as a dignified being (Petříček, 2000, p. 21).

Roland Barthes and Vilém Flusser suggest another, perhaps more subtle way of freeing oneself from these determinations. In his "autobiography without an author," *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes*, Barthes refers to various cases of (non)violence in language itself and mentions that his "body is freed from all imagination only when it finds itself in its workspace. This space is the same everywhere, patiently adapted to the pleasure of painting, writing, sorting" (Barthes, 2015, p. 46). Barthes also indulged in this pleasure while playing the piano and composing amateur music, which also freed him from the Lacanian "Imaginary" during these creative activities... Vilém Flusser mentions another example of activities during which we, so to speak, "forget ourselves" to "get to know" and "find" ourselves—spontaneous, mundane activities such as shaving, talking on the phone, smoking a pipe, playing the violin just for ourselves—which he does not consider to be communicative or work-related, but rather ritual gestures, gestures of "indulgence": "When we indulge in something, we get to know ourselves, so to speak, from the outside, and through this we come to ourselves, because then we perform gestures that are specific to us" (Flusser; Wilson, 2002, p. 33). Flusser points to the non-transcendental

nature of these activities, as well as to the almost complete surrender to their gesture – and, moreover, he places them in the context of the holistic power of existential (self)purpose.

It might seem that in both cases – Barthes and Flusser – we are offered a chance to break free from the considerable limitations associated with discursive practices or the tripartite relationship between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. This chance, opportunity, or starting point should be, and often is, a self-aware creative act that takes the form of either privately or publicly cultivated *metanoia* and *parrhesia*. Yes, human creativity elevates, fulfils, and shapes us as contemplative, playful, internally free beings in almost all activities. It brings us satisfaction in the form of a specific joy of being that we would not otherwise experience. Creo ergo sum! From my own experience as an intermedia-musical artist, I can only confirm the great homeostatic power during music-making, as well as the creation of works through which I liberate myself and surrender to the pleasure of work that Barthes wrote about, which does not mean, however, that it is not linked to tensions and personal doubts of searching.
However, there is another doubt that significantly relativizes the "salvific" motif of unrestrained and seemingly finally independent creative freedom. Why? What if we are dealing here with a certain kind of escapism, i.e., an escape? What if this is a trap of escape, of overlooking and temporarily forgetting the real, often incomprehensibly absurd realities of our existential existence full of suffering, about which Samuel Beckett wrote in his play *Fin de partie*? Each of us is exposed to what he called a triune agonizing dilemma (the meaninglessness of life, the powerlessness to change anything in this regard, and the fear that even death will bring no relief), which our playful creativity cannot simply rid us of... In this context, we may recall the thought of Martin Heidegger, who was convinced that truly independent art is not only the result of the artist's unrestrained creative act, but above all "the shock of the sudden revelation of being and the dictates of its truth" (Heidegger;

Morpurgo-Tagliabue, 1985, p. 415). Heidegger criticized and strongly rejected both aestheticizing and psychologizing existentialism in art, pointing to the fact that being manifests itself as a mystery. This mystery unfolds in the process of uncovering. (un)concealment (*alétheia*), and that art can be the realization, articulation, and demonstration of this process (Heidegger; Morpurgo-Tagliabue, 1985, p. 414).

How could these dilemmas of true independence and real freedom be addressed and resolved in the context of the different discursive practices of two social systems in our country (Slovakia): before and after 1989? In both periods, we were indoctrinated with normative "right" ideas about ourselves, albeit for different ideological reasons, and the process of acquiring independent, creative, and inner freedom was, and still is, difficult. Various forms of existential struggle and conflict linked to the ambivalence of both modes of free self-creation—creativity bringing temporary "relief" or "forgetting" on the one hand, and the search for true being, inner liberation on the other—can be found in all areas of our culture and art. At this point, I would like to refer to two model examples from Slovakian musical culture, specifically to some of the specifics of the work and "ups and downs" of the lives of two unforgettable personalities, Milan Adamčiak and Marián Varga, whose fates remain for us real evidence of the struggle for inner freedom in art, as well as in their own existentially difficult lives.

Milan Adamčiak (1946–2017) was a unique human and artistic "endemic" of intermedia-musical culture in Slovakia, who influenced almost everyone he met with his playful, sophisticated polymuse nature and his unique mode of (together-)being as a "bodhisattva" from the region of Liptov. His intermedia-conceived and conceptualized music, admirable original graphic scores and notations, various bizarrely staged sound installations and environments, idiosyncratic experimental and concrete poetry,

provocative neo-fluxus art and performances, the foundation of important organizational platforms, *pars pro toto* Spoločnosť pre NEkonvenčnú hudbu– SNEH (Society for NOn-Conventional Music - SNOW), as well as many fundamental musicological and art-historical texts, remain for us as a constantly relevant, open challenge full of inspirational ideas.
Philosopher of postmodern art and intermedia artist Jozef Cseres aka HEyeRMEarS, in his obituary *Umelecké a existenciálne gestá, na aké sa nezabúda* (Artistic and Existential Gestures That Are Not Forgotten), summed him up as follows:

Driven by ritualistic will, he created regardless of convention, allowing himself to be absorbed by the process and the medium, and, blinded by the creative act, he disregarded established methods and principles of representation. He deliberately mixed media and questioned established perspectives. (...) He was always more human than his surroundings, which he managed to infect with everything possible except immediacy and sincerity. Although he did not try to be extraordinary, he was unable to shake off his extraordinary nature throughout his life. His authentic art has been forever inscribed in the history of world culture, and fortunately, it has been documented, so we will always be able to return to it (Cseres, 2017, p. 31).

He left behind an admirable and unique body of work, which is mapped and processed in its entirety and complexity in the four-volume monograph by M. Adamčiak & M. Murin (eds.): *Archive I – IV: Expo – Kopo – Nôty – Akty* (dive buki, 2012–2016).
If we were to pause briefly to consider his unusual, independent musical work, which, as he liked to say, was primarily connected with the "joy of sound," it is systematically, taxonomically and adequately processed and documented in *Archívu III – Nôty* (Archive, volume III – Sheet Music), where you will find almost all of Adamčiak's preserved experimental and unconventional graphic scores and notations. They provide an extremely valuable

insight into Adamčiak's original intermedia-musical poetics, as well as into the thoughtful musicological, musical-semiotic, and aesthetic thinking that was reflected in it. They are classified into three basic, authorized categorical sections – closed, variable, and open – and into systematic sections. These are "mental operators" (J. Cseres) that provide different, specific impulses for a different sound-musical articulation than in the case of classical notation. Since Adamčiak's music has always been embedded in an intermedial and experimental, often (neo)fluxus context, many testimonies about these unique forms of creating musical works, environments, and situations are provided also by *Archív IV – Akty* (Archive volume IV – Acts/Files), dedicated to his conceptual art, various performances, happenings, and unconventional exhibitions.

These are unprecedentedly inventive conceptualized or conceptually intended actions, realized and unrealized (including musical) artistic experimental projects, and playfully bizarre performances. Last but not least, it is also worth mentioning Adamčiak's thematically and informationally valuable memorizations of various topics, such as *Korene aktivít* (Roots of Activities) and *Monoakcie* (Monoactions), as well as portraits of his former companions Jozef Revall, Róbert Cyprich, Alexander Mlynárčik, and his first experimental ensemble, Ensemble comp. in the 1960s, and later, the legendary group Transmusic Comp. and the aforementioned organizational platform SNEH in the 1990s.

Adamčiak's life story spans from his beginnings in Ružomberok through his agile emergence in Bratislava and the famous Smolenice seminars in the late 1960s in Slovakia, through his nearly twenty years at the Institute of Musicology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and externally at the Academy of Performing Arts and the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava. Then followed periods of the revival of his artistic and organizational activities at the break of the 1980s and 1990s, but also his gradual

disappearance from the public (not only) academic and cultural space. This was related to his lifelong phase as a vagabond on the margins of society, but also to another revival of interest in his work at the end of his life, thanks in particular to the admirable efforts of Michal Murin. Milan Adamčiak, was an extremely original, not only experimental-musical, but mainly conceptual-intermedial artist *sui generis*, very educated, and talented scholar, who was objectively sober, but also self-critical (in comparison with occasional self-mythologizing statements in personal communication) in his published texts dealing with his own activities.

He spoke contritely and self-critically about his membership in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the so-called normalization of the 1970s and 1980s, a period dominated by the doctrine of socialist realism (which many obscured and concealed after 1989); no wonder that he almost completely fell silent creatively during this time. He struggled bitterly and heavily with his personal failures (alcoholism, broken marriages, loss of contact with his children), spending more than the last two decades of his life in rather unfortunate conditions in the villages of Podhorie and Banská Belá. A few months before his death, in one of his last public statements, summarizing his life, he openly stated that a person should do more than just create art, but he clearly failed…

He was a personality of immense wealth of clear-sight and playful spirit, with a certain "Quixotic" dimension and character, which is why the aforementioned Beckettian dilemmas troubled him, perhaps until the end of his days... The significance of his "quixoticism" – in creating original musical-intermedia[l] art, but also in the difficult, doubting mode of his human existence – appears, especially in the environment of the "windmills" of (pseudo)academic hypocrisy or empty snobbery in our contemporary culture and art, as irreplaceable, unusually stimulating, and in many ways thought-provoking.

The theme of ambivalence of independent, freely creative imagination and the inner struggle for one's own essential freedom also ran through the life of one of the greatest figures in Slovak musical culture, the transgenre composer and exceptional musician **Marián Varga** (1947–2017), a uniquely original keyboard player on the Hammond organ, and an internationally respected co-creator of art rock. He legitimized the emerging paradigm of postmodernism in Czechoslovakia with his transgenre music – and this in an era of restrictive socialism – by bridging the previously separate worlds of so-called serious music and popular rock genres, with the intention of preserving continuity. As an excellent composer, he had a rare gift for creating impressive musical forms that were complementary in style and genre (cantatas, suites, songs, and various chamber, ensemble, and orchestral compositions), characterized precisely by the symbiosis of these two musical worlds. Together with his bandmates of the legendary music group Collegium Musicum, he contributed in an original way to the creation of progressive art-rock music, which creatively recontextualized the heritage of European written music. After all, even in his later solo works, Varga liked to use the method of portraying musical models from the past; less well known is the fact that, with his characteristic enthusiasm, he also devoted himself continuously to freely improvised music for almost two decades (from the first half of the 1980s to the beginning of the 21st century).

Varga, especially in the difficult conditions of the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia, influenced several generations with his attitudes, statements, decidedly nonconformist behaviour, and mode of being of inner freedom in music. I have always admired his decisions to leave the beaten path: from the first LP *Zvoňte, zvonky* (Ring, Bells) of the band Prúdy (1969), to the opuses by Collegium Musicum, among which extraordinary double-album *Konvergencie* (Convergences, 1971) through the

multi-style *Divergencie* (Divergences, 1981) with the orchestral piece *Musica Concertante* (in orchestration cooperation with Vojtech Magyar) to his first solo work *Stále tie dni* (The Same Days Again, 1984), which stood out from everything else of its time, not to mention the aforementioned original free improvisations. Since the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, out of a need to rehumanize the often overly introspective and amnesiac postmodern music, he returned to the semantically very interesting intertextual portrayal of motifs from historical works of written music that were close to his heart.

He deliberately quoted or derived them in a laconic manner in his musical floor plans, recontextualizing them and converging them in terms of genre (V. Godár). He portrayed various models from music history – Bach, Vivaldi, Händel, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Shostakovich, Bartók, the Polish school of sonorism, and his teacher Ján Cikker – in a very interesting way. Proof of this approach is the concert program *Solo in Concert* (2003), in which we encounter – in the confrontation between the irreplaceability of the acoustic piano and the sonic possibilities of synthesizers, from which he always knew how to "extract" evocative warm timbres – a kind of special Varga´s chamber music compendium. In the last years of his life, although he was increasingly less able to perform, he surprised the public again. He devoted more and more to writing scores of chamber and a few orchestral works of a clearly different poetics, in which he was, in a sense, "unrecognizable." Let us mention at least the remarkable orchestral compositions *Punctum contra punctum*, *Overture*, and the chamber compositions *Pastorale* for flute, *Elégia* (Elegy), *Antifóna* (Antiphon), *Solo Cello for Jozef Lupták,* or his string quartets (fourth, the last one, is titled *Quattro Movimenti per 4 archi*, 2011) and the a cappella composition *Ave Maria.*

Marián Varga was sickly from a young age, but he also struggled with the demons of alcoholism, temporary drug addiction, and, above all, various serious mental health issues. Once, at the so-called ideological-music auditions, which were mandatory for all musicians under socialism regardless of genre and amateur or professional status, he was asked a question about Marxism-Leninism and the history of the international labor movement: "Comrade, do you know where the greatest turmoil in the world is currently taking place?" Varga replied: "In my soul..." As a brilliantly gifted but troubled child, he quickly became a "popstar" of progressive popular music in Central Europe, led a turbulent life, went through a divorce, the death of his father, with whom he had lost contact, and later the death of his sister. His life only began to stabilize in the mid-1980s, when he began living with his second wife, Jana.

The situation during the so-called normalization period in socialism in the 1970s also played a role, when many of his colleagues – composers and music groups – in Slovakia, but especially in the Czech Republic, could not perform at all (some were completely sidelined for a time by various bans on their activities, persecuted, and even imprisoned – many of them chose the path of exile and emigration then), while Marián Varga was under the protective wing of the Minister of Culture of the Slovak government and member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Miroslav Válek, by the way, one of the greatest Slovakian poets in the 20th century. Thanks to this, he was able to give concerts and make recordings – he also still faced several bans and sanctions – but he did not find it easy to cope with this situation.

He was an admirably well-read intellectual, a distinctive composer, and a rebellious art-rocker who was very sensitive to the changing world – and commented on events in it in a very apt and sarcastic manner. In the documentary film *Obyvatel' vlastného ostrova* (Inhabitant of His Own Island, directed by M. Hanzlíček, 2010), he commented on the public expression of inner freedom, saying

that while such an attitude was extreme during the socialist regime, after it ended, it became, so to speak, extreme "squared". Before 1989, according to him, Slovakia was a place where almost nothing was possible (not only in terms of freedom of expression). After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, it became a country where almost anything was possible... As an admirer of Albert Camus and his tetralogy of absurdity, he always felt a bit like a "l ' étranger" in our culture, as evidenced by the existentially heavy titles of some of his compositions such as *Nesmierny smútok hotelovej izby* (The Immense Sadness of a Hotel Room), *Si nemožná* (You Are Terrible), *Sú aj iné veci: smutný spev sťahovavých vtákov* (There Are Also Other Things: The Sad Singing of Migratory Birds), *Antiwar Requiem*, *Amata nobis, quantum amabitur nulla*, *Nemé výčitky* (Silent Reproaches), *Pomôž mi* (Help Me), etc. Camus was close to Varga, perhaps also because he articulated the dilemmas we find in Beckett, expressing the absurd aspects of our existence.

On the occasion of the very last concert of his chamber compositions, organized by Vladimír Godár in Bratislava on December 13th, 2016, as part of the series *Albrechtina – (Un) known Music*, Marián Varga gave one of his last interviews. Among other things, he recalls – a few months before his death – how unresolved issues came to his mind, primarily his relationship with his father, whom he said he never tried to understand in his youth, even though his father sent him conciliatory signals. He died alone and away from his family, which, according to Varga, he certainly did not deserve. To interview Oliver Rehák ' s last question, what is the meaning of his existence, and what else would he like to clarify, Varga replied:

When you occasionally switch off the autopilot of everyday life and try to engage in some self-reflection, to orient yourself in the confusion of your existence, you may sometimes get a malicious response. As one of my favourite authors, Albert Camus, says in The Myth of Sisyphus*: "As soon as the mind begins to think about itself, the first thing it discovers is contradiction."*

With every experience, you realize that nothing is simple or unambiguous, that there are no easy answers. Nothing is black, and nothing is white. In between, there are a thousand shades of gray. And you must find your way through it. How you manage this is a matter of your culture and sophistication. Those who are immediately clear about everything, have easy answers to everything, and behave accordingly are essentially dangerous. But for certain things, you must have the simplest answers. In order to survive. The principle is that you will never have to be ashamed of your actions, you will never have to reproach yourself for not doing something you should have done. Like me, now that I'm old, I blame myself for not being more understanding towards my father. "Don't wait for the Last Judgment. It happens every day!" says another of Camus' heroes. And now I am being judged, and I am suffering (Varga; Rehák, 2017, p. 10).

Instead of the usual – perhaps expected – theoretical conclusions and findings, I would just like to say that there is really a lot at stake here. The ambivalence of imaginatively free creativity and hard-earned inner freedom – the struggle for which is never won in advance – expresses the importance of how and whether we can "carry the weight of our cross" of coming to terms with our own existence. We are human beings searching in self-questioning reflection – despite all possible "malicious responses" – for an existential homeostatic balance, which is an effort of understanding this sometimes-so-unfathomably unpredictable world, and coping with it and ourselves in it. And this even with the heavy awareness of everything we could have done better or differently in our lives. But we still have a chance to act differently – not servilely and selfishly, but truly and independently, freely, and sacrificially for the benefit of other humans, that is, with dignity.

Milan Adamčiak during the performance. (photo by Luis de Matos)

Marián Varga, PostmutArt Fest in Nitra (2013). (photo by Andrej Pleštinský)

The Intermedial Quality of the Verbal Dimension of Adamčiak's Graphic Scores

There is no doubt today that Milan Adamčiak was not only an exceptional and unconventional musician, visual artist, performer, experimental poet, musicologist, editor, teacher, etc., but, above all, an intermedia artist sui generis, as Jiří Valoch once characterized him. It is also clear that the mark of this unique intermediality can be found in his various works and events; in the following text, we will point out its presence in Adamčiak's original graphic scores and notations, both in their visual and verbal components. First, allow me a seemingly unrelated digression.

I am referring to Milan Adamčiak's special affiliations with Claude Debussy. While Peter Faltin contributed through his works, it was Stefan Jarocinski who played a bigger role in opening the door to understanding the essential attributes of his work opened the door to understanding the essential attributes of his work, as did Adamčiak's lectures during my studies of musicology and aesthetics at the Faculty of Arts of Slovakian renowned the Comenius University in Bratislava in the late 1980s. In the book *Debussy. Impresionism a symbolism*, Jarociński relativizes to a certain extent the adequacy of the style characteristics of impressionism in relation to Debussy's musical thinking, which was borrowed (at the end of the 19th century as a pejorative) from the visual arts. He points rather to its obvious affiliations with the literary movement and poetry

of the French Symbolists, led by Stéphane Mallarmé[2], with whom Debussy also had personal friendships.

Milan Adamčiak, then an employee of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, gave us the lecture on Debussy in February 1988 as part of the History of Music course at the Department of Musicology at Comenius University, in which he offered a very sensitive overview of all the essential attributes of Debussy's poetics, from the essential, revolutionary innovative attributes in his orchestral, chamber, and piano works. He described in a rhetorically impressive and persuasive manner Debussy's intentional resignation from the traditional principles of evolutionary development of motifs, as well as his liberation from the tonal-harmonic extremes of Wagnerianism towards the discovery of his own sonoristic logics, a paradigmatically and completely new concept of musical thinking, which ultimately emancipated the quality and structural significance of the very sound of chords and their unusual relations – in an effort to articulate existential Being in its happening, eventfulness, transience, and not in fixed staticity. Adamčiak also presented with a suggestive reflection on two books of Debussy's piano *Preludes* (1909–1913, each of which deals with a different musical problem), whose titles are characterized by their affiliation with French poetic Symbolism – *La cathédrale engloutie* (The Sunken Cathedral), *Des pas sur la neige* (Footprints in the Snow), *La Fille aux cheveux de lin* (The Girl with Flaxen Hair), *Brouillards* (Mists), etc. Last but not least, Adamčiak also analyzed Debussy's symphonic masterpiece *La Mer* (completed in 1905), a magnificent orchestral colossus of musical impressionism consisting of three parts: I. *De l'aube*

2 When writing *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune,* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, 1894, which was intended to be the "overture" to a multi-part orchestral composition), Debussy was inspired by Mallarmé's lyrical poem of the same name – even the number of bars in this emblematic composition of musical impressionism corresponds to the number of verses in his poem.

à midi sur la mer (From Dawn to Noon on the Sea), II. *Jeux de vagues* (The Play of the Waves), III. *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* (Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea), which Debussy modestly called merely "symphonic sketches".[3]

Adamčiak's deep understanding of Debussy and his undisguised respect for him are also evidenced by his artistic tribute – in 1982, he created the graphic score *La Mer – pour orchéstre*, which he later taxonomically assigned to the group of his drawn scores. It consists of a polyphonic series of lines that only touch or intersect in some places, alongside gently undulating lines in three shades of blue, evoking a visual association with the "calm surface" of the sea. According to the timing indicated at the bottom of the score, it is clear that it can be played as a two-part composition lasting 0–4 minutes and 4–8 minutes, with the second part probably to be interpreted attacca by turning the score 180 degrees ("upside down") – a principle that Adamčiak liked to use in many of his intermedia-musical graphic notations (the dynamic level is not specified, but based on communication with the author, it should be in the range of ppp to mp). Although he explicitly did not dedicate the composition to Debussy, the identical French title and the instrumental designation *pour orchéstre* evoke an implicit tribute, or rather a meaningful intertextual allusion to Debussy's emblematic composition of musical impressionism.[4]

3 Claude Debussy's *La Mer* is not a traditional symphony or symphonic poem in terms of structure, nor does it have a programmatic semantic character. It is rather a musical statement about man's relationship to the sea, that is, about everything that it can evoke in the emotional-abstract dimension of being.

4 In these considerations, we can also rely on the personal testimony of composer Daniel Matej in our telephone conversation in the spring of 2021. Before one of the concerts with Adamčiak, at which his works were performed, including La Mer, he confirmed to him that it was an homage à Debussy.

Why am I mentioning these facts in the context of reflections on the intermedia nature of Adamčiak's graphic scores? On the one hand, there is his keen interest in the relationship between Debussy's musical thinking and the French Symbolists; on the other hand, Adamčiak's overlaps between music, sound events, and words in experimental poetry. Incidentally, this specific poeticism combined with musicological precision is also reflected in the author's taxonomy, in which he distinguishes between closed, variable, and open graphic scores in his work, with more detailed distinctions—rotatable, contour, frame, block and strip, model, three-dimensional, floor plan oriented, material, object, installed, musical-spatial, postscript, collage, fogli musicali, albumblätter, and scores of electroacoustic music and tape music.

Explicit traces of his trans-/intermedial and interdisciplinary sensibility were evident in the verbal dimension, both in the titles of his graphic notations and in the important instructions. Adamčiak could have learned from the works of John Cage or Morton Feldman that, within the conceptual and intermedial framework, they are also an integral part of graphic musical scores. *Pars pro toto* from the works of both artists includes Cage's *Water Music* (1952) with his distinctive notes on the realization of various sound actions, and Feldman's composition, one of the first aleatoric compositions ever, *Intermission 6* (for 1 or 2 Pianos) (1953), which, without the author's instructional sentences (to play individual fragments in any order, with minimal strokes, holding them until they fade away completely, with all sounds to be played "as softly as possible") would be deprived of an important dimension and would not, in fact, be his intended composition.

Before we get to Adamčiak's works themselves, let us quote his understanding of the graphic scores of John Cage from the laudatory text *A Few Words About J. C.*, written on the occasion of his memorable visit to Bratislava in 1992:

The musician stands before the score in the position of a composer who, from globally defined outlines (graphic, verbal, numerical, drawings, diagrams, etc.), recreates his own unique composition, valid for that particular moment. He can choose the instrument, the length of the composition, and he chooses the sound (and not only sound, but also gesture, action...) spectrum of the material with which he will work freely, in relation to the disposition of the record. This is more like a drawing and graphic art than a notation and score. It is more like the game plan of an unknown social game than the directives of a score in which everything is sacred. Or it resembles a project that needs to be completed, detailed, and specified in terms of its requirements and possibilities. (Adamčiak 1992, p. 44).

Adamčiak interprets graphic scores as an impulse for the co-creation of new (often musical-performative) compositions, as well as a "project" requiring free completion and, ultimately, as a "game plan," with the moment of playfulness playing a significant role. I believe that these ideas have a more universal validity, including in relation to Adamčiak's graphic scores.[5]

I gained a more intense personal experience with them at some of his solo exhibitions, whether it was a selection of his work *Partitúry a koncepty* (Partituras and Concepts) at the K49 Gallery at the top of a fourteen-story apartment building in the middle of Nové Zámky (1998, curator: Jozef Cseres) – at which Adamčiak gave a more than two-hour (!) authorial speech, which was, incidentally, largely artistically mystifying. Or more wide-ranging presentation of his various works, *Punkty, noty, línie a tvary* (Points, Notes, Lines, and Shapes) at the Nitra Gallery in Nitra (2000, curator: Richard Gregor), which not only demonstrated a conscious commitment to certain principles of (neo)fluxus conceptualism, but also, among

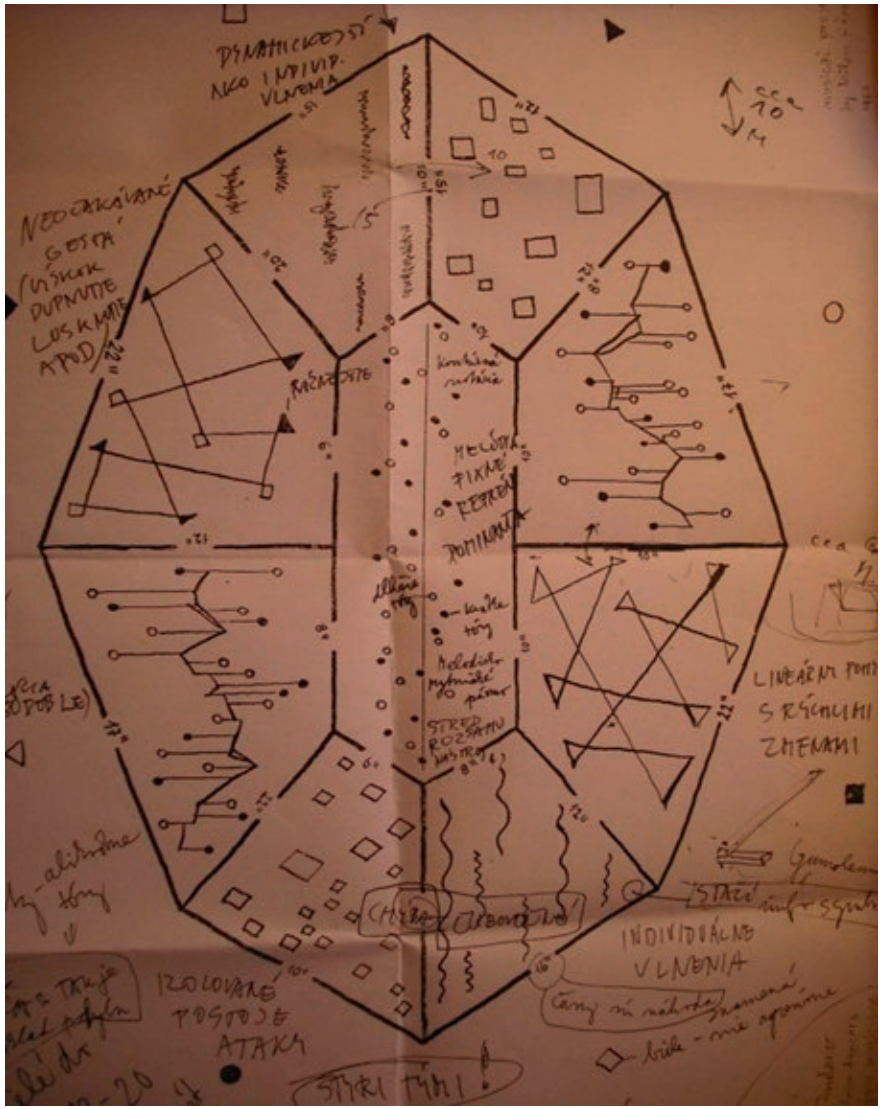
5 This was ultimately confirmed by his participation in the recording of his composition *Transfigurazioni* (1979) with my acoustic trio Ne:bo:daj (CD *Leter tu develoter*, Hevhetia 2015), for which he recorded an almost identical introduction with the above quote at the Krokus Gallery in Bratislava in 2015.

other things, a characteristic bizarre playfulness and joy in sound, line, shape... At this point, we can cite, for example, excerpts from his JAMA cycle from the second half of the 1960s – the title refers to "JA Milan Adamčiak" ("Me – Milan Adamčiak"). In this case, it is not a matter of artistic graphical, abstract forms, but only instructions for the realization of sometimes difficult performances, but his conceptual insight is already evident in them. From the same period comes one of the very first graphic scores for the interpretation not only of music, but primarily of unconventional dance, *Diamondance* (1967).

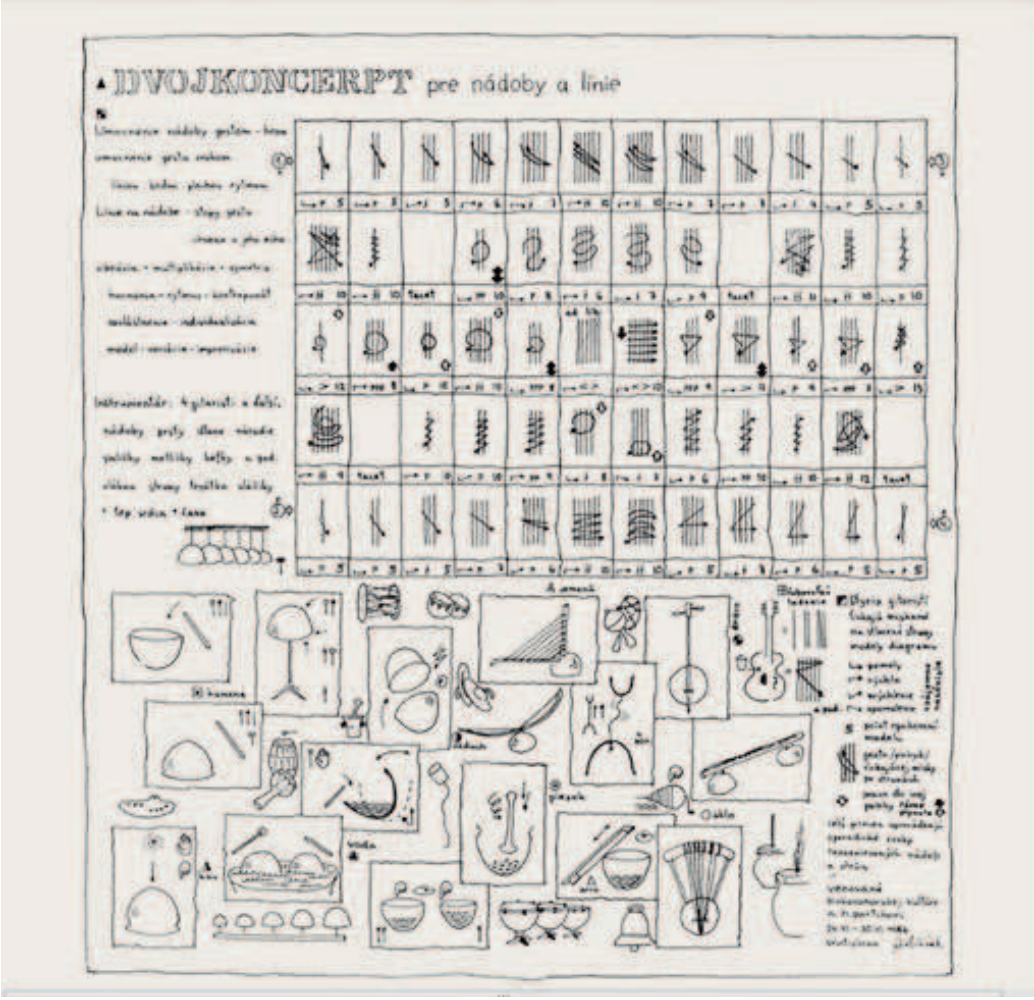
We are dealing here with a clear graphic plan and layout of various movements of dancers and actions for musicians in a planned spatial range of "approximately 10 meters" in a certain temporally marked minute around the perimeter of an octagon (albeit with the relativizing statement "times are random"). There are clearly formulated specifications such as "unexpected gestures (jumping, stomping, snapping, etc.)", "linear movement with rapid changes", "rolling postures, attacks", "individual waves", and so on. We can also find musical notes in so-called contour notation, such as "overtones," "short tones" (empty circles), "longer tones" (filled circles), "fixed melody," "refrain," "dominant", "melodic-rhythmic range," "middle range of the instrument," etc. Together with complementary relationships with artistically created shapes, all of the above elements of the score create a very dynamic whole.[6]

Another interesting example of the intermedial dimension of the verbal component of his graphic scores is *Dvojkoncert pre nádoby a línie* (Double Concerto for Containers and Lines; June 24–30, 1986), which is dedicated to Bukovohorská culture and, concerning the instrumentation, also to Harry Partch. Although

6 The first live performance of Adamčiak's *Diamondance*, a work that was unique in our region at the time, took place in 2009, thanks to Petra Fornayová and her dance group at A4 – Nultý priestor (Zero Space) in Bratislava.



Milan Adamčiak: *Diamondance* (cutout, 1967). (photo: the author's archive)



Milan Adamčiak: *Dvojkoncert pre nádoby a línie* (Double Concerto for Containers and Lines; 1986).

at first glance it appears to be "just" a detailed legend – describing in an excellent graphic manner the ways of playing, manipulating and sounding various vessels, stringed musical instruments and percussion instruments, as well as the course of the composition (with the number of repetitions of models and 4 tacet, general pauses) the verbal descriptions and instructions are by no means "dry," but poetically juicy and inspiringly metaphorical. The very first one reads: "Enhancing the vessel with a gesture – enhancing the gesture with sound, line, points, surface, rhythm," and the next one: "Lines on the vessel – traces of the gesture, tremor and its echo." When listing to the instruments, consisting of four guitars, vessels, tools, sticks, whisks, brushes, etc., Adamčiak also adds "+ heartbeat + time." He was not concerned just with the mechanical reproduction of instructions, but with awakening the performers' sonic imagination.

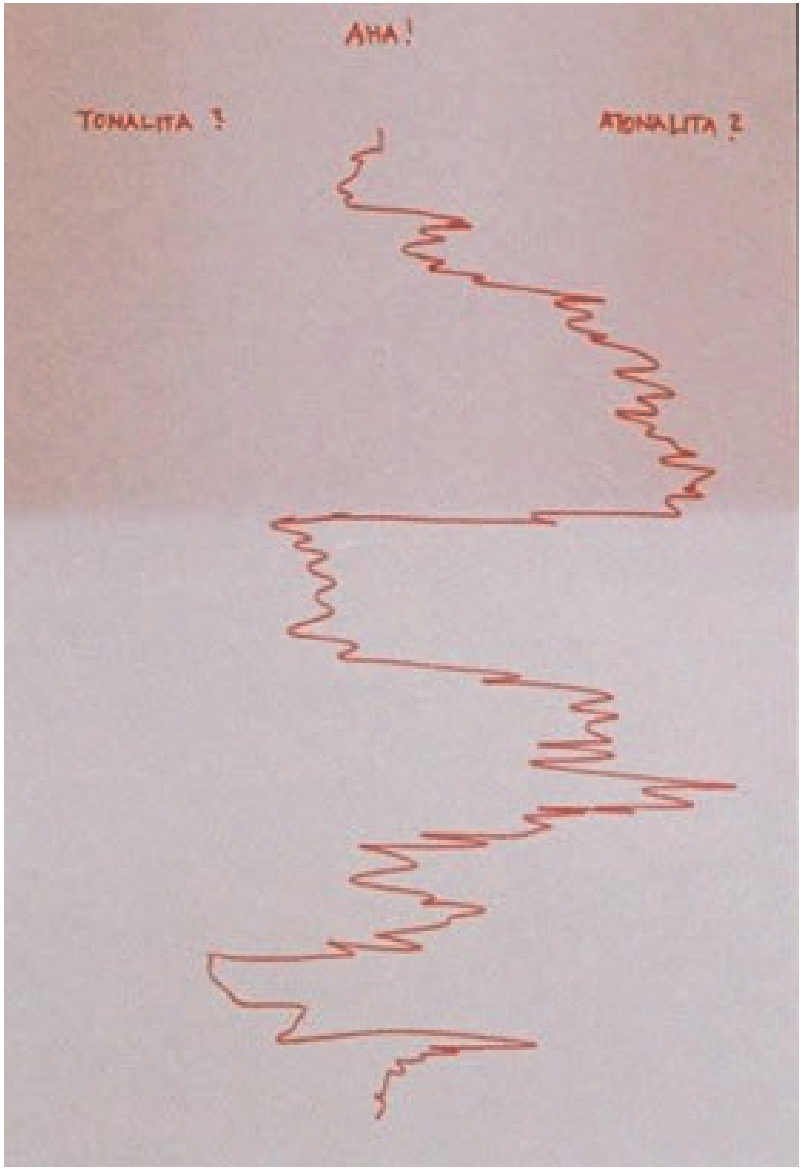
At the aforementioned solo exhibition at the Nitra Gallery (2000), Adamčiak also presented a series of four graphic prints entitled *Polarity – intenciogramy* (Polarities – Intentionograms; 1969–2000), each of which features the acronym "AHA!" in the header, referring to the three spheres of "Acoustic – Musical – Audiovisual." It is interesting that in each of them, within the AHA! context, he uses a variety of lines to philosophically address a kind of interface between different bipolar principles or areas, which he also raises in the form of questions such as "tonality? – atonality?", "monophony? – polyphony?", "melody? – harmony?". On the other sheet – which could be loosely understood as a succinct "manifesto" of artistic conceptual intermediality – "AHA!" is placed in a central position in the middle of a wavy spiral (perhaps even in three-dimensional space).[7]

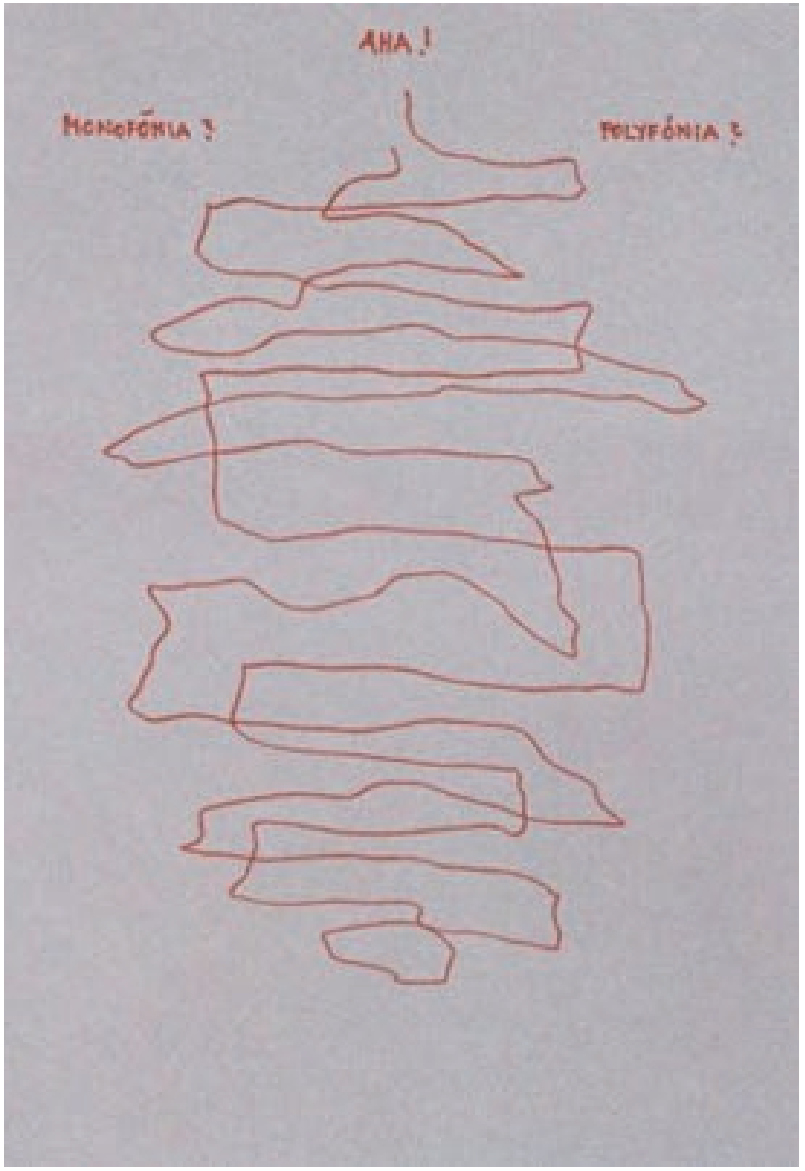
7 The concept of AHA! spheres was developed by Milan Adamčiak in the founding charter of the Transmusic Comp. ensemble (1989) and more in detail in the text establishing the Society for Unconventional Music (SNEH, 1990). See more: Murin, M. et al. 1995: *Avalanches 1990-1995*. Bratislava: SNEH, 216 pp.

It is interesting that in each of them, within the AHA! context, he uses a variety of lines or strokes to address, in a philosophical manner, a kind of interface between different bipolar principles or areas, which he also raises in the form of questions such as "tonality?–atonality?", "monophony?–polyphony?", "melody?–harmony?". On the very last of the sheets, "AHA!" is surrounded by the terms "music?", "poetry?", "idea?", "drawing?" in the corners, with the spiral beginning with an exclamation mark "!" and three dots "..." and ending with them at the bottom of the sheet, together with an eloquent exclamation mark and question mark "!?". However, as can be seen, the title of the cycle does not contain only "polarities" but also "intentionograms", which testifies to Adamčiak's clear intention to present, through a verbal-visual "shortcut", important abstract problems of reflection on established principles that are not only distinct but also overlap with each other.

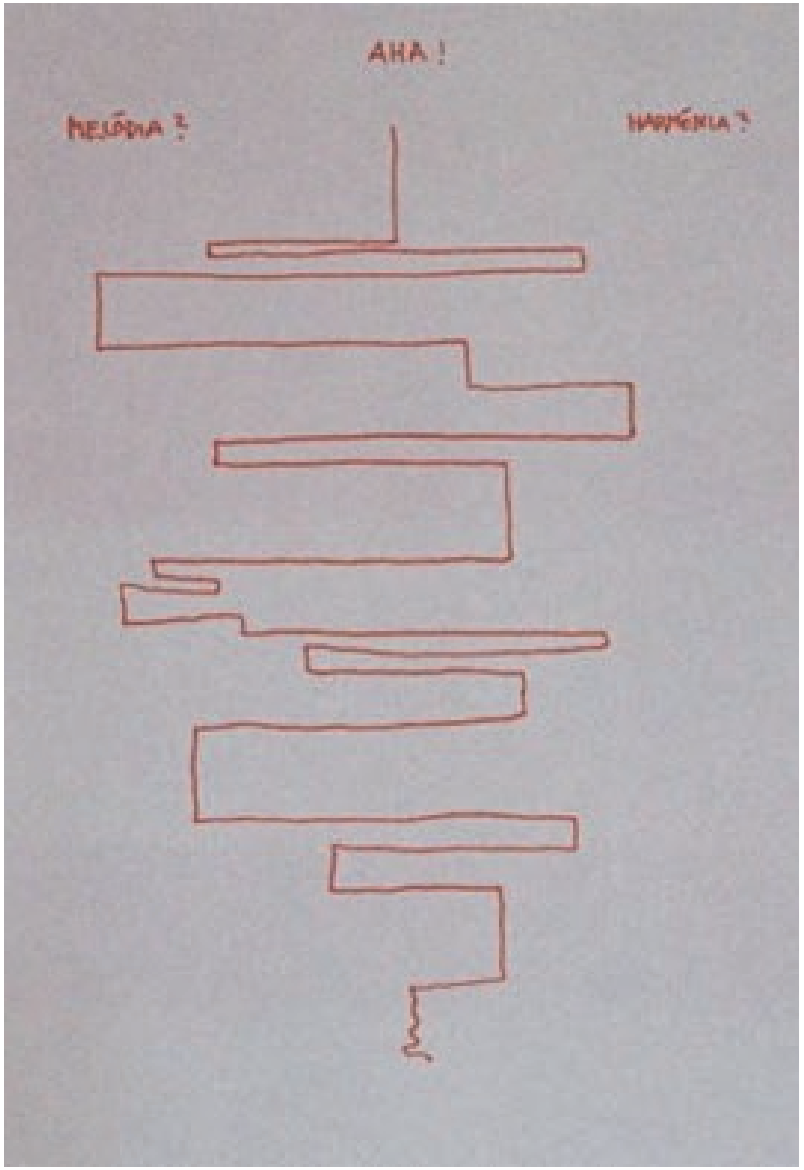
The unique nature of Milan Adamčiak's intermedial thinking was reflected in his use of words, not only in his experimental poetry, but also in the verbal component of his graphic scores and notations. In their case, it should be added again that they are, in a sense, as Josef Cseres characterized them, "mental operators". They are capable (as I can confirm from my own experience as a musical performer) of triggering different, specific impulses for other sound-musical articulations and creative spontaneous expression. Regarding the specific intermedial quality of Adamčiak's writing of a verbal or other symbolic nature (not only) in graphic scores and notations, let us conclude with another thought by Cseres, which could also serve as a motto for the reflections in this article:

All arts are composite, and all media are mixed because they combine different codes, discursive conventions, channels, modes of perception, and consideration. Derrida pointed out that writing not only makes language visible, but above all deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or text. (Cseres 1999, p. 88)





Milan Adamčiak: *Polarity – intenciogramy* (1969 – 2000, Nitrian Gallery) (photo by Łukasz Wojciechowszki)


AHA !
MELÓDIA ?
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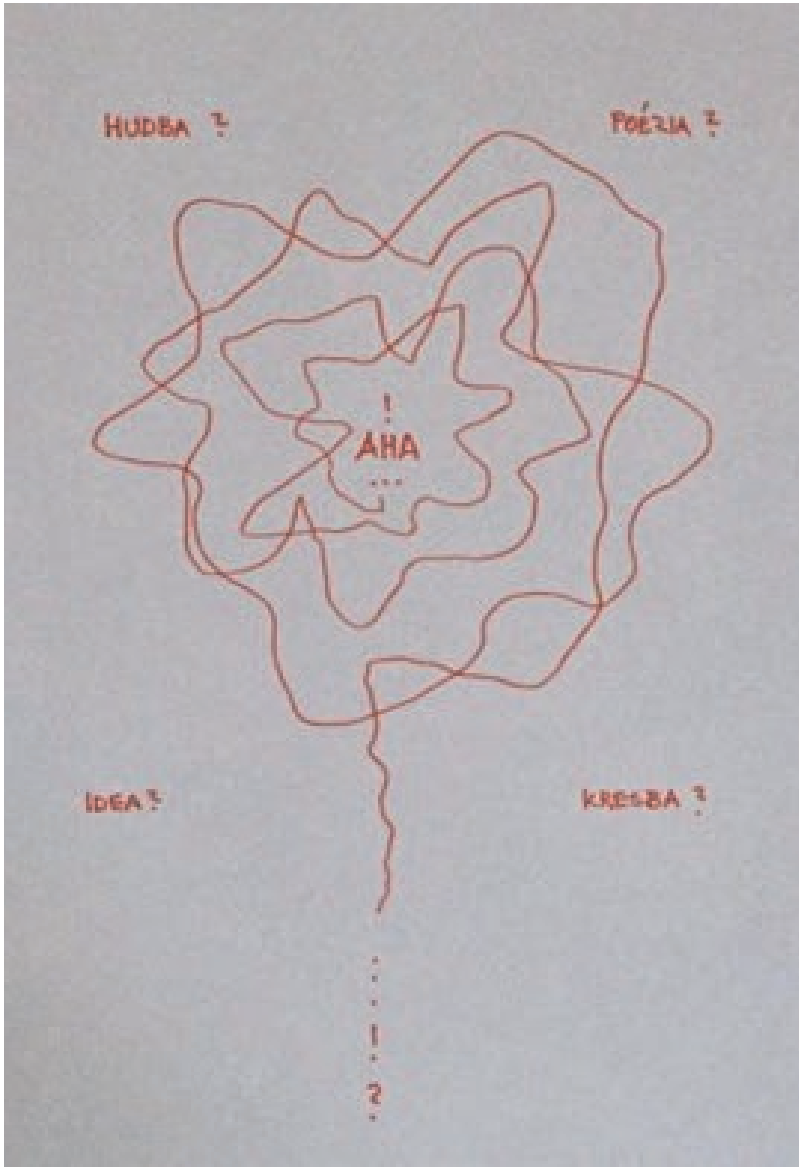
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The Spectacular "Suchness" of Milan Adamčiak's Performances

The personality of Milan Adamčiak (1946–2017), an intermedia artist sui generis, musician, performer, poet of concrete and experimental poetry, visual artist, musicologist, and polymath, left an indelible mark on all areas in which he worked and acted, in an unmistakable way that cannot be overlooked to this day. In the last decade of his life, thanks in particular to the admirable help and art-/altruistic activities of conceptual artist Michal Murin, there was a revival of interest in his work. Even after his death, this interest has not waned. On the contrary, there are still more initiatives that, in a sense, reflect the struggle to grasp and interpret his work. The essence of Adamčiak's unique intermediality is present in his art projects, installations, graphic scores and notations, unconventional poetry, and solo/group performances, which he devoted himself to at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as from the late 1980s until the end of his life.

This text aims to draw attention to the specific and unique character of his performances or happenings, emphasizing their distinctive, theatrically spectacular "suchness", which reflected unique trans-/intermedial and interdisciplinary sensibility and thinking. In our verbal search for and articulation of appropriate expressive characteristics, we could refer to the degree and specificity of a certain (un)planned staging, spontaneous timing of gestures and words, working with a specific time and space in the context of a specific site-specific approach, "casting roles" with collaborators or random "passers-by" drawn into the whirlwind of events.

In this text, we will attempt to apply other interpretative keys that may allow us a deeper insight into its nature, and underlying meaning.

Perform-action initiations

During the 1960s, as a student at the Žilina Conservatory, Milan Adamčiak devoted himself – mostly without knowledge of foreign trends in action, conceptual, and performance art, which were only gradually seeping into Czechoslovakia at the time – to his own, sometimes only private actions and performances, mainly in Ružomberok (the little town he came from) and its surroundings, or in Žilina. Among these, we can selectively mention *Syzifovské roboty* (Sisyphean Tasks, 1964), *Nočný chodec* (Night Walker, 1966), *Chodecké kusy* (Walking Pieces, 1966–1968), and the so-called *Monoakcie* (Monoactions), also such as *Pocta Františkovi z Assisi* (Tribute to Francis of Assisi, 1967), *Chlieb náš každodenný* (Our Daily Bread; 1967), *Pocta sv. Antonínovi (Podľa Pokušenia od Flauberta)* (Tribute to St. Anthony (Based on Flaubert's Temptation; 1968), *Pokánie* (Repentance; 1968), *Ghost Music* (1969), among others.[8]

Various events were organized in collaboration with musicians and performers Jozef Revallo, Róbert Cyprich, and Alexander Mlynárčik, among others, at the famous 1st Festival of Snow (Adamčiak – Cyprich – Mlynárčik – Urbásek) on the occasion of the World Ski Championships in the High Tatras (1970). Similarly, with the Ensemble Comp. – one of his musical-intermedial happenings was the legendary *Water Music* at "Bernolák", i.e., Jura Hronec's dormitory in Bratislava (1970), with musicians playing in the water in diving suits, surrounded by curious swimmers (photo on p. 56 top). At the end of the 1960s, which were favourable to various experiments, Adamčiak and Jozef Revallo created two performance pieces at the Smolenice seminars (1969), *Hraj na husliach svojho partnera* (Play Your Partner's Violin, from the JAMA cycle) and *Nehraj* (Don't Play) – probably the very first Fluxus event in Slovakia. A year later, the same event hosted a large happening/event called *Dislokácia II* (Dislocation II), with musicians playing the roles of pieces in the well-known board game Checkers on a large, marked chessboard.[9]

In 1970, Milan Adamčiak was one of the participants in the famous *1. otvorený ateliér* (1st Open Studio) of the Slovak unofficial, underground art scene in Rudolf Sikora's house at Tehelná street 32 in Bratislava, where he performed the Fluxus performance *Canon 4×1/5* and created a conceptual challenge

8 A detailed description of these can be found in the latest volume of the four-part monograph by ADAMČIAK, M. – MURIN, M. *Archive IV*. (Košice: Dive buki, 2014–2015, pp. 154–189), which is devoted to Adamčiak's intermedia conceptual art, various performances, happenings, and exhibitions, and is an essential source of information for this study. It contains an extensive interview with the author by Murin, which, from a diachronic perspective, *de facto* maps his conceptualized actions, realized and unrealized experimental art projects, bizarre performances, collective and solo exhibitions. It includes valuable enumerative memorization: *Roots of Activities*, *Monoactions*, portraits of Jozef Revall, Róbert Cyprich, Alexander Mlynárčik, and Adamčiak's first experimental ensemble, Ensemble Comp. This personal retrospective also concludes with a sequence on his collaboration with Július Koller and Květa Fulierová. Adamčiak then reflects his rediscovery in the Czechoslovak experimental art scene at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, linked to new exhibitions, presentations of his work, and the creation of the unique ensemble Transmusic Comp. and the Society for Non-Conventional Music (SNEH).

9 One of the participants was legendary keyboard player and composer Marián Varga, who participated not only in this happening in Smolenice, but also in Adamčiak's later event on the occasion of the important international political conference East – West in Bardejovské Kúpele (Bardejov Spa,1991). In an interview he gave me in 2001, he recalled: "We played together in Smolenice and then in Bardejov. [Adamčiak] He drew all kinds of plans and played 'chess' with us there: the Burlas company were on one side of the room, and Peter Michalica and I were on the other. It was supposed to be some kind of East-West strategic study, and we were the four presidents... But it was fun in a way, at least Adamčiak had something to remember." In FUJAK, J. *Vis-à-vis* (Dialogues not only about music). Bratislava: Vlna / Drewo a srd, 2018, p. 190.

for his colleagues called *Gaudium et pax*.[10]
Jozef Cseres noted the important fact that:

Adamčiak combined conceptual thinking with various forms of action art at the very beginning of his career, because he was convinced that human experience is naturally spatio-temporal, and therefore it makes no sense to limit artistic creativity with conventional types or genres and kill spontaneity with artificial institutional criteria.

(Cseres, 2017, p. 30)

Influences, contexts, and personal attitude

It is clear from the aforementioned works that they did not arise spontaneously or without regard to world events. In the 1960s and later, in line with his credo of "knowing a lot about something and something about a lot", Adamčiak absorbed different impulses and influences, including from professional and artistic literature and magazines, and was also active in correspondence with various conceptual artists worldwide. His performance art gradually reflected his knowledge of various modernist, new "-isms," which, until the Prague Spring of 1968, were considered ideologically dangerous. He gradually immersed himself in the initiatives of Dadaism, Futurism, Fluxus, conceptual art, and others. He intensively studied and internalized the works of John Cage (*The Silence*), Dick Higgins (*foew & ombwhnw*), Allan Kaprow, Wolf Vostel (*Happening und Leben*), Ben Vautier (*Propositions*), Joseph Beuys (who sent

10 In this context, we can also mention the events and happenings in which Adamčiak participated with conceptual artists Peter Bartoš, Július Koller, Jana Želibská, and Alexander Mlynárčik, such as Mlynárčik's festival happenings *Sviatočné hody* (Festive Feasts, 1970), *Evina svadba* (Eve's Wedding, 1971), and *Deň radosti – "Keby všetky vlaky sveta"* (Day of Joy – "If All the Trains in the World", 1971).

Adamčiak his catalogs as early as 1970), the Japanese avant-garde "proto-Fluxus" group Gutai (Jiro Yoshihara, Shozo Shimamoto), Yoko Ono, as well as representatives from the Czech scene – explosionist Vladimír Boudník, intermedia conceptualists Milan Knížák, Eugen Brikcius, artist and theorist Jiří Valoch, and others.
It is interesting that at the time of his early performances and events, Adamčiak was not familiar with Fluxus and did not consider himself to be part of this artistic movement. However, he often eagerly applied its principles, even later, during the wave of neo-Fluxus that began in our cultural and geographical space at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. The above-mentioned trends and lines of the international scene were important to him in many ways, but he did not stop there. He often used them in the sense of implicit or explicit references, semantically significant situa(c)tional paraphrases or quotations in a certain consciously acknowledged continuity and conceptual affinity, as a "springboard" or "material to which it was possible to add only one's own attitude".[11] In his own stated position, that is, in the creation and refinement of his own poetics, it was possible from the outset to detect Adamčiak's permanent connection with a certain earthiness, his straightforwardly sincere and authentic nature, which never faded from him – whether as an exceptional artist or a broad-minded and educated intellectual. On the contrary, thanks to this, he was always in opposition to the sterile emptiness of academicism and the snobbery of cultural and artistic society. From the first to the last, all of his performances were characterized by their distinctiveness, situational spontaneity, but also playfulness of expression (as the primary principle of the creation and life of homo ludens, including the deliberate awakening of childlike playfulness in us), often filigree humor, esprit, occasionally controversial unpredictability, and, last but not least, sometimes downright archetypal rawness.

11 See more: ADAMČIAK, M. – MURIN, M. *Archív IV. (Akty)*, 2016.

We can recall the words of Jozef Cseres about him:

Driven by ritualistic will, he created regardless of conventions, allowing himself to be absorbed by the process and the medium, and blinded by the creative act, he disregarded established methods and principles of representation. He deliberately mixed media and questioned established perspectives.(Cseres, 2017, p. 31).

In an effort to capture the endemic uniqueness of Milan Adamčiak's performative events, parallels with the transgressive ritual as understood by Georges Bataille or with Zen koans (this analogy is used with conscious risk of simplistic instrumentalization) come to mind, namely in their radical paradoxicality, the tension duality of strong emotion and brisk intellect, as well as the ability to break free from the suggested dualistic optics of perceiving reality, and all kinds of manipulative discursive practices.
However, Adamčiak's performances, events, and happenings were also characterized by a certain "suchness" of spectacularity. He himself consciously advocated the appropriation of gestures, gags, masks, folk theater, even carnivals, medieval mysteries, street theater, and the like, in the context of celebrations and holidays:

In connection with the history of action art, I have often come across historical facts relating to celebrations and holidays. The most beautiful happenings took place in the Baroque period – or even earlier, in the Renaissance – pardon me, even earlier: medieval carnivals and mysteries, and even earlier still, in antiquity. My colleagues and I often argued about the roots of happenings, where the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary, customs, traditions, and holidays are. Whether we wanted to or not, we had to respond to this. George Maciunas' famous Fluxus diagram provides a sufficiently clear answer. Beautiful happenings, events, and installations can be found in ancient mythologies and in the Bible.[12]

12 See more: ADAMČIAK, M. – MURIN, M. *Archív IV. (Akty)*, 2016.

Adamčiak himself, as a unique intermedia conceptual bricoleur, resembled, and sometimes even embodied, a modern-day "igric"/ juggler (originally a de facto medieval intermedia artist), capable of making the most of the minimum, i.e., not only what was materially available, but also what was situationally and semantically available in the given environment of a specific time and space.

Examples of the quality of Milan Adamčiak's performances and events

The above-mentioned characteristic features were also present to varying degrees in the events, projects, and activities that Milan Adamčiak created both before 1989 and after the change of the socialist regime. At a time of gradual revival of his artistic (and not only) performance activities after a hiatus of more than fifteen years, which lasted from the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, his group **Transmusic Comp**. also deserves a chapter (1989 – 1996, 2010 – 2016).[13]
In the Czech-Slovak context of that period, it was a unique independent ensemble bringing together professional and amateur musicians, artists, and theatre performers. In the founding charter, Milan Adamčiak described it as "an open, variable body operating in the acoustic, musical, and audiovisual (so-called AHA) spheres to develop, deepen, and transcend the boundaries of artistic convention".[14] Alongside him, the core of the ensemble consisted of Michal Murin and Peter Machajdík, with other members including

13 According to Adamčiak, the abbreviation Comp. was supposed to have a polyvalent dimension: company, compact, compages, comparison, competence, complementarity, compilation, complex, compliance, competition, comprehensibility, etc.

14 See more: ADAMČIAK, M. Zakladacia listina súboru Transmusic Comp. Zborník Spoločnosti pre nekonvenčnú hudbu (Founding document of the Transmusic Comp. Collection of the Society for Unconventional Music). In *Avalanches 1990 – 1995*. (Ed. M. Murin). Bratislava : SNEH, 1995, p. 35.

Peter Horváth, Peter Cón, Martin Burlas, Michaela Czinegeová, Zuzana Géczová, Daniel Matej, Vladimír Popovič, Juraj Bartusz, Oľga Smetanová, Peter Strassner, Peter Zagar, Zbyněk Prokop, and occasional guests. Within the framework of this study, it should be noted that the Transmusic Comp. concerts-happenings themselves were not only characterized by (neo)Fluxus poetics (in which were found, among other things, musical and home-/readymade sound instruments on the borderline between sound and visual installations). They created also spectacular situational, and artistically "crazy" syncretic events sui generis, e.g., *String Room*, *People to People*, *Legnavské tančeky* (Little dances from Legnava), *Flambovaná hudba* (Flambéed Music), etc., with integral elements of remarkable (and sometimes controversial) performance and unconventional musical theater, in which Adamčiak played a central role.

In the early 1990s, Alexander Mlynárčik staged a memorable happening with the participation of Milan Adamčiak, *Ecce homo/Ajhľa človek* (Ecce homo/Behold the Man; 1991), in the central pedestrian zone of Žilina, with a significant social intervention in public space in the context of an ecological project by Mlynárčik, Jozef Dorica, and Andrej Barčík. In cooperation with local municipal services, the participants organized *de facto* ecological warning event, scattering various types of trash along the entire length of the street and playing a cacophony of sounds from loudspeakers. As the curators and compilers of the exhibition catalog *Adamčiak začni!* (Adamčiak, Start!!) wrote about the entire event,

[They] littered the pedestrian zone between the train station and the Považská Art Gallery with waste (old paper, scrap metal, burning tires, coniferous trees). Adamčiak's contribution sounded on the local radio like a deafening collage of music, the sounds of chirping birds, whistles, big wooden flutes fujaras, and fragments of Slovak songs interrupted by the clatter of weaving machines from the textile factory.[15]

15 See more: GREGOROVÁ STACH, L. – MURIN, M. *Adamčiak, začni! Retrospektívna výstava intermediálnej tvorby Milana Adamčiaka 1964 – 2017*. [Katalóg k výstave]. Bratislava : Slovenská národná galéria, 2017, p. 13.

From the large number of other performances and conceptual events by Milan Adamčiak, let us mention at least a few that illustrate, and demonstrate the above-mentioned principles of his poetics.

Idea pre jedného muzikanta a okolie (The Idea for One Musician and Surroundings) (from the series *Manipulovaná hudba* – Manipulated Music), which Adamčiak repeatedly performed in various forms and variations from the late 1970s onwards, either solo or with Transmusic Comp., consisted of assistants wrapping Adamčiak, who was playing the cello, in bandages or rolls of paper until he was completely immobilized. (photo on p. 57 top)

In a unique project by Australian composer Ross Bolleter with the polyvalent title *Left Hand of the Universe* (1997), which was presented in the synagogue in Šamorín and linked to the exhibition *The Piano Hotel* as part of the Sound Off festival – its conceptual curator was conceptual artist and theatre performer Michal Murina (who also directed the entire Bolleter project in this space) – Adamčiak's composition *Kontúry* (Contours) for two pianists was also performed. The author conceived it as a means of reviving various ruined pianos, on which he performed with Zdenek Plachý and Michal Murin. All of them had their right hands "handicapped" in other compositions, i.e., tied behind their backs, so they could only play with their left hands. Adamčiak, sitting on the string body of his former grand piano, told the story of its gradual destruction and how he once fell on it and crushed it in his apartment. Immediately afterwards, he unexpectedly quoted a fragment from the famous Fluxus destruction of a piano with the axe (*Phillip Corner's Piano Activities*, 1962). (photo on p. 57 bottom)

Adamčiak participated in the rich series of performances and happenings *Art in Windows* at the theatre festival Divadelná Nitra (2001) festival with two concise pieces: the performance/live installation *Keep Smiling/Smiling Boys*, in which he sat in front of a television screen showing John Cage's smiling face in the window of the Šmak snack bar on Svätopluk Square and smiled

at passers-by, and an event with children called *Violončelista na Jakubovom rebríku* (Cellist on Jacob's Ladder), when he played the cello in the middle of a ladder on the same square, maintaining a situational balance with a small group of children on it.
At the one-day festival *Opak je pravdou* (The Opposite is True) at the Empire Theater in Hlohovec, dedicated to his 60th birthday (Experimental Studio of Slovak Radio and Radio Devín, 2007, concept by Juraj Ďuriš), in addition to various participations in events by József R. Juhász and Michal Murin, a long-awaited meeting of Transmusic Comp members took place. During a musical performance in which Adamčiak and Murin were joined by Peter Machajík and the author of this text (as a guest), he suddenly decided – during the simultaneous performance of his electroacoustic composition *Capriccio* (1983) and parallel improvisations by the aforementioned performers – to simply chat with Peter Machajdík, face to face, on stage ("since we haven't seen each other in a long time"). He then disappeared, only to reappear a moment later, curled up inside a large paper head, probably a forgotten prop from the local theater, right in front of the ensemble and the festival audience.
In 2011, as part of his Japanese tour with Michal Murin, Milan Adamčiak also presented his performance *Musicologist on a Tree* at the 17th Nippon International Performance Art Festival in Nagano. Organizer and performer Seiji Shimoda asked him to try to do something outdoors that had never been done before, or rather, something that was not customary there. Adamčiak described the performance as follows (photo on on p. 58 top):

(...) and so I decided to climb a tree and to chirp for little birds and insects, because there was an unusual forest noise. I asked for scissors, took a beer can modified into a whistle with me, and climbed a birch tree, undressing on the way up to the top. People below shouted at me that I might fall, so I settled into a fork in the tree, cut off part of my hair, wove it into a nest, and tucked it between the branches. Then I spent a while calling to the little birds, or rather chasing them away. It was only on the way down that it occurred to me that a 65-year-old Japanese musicologist would certainly not have done this.[16]

Adamčiak's ability to make unexpected gestures at any given moment is also evidenced by a special incident in 2010. At the Tabačka independent cultural center in Košice, we performed chamber ensemble Žena s blchou (Woman with a Flea) with a soloist Peter Katin (accordion) in a live broadcast for Radio Devín in Adamčiak's presence, as well as his composition *Transfigurazioni* (1979). Before the last part of my composition *Co(n)ver – Diver – Over – Ver*, I invited the audience to do things during the performance that are usually not allowed at concerts (they could make a phone call, eat, talk, rustle, squeak furniture, etc.). Adamčiak took this literally: at one point, he slowly pulled out a plastic chair from under him with one hand, lifted it theatrically into the air, and threw it to the ground with a loud crash in front of the ensemble(!).
An integral part of Milan Adamčiak's performances was often his introductory speech or address to the audience. However, it had nothing to do with art or curatorial explanations and interpretations of the following event – it was always a form of direct existential statement, often with autobiographical and, in a sense, (self-)mystifying elements, sometimes resulting in a comical position in which the author never took himself deadly seriously. This was also the case with some of Transmusic Comp's performances (*pars pro toto* PostmutArt Fest at the Nitra Gallery, 2011) and solo performances (Krokus Gallery, 2015).

16 ADAMČIAK, M. – MURIN, M. *Archív IV. (Akty)*, 2016, p. 142. There are several examples of performances on trees in the history of our unconventional art. Let us mention at least the actions of Augustín Dobrovodský, which, however, took place in a different time-space and semantic context of the Czechoslovak underground community meeting in a village Brýzgalky in the Kysuce region in the 1980s, one of which even made it onto the cover of his poetry collection. See more: DOBROVODSKÝ, A. *Kurič v letnom kine.* (Stoker in the Summer Cinema). Bratislava: BRaK, 2017.

Performance as a totem (?)

If we ask about the quality of Adamčiak's specifically spectacular performance, we should perhaps reflect on the very meaning of his (post)modern artistic gesture and attitude, within the contemporary coordinates of fundamental (even ontological) shifts in the understanding of the essence or function of art (especially since the second half of the last century). Many philosophers and aestheticians have asked similar questions. Let us mention Arthur C. Danto, who, in the context of the serious question of what in a particular socio-historical discourse allows something to become art in the first place, not coincidentally agreed to have on the cover of his book *Beyond the Brillo Box – The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective (1992)* a reinterpretation of Rembrandt's famous *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* by artist Russell Connor. However, instead of a dissected corpse, Connor placed a reprint of Andy Warhol's Brillo box at the center of a passionate dispute among scientists Danto, 2003, pp. 12–13). Like the radical avant-garde of modern modernism, the heretical conceptualists of emerging postmodernism (no longer needing to be aggressively original at all costs) rejected the bourgeois-petit idea of art as a psychotherapeutic couch, aesthetically refined entertainment, a means of pathetic self-flagellation with emotions, or, in the worst case, merely as decoration, ornament, a form of relaxation, or a profitable market commodity.

The aforementioned earthiness and unaesthetic-yet-sophisticatedly-playful subversiveness of Adamčiak's extraordinary, spectacular performative gestures and events lead us to a different understanding of their meaning. One of the keys to understanding their suchness lies in radical transgression, in a certain sense of (self-)sacrificing risk of stepping out of normative automatisms towards a risky merging

with the everyday sorrows and joys of life in their ontological nakedness, which erases the boundaries between the world and art. Adamčiak's colleague, the music aesthetician and semiotician Peter Faltin (1939–1981), whom he knew personally, was already reflecting in the late 1960s on fundamental paradigmatic changes in the field of musical media, which were also occurring in other art forms, manifesting themselves in a temporal-spatial framework.

Faltin linked the fundamental, almost transversal shift in unconventional music of the late 1960s with the effort and need to bridge the gap between art and the world, or rather between art and existence itself, in an attempt to identify with it. According to him, art no longer wants to be merely a statement about the world, but an immediate part of it (Faltin ,1992, p. 176). It is a shift from the mode of mimetic representation of being towards a state of complete interpenetration with it. Faltin goes even further and formulates the following idea about "the transformation of the work as a representation into a work as a *totem*(!) – that is, not a traditionally understood and interpretable artistic sign system, but "the manifestation of being itself"[17]:

If until now a work of art was a statement by man to the world, now a work of art becomes a statement by the world to man. It does not want to be 'beautiful' – that is, it does not want to adapt the world to man – nor does it want to be a 'message' – that is, adapting man to the world, but rather the creation of both man and the world (Faltin ,1992, p. 179).

17 We could indirectly relate the concept of the totem to Claude Lévi-Strauss in the sense of the symbolic materialization of a specific form of thinking and understanding the world, but perhaps even more helpful in understanding it would be in a certain permissible analogy, the concept of the indistinguishability of the signifier and the signified (i.e., the materiality of the sign and its spiritualized meaning) within the framework of mythological consciousness, as interpreted by Ernst Cassirer.

Conclusion

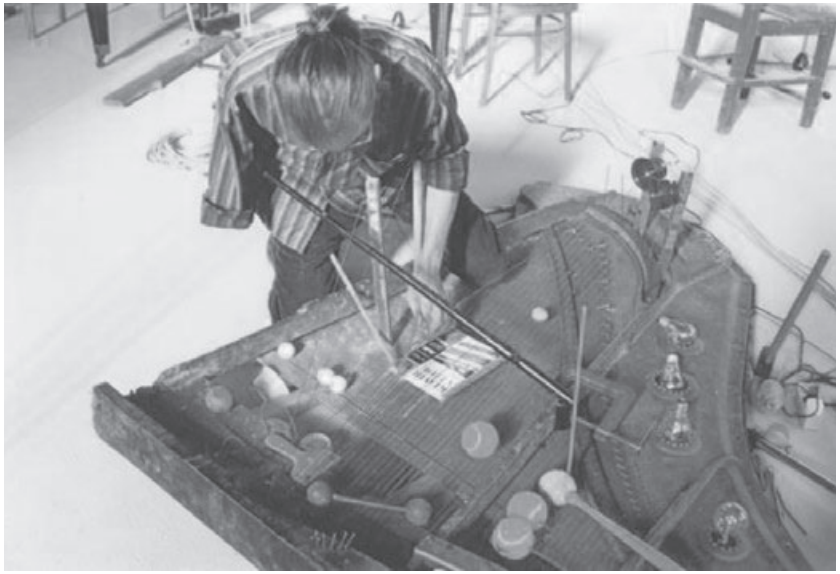
Adamčiak's specific existential status and modus perform-action art explicitly embodied and manifested the above-mentioned principles of the totemic fusion of the artist's being, the work, and the world or reality in its everyday greyness, apparent banality and conflict, as well as its transgressive festivity. But what question did he pose when, in the last stage of his career, he repeatedly, almost always, appeared before the audience as a former cellist with a long-stretched wire serving as a single string? He stretched it from the top of a plastic bottle serving as a sound box (sic!) to the ground, where he anchored it under his shoe – thus, leaning forward, he elicited only squeaky sounds from it with his bow. What a challenge this radical, expression-reduced performative gesture was, demonstrating both defiance and humility at the same time! It was as if all the time levels mentioned by Gilles Deleuze in connection with Marcel Proust's novel cycle *In Search of Lost Time* were meeting, overlapping, and merging within him: a time of loss, a time of forgetting, a time of finding, and a time of rediscovery (Deleuze, 1999, pp. 10 –101) . What could this gesture—an essential drop reflecting the whole world—mean in retrospect, looking back on his life and artistic story before and after 1989? In his suchness of being as a unique intermedia performer, he was often isolated. As an artist, scientist, and human being, he voluntarily and consciously chose to radically distance himself from the system of conjunctural advantages, and thus he was often confronted with alienation, misunderstanding, and abuse. In the words of Jozef Cseres: "He was an immediate, articulate man with versatile talent and creative potential, yet he failed to cope with the current transformation of meaningful leadership into stylized, empty communication, which essentially made him an exile in his own culture"(Cseres, 2017, p. 30). He made this ostentatiously clear with his spectacular solo performance of pulling a bow across a wire. (photo on p. 58 bottom)

Milan Adamčiak's work continues to receive well-deserved attention in the form of various artistic and professional events focused on his intermedia art, music, graphic scores, visual artworks, and experimental poetry. However, among his wide range of activities, his unique action art of performances, events, and happenings, which still provoke many questions and impulses for reflection, not only those indicated in this text, should also be the subject of deeper reflection.

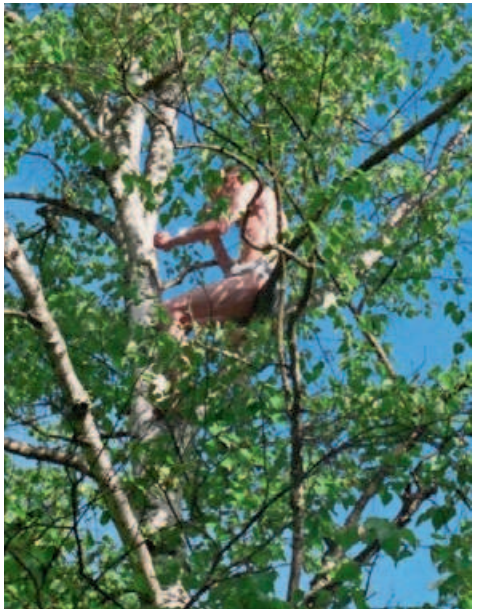
Ensemble Comp.: *Water Music*. Jura Hronca Dormitory, Bratislava (1970). (photo by Juraj Bartoš)

Transmusic Comp. in the early 1990s. Milan Adamčiak on the left. (photo: the SNEH Archive)

Milan Adamčiak: *Idea for One Musician and the Surroundings* (from the *Manipulated Music* series) as part of the Transmusic Comp. performance, opening of Vladimír Popovič's exhibition, Košice (1991). (photo by Zbyněk Prokop)

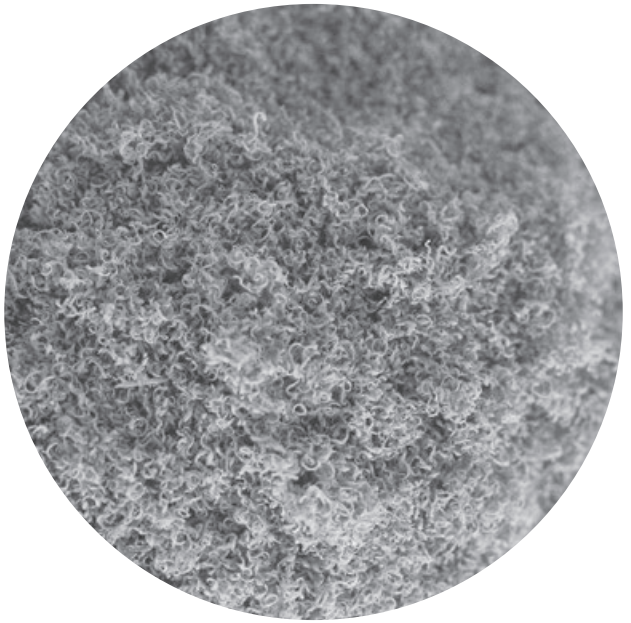


Milan Adamčiak: Performance of Ross Bolleter's project *Left Hand of the Universe*. Sound Off Festival – *Piano Hotel* exhibition (curator: Michal Murin), synagogue in Šamorín (1997). (photo by Michal Murin)



Milan Adamčiak: *Musicologist in a Tree*. 17th Nippon International Performance Art Festival, Nagano (2011). Photo: NIPAF Archive)

Adamčiak's performance with Transmusic Comp. PostmutArt Fest in Nitra (2011). (photo by Alena Cierna Jr.)



Sonic (and Other) Environments as the Mirror of Society (and as the Challenge for Artistic Testimony)

Introduction

Resonance is everywhere, and everything resonates. Even at the beginning of everything, as they say in the Bible, the sound of the word resonated so much that it caused the existence of our infinite universe and its constant expansion. In his masterpiece *Civilization Phase III* (1992/1993), Frank Zappa claims that everything is vibration and resonation of the various waves. We resonate all the time—with the universe, with the Earth (by the way, 70% of the Earth is water, and 65% of our body is water, too). We resonate with the air, with the flow of the wind, the ground, the trees, and the inner energy of fire. We either resonate with each other or not—in positive or negative vibrations…

This paper is focused primarily on the resonance of sonic environments surrounding us, and how they reflect our cultural habits, behavior, and social and environmental relations to the world. Thus, trans-/interdisciplinary collaboration in the scientific research of sonic ecology is the basic prerequisite to achieving relevant results. We see a big potential for interdisciplinary relations among different sciences—cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, acoustics, etc.—on the level of contemporary existential semiotics to investigate this field of the sonic (and other) environments surrounding us everywhere we are.

The existentially semantic dimension of sounds plays a crucial role in our lives anywhere and anytime we happen to be. No wonder the philosophy of the ecological approach to our acoustic

semiosphere is highly needed, especially in our world with various devastations of our natural and urban environments. To be clear, the environmental consciousness of the policymakers is superficial and hypocritical; the COVID-19 crisis in the first half of the 2020s, which amplified and accumulated all the crises we have experienced in recent decades (ecological, moral, economic, cultural, social, etc.), showed a total misunderstanding of the sources of the current ecological disaster. The change of this highly critical situation is directly conditioned on ending mutated global digitalized hyper-capitalism, which is based on the supremacy of marketing for unscrupulous financial profit.[18]
Environmental consciousness and policies in our society must eliminate these harmful influences as much as possible—they must not be campaign-like in their superficiality, not extreme, and unprofessional (with which we are confronted so often in the meantime). They should consider all local givens and specifics seriously, protect them as our cultural heritage, and respect and cultivate our environment anywhere we are on the Earth, as the only time-space that allows us to survive.
The ecological effort to save and rehumanize the spaces we live in—sonic ones included—can be considered as one of the most important issues today, more than ever before. There is also a real need to develop a special, creative sensitivity, alongside new ways of perceiving sonic elements, their meanings, and their remarkable significance in our daily being. If we are more sensitive and open to accepting and understanding the (sometimes implicit,

18 It is necessary to raise public awareness of the fact, who is the main polluter and destroyer of our environment in global measure. It is fine when we separate the waste and buy bio-/eco-products, and so on, but… In the conditions of a very late phase of transcapitalism – which causes far-reaching all-planetary crises (ecological is "only" one of them) and is unable to solve them at all –, it is necessary to stop as soon as the global disaster and unprecedented pollution caused by the richest class of people, the oligarchs and their megacorporation net (acting behind the visible elected political-economic structures) who live at the expense of the "99%" of population, and flora & fauna, too.

sometimes radical) otherness of sonic "suchness" then we will be able to accept otherness as such. The realistic and real ecological environmental policy (if it is not connected with the madness of the Green Deal) is very necessary today at any level and in different areas of our social life and culture. Unfortunately, the agenda of acoustic and sonic ecologies is in the shadow of other issues, but it is changing slowly. For example, in the awareness of how important it is to not generate acoustic smog in homes, schools, parks, and certain work environments, at least.
But there is not only audible noise and dangerous acoustic smog. There is something more hidden, mostly badly digitalized sounds of acoustic smog, which is almost inaudible—it is emitted by digital electronic devices, smartphones, computers, Wi-Fi routers, a stand-by regime of TV, radio, etc.—that surround us almost everywhere and irritate us constantly. We are often not aware of it, but it can slowly damage our health. We know how tired and dry our eyes are after staring at digital screens all day, so how tired our ears and mind must be exposed to digital noise all the time?
There is also another level – the non-ecological dimension of digitally streamed sounds. Kyle Devine in his book *Decomposed: The Political Ecology of Music* (2019)_claims that there is no such thing as a nonmaterial way of listening to music: *"The so-called cloud is a definitely material and mainly hardwired network of fiber-optic cables, servers, routers, and the like."* Devine, Ross 2020, 2), and as Alex Ross, review of this work pointed out: *"This concealment of industrial reality, behind a phantasmagoria of virtuality, is a sleight of hand typical of Big Tech, with its genius for persuading consumers never to wonder how transactions have become so shimmeringly effortless"* (Ross 2020, 3). Streamed music is even more non-ecological and more expensive than ever before (even in the time of digital CD media).[19]

19 Alex Ross continues: *„When we listen to music, we may ask ourselves: Under what conditions was a particular recording made? How equitable is the process by which it has reached us? Who is being paid? How are they being treated? And—most pressing—how much music do we really need?"* (Ross 2020, 3).

Sonic (and Other Environmental) Mirrors as Cultural Metaphor

If we can be denotative, there are real sound mirrors in the world, e.g., such as the acoustic one near Kilnsea Grange, East Yorkshire, or Denge sound mirrors located in Romney Marsh in Kent. These mirrors are passive devices that collect and amplify sound waves. They were often designed in a parabolic-shape made of sound-hard materials, which allows them to reflect and focus incident sound signals. Before the invention of the radar system, this kind of acoustic mirror was used to detect incoming aircraft. In recent times, they have been used often in aero-acoustic wind tunnels (for noise measurement). There are also parabolic acoustic mirrors, "whisper dishes" in various observatories, or ones with small portable parabolic microphones to record, e.g., birds, or to stream some football, or ice-hockey players during games.

But let us deal with the different meanings of sonic mirrors as a cultural metaphor, with the problematics of how acoustic environments speak about the quality and "suchness" of concrete cultural/social spaces & time. Various social discursive and nondiscursive practices of our civilization influence very deeply our ways of living in many important dimensions—spiritual, moral, ecological, economic, political, and communicational among others. They are mirrored in different sonic environments (pleasant or unpleasant, or even destructive), we are situated willingly or (mostly) involuntarily.

One of the authors and artists who deals with problems of contemporary civilization (not only) in the indicated contexts is Bob Ostertag (1957). An American composer, a world-renowned innovator of analogue and digital electronic music, a long-time queer activist (in earlier times, when it was not yet attractive and conjunctural), and at the same time a politically committed person on the left, capable of helping directly in the epicenters of war

conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador in the 1980s, or in Serbia after the bombing by NATO troops in the late 1990s. He reflects on social events and their sonic contexts, which he transforms into his intermedia-musical compositions or sonic "documentaries". We can mention the catharsis piece *Sooner or Later* (1991) based on a recording of the cry of a Salvadoran little boy burying his father, partisan, or *Yugoslavia Suite* with two parts *War Games* and *These Hands* (1999), appropriating the video war games in a simulacrum of CNN TV news, or the sounds and images of clapping red bloody hands of politicians during the Balkan civil war in 1990.[20] He also writes remarkably interesting texts and books from his travels and artistic tours. After the publication *Creative Life: Music, Politics, People, and Machines* (2009), he published another book set of texts, resp. of essays, entitled *Facebooking the Anthropocene in Raja Ampat. Technics and Civilization in the 21st Century* (2021). He presents here views of the contemporary world, various forms of culture and art in the late stages of fatally failing social (be it neo-capitalist or neo-socialist) systems at a time of their ubiquitous overgrowth with digital technologies, the Internet, and at the same time ongoing and threatening ecological devastation. Among other issues, Ostertag writes about how various environments around the world (sonic ones included) can express and mirror the ways of our cultural and social being.

20 Description taken from Ostertag´s authorized web site*: „In* War Games*, Ostertag sits on stage with a joystick made for computer games which mimics the joysticks in military aircraft. The performance looks and sounds much like a computer game. The result is an improvised mix of manipulations of image and sound from computer games, US Army and Air Force training videos, actual bombing videos from the cockpits of NATO planes bombing ex-Yugoslavia, and cartoons.*
"These Hands *uses video clips from the Balkan civil wars which were selected because of the prominence of hand gestures projected on a scrim (loading bullets into a gun, firing a bazooka, pointing to a map, bandaging a wound, covering one's tears). A live performer stands in the dark behind the scrim, with only his hands lit. The disembodied hands are visible both through the scrim and are also captured by a camera and collaged into the video. The performer can thus reach his hands into the hands in the videos and manipulate the image with his gestures."* See more: https://bobostertag.com

The first part of this publication is a conglomerate of direct testimonies, profound reflections, and insights in the form of an engaging postmodern travelogue, or rather a reportage from Ostertag's fifteen-month tour at the end of the second decade of the 21st century across various countries of the world. He describes not only the unprecedented expansion of the reach of digital technologies to the "most western" corners of the world and their transformative impact on local cultures, but also the tragic impacts of the "plastic age"—e.g. the contamination of urban agglomerations, countryside[s], nature, beaches, seas and oceans, fauna and flora—and thus ourselves, with (primary) plastics and (secondary) microplastics, and the onset of global, increasingly dystopian, irreversible climate change. The author did not choose the attractive tourist destination of Raja Ampat, an archipelago in the Indonesian province of West Papua with a dreamy diver's paradise, as a model example by chance. It is a place that is not easily accessible by plane or ferry, which evokes a pristine and exotic nature. However, after it became a popular tourist destination, you are already covered ankle-deep in plastic waste on the adjacent beaches... The local culture has disappeared, and people have reoriented themselves to the globally expanding tourism business, communicating with foreigners in English via smartphones, but no longer able to communicate in local dialects, even with the inhabitants of the neighbouring island(!).

On his travels, Ostertag encountered war conflicts, immense poverty, ecological devastation of unimaginable proportions, industrialized agriculture, and waves of huge numbers of refugees. But on the other hand, there is the breathtaking wealth of the "one percent" of the chosen ones and the dominance of the globally implemented internet, which has dramatically and explicitly paradigmatically transformed our world. According to him, the world is *de facto* divided into a significant minority of those who "have" and the

overwhelming majority "who have almost nothing". He notices the rapidly developing illiberal capitalism in China, controlled by the local Communist Party, is manifesting itself in the total devastation of air quality and terrible sonic ecological conditions in some cities, not only in megacities like Beijing, Shanghai, or Wuhan. Ostertag also notes the construction of huge agglomerations with standardized skyscrapers in China, which deprive the socially weaker population of their homes, who survive until the last moment in half-destroyed houses. However, you may not find the skyscrapers built a few years ago there today. They are built from poor-quality "disposable" components, often renovated and in their place, and alongside other new flourishes of postmodern architecture, soaring into the sky, apparently again only temporary.

Bob Ostertag has a permanent residence in the Mission district of San Francisco, a former working-class Latin American neighbourhood, now just a short distance from the headquarters of global digital technology giants such as Facebook and Google in Silicon Valley. According to him, these are young, fabulously "rich, arrogant immigrants", owners or partners, top managers of these mega-companies, whom no one sees in person, reminiscent of the authorities in Franz Kafka's novel *The Castle*. Nowadays, when the number of users of these internet corporations can be counted in billions, it is probably unnecessary to talk about the unprecedented global power and influence of these owners of our digital data. Wherever Ostertag went in the world, he saw more and more people, regardless of social status, "glued" to their iPhones and smartphones, surfing Google, preoccupied with posting statuses, videos, and photos on social networks. According to him, San Francisco itself is currently divided into the sphere of this tech-economy and the sphere of the economy of everything else, which is now dependent on the first completely.

According to him, the internet and hand-held pocket computers fundamentally change the way of communication (sonic ones included) in terms of their semantics and significance, their content, or the selection of those with whom we (don't) want to conduct it. They also change how we spend our time, and the understanding of the meaning of time and the quality of its experience. They are changing us right at the basal level of being and at an unexpectedly accelerating rate. Moreover, these achievements of modern digital technology often saturate our need for real and realistically absent relationships, "contact with the world", creating the illusion of their presence. Yes, we live in an all-pervading smartphone age, or internet and (micro)plastic one—in which, as Ostertag writes about in one place, even dead coral reefs are replaced by imitations made in a 3-D printer—with all the consequences of its environmental and our internal hyper contamination.

Ostertag avoids extreme views of tech-optimism or disillusionment, which allows him to see the fact that even though we are surrounded by various screens and smartphones at every step, the originally desired and productive supplementation of reality does not occur. There is not even the dreamed expansion and enrichment of our universe with additional parallel virtual worlds, but rather the effect of alienation—alienation from our immediate reality, as well as from ourselves.

The philosopher of postmodern art and conceptual artist Jozef Cseres writes about Ostertag's observations:

Among the problems that Bob Ostertag reflects on in his new book, the most important and acute question is, without a doubt, what humanity is doing to survive global crises in a planetary environment suitable for life. It is obvious that without respectful interaction with nature and without the help of technology, it cannot do it today. Technology is our new nature, and it doesn't always get along with the original one that was here before us (and hopefully will be after us). (…) But how to combine the biological and cultural dependence on technology, with the destructive consequences it has on nature, is a tricky question of our Anthropocene presence. (Cseres, 2021, 3)

Examples of Artistic Testimonies

The aforementioned phenomena are a challenge to create a kind of artistic testimony in a special multi-meaning statement, which can combine and mutate in the dialogical symbiosis of the world of sounds with selected semantic references and new experimental music. Music today is related to the sounds of various environments; we live in an era when any sonic sources of the semiosphere can be related to musical meanings, thus we can talk not only about musical work of art in a traditional way but also (to replace/update it) about musical discourse, as Polish semiotician Maciej Jabłonski suggested. According to Edvin Prévost "no sound is innocent" because every sound is pregnant by meaning. Ludwig Wittgenstein said that music as such is a very tricky phenomenon, a tricky language game *sui generis*—no wonder, the music generated from the sounds is even more tricky, perhaps. There are many artists focused on re-/cross-/contextualizing field recordings of sonic environments in contemporary music and intermedia projects—if we consider the large universe of audio arts as music.[21] I can mention at least some interesting projects from the Slovakian scene, specifically from Peter Machajdík and Jonáš Gruska.

Peter Machajdík (1961) is a polystyle composer, the author of very interesting works of radio art, electroacoustic, and acousmatic compositions, among which we can mention at least the experimental ones *The Healing Heating* (2005) or *Slyší e mě obře? no*? (Do you ear me ell? es?, 2013), created on behalf of the

21 These thoughts resonate with contemporary musical semiotic research in biosemiotics. As Matthew A. Slayton and Yogi Hale Hendlin claim in their study *The Musical Turn in Biosemiotics (An Expressivist Model of Communication)*: *„Paying more attention to soundscapes as cohesive structures also tempers mechaphony and other intrusive forms of anthrophony. Semiosonic research gives us deeper insights into harmonious and disharmonious sounds and noises, which can provide heuristics for ecosystem and organism health"* (Slayton, Hendlin, 2022, p. 232).

R(a)dio(custica) project of the Czech Radio station Vltava, *The Marathon* (2007) for the Festival of Electronic Music in Osaka, Japan, *Tolleranza* (2016), among many others. There are also remarkable sound installations such as *Hannahver* (2003), *Belianka* (2015), and live musical performances with an unconventional guitar accompanying the contemporary dance of Petra Fornayová. Machajdík is also engaged in organizational activities: for a long time at the international festival Genius Loci in Levoča, in the concert cycle Music at Fulla Gallery in Ružomberok, and since 2011, he has been the curator of the International biennial of sound art Sound City Days, and the curator of the festival Soundart vs. Nu Dance.

One of his important socio-environmental installations is *Waters and Cages* (2012) in the Gallery of Bratislava City (the city which of Machajdik's birthplace that John Cage visited only twenty years ago), a kind of hommage à John Cage created in the year of Cage's 100th anniversary of birth. The installation in the exhibition room involves both visual and auditory components. Four cages were filled with water from the most polluted rivers of the world, including the Yangtze, Mekong, Salween, Ganges, Indus, Danube, La Plata, Rio Grande, and the Nile. *"It is not easy to get water from the Amazon or the Nile, as some countries do not agree to export it. For example, an acquaintance smuggled me some water from the Yangtze River. Other acquaintances from India brought me water from the Ganges. I then mixed the water from several dirty rivers,"* (Machajdík, 2012, 2). In the installation, it was possible to hear the tones C - A - G – E from four speakers in each of the four cages, and rhythmic composition arose from the different time durations of each note (as a reference to Cage's legendary composition *4'33"*). Two other speakers set up in the room played every four minutes and thirty-three seconds the sounds of various voices and narrations of John Cage. Some of them were electronically adjusted, even played backward: *"It could symbolize Cage's return, maybe the return of his ideas and his message back among us"* (Machajdík, Opoldusová, 2012, 2). According to Machajdík, these audiovisual objects/cages with polluted water taken from the polluted rivers symbolize the changes in the organic components of the ecosystem, especially the risks to faunal assemblages, but also to the changes in the inorganic components of the environment. They deal with the question of the extinction of animal species, especially birds, and stand as a representation of the diminution not only of bird species, but also as a way to draw attention to the suppression of human rights.[22]

Jonáš Gruska (1990), an unconventional Slovakian composer, intermedia artist, and musician—or, as he calls himself, a "sound enthusiast and field recorder"—is one of the most interesting figures in contemporary Central European sonic and sound art. The creator of experimental sonic installations, audio-staged events, and intermedia projects in site-specific contexts surprises with the level of invention in almost every one of his works, in a relatively radical grasp of the medium of sound. Musically, he is oriented towards the world of "chaotically" polymetric rhythms and various non-tempered, unconventional tunings. Primarily, he works with the psychoacoustic properties, expression, and influence of the very phenomenality of sounds and so-called field sound recordings, which he likes to appropriate in his artistic output. He prefers always a direct live contact with the "tissue" of a particular sound, with its fascinating texture, whether it is generated electronically or recorded in a specific environment:

I remember a trip on a trolleybus, where I decided to listen to its electromagnetic field. The wailing solo melodies were distinctly interrupted by a harmonic drone. The trolleybus driver was at that moment a sort of performer for

22 See more: https://kultura.pravda.sk/galeria/clanok/65048-kamarati-pasovali-vodu-zo-spinavych-veltokov/ (Translated from Slovak language by the author.)

me—without his own knowledge he was creating a musical experience for me, conditioned by the traffic around him, the traffic lights, but also by his own decisions. (Gruska; Fujak 2021, 79).

As a bricoleur, Gruska developed special devices such as the Elektrosluch (Electrohearing) and Priezor (Visor), both kinds of antenna for electromagnetic listening, as well as (micro)Ears, sensitive omnidirectional microphones that capture microsounds. Among his sophisticated sound-intermedia installations, let us mention the series *Site Specific Resonances I. – V.* (2012 – 2016), for ventilation systems in a psychiatric ward in Prague or at the Vienna post office, for iron doors in Zlín. And also *Radiators* (2016, Oblastní galerie Vysočiny in Jihlava), *Experiment 0* (2017, for interference frequencies of sheet metal at Meetfactory in Prague). We can also mention also his sound field recordings, such as *Kvílenia* (Wailings, 2015), Zvuky Slovnaftu (Sounds of Slovnaft, 2015). Gruska is also the author of the remarkable project *Lúk*y (Meadowas, 2015), realized originally in the large hall of an abandoned sugar factory in Rimavská Sobota as part of the Ruins project with folklore women singers, later also in the center of contemporary culture Nástupište 1 – 12 (Platfotms 1 – 12), in Topoľčany, which resulted in the slightly differently conceived album *Spevy* (Singings, 2017).

Conclusion

Once upon a time, the indigenous people of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa were in shock and sadness when they discovered that writer, philosopher, and farmer Laurens van der Post, who visited them, couldn't hear the stars at all. For these bushmen, the inability to hear and listen to nature was a sign of profound disconnection from the world around us. Even in ancient Greece, Pythagoras recognized the relation between the harmony of spheres

(environment of the universe) and the music created by man according to Mystic Tetractys, which can harmonize our soul—he named this connection *mimesis*.

Are we connected with nature and the environments we create? Or do we create only the labyrinth of creek simulacra mirrors, the sonic noise ones included? And can we apply the understanding of Tetractys and *mimesis* (in the range from Pythagoras to Aristotle) in some analogies to contemporary musical discourse extended to various sonic environments in the context of sonic ecologies, which can harmonize our souls? Especially, if we know that everything, including us, was made from the stars? So, we can question ourselves today—can we listen to stars and sonic environments around us, and how does it resonate with the character of society we live in? What does it mirror? Each of us can answer these questions here and now, in concrete real situations, by him-/herself.

Denge sound mirrors. (photo: https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d8/dd/5b/d8dd5b0938b267255fa94039bb8f032e.jpg)

Bob Ostertag and his book *Facebooking the Anthropocene in Raja Ampat.*

Peter Machajdík and part of his installation *Waves and Cages* (2012). (photo by Ivan Majerský)

Jonáš Gruska. (photo by Lucia Kovalová)

Notes on Sonic Photography as a Trace of Kairos (and Transparent Sonic Sculptures in Site-Specific Contexts)

1

My memory is primarily visual, but some "flashings" of past moments are strongly connected in my mind with tactile, olfactory, and also auditory recalls. I can remember, for example, from my childhood:

sounds of air – various winds in trees and forests in the region of the Kysuce Beskid Mountains, sounds of water – a brook and a little river flowing close to my grandparents' wooden house in the village, sounds of fire – a bursting bonfire in a meadow at night under the summer sky, sounds of frozen snow – creaking while I walked in, sounds of my mother 's kitchen – while cooking the Sunday dinner with the radio on.

Later, as an adult, I can mention just *pars pro toto*: the sounds of a big, old machine during a computed tomography scan of my neck bones and skull in the hospital – I was situated on a large round table, being totally fixed on it. The noise (in different serial ranges) of the scanning machine rotating above me was around 130 db(!), and a medical assistant had forgotten to give me ear protectors. I survived this only because I had decided to change my way of perception of the situation – I started to believe that I was at an electro acoustic concert of great noise music…

2

As teenagers in the late 1980s, guitarist Peter "Varso" Varsavik and I (we were members of the alternative rock group Teória O drazu), had enormous fun by recording on a double-tape recorder collages of different fragments of musical styles (each for a maximum of 3 seconds) and some real sounds of the outdoor environment taken by a microphone from an open window – having no idea of John Zorn's musical "patch-work" or any other sonic art experiments. We were quite surprised by the impact of these collages on our changing perception of sounds. When I was later recording any banal situations of daily life by a movable tape deck, I quickly realiz ed that the reality "fixed" in this sonic footage had something to do with the phenomenality of photography: records of irrelevant dialogues surrounded by sonic details which we do not pay attention to, but are suddenly more interesting than these speeches, records of traffic noise, or something that was dropped there in the distance and broke with a big din, the screams of copulating cats, records of silent space full of hidden micro-sonic details of the concrete semiosphere, etc.

3

Sonic "photographic" records are characterized by special performative textuality, which can save and share the non-verbaliz ed *e x i s t e n t i a l* essence of any past moments, being enacted in concrete, unique, and unrepeatable space and time contexts. I think there is a certain parallel between Roland Barthes' s understanding of photography in his *La Chambre Claire* (Camera Lucida, 1980) and the phenomenality of sonic photos/records (of seemingly banal situations in ordinary environments full of unexpected and unpredictable sounding events). Barthes introduces two aspects of photography:

the studium – connected with subject, contexts, culture, and history, and *the punctum* – something that can rivet our attention and is often hidden in the details, but that is not related to clearly verbaliz ed meaning or beauty.[23] What if we talk about *the stu dium* and in particular about *the punctum* of sonic photography as a special inner existential dimension in the experience of listening to it?

4

Jaroslav Vančát, in his text *Fotografie jako časotvorný koncept* (Photography as a Time-creating Concept, 2006), writes about the different understanding of temporality in history: from the cyclic mythological model through linear models – the Ancient Greek model of time passage from the past and the Christian model orientated to the future – and those of modern Renaissance and Cartesian form . In the fine art of painting, the Renaissance brought the concept and sign construction of the simultaneous image plot– the ability to perceive everything in the painting in one moment. We transferred this concept to photography, but – as Vančát claims – this sign construction is not correct. We cannot see the image simultaneously, in every place at once: *"The eye is a kind of tactile place, (…) We are able to construct the objects in our mind only by very fast movements, the courses of our eyes sliding on the image…"*[24] In present times, after Einstein' s theory of relativity – when any universal conception of time is indefensible – the synchronicity of time on the imagin ation is not ontological givenness, but a historically conditional concept. Vančát claims that the touch

23 DILLON, Brian. Rereading: Camera Lucida by Roland Barthes. *The Guardian* [online]. London: Guardian News & Media Limited, 2011 [cit. 2020-05-21]. Available at : https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/mar/26/roland-barthes-camera-lucida-rereading

24 VANČÁT, Jaroslav. Fotografie jako časotvorný k oncept. *Ateliér*. 2006, IXX(21), p. 10.

of reality towards photography is bilaterally interactive, because the picture is also interactive towards our understanding and assignation of something as reality.

Could we apply these thoughts to the perception process of "sonic photography"? Could we interpret this comprehension of photographic qualities in the context of sound recordings, particularly if they are directly connected with concrete (sometimes re-discovering) semantic inner, existential experiences?

5

I tried to transform my personal experiences and understanding of sonic photography, with its unique qualities of *the studium* and *the punctum,* as well as with the interactivity of assignation, into my music and acousmatic pieces. Here are two examples at least:

Pentrophony (2010; commissioned by the Czech Radio Vltava project rAdioCUSTICA in Prague)

In the slang of Slovakia's Kysuce region, "pentro" means an attic in a barn or in a house. This composition is based on our family mythological memory and (not only but also) on my childhood. My brother Eduard and I, as very young boys, often used to go up to 'our' grandfather's attic in the village of Podvysoká, where we would play with his half-forgotten, dust-covered musical instruments – large drums and a so-called sidewalk cimbalom, which probably fascinated me the most. Since I had no idea how to actually play the thing, I explored it by strumming ... While we were in that attic (pentro), various sounds would occasionally " seep" up through the wooden floorboards from my grandparents' kitchen below, in particular the radio, which

was turned on almost all the time, or someone playing the accordion (my grandfather, granduncle, and especially my father were excellent accordionists).
In the acousmatic piece *Pentrophony*, I have tried to blend all these sonic-semantic memories – including the metaphor of the "pentro" as an amazing place that, through its mysterious otherness, invited us to engage in creative and inquisitive play. In a sense, this composition pays homage to all the things I have received from my ancestors, not only in that attic. I take an unconventional approach to playing the small sidewalk cimbalom (which I also used to play using two stones, one of them an old whetstone for sharpening scythes that belonged to my grandmother Eva on my mother's side) and my semi-prepared piano, approaching them as quasi-sonoristic electroacoustic instruments (although occasionally I also played them in a pizzicato style like an old lyre). To this, I add the creaking of wooden floorboards, and the sound recordings of touching the rough plaster of the chimney, the wooden walls and beams in the attic and the sound of striking them, playing the large nails driven into them like a mbira. I also mix in the electronic-kinetic bands of radio stations being tuned in real time.[25]

On Cage with AA (2015)

This composition is a kind of three-layered collage dedicated to John Cage and Milan Adamčiak. The first layer is woven from the sounds of streets in the centre of Nitra city; the second layer consists of excerpts from a text by Milan Adamčiak entitled *A Few Words About J. C.* It was written in 1992, when Cage visited Bratislava. Twenty- three years later, on April 20th 2015, Adamčiak read and recorded the fragments of the text for me due to this comprovisation in Krokus Gallery, Bratislava during

25 See more and listen: FUJAK, Július. Pentrofónia. *Český rozhlas: Radiocustica* [online]. Praha: Český rozhlas, c1997-2020 [cit. 2020-06-01]. Available at: https://www.radiocustica.cz/julius-fujak-p-e-n-t-r-o-f-o-n-i-a-5336151

the spring of 2015. The third layer was made in cooperation with Amy Knoles, who recorded her part in Los Angeles (in the music studio of her chamber ensemble, The California EAR Unit) – she was in direct contact with Cage in the 1980s. My motto of the piece (paraphrasing and changing a well -known thought by Cage): *Get out of whatever cage you are* .[26]

6

A short, but important note of the first part of this text is on the margin of ancient notion *kairos* – it expresses the non-linear, non-chronological temporality of "that right moment" – when we feel our being as a part of something very special, of the spiritual fullness of *pleroma*. I am convinced that sonic photography – either recorded for our private use or appropriated in musical works of art – is (despite its possible, but seeming banality) a trace of *kairos* (and sometimes *pleroma* as well), of something existentially valuable, which we often do not give our attention to when it 's happening in "real time". We need to focus our attention on the trace of *kairos* hidden in certain, unique, special experiences of sonic events. They can project in a certain ecological way the existential essence of our lived moments enacted in the concrete and unrepeatable spatial and temporal context, and they are related to barely verbalized meaning or beauty.

26 *On Cage with AA* – field recordings were recorded on portable minidisc recorder MD Walkman Sony MZ-R50, musical instruments were recorded in the c oncert hall of Region house in Nitra, and in the musical studio of The California EAR Unit in Los Angeles. Participation of legendary Slovak intermedia artist Milan Adamčiak (voice), American composer and percussionist Amy Knoles, and my trio Ne:bo:daj - Jana Ambrózová (voice), Julo Fujak (piano, field recordings), and Andrej Pleštinský (Italian bayan). Sound design: Richard Sabo (sound e ngi neer of Experimental electro-acoustic studio of Slovak Radio, Bratislava).

7

Special cultural sensitivity for sounds and sonic milieu or sonic *genius loci* of certain places can relate to contemporary unconventional music and audial arts. The tradition of musical appropriation of sounds and sonic environment, rooted already in Luigi Russolo´s futurism (art of noise), and some very important impulses of paradigmatically different artistic exploitation of the sonic universe in our music, we can find in thinking of Marcel Duchamp and later John Cage as well. I have been occupied by experimental, alternative music for almost three decades and the more I have worked with the use and the transformation of various sounds in "site-specific" musical pieces the more I realized that the thoughts of these two great conceptual artists played a crucial role in my intermedia site-specific music. Let us focus our attention on two points at least.

8

Around 1913, Marcel Duchamp wrote on a small piece of paper just this sentence: "*Sculpture musicale*: *Sons durant et partant de différents points et formant une sculpture sonore qui dure"* (Musical Sculpture: Sounds lasting and leaving from different places and forming a sounding sculpture that lasts.). Nothing more, nothing less. But it has a big impact on thinking about the nature and the phenomenality of sonic and audial arts, as we can see even in [our] present time. John Cage pointed out several times that Duchamp was maybe the first one in history who had thought about music by this artistic gesture in spatial co-ordinates exclusively (talking expressly on sonic sculpture), and not in temporal measures.
Almost forty years later, in 1952, one of the most controversial works of art, John Cage's *4´33´* was premiered, as a temporal

interval of silence, which can be interpreted and explicated in so many various and disparate ways – e. g., including Buddha´s silent koan with the white lily. But his friend, composer and conductor Steve Lucky Mosko told me (when I met him in Los Angeles, 2005), that it would relate to the essay written by Cage when he was fourteen. He wrote then in it that if people all around the world would stop just for one minute, in the same moment ofany of their activities, and would listen to the sounds, the world might change…! (I know the CD record of Cage reading his essay when he was almost 80 years old – it was fascinating...). As we know, absolute silence does not exist for a human being. Even in an anechoic room of sonic vacuum, we can hear the sounds of our own body – caused by our blood circulation and nerve system – as John Cages experienced there, and since then he decided to have no intention while creating music because the sonic semiosphere acts unintentionally, too.

In this context of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of "silence", full of micro-sonic events, it is very interesting that Cage considered listening in fact as an act of composing… Slovakian musicologist Daniela Šterbáková deals with analyzing many of the problems of Cage´s aesthetics in the context of the philosophy of absence in her book *Ticho. John Cage, filozofia absencií a skúsenosť ticha* (Silence. John Cage, the Philosophy of Absences, and the Experience of Silence; Karolinum, Praha 2019). Paraphrasing her ideas, she claims that if we are trying to hear the silence, we are in a paradoxical situation: *"the more we prick up our ears the more intensively we have a feeling that we are surrounded by a sea of noise. It may seem that absolute silence is inaccessible to us."*[27] Šterbáková analyses the problem of perceptible silence in dialogue with various authors:

27 Šterbáková, D.: *Ticho. John Cage, filozofia absencií a skúsenosť ticha.* (Silence. John Cage, the Philosophy of Absences and Experience of Silence.) Praha : Karolinum, 2019, last page of the cover. Quote translated from Czech original version by the author.

according to her, John Cage has opened the question of silence in his music and texts, while Roy Sorensen and Ian Phillips have elaborated it in the frame of analytical philosophy. *"Via the silence, the borders and mutual relations between 'common sense' and philosophical thinking appear. Besides, we deal with uneasy questioning of the ontology of the absences and the abilities of sense apperception. (…) Is it possible to perceive the silence not only by ears?!"*[28]

Duchamp's *Sculpture Musicale* and Cage's *4´33´´* are quite distinct. In the first case, we are confronted with only one sentence written on a piece of paper, in the case of *4´33´´* it is an interval of (relative) silence, and it is precisely temporally delineated. The performative character of a piece, the live interpretation of the piece by the musician(s), is very important: it consists of three parts in duration 33´´, 2´40´´ and 1´20´´, evenly divided by tacets (pauses). But for me, both could open paradigmatically and totally different approaches of deep listening to the sounds in concrete unique environments…

9

A long time ago, I did not know why I wanted to juxtapose these two diverse pieces on different occasions. I felt in some way that if we perform them and let them sound – despite of the disparity of those significant artistic gestures (embodied in "four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silent sounds" and in "musical, or sonic sculpture which lasts") –, we can feel a close affinity of both in the experiences resulting from the perception of unpredictably sounding sounds. Certain centripetency between *4´33´´* and *Sculpure Musicale* occurred to me and transposed the way the perception of my sonic universe is structured. All of the above became kind of

28 Ibid, last page of the cover.

the starting points of the creation of acousmatic and comprovised music in the context of saving/transforming unique soundscapes in Slovakia. Acting sounds of specific environments (with semantic social consequences) as a kind of unique complex music *sui generis* are involved in my artistic projects since the beginning of the 21st century. Here are some examples of my intermedia-musical pieces, I appropriate the principles and inspirations from the Duchamp and Cage impulses in explicit or implicit ways.

Transparent Sonic Sculptures in Site-Specific Contexts

Motto: *Music, in performance, is a type of sculpture.*
The air in the performance is sculpted into something.

Frank Zappa

Animation of Silence (in Music) of Puppets (2000)

The title of this concert study of music-intermedia usage of puppets and black puppet theatre in interpretation of my ensemble tEóRia OtraSu (thEoRy Of Shake), premiered at the festival Sound Off 2000 – Pupanimart in Old Puppet Theatre, Nitra, was linked primarily to the *Ticho – současník hudby* journal (The Silence – A contemporary of music) produced by artists from artistic scene Skleňená louka (Glass Meadow) in Brno. After four minutes and thirty-three seconds of rather loud parallel noise of videoclips from MTV and various pop songs from CDs, I introduced the piece *4´33´´* by John Cage. However, it was interpreted by wooden puppets "playing", performing the piece on musical instruments, sitting alongside them in a very silent way... This musical work of silence was followed by *Sculpture Musicale* of Marcel Duchamp

using the same wooden, already amplified puppets and Cage's recorded voice, where he reads the mesostics from this conceptual piece – they were at the same time projected on the silver screen.[29]

Melancholy (2017)

The intermedia site-specific piece was co-created with the fine artist Slavomír Zombek, the poet Peter Milčák, and me. It has changed the place of the ruined cowhouse near the Levoča to a site-specific gallery/concert hall of sounding events. Zombek painted every column of the space in four colours (yellow, red, blue, and black) with numbers 0 and 1 in vertical order as a binary code for different letters signed above them. The combination of them created Milčák's verses of his poem *Mare Tranquillitatis* (the name of the sea on the Moon). On June 24th, 2017 at 17:17 at the opening of the exhibition, I performed my comprovised collage of three musical-sonic layers, which consisted of : 1.) a musical record of duo XAFOO we have with the legendary figure of Czech alternative music Mikoláš Chadima (the fragments of our very first concert in festival Genius Loci in Levoča, 2009); 2.) my intuitive performance interventions in the given space of a cow-house, using and manipulating debris as an instrument to create a "Duchampian" sonic sculpture and with interaction of the audience during vernissage) sonic environment of the space and nature around, sounds of insects, bees, singing birds, wind in empty windows and some cars driving by in the distance as well. I was

29 A few years later, in a symbolic way, I re-opened the then devastated Concert Hall of Region house in Nitra, performing Cage's *4´33´´* in a different way. I was standing in the middle of the ruined space, holding in my hands a white lily and paperboard with the inscription *O-TVOR / OPEN 4´33´´* (2005). Just a week later, on another occasion, I organized a happening together with my students. We let sound both pieces by Duchamp and Cage using sonic qualities of a room in the Nitra Gallery, including its walls, doorposts, space heaters, various artistic objects, etc.

really impressed by Zombek's transformation of an old desolate cow-house into a post-industrial, melancholic gallery with Milčák's poetry in binary code on columns. So, I finished my performance with a symbolic artistic ritual: in one hand with a little toy imitating the "moo" of a cow, in another holding a big dried-up bough, I scratched the walls and roof walking to the gate, where I entered into open territory as a cowboy leading his imaginary herd.

Zvukoá socha síla (Sonic Sculpture of Bin) (2018)

The musical performance/event realized on September 2nd, 2018 in a deserted sugar refinery in Rimavská Sobota as a site-specific sonic-musical piece was inspired by Duchamp's already-mentioned idea of *Sculpture Musical*e, and it was performed and interpreted by great musicians Gabriela Vermelho (mezzosoprano, quinton), Jan Kavan (cello), and I (bowed and semi-prepared bassguitar, percussion, and concept). The event happened in the huge empty bin of the factory. I put two microphones outside of it to amplify all sounds of the environment, so the public inside could hear the speakers in front of them. Then we performed a kind of sonic happening with debris and stones on the ground and started to play our musical improvisations – while the sonic universe of the bin from outer and inner space could still be heard –, everything together was *"lasting and leaving from different places and forming a sounding sculpture"* (M. Duchamp). The experience from an almost one-hour long duration of site-specific music – with the opportunity to change the unbelievably big bin into a musical instrument of sonic sculpture – was something extraordinarily special; especially we knew that just a few weeks later the whole refinery would be demolished due to a stupid plan to build a big parking place for the shopping centre nearby this wonderful industrial relic. I know that all things must pass away, but our *Sonic Sculpture of Bin* will remain and last at least.

Švábení (Cockroach Lure) (2019)

When I received an invitation from the New Synagogue – Kunsthalle in Žilina - to create on December 14th, 2019, a live improvised piano performance for the artistic project *Švábení* (Cockroach Lure) of Czech artistic partner Petr Nikl, a very special theatre and fine artist, musician, and simply a brisk intermedia bricoleur par excellence, I didn't hesitate for a minute. (T)his site-specific game with light, sound, and shapes – where the synagogue turned into a public art studio – created in real-time space by ink on a large surface of rice paper, laid on the floor, with the random movements of robot toys, was an adventurous challenge for me.
In the opening part of the event, where the children in the audience were in an almost complete darkness, they reacted very vividly to the flashes of light in Nikl's large cone-shaped cap as well as his unexpected movements and actions. I used little mechanic cockroaches in the string corpus of the white piano and played various improvisations. I continued to work with the prepared piano in real time by using various materials (paper, rubber, small pieces of wood, etc.). Nikl created the whole visual and theatrical part, even in cooperation with the kids; my musical sculpture was shaped in an inner or explicit dialogue with his interventions. An extraordinary experience that will not be forgotten…[30]

La mer – hommage à Milan Adamčiak: *La Mer* (2021/2022)

Part I. *La mer la nuitn*
Part II. *La vie dans(e) la mer*

30 The video record of the whole event is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk-NfoNUdgI

An unforgettable Slovak intermedia artist *sui generis* and a modern-day polymath, Milan Adamčiak (1946–2017), my "zen master", was *inter alia* the author of original graphic scores and notations. In one of them , *La Mer – pour orchéstre* (1982), he expressed an implicit homage to Claude Debussy's eponymous symphonic work of art. His graphic score (see above) is also originally intended for the symphonic orchestra, but, unfortunately, it has not yet been realized in any way. My *La Mer* is loosely inspired by Adamčiak's piece; I tried to appropriate and transform his idea and advance it into a new, different context. The musicians of my two ensembles Hypianosis+ & guests Mikoláš Chadima (flute), Peter Katina (accordion), and tEóRia OtraSu either respected my new graphic sketch (Part I., recorded in Empire Theatre, Hlohovec, 2021), or they devoted themself to an unpredictable improvisational multi-dialogue (Part II., recorded live in A4, Space of contemporary culture, Bratislava).

An important, thematically organic component of both parts is formed (in the stereo panorama) by subtle field and hydrophone recordings of the Adriatic sea (above and below the sea level) near the island Korčula (in Glogovac – Part I., and in Lenga – Part II.) made by a remarkable personality of the contemporary sound art world Manja Ristić (provided from her project *11 Days*, summer 2020), She gave them to me selflessly – thanks to that I could then make my dream come true of incorporating musical and sonic "sea currents and waves".[31] Adamčiak, who loved the mere sound and recording of a forest stream, would, I think, be quite happy about it…

31 The piece *La mer* – hommage à Milan Adamčiak: *La Mer* (2021/2022) is part of album Július Fujak: *Transparent Sculptures* (Hevhetia 2022).

ÚÚÚ-FFF-ÓÓÓ – hommage à Július Koller: *P.O.P. U.F.O.* (2021)

In life, the great Slovak conceptual artist Julius Koller (1939–2007) was underappreciated, and today, unfortunately, only after his passing, celebrated. Koller sketched in 1970 the map & plan of the s. c. gaming environment which was named *P.O.P. U.F.O. – Psycho-physical Occupation of Place by Universal Fantastic Object*. More than fifty years later, the curator Daniel Grúň asked me to create something for the vernissage of Koller's exhibition in his birthplace, Piešťany. So, on September 16th 2021 at the local park, we , together with Grúň and performer TJ Vjuga, realized a sound walk around a large fictitious UFO as it was cartooned by Július Koller – at the marked points on the map. We recorded various unique sonic environments alongside Vjuga's performative sonic interventions, and observed unidentified/universal phonic objects (u.f.o.). Along with the quintet Hypianosis+, we also recorded collective improvised etudes coordinated by myself in a beautiful, small Empire theatre in Hlohovec the same year, on November 26th – by chance, on the very first day of the third lockdown in Slovakia, which, during the corona-crisis, has psycho-physically occupied our space in a radically different way.[32]

Conclusion

Instead of any analytical conclusions, let me finish the paper in John Cage´s favourite way – by a mesostich, which I wrote intuitively and by controlled chance:

32 The personnel of ensemble HYPIANOSIS+ in these recording sessions was: Július Fujak – coordination, piano, bassguitar, percussions, Martina Janegová – piano, percussion, Nikolaj Nikitin – saxophone, electronics, Miloš Železňák – electric guitar, electronics, Martin Kukučka – drums; TJ Vjuga, a. g. – voice, sonic interventions in the park, and Daniel Grúň, a. g. – voice, field recordings.

Just

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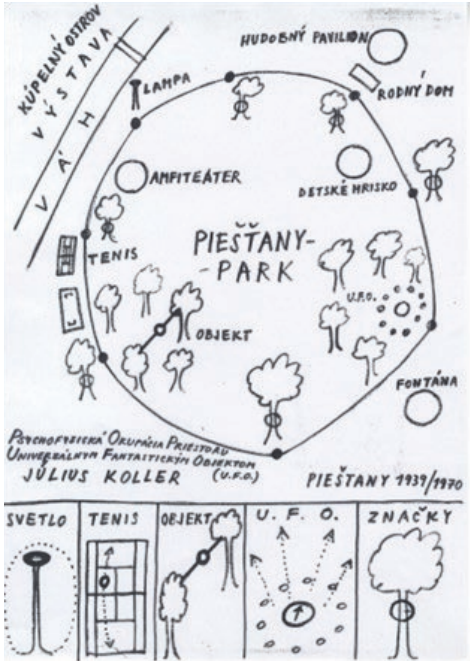
Július Fujak & tEóRia OtraSu: *Animation of Silence (in Music) of Puppets* (2000). (image from CD booklet)

S. Zombek – P. Milčák – J. Fujak: *Melancholy* in Levoča (2017). (photo by Lukáš Biroščák)

Petr Nikl: *Švábení* (Cockroach Lure) in New Synagoge, Žilina (2019). (photo by Július Fujak)



Júius Koller: *P.O.P. U.F.O. – Psycho-physical Occupation of Place by Universal Fantastic Object* (1970).

The Life-giving Sap of Music and Trees (From Resonance to Existence: Tree in music)

It is tough to describe all the associations and symbolic or archetypal meanings that have been linked in history to the relationship between humans and trees. The polyvalence of our existential relationship with trees stems not only from the many life-giving forms of our coexistence with them, but also from the very nature of trees as living beings, which cannot be captured in words so easily. It is no coincidence that contemporary biosemiotics is turning its attention, among other things, to the study of the unique, silent intelligence of plants, as well as to their remarkable ability to communicate in their *Um-welt* alongside the sophistication of their root systems. In the case of trees, we are de facto talking about their brain tract hidden underground (the growing root, by the way, also visually resembles our micro nerves and synapses) – from which it is clear that we are dealing with something admirable and unusual at the same time... We admire trees for their unique "quality" of being, we stand in awe of their ability to grow from within, and their symbiosis with the environment of a particular ecosystem, and above all, by the biophilic miracle of photosynthesis – *arbor vitae* is not just a metaphor, but a synonym for life, a principle from which we still have much to learn today.

The theme of the relationship between trees and music is boundless. In the history of music from prehistoric times to the present day, we find ample evidence not only of the use of its material, but most of all, of the profound inspiration of its phenomenality and culturally transposed semiosis in

the spheres of musica iconica, musica rhetorica, and musica symbolica.[33] A chapter in itself is the first case where the existence of a tree is extensively extended, prolonged, or rather continues in a musical instrument made from its wood – as a kind of "afterlife". The history of instrument making is as old as the history of music itself, and the alchemy of creating and manufacturing musical instruments often has a mystical touch for many masters, of whom we can at least mention Antonio Stradivari. Even after a tree has been felled, wood continues to work and live, embodied, for example, in the shape of a violin, which, the older it is and the more it is played to its full potential, the more it gains in the beauty of sound. It is no coincidence that it is customary to say that an instrument "has a soul" ("soul" is also the name given to the internal reinforcement of the body of string instruments, acoustic guitars, psalteries, etc., which is hidden from our view).

Personally, like every musician, I have a very intimate relationship with my instruments – whether it's my grandfather's century-old "walking" cimbalom, my father's piano, or my guitars and percussion instruments – but also a great respect for the instrument makers. I am fascinated by the story of a unique basset horn from the late 18th century, created by the exceptional instrument maker Theodor Lotz (from Pressburg, today's Bratislava) for the soloist Anton Stadler (who appropriated Lotz's "copyright") on commission from Mozart himself for his famous (bass) clarinet concerto in A major, K. 622, which demonstrates Mozart's deep interest in new technologies related to expanding the sound possibilities of wooden wind instruments (in this case, especially in the bass register).

33 Vladimir Godár refers, also from the historical perspective of the development of music, to Bonaventura's classification of psychic vectors – which was followed, incidentally, by Ch. S. Peirce, according to which icons refer to external reality, indexes to our internal reality, and symbols to the principle of transcendence (Godár, 2013).

Similarly, one can admire the unique musical carpentry of the extraordinary American composer, nomad, and visionary of the 20th century, Harry Partch, and his original, beautiful musical instruments with a specific system of tuning – let us mention at least his admirable, bizarre wooden marimba Quandrangularis reversum, Crychord, and psaltery Harmonic Canon III – or from the recent past, I could also mention the discovery of a revolutionary type of body and neck anchoring for the unique electric guitars of Jerry Auerswald from Konstanz. Auserwald, visionary builder of a new generation of musical instruments (shaping their bodies, incidentally, from naturally weathered African trees over a century old) created characteristically emblematic custom guitars for icons of world pop music such as Prince and Adam Clayton of U2, among others. I also respect every quality folk-instrument maker because they are the ones most connected to nature.

However, let us turn our attention to the cultural, history-making discourse of the symbolism of the tree as the tree of life (arbor vitae), even in the specifically abstract context of music. It is no coincidence that the logic of the brilliant musical thinking of important composers – Johann Sebastian Bach in polyphonic fugues, or Jan Václav Stamic, Joseph Haydn, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the dialogical development of sonata form themes, or Ludwig van Beethoven in the evocative evolution of branching motifs in his revolutionary sonata cycle– is likened to a tree, or rather to the branching of its limbs. Within the discursive narratives of various historical eras, views on the possibilities of allegorical appropriation of the tree in music have, understandably, changed. Let us recall the monumental richness of the semantic interconnection of characteristic motifs in Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is well known that it was precisely through their development or "branching out" in these four great operas that he so ingeniously and sophisticatedly elevated the role of the

orchestra to the level of the ancient chorus. In another context, we can point to the implicit presence of natural processes in the ephemeral sonority of Debussy's musical impressionism, as evidenced by his revolutionary piano *Preludes* or the breathtaking monumental symphonic piece *La Mer*.

Since the second half of the 20th century, however, there has been a radical shift in various types of music and audio arts, especially in the artistic direction of postmodernism, from the metaphysical paradigm of understanding the tree as a mythological emblem of the creation of the world or the essence of knowledge[34], to a paradigmatically different thematization of rather rhizomatic structures where it is impossible to distinguish between primary and derivative. Let us mention, for example, the radical ontological otherness of free or non-idiomatic improvisation, of free jazz since the 1960s, the non-evolutionary and non-contrasting character of Morton Feldman's music, John Cage's musical events (and his understanding of silence as a starting point in Zen-Buddhism and the philosophy of absence), or the sound art movement.

To understand contemporary art, it is essential to be familiar with the modernist artistic movements to which it relates, even in the case of the thematically symbolic allusions to trees. Let us recall how the visual and musical avant-garde, more than a century ago, embarked on an extremely courageous and rebellious re-evaluation of the foundations, limits, and conventions of the social and cultural-artistic canon of the time, especially of the discursive practices determining "what should and should not" be considered "true" and "right" art. This raised fundamental questions, still relevant today, about the very legitimacy, justification, and existential-social function of art in general. Avant-garde modernism refused to see its meaning only in the narrow "neo-romantic" expectations of the

34 Let us mention, for example, the Kabbalistic understanding of the Tree of Life and its spheres as a living form of our universe.

bourgeoisie, linked only to distraction, hypocritical emotional self-flagellation, or selfish aestheticism. We remember in this context the evolution of Mondrian's works *Gray Tree* (1911) and *Flowering Apple Tree* (1912), or before them, Picasso's shocking *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). Picasso here, according to Michel Foucault, by including the excluded (i.e., according to the eugenics of the time, inferior prostitutes), disturbingly allegorizes the abnormality of the framework of the modern episteme. Let us not forget also the visions of the Suprematists and Constructivists depicting the unrepresentable, when they made present and visible what is abstract in a radical shortcut.

It is obvious that testing and relativizing the ontological frameworks of musical and musical-intermedia artistic media since the middle of the last century in initiatives of (post) Duchampian conceptualism and Fluxus – with a conscious resignation from the aesthetics of beauty and sublimity – have brought a significantly different type of relationship to the polyvalent themes of trees, vegetation, and the biosphere. The advent of musique concrète, happenings, performances, staged sound events, and musical-intermedia installations opened up new possibilities for artistic appropriation of increasingly ecologically perceived themes. *Pars pro toto*, the works of John Cage, specifically *Child of Tree for percussion solo* (1975) and *Branches* (1976) for amplified plant materials and branches, or his experiments with amplified cacti, which were creatively followed up in the Central European context by the Slovak intermedia artist Milan Adamčiak. In this context, we should not overlook the projects of the postmodern American sound art composer, koto player, and body art performer Miya Masaoka. Since the 1990s, she has been exploring the interaction between human speech and the "language" of plants in works that are taxonomically difficult to grasp. In her interactive installations with a clearly readable ecological and socio-critical message, people and various plants enter a mutual communication,

amplified by contact sensors – their reactions are audible thanks to digital converters (this involves the transformation of the electrical impulses of their reactions, measurable at the level of thousandths of a volt), through which these plants can "speak".[35] Among them are *Oh, Plant!* (2018) and the series *When I Was A Plant* (2019). In the accompanying text to the second piece, which is subtitled *Spanish Speaking Plant, with climate data* (2019), Masaoka writes: *"The plant is "speaking", or expressing the voice of living things, which might otherwise be construed as silent, mute, and passive. The response of the plant and its root system in real time is a manifestation, a metaphor of our being"*[36]

I can illustrate a few other examples of different ways of relating to trees – mythological, spiritual, multidimensional and symbolic, perhaps even corporeal sensory – from which musical associations may implicitly resonate and subliminally influence us, specifically at the exhibition *GROW – Der Baum in der Kunst* (Tree in Art; Belvedere Gallery, Vienna, curator: Miroslav Haľák, 2022/2023). In the time span of the confrontation between different periods, we can point to the direct musical drama and modernist dissonance of Lilly Steiner's *Apocalypse* (1939/1951), which resonates with the dodecaphonic musical expressionism of the time, or the symbolism and philosophical dimension of the absence of a tree, which leaves a deep impression on us – whether in the specifically postmodern perspective of looking up at Dorota Sadowska's *Modro-zelený Kristus* (Blue-Green Christ; (2021), floating in the motionless silence of infinity, or in the scene of the deafening tragedy of expulsion from paradise in the sculpture *The Damned* by Liza Lou (2004). More explicit references to the musical context are, of course, various visualizations of musicality, such as dance

35 See more: Steve Elkins' movie *The Reach of the Resonance* (2010).

36 MASAOKA, Miya: *When I Was A Plant* . In: http://miyamasaoka.com/news/2019/when-i-was-a-plant-spanish--speaking-plant-with-climate-data/

in its traditional form, as in the painting *Verwandlung des Apulus in einen Ölbaum* by Andries Cornelius Lens (1765), or in the allegorical and fatally fragile movement of figures in *Nervous Trees* by Kristof Kinter (2013), balancing with a globe. The aforementioned "life after life" of a tree can be seen in the essential fusion of man with a tree trunk as a stringed musical instrument in Elisabeth von Samsonow's *Quantenspalt* (2013), or in the "monument" to organ sound in Oswald Oberhuber's minimalist wooden sculpture *Säule (Orgelpfeife)* (1931; Meran/Merano – 2020). There are cases where the sound from a visual work spreads almost tangibly – we can actually imagine the rhythmic pulsation of Daniel Fischer's evocative *Srdce skutočnosti* (Heart of Reality; 1995) even acoustically.

A propos: rhythm, pulsation, and silence... Yes, rhythmic structures, and above all, great silence, in its many forms, is present in perhaps every work that thematizes trees, their trunks, their crowns, rows of trees, avenues, gardens, parks, forests, mountains... Just as silence is not only a part and a basic prerequisite, or a "blank canvas", of music, so the silence of trees is a counterpart to our natural and civilizational sonic sphere.

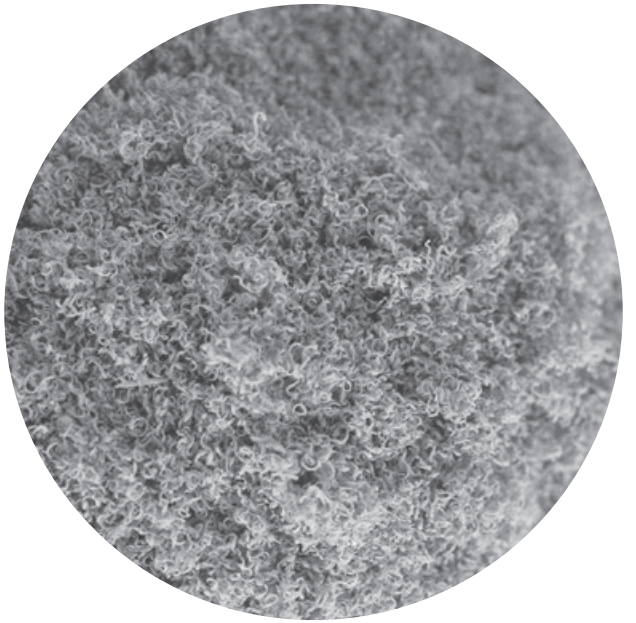
Currently, one of our globally critical issues is ecology, or rather, the mode of survival on our planet, which is also measured by our relationship to trees (which is negatively pronounced in the case of the exploitative logging of rainforests). At the same time, trees provide us with disproportionately more than we give them – beneficial biodiversity, oxygen, moisture, shade, and almost all life-giving energy. It is therefore not surprising that alarming ecological protest content is also significantly penetrating artistic, musical, and sound art discourses, at a time of unprecedented devastation of our natural and urban environments, when political representatives of states and powers, now digitally mutated and destructive transcapitalism, approach problem-solving only superficially and hypocritically.

Efforts to protect and, in particular, revitalize ecosystems and residential urban areas have resulted in various initiatives, including in the context of socially critical art. One example is the Central European Network for Sonic Ecologies, an association of music and sound art artists and theorists (founded in Budapest in 2018), which focuses, among other things, on the philosophy of an ecological approach to understanding our acoustic semiosphere and sound *per se*, with a primary focus on reflecting on serious environmental and social changes in society. It is sonic ecology—a term introduced half a century ago by the Canadian composer and philosopher Raymond Murray Schafer—that is needed more than ever in these times of unprecedented noise pollution, which is devastating our environments. We can avoid visual pollution by closing our eyes, but when we are exposed to (post)industrial noise, we are constantly immersed in it, and simply temporarily covering our ears (from it and its causes) does not help us much...

In this context, it is important to point out the need for genuine sensitivity, the ability to develop creative sensibility, and the ability to find new ways and forms of perceiving important musical or sonic semantic dimensions of fauna and flora, including trees and all living things on our planet. After all, we may be dealing here with a certain unique form of the so-called *kairos* (ancient Greek καιρός), with the true opportune moment of being, which finds its fulfillment, or at least with its fleeting "echo" wherever trees grow and live. The trace of *kairos* is also present in their thematization in visual, musical, and intermedia art, but also in everyday contact in seemingly mundane, banal situations when we just pass by trees or rest next to them, touch them, or otherwise share our coexistence with them. Let us not forget that trees, as living and life-giving beings, were here before us and probably will be here after us – just as the silence is before music and after it has faded away...

Miya Masaoka in musical action with plants (2019). (photo: aithor's archive)

Images from the exhibition *GROW – The Three in Art* (Belvedere, Vienna, 2022/2023, curator: Miroslav Haľák): Liza Lou: *The Damned* (2004), Elisabeth von Samsonow: *Quantenspalt* (2013), and one of the musical QR codes with music of Marián Varga & Július Fujak. (photos by author)



The Variability of Comprovisational Methods in Contemporary Music

Introduction

It has been more than a decade since my declaration of *Compro. sk11* (2011)[37] was signed by a group of contemporary Slovak composers, musicians, musicologists, and performers, alongside the concept of comprovisation becoming established in the public course of our musical culture. It encompasses various complementary fusions of pre-composed and improvised methods of creating musical works, which have been undergoing ontological transformations since the late 1960s (P. Faltin) and often take various forms of musical events, happenings, co(i)mprovised music, and the entire spectrum of audio arts (radio art, sound art, sonic art, etc.). Today, we encounter much more frequently that composers themselves, even outside the circle

37 Compro.sk 11 – an aesthetic manifesto by eleven Slovak artists, composers, musicians, performers, actors, and theorists – Martin Burlas, Július Fujak, Ján Boleslav Kladivo, Miro Tóth, Juraj Vaja, Boris Vaitovič, Peter Katina, Jozsef R. Juhász, Attila Tverďák, Valér Mika, and Robert Roth – who, without claiming to form a unified group, have committed themselves through their work, or part of it, to their own conception of comprovisation. This statement, set in a broader musical, artistic, and existential context, was published in several periodicals in 2011. Subsequently, an eponymous e-book was released in multimedia CD-Extra format (TJ Vjuga (ed.), Vlna 2012) with musical and audio-visual samples of the work of the signatories and expert texts by Július Fujak, *Comprovisation – on the margins of the discussion about the validity of the notion*, and Valér Miko, *Viac transparentnosti do umeleckej komunikácie* (More Transparency in Artistic Communication), and *Ako sa hľadá nová aktívna sila človeka* (How to Find a New Active Force of Man).

of the aforementioned declaration – in our Central Europe, for example, Daniel Matej, Miloš Železňák, and David Kollar, and in the Czech Republic, Mikoláš Chadima and Peter Graham – use this term, albeit always with their own specific definition, to describe some of their works. In addition to European countries and the US, a relatively lively professional discussion about the phenomenon of "comprovisação" in contemporary music has also emerged in recent years in South America, especially in Brazil, where a whole series of specialized studies and dissertations on the topic have been written in universities by authors such as Arthur Faraco, Alil Luzelei, Damián Keller, Otávio Kavamata, and others.[38]

I recently devoted space to the theme and reflection of the "case" of comprovisation in relation to my own music as well as the music of several colleagues, primarily from our music scene, in the text *Bilancia komprovizácie Made in SK* (Balance of Compromivsation Made in SK) (Fujak, 2021, 133–146). I pointed to its "peripeteia" of acceptance, and above all to its narrower understanding, as well as its existentially broader conception, which represent viable alternatives to approaches to creating progressive music. Not forgetting that in our not very favourable musical and cultural environment during the late phase of mutated (trans)capitalism, it was a story of establishing comprovisation as "a virtue out of necessity." I refer here to the unavailability of sustained, concentrated collaboration with larger musical ensembles and orchestras, which led us to the search for other means of creating works that organically appropriate the phenomenon of creating music in the context of free, sometimes inaccurately called non-idiomatic, collective improvisation.

38 The authors from South America mentioned above respond to and cite my text *Comprovisación: Notas para la discusión sobre la validez del concepto.* In. Oro Molido. 2012, Vol. 4., n. 33, pp. 24-31.

The considerable variability and heterogeneous, convergent, and divergent diversity of comprovised approaches is evidenced by the diverse pieces of specific poetics, albums, and concerts of today's music artists, whether composers or co-creating performers, who explicitly profess improvisation or implicitly articulate it. In the following lines, I will undertake an exploratory, to a certain extent, "representative model" search of environments in which the principles of symbiosis between composed and improvised methods are applied in the organic whole of a musical event, in disparate contexts and coordinates.

A survey of various comprovisations

Alongside several remarkable chamber music ensembles active in Slovakia over the last decade, devoted to music of the 20th and 21st centuries – among them the Quasars Ensemble, Cluster Ensemble, and Ensemble Ricercata – the EnsembleSpectrum, led by conductor and composer Matej Sloboda, is becoming increasingly active in our country, focusing mainly on contemporary works by composers of the younger generation. One of EnsembleSpectrum's noteworthy newer projects is the continuation of the *New Dawn* series, this time with another part, *Vol. 2*, entitled *La femme armée* (The Woman in Armor), which also features compositions characterized by or influenced by comprovisation. The main conceptual theme of the project is intended to evoke an allusion to the theme of the ancient secular song from the 15th century *L'homme armé* (The Man in Armor), but with the intention of changing or even reversing gender roles in the present, when women are often in the position of "defenders" (and certainly not only) their own rights and freedoms. (Fortunately, postmodern feminism no longer perceives this as militant opposition to men, but rather as an immanent, authentic search for women's own, internally sourced integrity "an sich" and the irreducible mystery of their unique phenomenality).

Various composers creatively approached this task, and the result of their efforts was a series of very impressive works, in some cases regardless of their admittedly thematic and non-musical context or program. The project itself resulted in both a studio and concert form[39], and I refer primarily to those works that can be described as comprovisational. These were based on personal correspondence with the ensemble's leader, M. Sloboda. As he notes regarding the women composers' approach:

They embark on uncovering issues of dissociative identity disorder, protecting personal space, abandoning the "foggy, uncertain" areas of their consciousness, personality, and life, coping with the unexplained death of a young soul in the darkness of night, or exploring repressed sexuality, passion, and love in the poetry of female troubadours of the late Middle Ages.[40]

Anna Paluchová (*1990) created her calmly nervous, captivatingly epic work *HUGH I.* (2021) in the form of an assignment (L'homme armé) and a verbal description of her musical image, based on which the members of the ensemble concentrated on improvising their lines into a pre-fixed electronic surface, forming the "Ariadne's thread" of the entire composition. Glissando smears of long-sounding tones play a significant role in the piece, enriched by bouncing "sparks" of crystal-clear piano chords, which alternate with soft female vocals in the background.

39 The premiere concert performance of *New Dawn Vol. 2 – La femme armée* took place on June 7th, 2021, at the RTVS Studio in Košice, and on June 8th, 2021, at Nová Cvernovka in Bratislava. The concert repertoire was thematically enriched by Robert Morton's early Renaissance miniature *Il sera pour vous combatu/L'homme armé.*
For the sake of completeness, it should be added that this EnsembleSpectrum project also includes remarkable compositions by Martina Kachlová, *Pray for Viola* (2021), and Estera Wityńska, *Zostawiam v tyle mgły* (*I am leaving the haze behind me*; 2020), which are fixed in the form of a traditional score without elements of comprovisation, too.

40 See more: https://ensemblespectrum.sk/projekty.

Contemporary Czech composer and experimental intermedia-musical artist **Lucie Vítková** (1985), in her figuratively and perhaps literally conceived *Room* (2020/2021), reaches for a much more (poly)rhythmically structured solution to the musical plan, reminiscent of minimalist patterns with a freely dominant role for the piano part. While interfering with the flow of independent processes, the piece sounds like some "organum" sound art recording of rain outside the window of an imaginary room (created, incidentally, by so-called white, pink, and brown noise), which sometimes fades away and sometimes grows stronger. The composition is an special interactive combination of a traditional score (with a detailed notation of the pitch and length of the tones) and a more freely conceived, painted pictorial score (with "trigger" words placed throughout, triggering mental musical action). It also includes a kind of "audio score" in headphones (containing the aforementioned white noise). In this counterpoint of perceptions and impulses, the spoken word of one person, "mixed" simultaneously from several sentences, also plays a significant role.

The studio project *Women in Armor* also includes one of the highlights of the entire project, an almost twenty-minute piece *and chantar... (lacuna)* (2021) by Latvian composer **Santa Bušs** (1981). It is based on the appropriation of one of the few surviving ancient songs by the troubadour Comtessa de Dia, *A chantar m'er de so qu'eu no volria*, which, according to Matej Sloboda, deals with "infidelity, repressed sexuality, and personal betrayal" (quote from personal correspondence). The concise final form emerges from collective improvisation, and it is guided by very detailed instructions. The first five minutes of Bušs' composition are immersed in almost complete silence, from which only the micro-sounds of individual, sometimes hard-to-distinguish instruments emerge. Gradually, however, the flow of several levels of sophisticated, totally autonomous sonoristics dynamically increas, resulting in an extremely captivating multi-dialogue. Despite its massive temporal

scope, this specifically comprovised composition keeps the listeners in constant attention and excites implicit tension, as it brings several surprising musical micro-events in an organically depicted large dynamic arc that transports them into a different space-time reality.

Another form of contemporary comprovised music is represented by the project *Bezelstně* (Innocently; label Polí5, 2020) by Czech composers and musician duo Jan Faix & Pavel Hrubý. Their piece could be described as multi-genre acoustic-electronic post-jazz, characterized by procedural multidimensionality, but also by musical esprit and humour. **Jan Faix** (1980; keyboards, synthesizers, live electronics, beats, live processing, and sampling), a member of Orchestra Berg, the group Skrytý půvab byrokracie (The Hidden Charm of Bureaucracy), Count Portmon, and Stratocluster, alongside **Pavel Hrubý** (1970; alto saxophone, bass clarinet, and vocals), member of Limbo, Tellemarkk, Phoenix Quartet, and Pigeon Saxophone Quartet, recorded this remarkable album, full of unexpected twists, pulsations, and excitement, straddling the line between bizarre electronic music and the captivating acoustics of solo wind instruments. This is a no blasé meditative dialogue, but a musically improvisational conversation full of confrontational tensions, sometimes even sonoristically harsh clashes, as well as complementary harmonious lines. These two renowned nestors of the Czech "other" alternative music scene met for the first time on this project, and it must be said that they fit together very well, both in the rhapsodically calmer, ethereally elusive passages and in the downright noisy, nervous passages.
Hrubý's timbre, both on the alto saxophone and the bass clarinet, is convincing in its effort to find new, non-self-serving articulation techniques, sometimes even beyond the boundaries of free jazz. Faix is an inventive creator of surprising electronic textures, (poly) rhythmic surfaces, and regular pulsations, reminiscent in places of the playful transgenre approach of remarkable player Cor Fuhler. What is important, however, is that both always create compositional

surfaces in mutual comprovisational balance, with mutual respect for differences, even in places where the texture is almost too dense. The entire album is one of the most successful titles in the field of freely improvised music in Central Europe in recent years. Although the recording was made in the summer of 2019 before the coronamatrix crisis, this "neo-cyber-punk-free-jazz" sounds somewhat anticipatory, like the ideal soundtrack to a possible sequel to the movie *Blade Runner* in a dystopia that became reality in the "corona" years of 2020 – 2022.
If we want to delve into other currents of the contemporary music scene that reflect an interest in the archetypal, deeper foundations of our musicality and, at the same time, reveal some principles of comprovisation, then we could turn to the album *Zvony* (Bells; label Hevhetia 2021). This unique and earthy album was created by the Slovak composer, percussionist, and player of flutes and fujara **Michaela Antalová** – known, among other things, from the unmistakably distinctive Norwegian-Slovak-Czech group MIKOO, the Prague Improvisation Orchestra, and the group Dunajská vlna (Duna Wave)– alongside he multi-genre agile Norwegian double bassist/guitarist **Adrian Myhr** (1984). While the first of this pair focuses mainly on the unconventional playing of Slovak "national bass flute" - fujara, as well as the Norwegian seljefløyte and bells, her bandmate explores the possibilities of the double bass, often vibrated in all sorts of ways, and the "(pre) ancient" wooden harmonium (pump organ) – which, as a result of their mutual improvised dialogues, brings interesting musical expressions. The resonances of bowing the bass strings, plus high registers and harmonics work very well here and interferes with the exuberant and introverted fujara playing and the various whistles.
However, the value of this connection lies not only in the sensually captivating harmonies but also in the articulated, non-verbal content that emerges from an archetypal depth. Although on the one hand this duo openly draws on the heritage of traditional folk music (in the songs *Ej, nožičky ma bolia* [Oh, My Little Feet Hurt],

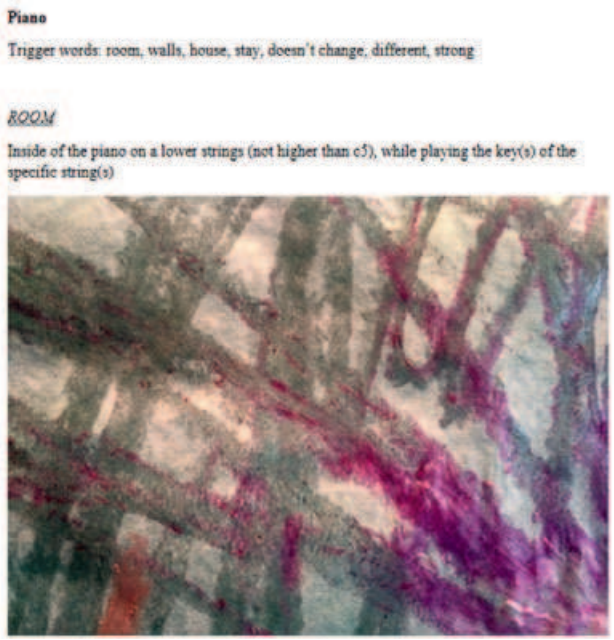
Kivlemøyane, and *Smutná breza* [Sad Birch Tree], which echoes the melody of the Šumiac men's choir), on the other hand, without abandoning it, it creates, through its improvisation, a kind of modern, unconventional "trans-folk" counterpart which flows from their instruments like the living sap of "primordial music".
Although every analogy is somewhat misleading, in this context I am reminded of the research into the primordial music of Iceland by American composer and conductor Stephen Lucky Mosko (1947 – 2005). He thoroughly clarified and explored the fact that a completely different, endemic type of musical thinking on this island, so different from our modal systems, can help us understand Antal and Myhr's unveiling of long-forgotten layers or sediments of musical and cultural experience, tucked away somewhere in the dark depths of our collective unconscious. With their peculiar musicianship, this duo seems to revive and bring these layers to life within us.
This is particularly evident in comprovisational compositions such as *Noc* (Night), *Kivlemøyane* (which brings to life the Norwegian legend of the persuasive power of shepherdesses playing their whistles, luring believers out of church during mass, for which the angry priest curses them, until they turn to stone on the spot), or in the title track *Zvony* (Bells). We can also mention miniatures such as *Solbakken*, *Morning Stars Faded*, and *En Liten Hallig*, as well as in the final coda *V záhrade, po poli, po horách* (In the Garden, Across the Field, Across the Mountains), with a field recording of a meadow near the village of Zlatno. This peculiar musical journey into the "ancient realms" of our (above?)consciousness could be the very moment of initiation that result in a fundamental change in the perception of the hidden folds of our auditory, often conflictual cultural semiosphere, alongside ourselves, who, being existentially immersed in it, have to deal with it daily.
The author of the extraordinary musical project *Dysphoria* (Hevhetia 2021) is **Soheil Peyghambari** (1985), an Iranian musician and composer, bass clarinetist, soprano saxophonist, and graduate of the

Tehran Conservatory, is also very active on the French music scene. He is dedicated to postmodern jazz, nu-fusion, ethnic transgenre music, and free, non-idiomatic improvisation, often with the finest musicians from around the world, such as Markus Stockhausen, Yuri Honing, Adam Pierończyk, Kevin Kastning, Franck Dadure, Tony Levin, Arve Henriksen.
The individual compositions and preludes on this largely comprovisational album are arranged into five parts according to an interesting dramaturgy. Peyghambari presents a very interesting and original approach to the bass clarinet alongside other instruments, in which one can sense his roots in the tradition of Oriental playing on various pipes, which defies our modal thinking, as he works very inventively with micro-intervals, glissandos, and the articulation possibilities of the instruments' sound bodies. However, he is not "only" connected to the roots of ancient Iranian music; he nourishes his more unconventional and experimental branches with them, in their mutual symbiosis. Add to this his work with so-called live "noise" electronics, interesting rhythms created by multiplied samples in loops (sometimes reminiscent of Kraftwerk or J. M. Jarre as well as humorous synth patterns and minimalist surfaces) – the result is always a different mood and a natural-sounding, multi-style musical palette.
I can point to *Les souvenirs de demain*, featuring Leila Soldevila on double bass, or the captivating, almost mystical-sounding solo etude *The Inversion*. However, if we want to experience the comprovisational hybridization of "King Crimson-esque" and "Reichian" allusions, which burst into surprising garlands of dialogue with the bass clarinet, we need to turn to the title track *Dysphoria*, featuring guest drummer Rozbeh Fadavim. By the way, in the third track, *L'obre de Dieu*, which is initially calm and then bizarrely electronic, Peyghambari uses historical, archival recording of the voice of Mozaffar Ad-din Shah Quajar, the fifth king of his dynasty – the very first audio recording in Iran (from 1905), in which this monarch refers to himself as "the shadow of God". Whether he really was

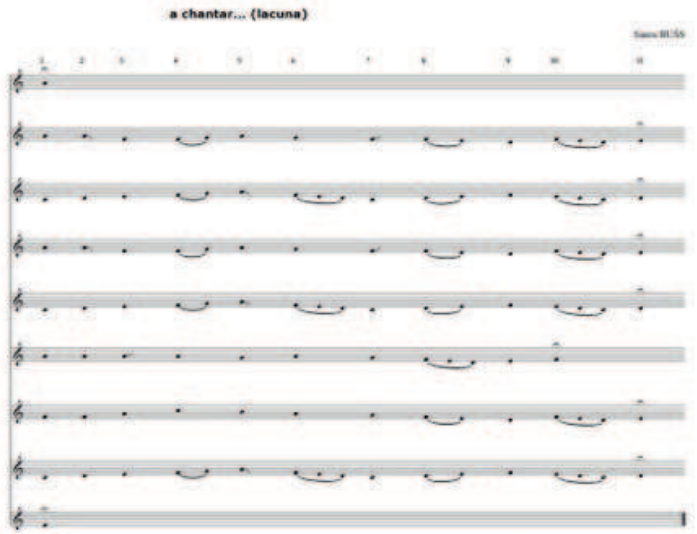
one or not, we cannot tell from Peyghambari's remarkable music, but his *Dysphoria* (from the ancient Greek *δύσφορος*) certainly evokes not only states of deep depression, discomfort, and anxiety, but also an euphoric effect of catharsis.

Conclusion

In concluding this text, which focuses on exploring various and variable approaches to improvisational composition in contemporary music in its diverse forms, it should be added that this provides only a fragmentary picture, or rather a glimpse of only a fraction, a limited representative sample, of the remarkably diverse world of comprovisation in unconventional music today. From my own experience as a multi-genre musician and unconventional composer, I can confirm that comprovisational methods are productively applicable in various contexts, including multi-style contexts. Ranging from the creation of live music to silent films (with the group tEóRia OtraSu: *Nosferatu*, 2002, or *Jánošík*, 2004, in this case also with legendary Czech multi-instrumentalist Vladimír Merta and singer Jana Lewitová), to composing experimental acousmatic compositions (*Petrophony*, 2010; *Nitrian Atlantises*, 2013, commissioned by the Czech Radio – Vltava, in the frame of the project Radiocustica). I can mention also the rhizomatic project *kaleidoSONICope!* (Hevehtia 2020), or musical assemblages with the appropriation of field recordings of sound environments in so-called sound sculptures on the album *Transparent Sculptures* (Hevhetia 2022/2023). The variability of the use of comprovisational methods in the decidedly adventurous processes of creating various types of contemporary progressive music, which is full of surprising, unpredictable impulses – as evidenced by the musical works analyzed and interpreted above – seems to be inexhaustible…



Lucie Vítková: *Room* (2020/2021) – example of painted score.

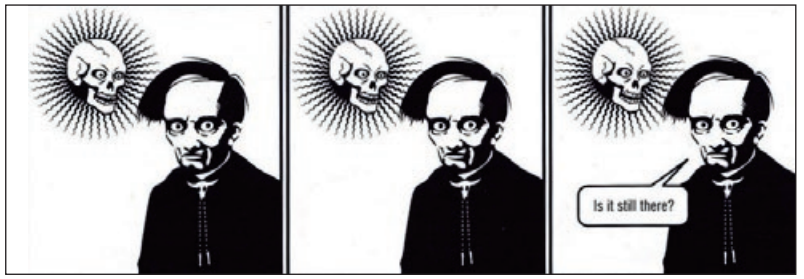


Santa Bušs: *a chantar... (lacuna)* (2021) – the first page of a score.

Lucie Vítková: *Room* (2020/2021) – example of traditional score.

Transgression of Mortality in the Discourse of Unconventional Music

Motto:



Max Cannon : *Is it still there?* (from the series *Red Meat*)

On the topics of mortality, definitive decline, suffering leading to definitive end of our life, i.e. the weight of dying and death itself, or rather its various modalities, its incomprehensibly otherworldly phenomenality and its unfathomable mystery, I find it impossible to write impersonally, or "only" from an objectifying theoretical distance, especially as I grow older, and the number of people close to me gradually and irretrievably pass away. In the last two decades alone, quite a few truly precious personalities, relatives, and friends have left, whose often unexpected departures still raise unanswered questions in me—I may never find satisfactory answers, but that does not mean it makes no sense to ask them. One of them is the question posed by Max Cannon in the comic strip at the beginning of this text: "Is it still there?" In other words, is death constantly present in the "sun of life"? Does the bright glow of life constantly drag along a subliminal, creeping dark shadow of mortality? Or is the biophilic separated from the necrophilic, and are they constantly competing with each other? What if the

correlation between life-giving and death-dealing generates a third "Pythagorean" quality unknown to us, or even generates their endless cycle and "yin-yang" dance?

Sonu Shamdasani, psychologist and editor of Carl Gustav Jung's *Red Book* comments that *"Jung realizes that if we do not come to terms with the dead in some way, we simply cannot live. That our lives depend on finding answers to their unanswered questions"* (Hillman – Shamdasani, 2014, p. 8). According to him, the dead are not just a metaphor or a code for the unconscious. They are present in the images that appear to us, for example, in dreams. And certainly not by chance, also in imagination and figurative thinking in art. The dead thus raise heavy existential questions that persist as challenges for us through their lives, thoughts, and work. We can "put them off until later", but they will find us anyway.

Each of the human beings who were close to me and whom I knew personally were exceptional, unique, and irreplaceable. The very way of their (together-)being in this world, their relationships, their work, their creativity, but also seemingly trivial memories of them in everyday life, left certain traces in the form of questions, messages, challenges, and special signs. Because even if the way their departures sometimes makes no sense, those questions do have real meaning—and much greater than we are willing to admit. What helps us survive, or rather endure and bear the experience of the definitive, often traumatic loss of a kindred spirit? What can help a person cope in the painful (self-)questioning of the ontological status of the inalienable experience of my/our being? I am convinced that one way of coping is to create and listen to music. In the very existentiality of musical-artistic semiosis, in its creation as well as in its perception, in the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, there is a deep inner need to come to terms with this unfathomably conflicted world and oneself in it, including one's own mortality.

There is a very important musically articulated search for homeostasis to understand our internally contradictory existence. At the same time, however, this search also contains (and this is essential in the given context) a questioning of the transcendence of our finite existence in certain defined space-time coordinates, which are always experienced differently and uniquely.

In this context, I consider the concept of *transgression* to be key, especially in distinguishing between what is and what is not a real de-tabooing of topics such as death, mortality, mortal suffering, agony, dying, etc. Their de-tabooing does not necessarily relate to obsessive forms of exhibiting deadly violence or the aestheticization of mortality. Aesthetic amplification, or extreme preference (or voyeuristic fascination) for the aesthetic dimension of thematization, or hysterical tabloid depictions of various manifestations of (post)mortality in art and mass media, comes at the expense of the ethical or philosophical-spiritual dimension. Moreover, it does not touch on the very secret, the mystery of the taboo of death in its essence. There is no room here for the humility, reverence, silence, and dignity that the majesty of death itself demands.

The key to de-tabooing death can be found in the aforementioned *transgression*—in its diverse qualities, types, and degrees—in its grasping and instrumentalization as an explicitly radical, often extreme violation of certain conventions, norms, boundaries, and a radical, controversial, even heretical excess. This can often be related to unverbalizable states of awe, anxiety, fear, ecstasy of excess, to philosophical-imaginative ideas of crossing the real (post) mortal boundary separating life and death, as well as to subversively focused absurdity, bizarreness, or carnivalization of death. The following examples, or interpretations of certain types of taboo-breaking practices of transgressing mortality, which can help us in the torment of coming to terms with it/them, relate to various contemporary and mostly unconventional musical discourses, i.e., works of postmodern music of heterogeneous poetics.

Transgression through postmortality

People are haunted not only by the fear of death or the anxiety of constant suffering and the pain of dying, but also by the uncertainty and even dread that no one has any idea about "what (and if) there will be (something) afterwards". It is not just a fear of the continuation of similar or even worse conditions "after" – the dread of the postmortem stems from the impenetrable and absolutely unknown, to the nothing-known reducible otherness associated with death. This problem is raised, among others, in Edgar Allan Poe's notorious short story *The Pit and the Pendulum*, which was taken up in the 21st century by the distinctive German contemporary composer **Helmut Oehring**. In 2010, he created the majestic melodrama *POEndulum*, which is part of his 4-part cycle *GOYA*. It is written for [a] symphony orchestra and expressive, declamatory male voice, performed by the "diabolical" **David Moss** (1949), a well-known American vocal performer, percussionist, intermedia bricoleur, and unconventional storyteller (pars pro toto from his remarkable works, let us mention at least the excellent performance *Wittgenstein Sings*).

They say that what you suppress will find you sooner or later. I had no intention of reading Poe's brilliant horror story since my terrifying encounter with it in childhood, so when Oehring's work was performed at the Ostrava Days 2015 festival, I got a whole handful of it, in a context that exceeded my expectations. The author, in collaboration with librettist Stefanie Woerdemann, combined excerpts from this legendary literary text with the context of the murder of Federico García Lorca at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 – inserting excerpts from his works *Las seis cuerdas* and *La sombra de mi alma* as two interludes in the middle and at the end. Although the composer occasionally resorted, perhaps ironically, to horror music clichés, for the most part, he created a very distinctive, impressive symphonic piece, in which Moss' breathtaking voice crept and swept, moving not

only within a range of four and a half octaves(!), but also in all kinds of experimental positions, brilliantly interpreting both literary gems. He literally materialized the postmortem suffering of the main character of *The Pit and the Pendulum* in the minds of the audience, especially when it was bridged with the madness of fascism. Simply put, to experience *POEndulum* and not "go mad" from fear and excitement is to experience one of the most cathartic and impressive positions of Helmut Oehring's art, which has acquired a timeless dimension through the quality of its transgressive penetration into postmortality.

A different perspective and artistic interpretation of "life after death" is offered by contemporary Czech composer **Ivan Acher** (1973), who is currently one of the most sought-after composers of stage and ballet music. This is evidenced by the entire list of theater and dance-intermedia productions for which he has written music for the National Theater in Prague, as well as Lenka Vágnerová & Company. It was with the latter, now a renowned ensemble of contemporary intermedia and unconventional dance, that Acher collaborated on two very successful projects: *Riders* (2012) and *La Loba* (2013). I was fortunate enough to experience the unique dance-theater work *La Loba*, which also won an award at the prestigious Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, in 2014 at the Elledance Theater in Bratislava as part of the Focus Slovakia – Czech Republic festival. In this work, choreographer Lenka Vébrová freely explores the ancient story of a strange wandering woman who, collecting and carrying with her the bones of various long-dead animals and people, was able to create other bizarre and terrifying, newly revived creatures. It is as if she personifies and carries with her the heavy fate of both extinction and birth.

The excellent dancer Andrea Opatovská, in the role of an elusive, nervous, groping human being, is confronted almost throughout with this mystical woman, who brings (unwanted) life back to

the lifeless – played and sung by extraordinary Jana Vébrová in an expressive movement études. Both actresses gave admirable performances in their roles, but in addition to her overall performance, Vébrová also mastered a very demanding singing part and percussive playing on a large ox skull with big wooden sticks, all in the context of a relatively complicated half-playback. Evidence of Achers talent for constructing skillful, dramatic, sophisticatedly temperamental, and frighteningly surprising musical lines can be found in various parts of the work, where he combines original polyrhythms and "acherotonal" harmonies, in this case the accordion and Vébrová's unrestrained voice in an unknown invented language, Kryštof Lecian' s cello, Miloš Dvořáček's percussion, and the author' s electronics (Tribo). Several inventive musical plans and sound layers can also be found in other sections (e.g., in the slippery choral *Bones*, or in the closing coda *Burrow*), which keeps the listener in a state of constant alert.

Transgression through absurdity

The absurdity of human finiteness, linked to the limits of our mortality, is often articulated in postmodern art through the absurdity of expression. In Slovakia, **Martin Burlas** (1955) has been exploring the theme of absurdity in his projects, chamber and musical-dramatic works, and songs for almost four decades. The artistically articulated positions of various neuroses, gallows (self-)irony, sarcasm, deserved mockery of pathetic existential themes, chilling to morbid black humour, as if beyond the limits of the absurd, and yet indefinable subtlety and fragility of expression can sometimes be found explicitly, sometimes latently within his works. For example, in the minimalist compositions from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as in the songs of the very first alternative rock bands

in Slovakia such as Mať kovia (Mathews), Sleepy Motion, and in the musical adaptation of Ján Ondruš's poetry by the group Vitebsk Broken. We can mention also – at least selectively – on the profile albums *martin burlas* (1995), *Koniec sezóny* (The End of Season; 2004), *Sotto vocce* (2009), *Hexenprozesse* (1990, rev. 2015), or in *Spam Symphony* with lyrics by Nora Ružičková (2014/2015).

This text primarily deals with the transgression of mortality, of what comes after it. So far , however, there has been no mention of the state "in between", "between life and death", i.e., the coma. Martin Burlas approached the topic of comatose states in the genre of postmodernism, i.e., subversive opera. All of Martin Burlas' operas to date have provoked and, above all, unsettled not only experts but also a significant part of the audience with their poetics. This was no different in the case of his third opera, *Kóma* (Coma, 2007), which purposefully disrupted conventions and traditional expectations in many ways. It is a one-act, yet non-narrative performance in which dialogue, coloratura, and stage design are almost completely absent. Much of this stems from the thematization of the comatose state itself and its connotations, which determine the unconventional conception of the individual components of the entire production. The scene of the "anti-opera" action is formed by a large rectangular white "pool" – with the areas around it also serving as the interior of a hospital – at the bottom of the pool sits an entire chamber orchestra with conductor Marián Lejava. In the background, on industrial-looking theater walkways and staircases with railings, there are four plasma screens with letters K, Ó, M, A appearing one at a time (set design by Tom Ciller). To illustrate the typically detached relationship between doctors and their comatose patient, a group of doctors in white coats stand with their backs to the audience, watching football on one of the screens throughout the entire performance without any intervention in the opera at all...

The opera begins with an inconspicuous overture during which three characters in funeral-dark suits and Satie-style bowler hats awaken very imperceptibly – perhaps they are the alter egos of the main character in a coma, or perhaps they are funeral service workers at the same time(?). Alongside the pantomime of the three black gentlemen, Petra Fornayová plays an important role in the unconventional dance of a sterile, lascivious nurse and caregiver. The music sounds unhurried in the overlapping sophisticated contours of a strange minimalist polyphony, with almost nothing happening on stage in terms of nervous movements. The apparent simplicity and nakedness of the individual musical parts of this thematically and "comatose" opera conceals and articulates a certain existential uncertainty and comically bitter (self-)irony. In addition to the intertwining, unplanned acoustic textures, the intermezzos also feature "crazy" digital-electronic lines connecting the individual stage numbers. The lyrics of the inventive vocal parts of the individual characters – the doctor, the patient's parents, and his girlfriend during his visit – consist solely of aphorisms by Jiří Olič, adapted for the libretto by Burlas and dramaturge Vladimír Zvara.

The expressive range of meanings that are difficult to verbalize is played out here, completing the absurdity of the hospital environment, its unmistakably cold, yet in its consequences harrowing phenomenality, evoking the "smell" of the sword of Damocles of death, which hangs here imaginatively. All the main creators of the *Kóma*, under the direction of Rastislav Ballek, understood the consequences of their role in this alternative to opera, which directly touches on the senselessly chilling circumstances of our "homeless state of mind" (I. Žucha) bordering between life and the definitive end, which we only provisionally call a coma.

Transgression through bizarreness

In addition to absurdity, the sister of black and deadly humour, artists dealing with the theme of death also resort to shocking bizarreness in its various forms. From countless contemporary artists, who are hard to classify taxonomically, I have chosen Tomáš Vtípil and the trio The Blessed Beat as examples of transgression through bizarreness.

Tomáš Vtípil (1981), a Czech unconventional violinist, composer of music, with a *sui generis* poetics, a unique performer, controversial poet, and simply a healthily cheeky enfant terrible of the current music scene. It is no coincidence that the famous Jon Rose once played with him in an abandoned railway station in Violín near the Rosenberg Museum, and that his performance was one of the best that the Nitra cycle and the PostmutArt festival have offered in recent years. As an example of his work, let us mention his project *Syntax Error* (2013). The album consists of eight compositions/comprovisations, postmodern melodramas, sonic sculptures, and non-songs shaped from the raw material of surprising polyrhythms, spatial digital electronic surfaces intertwining in multiple dimensions, into which Vtípil weaves emotionally charged texts—sometimes detached, sometimes insistently declaimed.

The entire project seems to embody the new post-structuralist sensibility of the 21st century, with its definitive dissemination of meanings, both musical and verbal. The often-ironic confusion of rhythmic pulsation and intelligent electronic music collides here with the unexpected punchlines of strange verses, as if everything were questioning each other in a certain sense and at the same time multiplying in quality through this questioning. How does this bizarreness relate to the theme of transgressive transcendence of mortality? Perhaps it is precisely through the apparent "distraction" and reference to our constant presence of the non-obvious things that

surround us and of which we ourselves are a part – that we are offered the opportunity to see from a different angle what we fear and tremble at. The introduction itself will surprise you: after a few seconds of chill-out violin tones in the style of Kaffe Matthews, a brutally contrasting, nervous techno passage with extreme English vulgarities kicks in, but the violin reappears, followed by disjointed fragments of dialogue from an anonymous girl. In his modern electronic "anti-songs", Vtípil plays with a mixture of numbing boredom, shock, mortal anxiety, emptiness, overcrowding, banality, absurd bizarreness, and difficult self-reflection, which, however, has nothing to do with anthropologically pathetic self-questioning. Perhaps when listening to his project *Syntax Error*, some may feel embarrassed, but probably not only because of the possible uncertainty it causes, but also because of themselves, since this project focuses on our shortcomings. In the very "syntax" of human mortality, some kind of systemic "error" will emerge anyway, and no one knows exactly what the consequences will be for us, although we may have an inkling.

Charles Bukowski is not for everyone; similarly, improvised music with a sonically radical or noisy sound may not be to everyone's taste. The Slovak-Italian trio **The Blessed Beat**, consisting of Slovak musicians David Kollar (guitar, electronics), and two Italians Palo Raineri (trumpet), and Simone Cavina (drums, electronics)—the first two being members of the very successful band Komara with King Crimson's court drummer Pat Mastelotto—created their album *MiV* as an "imaginary soundtrack" to Charles Bukowski's shocking short story *The Copulating Mermaid of Venice*, which thematizes characteristically the phenomenality of American bar culture, gambling, alcoholism, of course, but also sex and violence in the form of necrophilia (from the perspective of the perpetrator...)(!). Creatively, in the case of The Blessed Beat's music, it is a form of collective improvisation

created and recorded in real time (in the Italian studio Vacuum, in Bologna in 2015), i.e., a recording of the spontaneity of the moment alongside unpredictable ideas of the performers' efforts to keep their sound-musical mutations in balance on the tense tightrope of a trialogue. The freely improvised music here moves primarily on an uncompromising basis of alternative rock idioms, but the articulatory vocabulary, influenced by Bukowski's poetics, is nevertheless somewhat different.
With an eventful collage of bizarre sounds and tones, the trio attempt to go transgressively somewhere "beyond"... Not only beyond the literary text, but beyond the boundaries of binary oppositions in which we normally and automatically move – thus seeking the possibility of expressing what lies "between" them... It is as if the question being asked here is what (apart from the already aforementioned state of coma) is hidden in the space "beyond" or "outside" the duality of life and death. The music of this trio – which at times takes on the character of a massive, sonically aggressive polyrhythmic tsunami, while at other times seems introverted and internalized – is perhaps most evocative in those moments when it breathes in this space "beyond/between", articulating the elusiveness, instability, and unpredictability of existence to which we, as mortal beings, are exposed every day. Perhaps here we can find the key to understanding the shocking transgressiveness, thematized in this project by combining Bukowski's controversial novel with the unconventional musical improvisations of The Blessed Beat. It is an expression of an effort to go, perhaps quixotically, but at the same time brutally and transgressively, "beyond" and "between" the binarity of life and death.

Another example of transgression through bizarreness can be found in alternative, s. c. bottom-up/DIY musical culture in Slovakia. The ideological platform of alternative rock groups was their affiliation with the independent, unofficial alternative

counterculture of the last decade of socialist Czechoslovakia, as well as its transformations after 1989. This stance could take the form of either (in)direct criticism of communist ideology, or it could be indirectly, sometimes explicitly opposed to the official doctrine of socialist realism. And in particular – it was an expression of the search for one's own, parallel alternative culture and artistically articulated worldview of the young generation of the time in the rigid conditions of s. c. normalization.[41]

Rock music in general, but especially alternative rock, was often part of the aforementioned DIY ("do it yourself") culture and, at the same time, a "bottom-up culture" culture. While the former is based de facto on bricolage, i.e., the creative use of what is, so to speak, at hand, the latter, which is related to it, refers to the principle of authentic, selfless motivation for creation in the unofficial cultural and artistic sphere. Both modes of culture and art are connected by the concept of independence, which can be understood as a way of the establishment of being internally free and dignified, both in the sense of true authenticity, independence, and autonomy of our cultural and social (co) existence. At the same time, they involve defiance, resistance, and rejection of a risk-free, conformist way of life, as well as a way

41 Although the concept of alternativeness in public discourse is associated with questioning certain ideologically servile, conventional models linked to the cultural and artistic establishment, its content – which in the past has been repeatedly emptied of meaning in connection with specific political realities – can also be understood differently. In a text dedicated to Frank Zappa, philosopher Miroslav Petříček does not define the alternative as such primarily in opposition to conventional and normative practices and doctrines, but above all by fundamentally questioning the very status of the normative convention. This convention presents itself as universally valid, but it cannot provide any relevant justification for the validity of its universal imperative. See more: PETŘÍČEK, M. Minimální maximalismus. Big Note Franka Zappy (Minimal maximalism. Big Note of Frank Zappa). In *Fenomén Zappa*. (Eds. V. Papoušek, D. Skalický). Praha : Akropolis, 2016, s. 62 – 63.

of thinking, and a way of acting in official culture, including the protest against often absurd social conditions, while maintaining a parrhesian attitude.[42] Although the original, excessively theatrical and performative practices of Slovak alternative rock bands showed a certain disparity and heterogeneity, they were united by attributes of a common, often bizarre poetics or aesthetics of the DIY and grassroots culture such as resistance, articulation of feelings of absurdity in social conditions (before and after 1989…), and also playful (self-)ironic humour.

Part of the CzechoSlovak alternative rock scene at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s was the band **Teória Odrazu** (Theory of Reflection), which was provocative in the socialist regime, because it was the official theory of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's theory of art), of which I was a co-founder in 1987. Through musical carnivalization of death and gallows humour, we set to music the Slovak contemporary poetry of Peter Milčák, Pavol Suržin, as well as the postmortal humorous poem of the Czech songwriter Jiří Dědeček.

In the funeral song *Čierne oči, čo plačete* (Black Eyes, Why Are You Crying), based on the hardcore riffs of guitarist Peter "Varso" Varsavik and my low glissando bassguitar, the vocal tells a bizarre story about an undertaker with a hearse, returning routinely from work, while the chorus sounds like a parody advertisement for funeral services: *"We will advise you, we will serve you! / We will deepen our cooperation! / You don't have to come to us, / we will come to you! / You don't have to come to us, / we will come to you!"*. This is followed by a psychedelically dark interlude, after which the undertaker sings plaintively to the beat of a funeral

42 In other words, in Michel Foucault's conception, it is an attitude of open, direct speech, which, although associated with the risk of loss – in the given historical circumstances, this took the form of censorship, the impossibility of officially releasing recordings, or even bans on concert activities – it is precisely through this *parrhesia* that it was and still is possible to acquire (even before ourselves) true human dignity.

drum and bass glissando: *"Slow down, slow down, my black mare! / We'll still carry what the Death has mowed down..."* (lyrics: Peter "Šteko" Štekláč, and TJ Vjuga). The dark atmosphere of the music is completed at the end by a "distorted" ironic quote from the folk song played on a military bugle...[43]

In the composition based on Pavol Suržin's poem *Čo vravia* (What They Say), the band resorted to a polyrhythmic juxtaposition of hard rock-punk-funk (in perhaps one of the most complicated tectonic compositions) and transformed folk melodies, with a semantic allusion to the song *Jedna druhej riekla* (One Said to the Other). It is worth quoting Suržin's agonizingly cathartic poem in its entirety – at the time the song was completed, he was already terminally ill: *"Let him be glad/that the sparrows chirp [at] him in the morning./I am glad.//Let him be glad/that he coughed through such a harsh winter./I am glad.//Unassuming,/when he stares somewhere like a sphinx.//He can barely walk,/but his words go far.// Let him be glad/that he won't die several times over./I am glad.//And let it be with pleasure,/as when the light suddenly turn off!"* (Suržin, 1989, p. 92).

The third example concerns the slow, quiet, melodic song *Tu*, in memoriam of Miles Davis, [which] was written shortly after his death. From the lyrics, again written by Peter Milčák, I quote: *"Death, hidden in the trumpet/is as gentle as gr ay little doves.//Doves that peck from the palm of your hand.//Greedy little doves,/eternally insatiable."* (Milčák, 2012, p. 30) In an unexpected dynamic contrast to the other piano passages, singer Šteko expressively shouted the last two verses, followed by silence and a coda with his wheezing bugle.

43 There is even an amateur videoclip of this song (dr. by Marián Hanko, 1991). Singer Šteko with his bugle finds himself in the underground tunnels of the city Čadca as "Hades' Kingdom", wandering around by candlelight, where he soon plays chess at a table with the Grim Reaper, a drummer dressed as him, wearing a black cloak. Although Šteko loses the game, the Grim Reaper is checkmated by him with a crushed bugle. He immediately finds himself as "an Orpheus" back on the surface of the earth in an unfinished square in front of the House of Culture in a city, where he shakes hands with a welcoming committee of dirty Roma children.

As part of the performance, Teória Odrazu also staged a performance piece entitled *Surgery of a Guitarist*. Accompanied by electronic music from a synthesizer, guitarist Peter Varso played acrobatic solos, parodying the "worship" of heavy metal virtuosos, with artificial food props under his shirt – chicken, mushrooms, fruit, and vegetables. After a while, Štekláč arrives on a bicycle dressed as a surgeon in a white coat and mask, but instead of a scalpel, he holds his military bugle, a saw, and a hammer. He knocked the guitarist down onto either a prepared hospital bed or the ground, where he begins to operate on him alive, until he falls into a coma: he removes the fake food from him and scatters it around. The "resurrected" player barely stands on his own two feet and, leaning on a crutch with one hand, plays only very simple tones on the string with one finger.

Instead of a conclusion: Transgression through love

Philosopher Pavol Sucharek, an editor of the book *Fenomenológia stretnutia* (Phenomenology of Encounter), featuring the first Slovakian translations of French (post)phenomenology of F. J. J. Byutendijk and Henri Maldiney, as author of the introductory study and conclusion argues that the cathartic therapeutic potential of art is still neglected today:

Art, with its metaphorical nature, its ability to integrate personality, facilitate communication, and serve as a means of emotional release, sublimation, and catharsis, is still an underappreciated field... Where verbal communication and rational attitudes usually fail, the process of artistic creation becomes a universal communication tool. Thanks to it, we can learn more about ourselves than in all the years we have been talking about ourselves in words. (Sucharek, 2015, p. 151).

The above statement also applies to musical art, or rather to its characteristic type of *mimesis* – as a tool of very distinctive creative artistic expression, i.e., the creation of a unique, otherwise inarticulate reality *sui generis*, especially when we use it to cathartically come to terms with the phenomenality of death and mortality. If we look at this reality from the perspective of contemporary existential aesthetics and semiotics – in their reflection on the quality of experiencing our being, for example, in the intentions of Levinasian ethics – then, in addition to the various versions of transgression, we arrive at the paradox of transgression through love. I believe that in our shared and uniquely personal history, we can find ample evidence that the most radical forms of transgressive overlaps of social norms are often linked to manifestations of heroic (and self-)sacrificing love. I think that, in addition to well-known examples from history, religion, and philosophy, I could cite here many, many examples from the lives of people who are now dead, whom I mentioned in the first part of this text. Their transgressions, embodied in various acts of love for others, transcend and continue to live on in my life.

In musical discourse, this type of transgression is addressed in various ways. One way of expressing it is through compositions dedicated not only to the memory of the personalities concerned, but also to their legacy, full of important challenges and questions with which we engage in dialogue. As Igor Stravinsky once said, only the truly living can truly engage in such a dialogue with the dead. The ancient epic *Gilgamesh*, springing from grief over the loss of his friend Enkidu, was created on this archetypal basis of dialogical impulses. Vladimír Godár devoted his evocative chamber composition *Bikit Gilgames* for bass and cello (1998) to this very theme. In this context, we must not overlook his musical panegyric *Dépploration sur le mort de Witold Lutoslawski* for piano quintet (1994) or his monumental work *Qurela Pacis* (Lament for Peace; 2011), dedicated to the victims of war. I would like to mention the piano piece

Music Illustrations to the Artworks of Veronika Madajová (2001), the polyphonic Ursiny song *Čas je pesnička* (Time is a Song) in memory of her mother Hela, with a poem by Jana Š. Kuzmová (2008). I can mention also the composition *Nikde* (Nowhere) in memoriam of Branislav Hudec with lyrics by Daniel Pastirčák and a final excerpt from *Psalm 39*, performed by mezzo-soprano Eva Šušková and guitarist Ondrej Veselý (2015/2016). In each of these compositions, I am engaging a dialogue with the living, transcending transgressions of love of all of those who, despite definitively crossing the threshold of death, thanks to this, have not actually died for me.

What else can be added to conclude the topic of mortality and its transgressive transcendence by music? Just one haiku by an anonymous Zen poet (Cílek, 2007, p. 4):

The rain is falling.
How do you want to stop it?

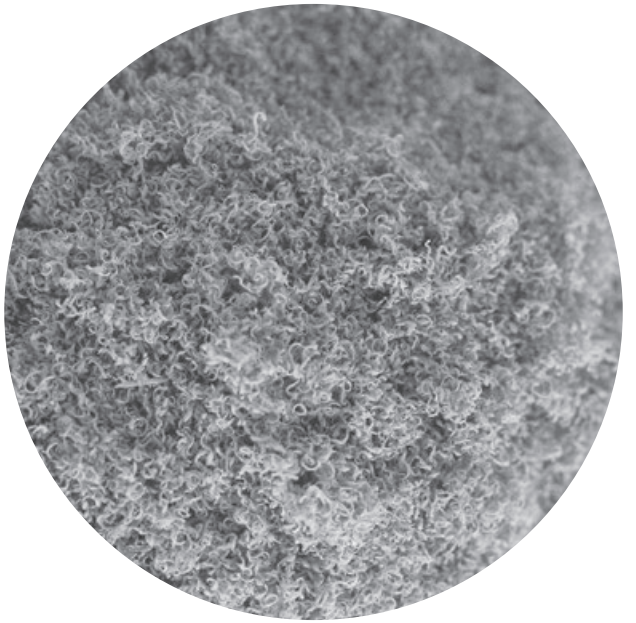
Well, let us listen to it.

David Moss while performing Oehring's *POEndulum* (2015). (photo by M. Popelář)

Shot from the performance *La Loba* (2013). (photo by V. Kronbauer)

Martin Burlas: *Kóma*, image from the opera (2007). (photo: the author's archive)

Teória Odrazu: *Surgery of Guitarist* (1990). (photo: the author's archive)



Afterword

To define the personality of Július Fujak (born October 10, 1966, in Žilina) in a sufficiently accurate, concise, and, so to speak, generalizing manner – well, that is not entirely possible. He is, all in one person, a musician/multi-instrumentalist, distinctive composer/comproviser, and, when necessary, a performer. At the same time, he is an aesthetician and a semiotician, a university professor, an organizer, musical curator, publicist, ...; in short: a man of many professional "faces."

If we want to briefly describe his creative poetics, which is also evident in this book, we would likely have to use terms such as openness, diversity, multidimensionality, or – given the possibility of viewing a plurality of approaches from various perspectives – perhaps a principle of kaleidoscope. Yes, this metaphor was indirectly provided by Július Fujak himself, as he employed this very principle in his experimental musical project kaleidoSONICope! (2020). In it, he reveals and explores the boundless diversity of ways in which music is created and comes into being through non-idiomatic improvisation, radio-acoustic composition, and experimental sound design, exploring the possibilities of expanding the boundaries of song form through the overlaps of rock poetics, folk motifs, the resonance of graphic scores, and so on. This could be described as musical nomadism, the purpose of which is to experience the diversity of approaches and possibilities for interconnections fully, the result of which offers new, perhaps less predictable, and to a large extent unheard-of musical moments and situations.
His writings on aesthetics and semiotics of music are extensive and thematically diverse, exploring semiotics-oriented topics that reflect on the issues of musical communication in books

such as Musical Correla(c)tivity. Notes on Unconventional Music Aesthetics (2005), Various Comprovisations: Texts on Music and Semiotics (2015), Emanácie hudobnej semiosféry (Emanations of the Musical Semiosphere; 2018), and Otázniky hudobnej semiotiky a estetiky (Questions of Musical Semiotics and Aesthetics; as editor, 2010).

It is certainly worth highlighting his immensely important work in mapping the peripheral expressions of the Slovak independent music scene to "places" that are often overlooked or completely ignored, yet by their very nature provide important testimony to ways of thinking, creative attitudes, opinions, reactions, interconnections, influences, and contexts; this category includes Slovenské hudobné alternatívy (Slovak Musical Alternatives; co-authored with Martin Kalinka and Oliver Rehák, 2006), followed by Sondáž nezávislej hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku (A Survey of Independent Music Culture in Slovakia; 2021). The ability to observe and uncover interconnections in contemporary aesthetics, semiotics, and cultural studies can be found in various scholarly texts, as well as in the individually examined topics of Fujak's pedagogical publication, Presahy semiotických a kulturálnych štúdií (The Intersections of Semiotic and Cultural Studies; 2023).

Any attempt to grasp Fujak's work – whether in its complexity or through clear categorization – is highly problematic. However, this problem does not lie in Fujak's work itself, but in the way we choose to approach it and view it. So, what is his work like? Its essence lies in opening up alternative spaces of perception, placing both himself and the listener in situations where one cannot comfortably rely solely on one's memory or on established frameworks of creative and receptive experiences. In the synchronic and diachronic interferences of musical diversities, he seeks possibilities for the emergence, creation, and discovery of new expressive and semantic nuances, which he uncovers in the interstices of various types of music, often within intermedia

contexts and coordinates. And nuances, as we know from sensitivity, are the opposite of absolutism, as Albert Camus has already pointed out. Thinking and perception are thus, in the course of both creation and reception, based on fluid, one might say slippery, transitions (from one genre to another, or from one medium to another, etc.).

It is precisely in these transitional situations and the aforementioned interstitial spaces that interferences occur, which cannot be viewed through the lens of binary oppositions – that is, through an "either-or" framework. Indeed, the very effort and the need to examine and approach the phenomena of this world through the prism of dichotomous division is characteristic of the dominant strands of European thought in past eras. The field of art, naturally, has not escaped this differentiation either. Examples include the division of culture into "high" and "low," the distinction between so-called "classical" and "popular" music, the understanding of artistic works through the binary opposition of form and content, or even the strict differentiation of a broad spectrum of sounds into musical and non-musical sounds. Postmodernism "blurred" this dichotomous "black-and-white" view of things, and all that remained of the clear-cut order, rigorous hierarchy, and autonomy were historical categories.

And we see that viewing contemporary music through this lens yields a significantly blurred and highly distorted perspective (or listening experience). A characteristic example is the concept of "comprovisation" which has been mentioned several times in Fujak's texts. It is precisely here that we find the aforementioned intersection, the interstice between two musical-creative principles: composition and improvisation, whose dialogical interrelation gives rise to that "Pythagorean" third, new quality. And it would be a mistake, as Fujak claims, to relate the concept of comprovisation exclusively just to the field of music. The postmodern situation has called into question the autonomy and uniqueness of individual artistic media, or rather their

sterile, "pure," mutually separated understanding, and so we can understand comprovisation precisely as "something that can also be found in the slipping through of fluid space between various artistic media (...) between music, visual art, film, dance, theatre, performance, happening, literature, photography, video art, etc.," as he writes in the Compro.sk11 statement (2011).

However, ultimately, according to Július Fujak, comprovisation concerns not only art, but – and this is essential – also our existential (co)existence. Transversal movement not only across artistic media but also through our life experiences offers extensive possibilities for acts and events of comprovisation. The dichotomous "either-or" scheme is replaced here by the "both" principle; that is, binary oppositions are replaced by modal differences, because transitional situations are modal in nature.

Ľubomír Pavelka

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Text 1, In: Fujak, J. (ed.): *Charakter a vývoj nezávislej kultúry a umenia na Slovensku po roku* 1989 (Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 57–71, 2020);
Text 2, In: Šrank, J. (ed.): *Poézia, experiment a intermedialita v tvorbe (nielen) Milana Adamčiaka* (Bratislava: PgF UK, pp. 142–157, 2025);
Text 3, In: *Slovenské divadlo* (vol. 70, n. 4, pp. 390–403, 2022);
Text 4, In: *Linguistic Frontiers* (vol.. 8, n. 1, pp. 2–8, 2025);
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Summary

The publication *The Semiosphere of Sounds and Music in Culture. But What is In-Beyond-Above*? is focused on various themes and problems of the ambivalence of creative and inner freedom in art and music, of sonic art in special cultural contexts, and also of ecological relations of music – nature – trees as well as transgression of mortality in contemporary and comprovised music. The following studies are dedicated to the first group of problems:
The Ambivalence of Creative and Inner Freedom in Our (Independent) Culture.
The status of independence in culture evokes many questions in its ambiguity and incongruity. Is creative activity one of the forms of acquiring it, which can even liberate the artist as well as the recipient from the concepts of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real (J. Lacan) in forming the Self? Isn't it just the trap of escapism, neglecting the reality of our existential *Dasein*, which is full of suffering and doubt of its possible meaningfulness? Does independent art result from the act of a freely creative artist or is it rather "the shock of sudden uncovered being and dictation of its truth" (M. Heidegger)? Is there any relation between the dilemma of the independence from discursive practices of historic episteme (M. Foucault) before 1989 and after, and the process of becoming homo liber? The author finds some answers to these questions in Slovak musical culture in the art and life of two memorable personalities: intermedia artist *sui generis* Milan Adamčiak (1946 – 2017) and trans-genre composer Marián Varga (1947 – 2017).
The next two studies are related to the art of the aforementioned Milan Adamčiak. At the beginning of the paper *The Intermedial Quality of the Verbal Dimension of Adamčiak's Graphic Scores*, the author introduces certain affiliations of Adamčiak with Claude Debussy, especially the connections between paradigmatically new

music and poetry. He describes and interprets various selected examples of Adamčiak's conceptual works of art – including graphic scores from the second part of the 1960s until 2000, series *JAMA* (1965–1969), score for dancers and musicians *Diamondance* (1967), experimental *Double concert for Pots and Lines* (1986), and *Polarities – Intention-diagrams* (1969–2000). There are references to the thoughts of postmodern theoretician Jozef Cseres, an expert on Adamčiak's artistic creation, about the composite and mixed discursive nature of any artistic media.
The paper *The Spectacular "Suchness" of Milan Adamčiak's Performances* is focused on some aspects of his specific and unique conception, presenting not only conscious references to contemporary postmodern avant-garde of (neo)fluxus or conceptual art, but certain *sui generis* spectacularly presented dimensions of earthiness, surprising playfulness, and humorous controversy. Besides the selective model presentations of his solo and collective performances and happenings, the author tries to reflect the specificity of intermedial poetics of Adamčiak's performance art in references to the ideas of Jozef Cseres and Peter Faltin (the work of art as a totem) regarding shifts in the understanding of the ontological status of a postmodern work of art.

The second part of the book opens the study *Sonic (and Other) Environments as the Mirror of Society (and as the Challenge for Artistic Testimony)*. The main topics include the (non)ecological dimensions of sonic and other environments in the contemporary world, reflecting the "suchness" and quality of certain cultures and societies of global transcapitalism in the late phase of digitalisation, alongside ecological devastation. Various social discursive and nondiscursive practices of this civilization influence our ways of living in many important dimensions—spiritual, moral, ecological, economic, political, and communicational, among others, which are mirrored in different sonic (and other) environments, in which we are situated. The author refers to the special works of art

kinds of new musical discourses appropriating field recordings of unique environments, sonic sculptures, and intermedia installations in social-critical contexts within the testimonies of artists such as Bob Ostertag (USA), Peter Machajdík, Jonáš Gruska (both SK), among others.
The paper *Notes on Sonic Photography as a Trace of Kairos (and Transparent Sonic Sculptures in Site-Specific Contexts)* deals in the first part with the centripetal juxtaposition of Marcel Duchamp's *Sculpture Musicale* and John Cage's *4´33´´*. Both pieces became the starting points of the author's creation of acousmatic, comprovised music, transforming unique soundscapes (mostly) in Slovakia. The sounds of specific environments (with semantic social meanings) – kinds of unique musical-sonic sculptures were involved in his musical artistic projects *Animation of Silence (in Music) of Puppets* (2000), *Nitrian Atlantises* (2013), and *Melancholy* (2017), co-created with the fine artist S. Zombek and the poet P. Milčák, *Sonic Sculpture of Bin* (2018) – inspired by already-mentioned Duchamp's idea – as well as other "transparent" sonic sculptures such as *Cockroach Lure* (2019) with intermedia artist P. Nikl, *La Mer* (2021/2022), and *ÚÚÚ-FFF-ÓÓÓ* (2021) dedicated to two great Slovak conceptual intermedia artists Milan Adamčiak and Július Koller. In the final comment, the author writes about the phenomenon of sonic photography – related to the thoughts of Roland Barthes' *La Chambre* Claire (Camer Lucida) –, which can be appropriated as an organic part of transparent sonic-musical sculpture.
The essay *The Life-giving Sap of Music and Trees (From Resonance to Existence: Tree in Music)* deals with various dimensions of the relations between trees and humans in artistic, ecological, and musical contexts, ranging from modern avant-garde initiatives to postmodern works of art from an interdisciplinary perspective. The original text was commissioned by the Belvedere Museum in Vienna for the major international exhibition *GROW. Der Baum in der Kunst* (curator: Miroslav Haľák, 2022/2023), which includes more than a hundred different works in several sections – paintings,

sculptures, photographs, and installations – ranging from the 15th century to the present. (Note: The exhibition also includes a musical component – in individual sections, visitors can use QR codes to listen to thematically related compositions by various authors selected by Ján Sudzina from the portfolio of the Hevhetia publishing house.)

The third part of the publication contains two studies. *The Variability of Comprovisational Methods in Contemporary Music* focuses on an exploratory, analytical interpretation of certain contemporary musical works, whose organic creation incorporates various principles of improvisation and symbiotic complementarity between pre-composed and improvised sections, resulting in the organic form of the work. After introducing the issue, the author interprets musically disparate projects from various areas of contemporary so-called serious music, electronic and trans-genre jazz, as well as taxonomically difficult-to-grasp positions on the borderline between ethno-music and improvised music – specifically, composers A. Paluchová (SK), L. Vítková (CZ), S. Bušsová (LAT) in the framework concept New Dawn Vol. 2 – La femme armée by the musical ensemble EnsembleSpectrum (SK), as well as the artistic tandems Jan Faix & Pavel Hrubý (both CZ), Michaela Antalová (SK) & Adrian Myhr (NOR), and soloist Soheil Peyghambari (IRN).
In the very last paper, *Transgression of Mortality in the Discourse of Unconventional Music*, the author writes more intimately and personally about an encounter with the definitive loss of a close human being as a cardinal existential experience, linked to the deep authenticity of our uneasy existence. Meanwhile, he pays close analytic attention to displays of transgression in current non-conventional music, which manifest various transgressions through (post)mortality, through absurdity, through bizarreness, and, in conclusion, transgression through love.

Július Fujak (b. 1966) – Slovakian aesthetic scholar, a semiotician of music, experimental composer, and multi-instrumentalist. He graduated from the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Bratislava (aesthetics and musical sciences, 1990); later, he became a researcher at the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication in Nitra (1996-2007), and at the Department of Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (2007-2022). Currently, Fujak teaches at the Institute of Culture and Tourism Management, Cultural Studies and Ethnology, Faculty in Nitra (since 2022). His compositions and intermedia projects were performed and broadcast in many European countries, as well as in the USA and China. He wrote numerous publications and texts on music aesthetics and semiotics, as well as on the history of Slovak alternative music.

Július Fujak: *Iné hudobné diskurzory / Other Musical Discursors*

digital 4-album (Hevhetia 2024)

https://hevhetia.bandcamp.com/album/other-musical-discursors

Discursor A Compositions

1 *Hurt H2O – homage to Marián Varga* (JF, 2002) 7:00
JF – piano, Jan Kavan – cello, DJ Fero – turntable

2 *Yellow Lily* (Marián Varga & JF, 2001) 6:14
Marián Varga – synthesizer, JF – piano

3 *Water for Purgatory* – in memoriam Michal Reiser (2022) 10:00
JF – electric piano, electronics. Mikuláš Chadima – flute, Samo Smetana – violas, David Kollar – electric guitar, extended techniques, TJ Vjuga – piano, semi-prepared bassguitar

4 *Intro of Wrestling* (JF, 2003, rev 2005) 3:22
The California EAR UNIT: Amy Knoles – marimba, drums, percussion, Dorothy Stone – flute, Vicki Ray – piano, Erika Duke-Kirkpatrick – cello, Robin Lorenz – violin, Phil O'Connor – clarinet, saxophone, & JF – piano

5 *Animating Silence* (JF, 2000) 5:52
tEóRia OtraSu (thEoRy Of Shake): JF – piano, Jan Kavan – cello, David Šubík – trombone, voice, Pavel Magnusek – drums, Tomáš Havlíček – bassguitar, Blahoslav Rozbořil – physio-phonograph; recorded voices: Zdenek Plachý, Pavel Daněk, Petr Hrbáč

6 *Promenade in Brown-Green* (JF, 2001) 5:07
JF – piano, turntable

7 *Ver – Open a Window While Listening* (JF/Hildegard Westerkamp, 2007) 3:32
JF – piano, Jozef Lupták – cello, Igor Karško – violin, Mária Henselová – text reading

8 *Nosferatu* (live music finale for F. W. Murnau's horror film) (JF, 2002) 6:09
tEóRia OtraSu (thEoRy Of Shake): JF – semi-prepared piano, string cimbalom, Jan Kavan – cello, Lucia Vadelová – voice, violin; Martin Kalinka – electric double-bass, DJ Fero – turntable

9 *La mer, Part I. Mer la nuit* – a tribute to Milan Adamčiak: *La Mer* (JF, 2021) 9:11
Hypianosis+: JF – string bassguitar, synthesizer, Nikolaj Nikitin – saxophone, electronics, Miloš Železňák – electric guitar, electronics, Martina Janegová – extended piano techniques, Martin Kukučka – percussion;
guests: Manja Ristić – field and hydrophone recordings in Glogovac on the island of Korčula, Mikoláš Chadima – flute, Peter Katina – accordion

10 *Kundalini - for Soheil* (JF, 2024) 8:40
Soheil Peyghambari – bass clarinets, field recording

Discursor B Ex-peri-ments

11 *Hy-ph-ol-op-ho-ny* (JF, 2002) 4:45
tEóRia OtraSu (thEoRy Of Shake): JF – string bassguitar, semi-prepared piano, octopad sampler, toys, Underwood typewriter, whispering, David Šubík – hyposonic sampler, DJ Fero – turntables

12 *Pentrophony*, Part IV. *Rainy Circles* (JF, 2009/2010) 4:20
JF – semi-prepared piano and cimbalom, field recordings from the attic of the old Fuják family house in Podvysoká, radio, Ján Fuják – accordion

13 *Live in Brussels*, Part I. (excerpt) (Franz Hautzinger & JF & Zsolt Sörés, 2011) 5:00
Franz Hautzinger – quarter-tone trumpet, JF – semi-prepared piano, string bassguitar, sound processor, toys, Zsolt Sörés – live electronics, viola, sound objects

14 *On Cage with AA* (JF/Milan Adamčiak, 2015) 4:58
Ne:bo:daj: JF – piano, field recordings, radio, Jana Ambrózová – violin, Andrej Pleštinský – accordion;
guests: Milan Adamčiak – reading of the text *A few words about J. C.*, Amy Knoles – digital percussion

15 *Kafka* (excerpt) (Mikoláš Chadima & JF, 2009) 3:51
XAFOO: Mikoláš Chadima – saxophone, JF – semi-prepared piano, string bassguitar, processor

16 *Lost in Shopping Labyrinth* (JF, 1980, rev. 2010, Jon Rose, 2010) 5:40
Jon Rose – violin, JF – piano with plastic cups, organ, field recordings of shopping centers, Mikoláš Chadima – saxophone, Peter "Šteko" Štekláč – military bugle

17 *By My Blood* (nonverbal letter from *Wordless:*) (JF, 2009) 5:04
JF – semi-prepared piano, sidewalk cimbalom, stones

18 *Parrhésia* (JF & Ján Boleslav Kladivo, 2016) 5:50
Ján Boleslav Kladivo – electronics, piano, JF – prepared bass guitar, processor

19 *Power of Silo* (JF, 2018) 3:47
JF – string bass guitar, percussion, stones and construction debris from a sugar mill silo, field microphones, Gabriela Vermelho – vocals, quintone, stones, Jan Kavan – cello, stones

20 *Nitrian Atlantises* (excerpt) (JF, 2013) 10:00
JF – semi-prepared piano, synthesizer, voice, field recordings, ocarina, replica of a Neolithic anthropomorphic urn, black volcanic sand from "Atlantis" (Santorini), sound objects, percussion, Jana Ambrózová – voice, violin improvisations, Jean-Michel van Schouwburg – voice, Andrej Pleštinský – accordion, Zuzana Hanusová – bodhran, Trio from the Swingless Orchestra's wind section: Martin Štourač – trumpet, Monika Štrbová – saxophone, Tomáš Obola – trombone, Juraj Dufek – bass bagpipes, Eduard Fujak and Ondrej Veselý – guitars, Naďka Fujaková – whispering

Discursor C Alternatives

21 *Raz zo sna* (Once in a Dream) (JF/Peter Milčák) 3:13
Teória Odrazu (Theory of Reflection): Peter "Šteko" Štekláč – vocals, trumpet, Peter "Varso" Varsavik – electric guitar, JF – bassguitar, Vlado Šustek – drums

22 *Anjelské poriadky* (Angels Rules) (TO!/TJ Vjuga, Peter Milčák) 5:30
Teória Odrazu (Theory of Reflection): Peter "Šteko" Štekláč – vocal, trumpet, Peter "Varso" Varsavik – electric guitar, JF – bassguitar, Vlado Šustek – drums

23 *Chorá žena* (Sick Woman) (Peter Varsavik, JF/Peter Varsavik 1995) 3:13
0tras: Peter "Varso" Varsavik – electric guitar, vocal, JF – drums, keyboards, Jožo Hruška – fretless bass

24 *Presýpacie hodiny* (Flush Clock) (JF/Peter Milčák, JF, 1995, rev. 1998) 4:17
0tras: JF – vocals, keyboards, bassguitar, electric guitar, drum machine programming, Peter "Varso" Varsavik – lead electric guitar, vocal, guest: Michal Kaščák, a. g. – vocal

25 *Why "Of Course"?!* (JF & Peter Macsovszky & Varso, 2000) 5:28
Trojkolo: Beh Fiktivity: JF – bass guitar, drum machine programming, radio, collage of sound fragments, sound objects, Peter "Varso" Varsavik – electric guitar, Peter Macsovszky – vocals; guest vocals: Zoltán Rédey, Milan Adamčiak

26 *VAX! – Interlude I.* (JF/JF, 2021) 3:15
JF – drums, bassguitar, Nikolaj Nikitikn – saxophone, Peter "Varso" Varsavik – electric guitar, Ivan Gontko – barrel organ and vocals

27 *Big Catchs XXII* (JF/Ján Boleslav Kladivo, 2018, rev. 2020) 4:31
JF – vocals, keyboards, bassguitar, drums, Braňo Jobus – vocals, Ján Boleslav Kladivo – electronics, Peter Varso – guitar solo 1, Eduard Fuják – guitar solo 2, Johanka Fujaková – backing vocal

28 *Woody Alien/Joystick Jazz II.* (JF, 1998)
JF – synthesizer, electric piano, programmed drums, Martin Korónyi – saxophone

29 *Sou Would Miles?!* (JF, 1988, rev. 2022) 4:29
JF – two bassguitars, drums, keyboards, Nikolaj Nikitin – saxophone, Miloš Železňák – electric guitar, Peter "Šteko" Štekláč – trumpet muted with sand

30 *pl* (JF & Hypianosis+, 2021) 5:32
Hypianosis+: JF – bassguitar, Martina Janegová – piano, Nikolaj Nikitin – saxophone, Miloš Železňák – electric guitar, Martin Kukučka – drums

Discursor D Songs

31 *Bielučká perina* (White Quilt) (JF/Peter Milčák, 1993) 2:34
Duo Kvety vĺn (Flowers of the Waves): JF – piano, Lucia Vadelová – vocals, violin, Skalka – children's choir from village Skalité

32 Ranená H_2O (Morning Water) (JF/Eva Pariláková, 2002) 3:06
Ne:bo:daj: Jana Ambrózová – vocal, violin, JF – piano, Andrej Pleštinský – accordion

33 *Tikot* (The Ticking) (JF/Peter Milčák, 1997, rev. 2010) 1:42
JF – vocals, guitar, Dominik Fuják – vocals

34 *Woland's Ball* (JF/JF, 1994) 2:00
Braňo Jobus – Woland's vocal, JF – piano, vocal, Peter "Šteko" Štekláč, Dominik Fuják, and Daša Bánovská – choir

35 *Srdce plné farieb* (A Heart Full of Colors) (JF/Veronika Madajová, 2001) 3:03
Zuzana Homolová – vocal, JF – piano

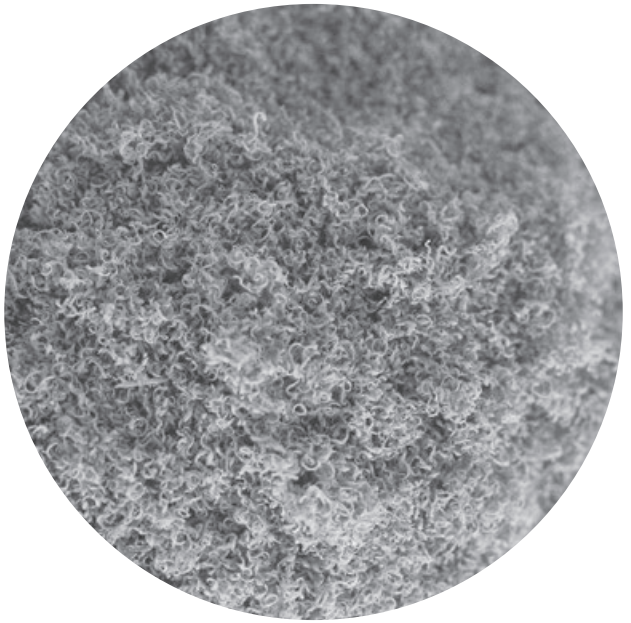
36 Kozmo išli z Jágra (When We Came from Jágr) (folk song, arr. JF, 2012) 4:09
Ne:bo:daj: Jana Ambrózová – vocal, drum, JF – piano, Andrej Pleštinský – accordion

37 *The Trial and the End* (final part of the live music for the film *Jánošík* by the Siakeľ brothers) (JF, Vladimír Merta, Jana Lewitová, 2006) 2:25
Vladimír Merta – vocal, whistle, Jana Lewitová – vocal, viola, tEóRia OtraSu: JF – piano, Stanislav Palúch – violin, DJ Fero – turntable

38 *vRaj* (JF/TJ Vjuga, 1994, rev. 2022) 4:04
JF – vocals, keyboards, fretless bassguitar, drums, Edo Fuják – electric guitar

39 *Čas je iba pesničkа* (Time Is Just a Little Song) (JF/Jana Štefánia Kuzmová, 2009) 2:36
JF – vocals, piano, Ján Boleslav Kladivo – electronics

40 *Psalm 39 – in memoriam Branislav Hudec* (JF, 2015) 6:00
Eva Šušková – mezzo-soprano, Ondrej Veselý – guitar, JF – vocals, guitar chords, bassguitar, drums, Ján Boleslav Kladivo – electronics and "seagulls"



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