

Extending the Dialogue

**Essays by Igor Zabel Award Laureates,
Grant Recipients, and Jury Members, 2008–2014**

Daniel Grůň

The Case of Milan Adamčiak

**Visual Music between
the Acoustic Process,
Performance, and
the Autonomous
Sphere of Writing**

Bratislava-based art historian and curator Daniel Grúň researches the legacy of the neo-avant-garde movements of Central Europe. In his essay, he begins by analysing the work *Vodná hudba (Water Music)*, a now-legendary musical happening created by the Slovak artist Milan Adamčiak and two others in a Bratislava swimming pool in 1970. Grúň goes on to explore the archival material associated with this and other works by Adamčiak, paying particular attention to the modes and strategies of documentation (and their political context) as well as to the interdependence of documentary/notational formats and artistic forms. Among other things, Adamčiak's art provides Grúň with a case study for discussing the complex questions related to the "performativity" of documentation and the reasons for the self-historicization of Central European neo-avant-garde artists.

Every movement is accompanied by a trembling, that is to say, a sound.

We are looking at photographs that capture a musical happening in the covered swimming pool area in a student hostel. The musicians have graphic scores hastily opened in front of them, and are performing the work by playing three string instruments, a xylophone, and cymbals. The arrangement of the performance with musicians seated on the floor in immediate proximity to the public contributes to the disappearance of the traditional division of stage and auditorium (figs. 1–2). A subsequent part of the concert takes place in the swimming pool, the water further uniting the performers and the public. Wearing diving goggles and carrying oxygen cylinders and violins, the musicians dive down to the bottom of the pool and are followed by curious members of the audience, some of whom also use diving gear (fig. 3). The last of the series of documentary photos shows the participants enthusiastically applauding, while in the background we see swimmers looking on from a distance, and a group of students leaving the swimming pool area (fig. 4).

Milan Adamčiak (b. 1946), with Róbert Cyprich (1951–1996) and Jozef Revallo (1944–1993), played this legendary concert entitled *Vodná hudba* (*Water Music*) in Bratislava in 1970. It is no coincidence that the happening has the identical name of John Cage's *Water Music* (1952). Its manner of presentation, literally under the surface of the water, radicalizes its performative component. What we cannot see in the photographs are the acoustic qualities of the covered swimming pool area: for example, the natural echoes on the water surface and the smooth tiles. Unquestionably, the specific qualities of the chosen space played their part in the happening. It is well known how significantly Cage's work influenced the artists associated with the Fluxus Movement, and, we are reminded in this connection of the so-called event scores such as *Drip Music* (1964) by George Brecht, several works by Yoko Ono included in the book *Grapefruit* (1964), the following work, *Event for the Twilight* (1963), by Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi:

Event for the Twilight

Steep a piano in the water of a pool
Play a piece of F. Liszt on the piano

Chieko Shiomi, 1963

In *Water Music*, in contrast to the works mentioned above, Adamčiak does not use a written text as a method of notation, but nonetheless his work is premised, as we can see in the photographs, on the musical composition noted in a graphic score. In other works, such as *Sizyfovské*



figs. 1-2

Milan Adamčiak and Róbert Cyprich in collaboration with Jozef Revallo, *Water Music*, musical happening in the covered swimming pool area, Juraj Hronec student hostel, Bratislava, 1970.

Photos by Juraj Bartoš. Courtesy of Milan Adamčiak.

roboty (Labours of Sisyphus, 1965–1969), we find unambiguous parallels with the event scores produced by Fluxus artists. But, unlike the Fluxus artists, Adamčiak never published his event scores, nor did he realize them as actions in concerts. Rather, he allowed them to circulate in the form of verbal instructions among friends and randomly selected partners. The scores were transcribed in typewritten form on sheets of paper in 1969–1970. One of the recurring motifs is the triangle of performer – instrument – public (fig. 5):

Solo per gran cassa (Labours of Sisyphus)

- someone brings a large drum onto the stage
- he sets it up and goes away
- the public gazes at the large drum

jama 1968¹

From the mid-1960s onward, the ideas of the international Fluxus movement made their way into Czechoslovakia, and Adamčiak could have found them published in a number magazines or books, or he could have picked them up from other artists in Prague. Jiří Kolář applied similar principles in his cycle of exhortatory poems, *Návod k upotřebení (Instruction Manual, 1969 [1965])*, as did Milan Knížák in directions for his actions.² What interests us here is not so much finding a solution to the problem of delayed development, dependency, or derivation from Western or other models. Our concern is to show what part writing as an autonomous sphere played in these records, how it invited the author and the recipient into performative unity, and the potential presentation in action of a given piece. What Adamčiak managed to capture in *Labours of Sisyphus* was not merely a disjunction of the classical relationship between performer and public. His situations staged in a minimal number of words, for example, *Monoactions* in 1969, also gave utterance to emotions evoked by the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Monoactions 3–5

rise!
quickly count all your buttons!!
sit down!!!

jama 1969

- 1 During 1968–1970, Adamčiak used the monogram *jama*, an abbreviation of “*ja, milan adamčiak*” (“I, Milan Adamčiak”).
- 2 See Pavlína Morganová, *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art behind the Iron Curtain*, Karolinum Press, Charles University, Prague, 2014, pp. 42–43, 60–61.

Milan Adamčiak was one of the first Czechoslovak artists who began to systematically research intermedia overlaps. He conducted his research principally in the creative spheres: in the field of experimental poetry, action art, and so-called new music. In the second half of the 1960s, he created cycles of diverse kinds of typographic grids in which graphic and semantic realization overlapped with the acoustic rhythmization of the text. One part of his work has its premise in experimental poetry, taking the form of directions and instructions for various activities. Another part opens the way toward visual music with unconventional notations and graphic scores. A third links the inspirations from the two preceding parts in performative presentation: game-playing experimentation and the non-completion of the compositional process, significantly opening up the possibility of perfecting the work using both classical and non-classical instruments and unusual settings. It was above all Adamčiak's creative participation (together with Róbert Cyprich) in happenings and concerts in 1969–1970 that art historians characterized as being a parallel to the Fluxus Movement.³ Unlike Milan Knížák, whom George Maciunas appointed director of Fluxus East, Adamčiak had no direct personal contacts during that period.

From 1964 to 1967, Adamčiak acquired some important contacts through translations by the Czech poets, Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, who were the editors of the first Czech anthology of programmatic texts of concrete and experimental poetry, action art, happenings, and the Fluxus movement. The anthology was entitled *Slovo, písmo, akce, hlas* (*Word, Letter, Action, Voice*).⁴ In 1967, Milan Adamčiak met the Brno author, Jiří Valoch, who ranked his works among the most progressive examples of Czechoslovak graphics and would later publish extracts from them in a book on graphic scores.⁵ Adamčiak was in touch by correspondence with artists such as Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier, the Spanish group ZAJ, Marshall McLuhan, Joseph Beuys, Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Clemente Padín, Elena Pelli, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, and many others. He exchanged his texts for other texts and publications. As late as 1969–1970, with the euphoria of the 1960s expiring, he organized an independent exhibition of graphic scores (*Visual Music*, V-klub, Dom umenia, Bratislava) as well as a number of performances, where he took part in happenings and exhibitions, including the music project *Kánon 5 × 1/4*, part of the *1. otvorený ateliér (1st Open Studio)* exhibition in the private house

- 3 Zora Rusinová, "Milan Adamčiak a Robert Cyprich", in *Umenie akcie 1965-1989*, ed. Zora Rusinová, Slovenská národná galéria, Bratislava, 2001, pp. 89–93; and Andrea Bátorová, "Alternative Trends in Slovakia during the 1960s and Parallels to Fluxus", in *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, ed. Petra Stegmann, exh. cat., Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2007, pp. 165–166.
- 4 Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, eds., *Slovo, písmo, akce, hlas*, Československý spisovatel, Prague, 1967.
- 5 Jiří Valoch, ed., *Partitury: Grafická hudba, fónická poezie, akce, parafráze, interpretace*, Jazzová sekce Svazu hudebníků, Prague, 1980.



figs. 3-4

Milan Adamčiak and Róbert Cyprich in collaboration with Jozef Revallo, *Water Music*, musical happening in the covered swimming pool area, Juraj Hronec student hostel, Bratislava, 1970.

Photos by Juraj Bartoš. Courtesy of Milan Adamčiak.





solo per gran cassa

- niekto donesie na scénu veľký bubon
- postaví ho a odíde
- publikum sa díva na veľký bubon

jama
1968

fig. 5

Milan Adamčiak, *Solo per gran cassa*
(*Labours of Sisyphus*), 1968, typing on paper, 10 cm x 13,5 cm.

Courtesy of the Slovak National Gallery.

of Rudolf Sikora, *Gaudium et Pax* (action in the nature), the *Festival snehu* (*Festival of Snow*) together with Alex Mlynárčik, Róbert Cyprich and Miloš Urbásek, and *Dislokácie II* (*Dislocations II*), part of the *Smolenice Seminars for New Music*.

Adamčiak was a professional musicologist. He took a job with the Slovak Academy of Sciences and joined the Communist Party at the beginning of the period of normalization (1972–1989). To continue with the activities he had launched earlier would have had unacceptable implications for his career. While he worked publically as a scholar, columnist, and popularizer of so-called contemporary music, in private he created for a narrow circle of recipients.

In 1964, Adamčiak first heard John Cage's works on the radio (in that same year Cage visited Czechoslovakia and together with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company appeared in Prague and Ostrava) and, since then, his work confronted the principles and procedures that the great inspirer brought into music and musical notation on numerous occasions and at numerous levels. Only in 1992 did Adamčiak finally meet Cage personally during a visit to Bratislava when Adamčiak organized an exhibition of his scores in the Slovak National Gallery.⁶ One of Adamčiak's favourite and frequently repeated *bon mots* went something like this: "Cage's aim was to have no aim. My aim, on the contrary, is to have as many aims as possible." As Jozef Cseres says, this statement reflects Adamčiak's polemical character: he was never content with the status quo.⁷ What's more, there is the multidimensional mode of the artistic distribution of ideas which, under the conditions of marginal existence, proceeds in several, often mutually conflicting, spheres of application. At this point, we might cast doubt on the originality of Adamčiak's work as "art" since he created many of his works as paraphrases or pastiches of the work of world-renowned artists. For Adamčiak, *hommage* was a conscious principle: he appropriated and adapted, polemicized, paraphrased, and recontextualized.⁸ He viewed two composers, Bogusław Schaeffer and Mauricio Kagel, as his teachers in graphic notation.⁹ It was Schaeffer's scores that gave substance to the idea of polyversional music, the ambition of which was to equalize composer and performer. Schaeffer's compositions are based on the principle of unpredictability and potentiality, leaving open possibilities for the performance of the score. Likewise, Adamčiak's graphic scores also place considerable demands on performance, above

6 Milan Adamčiak, "A Few Words about J. C.," in *John Cage*, exh. cat., Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, 1992.

7 Jozef Cseres, "John Cage in US: On John Cage's Influence among Czechoslovakian Artists", in *The Freedom of Sound: John Cage behind the Iron Curtain*, ed. Katalin Székely, exh. cat., Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 2013, pp. 80–81.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

9 Michal Murin, "S Milanom Adamčiakom o grafických partitúrach, hudobných projektoch a muzikologickej tvorbe", in *Milan Adamčiak Archív III (Nôty): Notácie a grafické partitúry*, ed. Michal Murin, Dive Buki, Košice, 2013, p. 66.

all on moments of improvisation. Although most of them can be played and also often contain verbal instructions for the performer, their visual resolution is sufficient for the reader simply to imagine the recorded auditory processes (fig. 6). For Adamčiak, the graphic score was a field of permanent conflicts, movements, and collisions, like batteries charged with dynamic energy. The meeting of graphic signs in the score emits the stimulus that in reading triggers acoustic associations according to the suggested instructions and also sketches spatial relationships (fig. 7). Many of these imitate and paraphrase electrical circuits, mechanical engines, or machines for playing (beginning with chess and ending with the gramophone or hi-fi tower). Hence, they correspond with the principles of invention, playfulness, and improvisation.

As Liz Kotz puts it in her book on language in 1960s art, language is central to the expanded concept of notation. “As already evident in Cage’s compositions of the late 1950s, language, graphic inscription, and diagrams all provide a means of defining parameters or indicting a structure, while retaining sufficient ambiguity to permit distinct performances or instantiations.”¹⁰ The model of unconventional musical notation was developed above all in the circle of artists close to the Fluxus Movement, for whom words to be read and actions to be performed became inseparable. “In their direct invitation to enactment and performed response, event scores could seem like almost absurd literalizations of 1960s’s critical claims for reading as an activity of production.”¹¹ Hence the event scores, using a typewritten or other kind of text, can be categorized simultaneously as poetry, performance art, and musical graphics. That is precisely the intersection point of performativity and writing to which *Labours of Sisyphus* (1965–1969) and *Monoactions* (1969) correspond. Both of them use a minimum of words and are written as directions or instructions for the achievement of an action. The first cycle of texts is divided into twenty-two parts, and in many of them the actors are musical instruments and a performer. In the case of *Monoactions*, the textual form was not as important as the presentation, because most of them served to defamiliarize everyday, ordinary situations and activities.

In Milan Adamčiak’s work, the visual poem created on the typewriter is the result of a gesture, and thus may be a written, sonic, and graphic record of an action. The problem of impulse (a point, a stroke on the typewriter key) and the problem of process (a line developed in time) gradually led him to an intention to consider typewritten grids as scores with their own rhythmic and acoustic event. In achieving this purpose he actually found a new expressive field, the result of a unique fusion of the impulses of concrete poetry, auditive poetry, new music, and action art. During the early 1960s, the French poet, translator, and theoretician Pierre

10 Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2010, p. 49.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

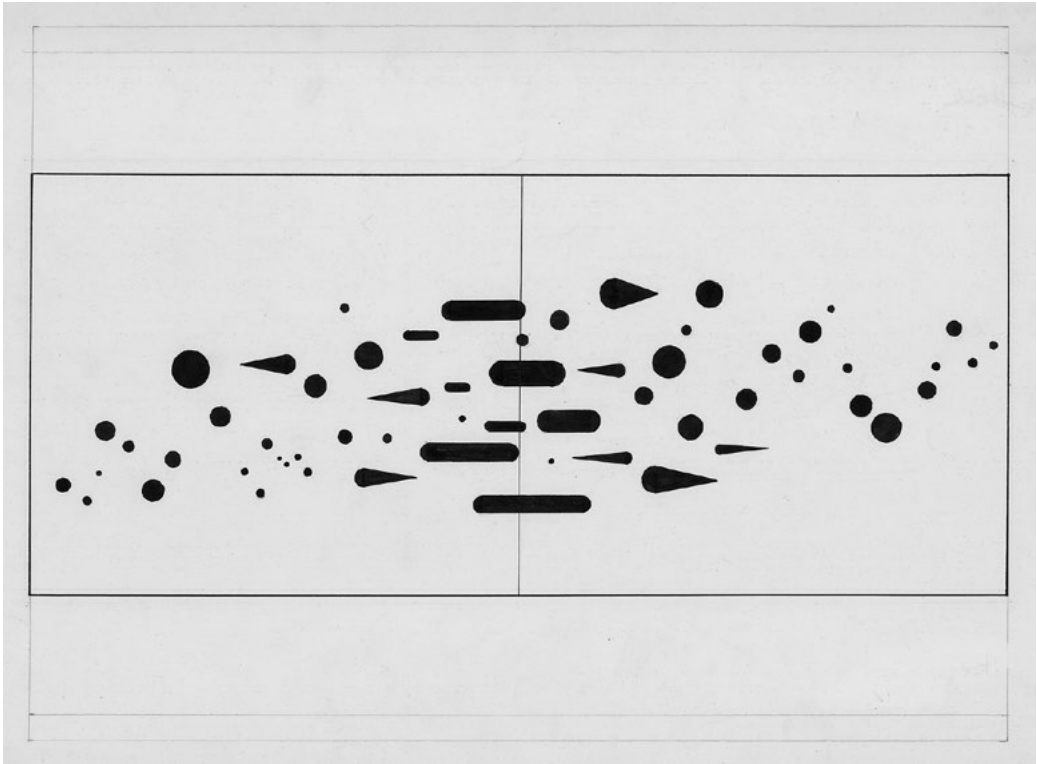


fig. 6

Milan Adamčiak, *Sign'ings*, 1968, ink drawing on paper, 32.5 cm x 45 cm.

Courtesy of the Slovak National Gallery.

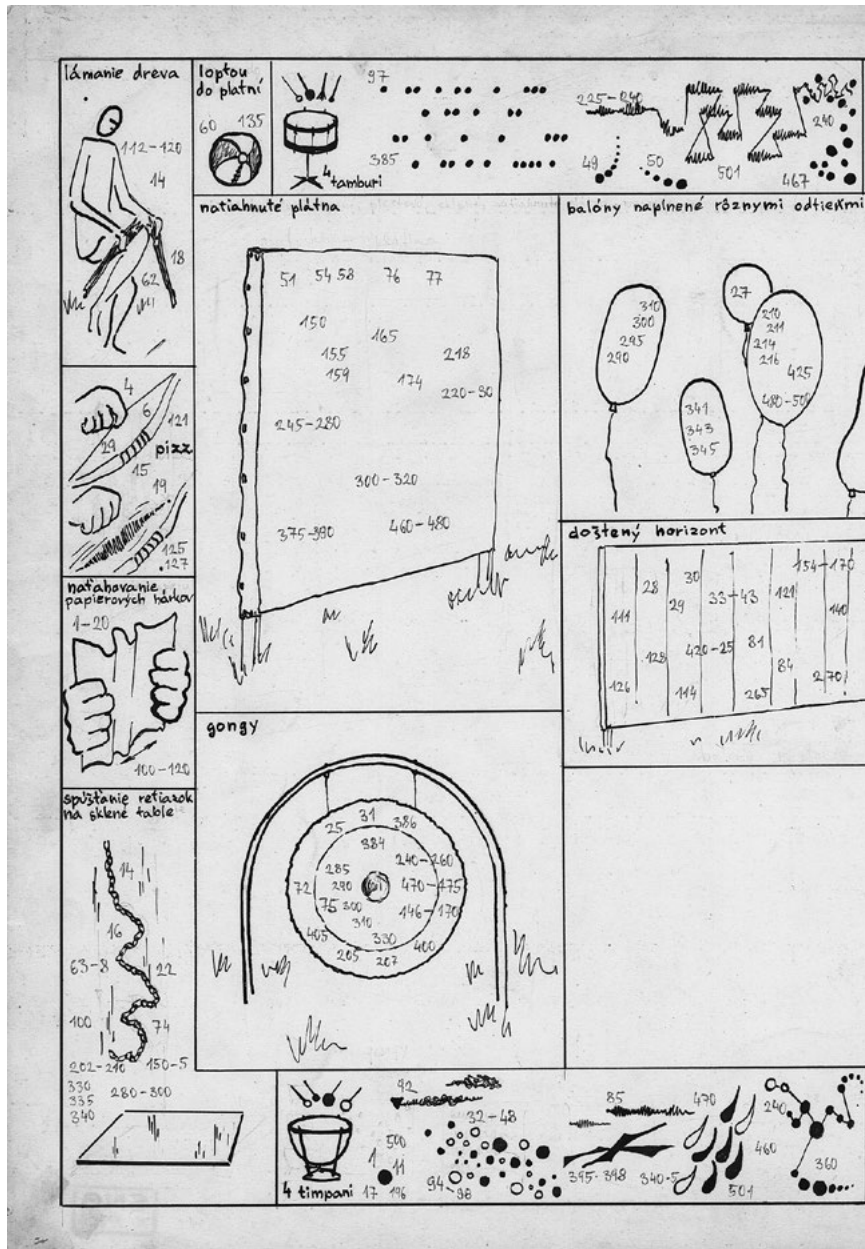
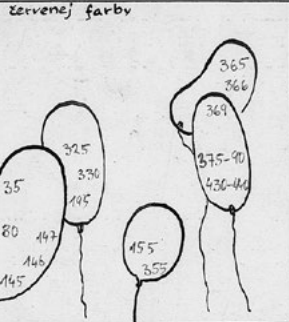
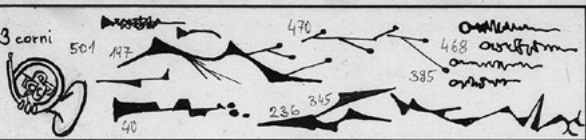


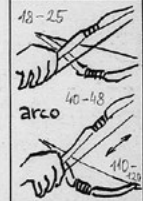
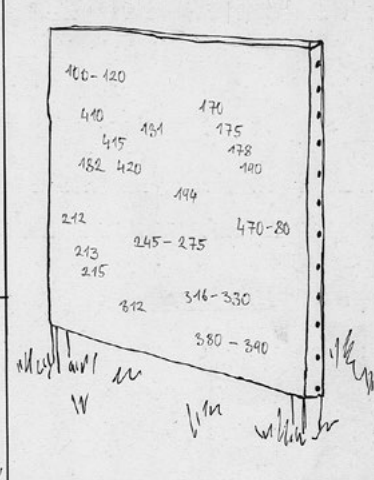
fig. 7

Milan Adamčiak, *Sebastian Poem*, 1969, ball pen
and ink drawing on paper, 32.5 cm x 45 cm.

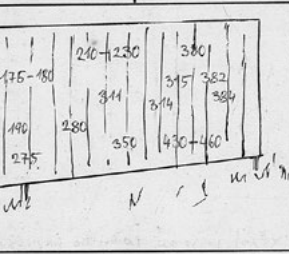
Courtesy of the Slovak National Gallery.



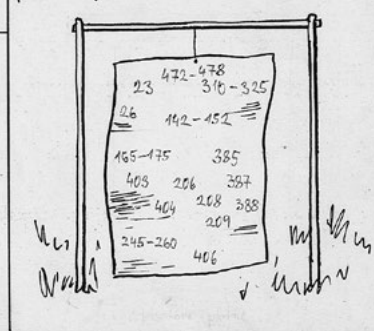
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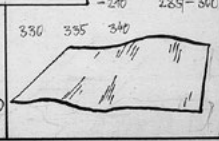
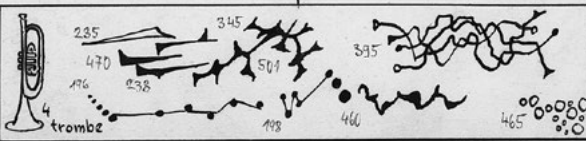
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plechové platne



spúšťanie reťazi na plechových platni



Garnier had proclaimed the challenges of phonetic poetry, which initiated new techniques of working with language as a material. He used the term “force-fields” (*Spannungsfelder*) for audiovisual experiments in concrete poetry where the constellated force of each word, each syllable, and each sound is exploited, and even the non-sounding points are charged with magnetism. Adamčiak’s visual poems entitled *Liniengedichte* (original title) was rooted right in the cylinder of the typewriter, where he applied the idea that each line is a process and has its own life on the paper’s surface. *Liniengedichte* was preceded by the cycles *Intenciogramy* and *Invenciogramy* (*Intentiograms* and *Inventiograms*, 1969) in which the line represents a kind of ideograph of life energies (e.g. tension-relaxation). To record them, Adamčiak used, in addition to “loose” paper leaves, sheets with a variously pre-inscribed metric grid (millimetre paper, logarithmic paper, etc.). Later, in the 1970s, these evolved into a cycle of cinematic drawings and scores created with recordings of his own constructions from a child’s construction set and other models of various kinds. In the series *Pseudogramy* (*Pseudograms*), Adamčiak extended the register to include writing using unconventional instruments (feathers, matchsticks, reeds), which he used as a working inventory for a gestic record in the limited space of the graphic score. Continuing along this path, he later arrived at score “inventories” and spatial installations from various materials (sugar, rice, sand, bones, cores, spices) that applied graphic tracing and gestic manipulation.

In 1969, Milan Adamčiak published his manifesto “Ensemble Comp.” in *Mladá tvorba* journal. The manifesto appeared in one issue, along with the libretto of Róbert Cyprich’s action *Čas slnka* (*Time of the Sun*). These two artists collaborated intensively during this period. The production of “Ensemble Comp.” was preceded by the staging of joint events in Žilina and Ružomberok (1967–1968), the creation of experimental poetry, music production (together they organized the so-called *Evenings of New Music*), and joint creations with Alex Mlynárčik.¹² In their remarkable output, both artists were responding to the topical ideas of experimental poetry, aleatory music, and action art. Adamčiak proclaimed the fusion of the three spheres – poetry, music, and event – and this remained a key aspect of his lifelong work. He presented a whole gamut of examples: bipoetry; patext; numerical texts; selective texts; prepared texts; montage, mix, and permutational text; verbal, substantive, adjectival, adverbial text; intermedia texts (phonic, auditive, etc.); visual texts; objective, topic, and shape texts; mobile, destatic, and spatial poems.

In all spheres of Adamčiak’s work, the creative potential of the reader/performer/viewer was emphasized. Poetry represented an active (performative) engagement of the reader in the completion of variations of the

12 The following are the actions documented by Alex Mlynárčik: *Trenie* (*Spawning*), *Festival snehu* (*Festival of Snow*), *Hommage à Courbet*, and *Donácia* (*Donation*). See Alex Mlynárčik and Pierre Restany, *Inde / Ailleurs*, exh. cat., Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, 1995.

text units. The reader, consumer of linguistic expression, is made equivalent to the author in the text. Adamčiak also used the designations “programmer” and “realizer”, for example in the following quote:

In the finished text ... the programmer pre-codes some kind of word ... to a system of numerically appropriate interpunctual signs The consumer/co-creator replaces the code with a word of the given verbal kind that suits him. A new text emerges, syntactically corresponding to the program.¹³

In music, the consequence of this collaboration is the principled engagement of the composition’s performer and the public. The musical work should not be precisely determined; rather it becomes directions for the performer’s self-realization. The event is understood as a synthesis of the two preceding categories:

... the public’s engagement in creative activity erases in full measure the distinction between creator and consumer, and levels the differences between artist and public ... it allows the subject to activate his human creative capacities, and permanently to participate and to manifest his true relationship to the action of life and society.¹⁴

Adamčiak speaks of becoming conscious of “active existence”, and his graphic scores and experimental poetry not only represent the achievement of “a liberated language”, but also anticipate open play with anyone who is prepared to take part. In 1966–1967, he was concentrating entirely on visual poetry composed on the typewriter. A year later he began using the monogram *jama*, an abbreviation of “*ja, milan adamčiak*” (“I, Milan Adamčiak”). The period at the turn of the 1970s represents the culmination of his poetic work. That was when he produced the cycles *Konštelácie*, *Selektívne texty*, *Preparované texty*, *Montážne a Mixážne texty*, *Patexty*, and *Bipoemy* (*Constellations*, *Selective Texts*, *Prepared Texts*, *Montage and Mix Texts*, *Patexts*, and *Bipoems*) in which he made practical trials of the avant-garde principle of the semantic decomposition of the text. Parallel with this, he was producing, from 1969 on, the associative manuscript *Skripturálne básne* (*Scriptural Poems*) and the rubber-stamped *Typoemy* (*Typoems*), crafted as shape compositions. In the *Typoems*, and throughout one part of the *Typoraster* (*Typogrid*) series from 1966–1969, he concentrated on a graphic record of the musical aspects (serialism, aleatorics, and polyphony) on a given surface. Both series of typographic poems are produced by typewriter on paper. Adamčiak had by then achieved a masterly combination of the initiatives of concrete poetry and graphic music in his visual poetry. The structure of the typographic grid also dominated his

13 Milan Adamčiak, “ENSEMBLE-COMP”, *Mladá tvorba*, vol. 14, no. 10, 1969, p. 26.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

visual poetry, which was inspired by the ornamentation of folk embroidery, and the texture of carpets, curtains, and fabrics.

What perhaps characterizes Adamčiak's poetry most persuasively is the performative and sonic dimension of machine-written type – the key-stroke, the succession of types, their overlapping and blurriness, the coherently composed image field. The visual qualities of the rubber stamp and machine-written type are determined by the rhythm and intensity of the strokes. The deciding factors are a randomly selected alphabetic code, a previously chosen combination of types, and their permutational application in the graphic realization. We can read the surface arrangement, and the density and overlapping of rubber-stamp types as a record of acoustic processes and simultaneously as directions for their interpretation. The graphic traces recording this synesthetic process are analogous to a number of important concepts such as Eugen Gomringer's *constellation* (*Konstellation*) and *randomness* as defined by George Brecht, who was known to Adamčiak from translations in the 1960s.¹⁵

Adamčiak was also preoccupied with composing the artwork in space. His organization of graphic signs evokes crystalline structures and the architecture of sounds. The non-completion of the compositional process, the principle of “the open acoustic system”, became an enduring attribute of his work. Starting in the early 1970s, Adamčiak was creating *Systémové partitúry* (*Systemic Scores*) with the aim of indicating solutions to notational problems in the form of matrices, graphs, tables, and diagrams. Within the space of one page he employed a regular grid in the form of a network, which he called *Lineatúry* (*Lineatures*). *Lineatures* and *Systemic Scores* are aimed at the organization of musical time. The precise written entry of their rhythmic composition represents directions for a subjective interpretation.

In addition to Eugen Gomringer's constellation theory, the principles of Abraham A. Moles's permutational art and Max Bense's statistical aesthetic of the text also resonate in Adamčiak's texts. The work of Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová brought new criteria originating from statistical aesthetics, manifestos, and literary experiments proclaiming a turn towards the materiality of language and the structure of the text to Czechoslovakia.¹⁶ The above-mentioned artists were proclaiming not only a new type of artwork, but also a new type of poet-creator that would be able to theoretically clarify the principles of composing concrete poetry. Earlier, Walter Benjamin presented the following conundrum in “The Author as Producer”: “Before I ask: what is a work's position vis-à-vis the production relations of its time, I should like to ask: what is its position

15 See George Brecht, “Náhoda a obraz”, p. 48, and Eugen Gomringer, “Od verše ke konstelaci”, p. 224, both in *Slovo, písmo, akce, hlas* (referenced in n. 4).

16 As early as 1962, Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová presented their “Lecture on the Philosophy of Language, Statistical Aesthetics and Contemporary Literary Experiment” at Mánes in Prague. See Vít Havránek, ed., *Akce, slovo, pohyb, prostor: Experimenty v umění šedesátých let*, exh. cat., GHMP, Prague, 1999, pp. 226–257.

within them?”¹⁷ This question, Benjamin avers, concerns the function of a work within the literary production relations of its time. In other words, it is directly concerned with literary “technique”. During the liberal 1960s, socialist Czechoslovakia saw not only the rise of the avant-garde vision of programmatic art, inspired by the conquests of science and technology, but also of the new role of the creator, bringing the poet’s consciousness into proximity with the machine. The concept of “technology” therefore becomes crucial for an understanding of experimental poetry and graphic music. As David Crowley pointed out, experiment in poetry and music cannot be disengaged from the political frameworks which socialism (a social experiment) was then producing.¹⁸ Scientific socialism stimulated progressive thinking in the cultural environment, and the anticipation of future technologies had already provided a powerful seedbed for the artistic imagination since the late 1950s. Artistic experiment undeniably drew on the technological possibilities the development of which was cultivated by state policy during the 1960s. However, the social situation in Czechoslovakia after 1968, followed by the onset of normalization in the early 1970s, saw the complete removal of experimental creation from public discourse. These political circumstances marked an entire generation of progressive artists striving to become a new international avant-garde, Adamčiak among them. The situation induced Adamčiak to integrate performativity and writing into a single whole. Not being able to perform his works publicly, he further dematerialized the compositional process, ultimately realizing the potential of graphic scores and experimental poetry to be effectively played out in the mind of the performer. Only after 1989 were several of Adamčiak’s scores publicly played as sonic, musical, and dance performances.

The extensive and internally differentiated archive of Milan Adamčiak’s experimental work is dislocated, scattered. It is only in the past few years that his work has been published in book form.¹⁹ One of the reasons for this situation is that Adamčiak sent out or gave away a large part of his production on various occasions. A second more prosaic reason is his eviction from his apartment, homelessness, and subsequent departure from Bratislava in 2005. Ultimately it is only because of the artist’s work typology, more than the medium, that there can be any question of an archive, because its coherence is imaginary. We can interpret the “archive” as

17 Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”, trans. Anna Bostock, *Understanding Brecht*, Verso, London, 1998, p. 87.

18 See Daniel Muzyczuk, David Crowley, and Michał Libera, “Sounding the Body Electric: A Conversation”, *ArtMargins Online*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/689-sounding-the-body-electric-a-conversation> (accessed July 29, 2016).

19 Milan Adamčiak, *Archív I (Expo): Experimentálna poézia 1964–1972*, ed. Michal Murin, Dive Buki, Košice, 2012. Works by Milan Adamčiak are in collections of Michal Murin, Jozef Cseres, Linea Collection, Marinko Sudac Collection, and the Slovak National Gallery.

a system of categorization of experimental poetry, action art, and graphic scores. It emerges from the artist's goals and intentions, and, at the same time, is a kind of instruction for reading the articulated complex of what he produced. Adamčiak's work ranges between intricately structured scores and spontaneous sketches; parts that amount to jottings encounter a conceptual analysis of variations in the positions and sound variations of the performer. On the one hand, documentation appears as a figure in the complex of the artist's self-historicization, a very frequent phenomenon in the former Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe.²⁰ As reasons for self-historicization, we might point to insufficient institutional reflection, or the distrust of the institution, and the associated effort to organize and communicate the closed quality and private character of artistic activities.

It is possible, using the example of Milan Adamčiak's work, to pursue archival strategies with the help of which artists create an autonomous context for their own artistic production. A fundamental expression of these strategies is the collection or accumulation of documents, often accompanied by the construction of personal mythologies and retrospective auto-interpretations. In an otherwise heterogeneous production that is scattered among genres, and ranges across a number of media, one can detect analogous processes at work in the case of such artists and their attempts to newly define themselves and their art in society – after many years of real socialism, and then in the subsequent era of political and social transformation.

Numerous publications have addressed the question of action art in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, elucidating the differing forms of action art and their historical context. Hitherto, however, little attention has been paid to the modes and strategies of documentation on which the forms of action art are mostly dependent. In the case of Slovak artists such as Alex Mlynárčik, Stano Filko, Július Koller, Peter Bartoš, and Milan Adamčiak, the procedures of self-historicization correspond with these artists' exclusion from the public sphere. Documentation from their archives, apart from reflecting and materializing the particular artist's aesthetic project, are also important personal testimonies on their life situations and the cultural politics of the time. Precisely for that reason, it is important to pay attention to the medium and form of documentation which artists chose in order to communicate their works, and what methods they used to preserve them and communicate them further.

Between today's viewer/reader/performer, historical time, and the performative work of artists of this generation stands the record, the documentation. Often it is automatically identified with the work as such, even though in many cases it amounts to mere traces, remains, relics of performances. In what sense do we today become performers of these performative works and by which methods can these works subsequently

20 See Zdenka Badovinac, *Prekinjene zgodovine: Arteast razstava / Interrupted Histories: Arteast Exhibiton*, exh. cat., Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2006.

be communicated to the public? Philip Auslander has used the term “performativity of documentation” to define documents that are not simply an indicative access point to a past event. Instead, these documents themselves are performances that fully reflect the sensibility or the aesthetic project of the artist. At the moment of reading these documents, we become an active public.²¹ Therefore the unique presence of performance in real time, its disappearing “now”, is not necessarily in contradiction with the archive, the logic of which is enduring repetition. Rebecca Schneider points out that if we perceive performance as an act of enduring and repeated manifestation, we need not approach it as something that vanishes after its completion.²² In the work of an artist such as Milan Adamčiak, the document or object does not merely contain isolated relics of performance: these documents anticipate and generate further performances.

Adamčiak has followers in present-day Slovakia in literary, musical and artistic circles. Apart from scholarly reflection on his work, his charisma and his unconventional perception of language and the world does not cease to inspire young artists and poets with. One of the most moving scenes in the film *Muzikológ a tvorca (Musiciologist and Creator, 2008)* by Arnold Kojnok, the young Slovak documentarist, shows Adamčiak walking beside a stream in the forest. He steps into the current and alters the arrangement of stones in order to change the sound of the flowing water. He perceives the landscape as an active score; he intervenes in the landscape to make it “ring out”. The motifs, techniques, and processes that Adamčiak applied and recorded remain relevant to this day. He returns to them, reconnects them again to life situations, and tests them in new conditions and settings, which is exactly what he expected the receiver/realizer of his work to do as well.

Translated from Slovak by John Minahane.

21 Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation”, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2006, p. 9.

22 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2011, p. 101.

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