



# Amateurism Under Socialism

## The Politics of Art Education in the Work of Milan Adamčiak, Július Koller and Jiří Valoch

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### Alternative Art Education

If art is teachable, it follows that the elitist establishment power structure that rules taste and the market can be demolished. If it isn't teachable, then the primary function of art institutions is to skim off the talented cream and make it serve a consumer society.<sup>1</sup>

Luis Camnitzer poignantly expressed the potentiality for social change that lies in teaching practice and at the same time pointed to its willing (or unwilling) servility to ruling power structures. This prompts us to ask what the conscious decision not to become a professional artist means and what social and cultural shape does it take in a given historical paradigm? This article sets out to explore some of the ambivalent practices of individual artistic expression within the centrally-controlled state apparatus of socialist art, and to reflect on the role of amateur art linked with alternative art pedagogy as a kind of 'in-between zone' between official culture and free time activity that arose in the aftermath of the so-called cultural revolution of the 1960s.

The status of amateur art between official and unofficial culture, and its distribution apparatus, disturbs the image of 'two adjacent zones' within the Czechoslovak art scene.<sup>2</sup> The late Piotr Piotrowski, in his famous book *In the Shadow of Yalta* describes the unofficial, parallel cultural sphere as having its own information distribution channels and its own hierarchies of value. Working outside the context of professional art venues led representatives of the Czechoslovak unofficial scene to defend the ethical and inherently artistic values of 'true' modernist art, together with the notion of innate freedom, against the ideological distortions imposed

1 Luis Camnitzer, 'In Latin America. Art Education Between Colonialism and Revolution', in Steven Henry Madoff, ed, *Art School: Propositions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009, p 208

2 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, Reaktion Books, London, 2009, pp 248–249

by the Socialist regime. However, as explored in this article, between the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ culture there lay zones of interaction and infiltration, not to mention cases of direct engagement of artists in non-art movements and the formation of so-called free zones of participatory creativity under socialism – a prime example of which was the widely accessible domain of amateur art. Following the thesis of Piotrowski’s horizontal art history, one could track progressive instances of alternative pedagogy in former Eastern Europe. Among those most prominent would be the Open Form of Oskar Hansen, who employed his architectural theory in the field of art education at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts from 1952 to 1983 and had an enormous impact on artists such as KwieKulik and subsequently on those who graduated from the sculpture studio of Grzegorz Kowalski. Another example of an unconventional educational workshop was the course organised by Miklós Erdély and Dóra Maurer who initiated the Creativity Exercises in 1975–1977 at the Ganz-Mávag factory’s cultural centre in Budapest. The deconstruction of the teacher/learner relationship as well as the authoritarian methods of conventional pedagogy led to ‘a novel definition of creativity, which abolishes the distinction between expert and dilettante and refuses to acknowledge the omnipotence of the artist-persona.’<sup>3</sup> What these two models of alternative art pedagogy have in common is that their goal was to investigate the relation of the individual and the collective, to stimulate improvised imagination and to develop mental capacities to think art in spatial and intersubjective relations. These courses altered the limited range of official art education, the main goal of which was to reinforce the ideological order. They also functioned as an improvised means of knowledge distribution and provisional laboratories for innovative forms of collective creativity.

## Opacity

My understanding of amateurism stems from the analysis of work by three distinctive artists – Július Koller (1939–2007), Milan Adamčiak (b 1946) and Jiří Valoch (b 1946) – and it is grounded in a new reading of the term opacity coined by the late Martiniquan cultural theorist and poet Édouard Glissant. In his collection of essays *Poetics of Relation* Glissant introduced this concept, arguing for a right to opacity that is not merely the right to difference but, as he puts it, subsistence within an irreducible singularity: ‘The opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence.’<sup>4</sup> According to Glissant, this same opacity is also the force that drives every community. Amateurism and its ‘right for opacity’ plays a crucial role here in unfolding the idea of anti-art and its justification as a tool of cultural critique. The artists mentioned above incorporated amateurism into their artistic practice giving it an amateurish accent and educational mission. Framing positions and attitudes of these artists with the term opacity means here that their work is far from transparent; rather it is difficult to grasp their work either as an open critique to the socialist regime or as a form of service to the communist ideology carried out in exchange for profitable institutional positions. In turn, what these artists have in common is their endeavour to invent, test and radicalise unconventional artistic forms

3 These pedagogical projects were reactivated in the exhibition entitled ‘Creativity Exercises – Spaces of Emancipatory Pedagogies’ (17 September – 31 October 2015). See, Dóra Hegyi and Zsuzsa László, eds, *Creativity Exercises – Spaces of Emancipatory Pedagogies*, exhibition catalogue, tranzit.hu, Budapest, 2015, pp 12–13.

4 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, [Gallimard, 1990], Betsy Wing, trans, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1997, p 191

and attitudes, bringing the work closer to everyday life situations. The work of these artists and their commitment to the politics of art education stems from the progressive culture of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia.<sup>5</sup>

As a young artist Július Koller engaged critically with the entire panorama of modern art and also with the artificiality, hypocrisy and conservatism of the official political ideology. In a spirit of proletarian modesty, he responded to the then current avant-garde trends (Pop Art and Happening), especially their modishness and calculated arrangement, with actions directed towards everyday life and the immediate surroundings. Milan Adamčiak was one of the first Czechoslovak artists to systematically research intermedia overlaps. As a musicologist he conducted his research in the field of so-called 'new' music. In the second half of the 1960s, he created typographic poetry in which graphic and semantic realisation overlapped with the acoustic rhythmisation of the text. One aspect of his work has its premise in experimental poetry, taking the form of directions and instructions for various activities. Another opens the way toward visual music with unconventional notations and graphic scores, while a third links 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 musical work using both classical and non-classical instruments and unusual settings. Valoch, like Adamčiak, also had a double identity. He was principally known as a theorist and curator based in The House of Arts in Brno (Dům umění města Brna) where he realised numerous exhibitions of the key personalities of Czech and Slovak art. Since the mid-1960s he created visual poetry, and at the beginning of the 1970s his work transformed itself under the influence of concrete poetry and conceptual art.

## Amateurism

The etymological kinship of the word *amateur* with the Latin *amator* (one who loves again and again) makes it possible to view art as a widely accessible cultural practice. Without seeking perfection or competitive status, the amateur takes prolonged delight in the chosen activity, thus giving substance to the idea of the anti-bourgeois artist.<sup>6</sup> Koller trained as a painter but his activities also included investigation into the technological imagery of late modernism, which at the same time becomes the sphere of his activities. Culture in its entire 'cosmohumanistic' breadth is indicated as the field of operation, which is related to the negated sphere of art in such a way as to show possible alternatives to it. In 1965 Koller published his first manifesto, *Antihappening (System of Subjective Objectivity)*. Contrary to the genre of the happening, which is a way of putting an artistic act into action, an *Antihappening* aimed at a personal reshaping of the subject, of awareness and of the surroundings and real life. Using the means of textual announcement ('making known'), the demarcation of the artist's diverse activities became part of the cultural context.

*Antihappening* was developed concurrently in two modes, those of textual announcements and of actions (both private and public) that

5 Daniel Grůň, *Archeológia výtvarnej kritiky: Slovenské umenie šesťdesiatych rokov a jeho interpretácie* (Archaeology of Art Criticism: Slovak Art of the 1960s and Its Interpretations), Slovart and VŠVU, Bratislava, 2009, pp 125–132

6 Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes [1975], Czech translation, *Roland Barthes o Rolandu Barthesovi*, Josef Fulka, trans, Fra, Prague, 2015, p 63





Július Koller's programmatic amateurism is not merely a departure from the affirmative and conjunctural art of late modernism; rather, Koller bases the continuum of the culture of life on a qualitatively different level, as compared with his avant-garde colleagues of the 1960s. The concept of 'permanent revolution', championed by Trotsky, which influenced several Czechoslovak artists via the French critic Pierre Restany, lost its justification after 1968. Hence the continuum of educational activity which Koller called *Confrontations (Antihappening)*, is not revolutionary and indeed it is not even entirely oppositional. The reason is that Koller identified with the task of the cultural-enlightenment worker. Unobtrusively he thus penetrated the state system of cultural enlightenment, aiming to realise within it his own programme of cultural synthesis and 'confrontation with contemporary popular amateur work in visual art'.<sup>7</sup> Thus Koller's engagement with amateur art must be understood as a political gesture neither on the side of official culture nor on the side of its dissident opponents.

As a lecturer Koller conducted consultations with amateur artists, organised summer gatherings, presided over selection committees, took part in symposia of amateur artistic work, prepared exhibitions and wrote texts about the work of 'non-professional' artists. 'It is necessary to support amateurs so that they develop their unprostituted artistic talent independently of the consumer and political market, and so that they create truthful images of subjective-objective reality.'<sup>8</sup> The City House for Culture and Enlightenment (MDKO) and the District Cultural and Social Centre for Bratislava III (ObKaSS III), for whom Koller worked, gradually extended opportunities for self-fulfilment through art as a free-time activity: 'Confrontations' (from 1967), 'Amateur Artists' Summer Gatherings' (from 1974), 'Symposia of Amateur Art' (from 1976) and 'Creative Confrontations' (from 1979). Koller was convinced of the social importance of free-time activities and he believed that raising the creativity level of non-professional artists contributed to the development of culture and awareness of social relations.<sup>9</sup>

Potentially, anyone who was interested in mastering art and painting in the open air might be a participant in the summer gatherings. It follows that these gatherings were not as tightly controlled ideologically as the official art of the communist regime, and they created a space for developing individual expression and collective creativity. Thus, a diverse group of amateur artists from various professions – scientists, doctors, lawyers, manual workers, engineers – began to develop around Koller. The summer gatherings were conducted in collaboration with local cultural centres throughout the entire republic. These temporary communities of non-artists gave a stimulus to situational games which were bound up with selected localities and the local milieu. Apart from offering an exceptionally creative atmosphere for non-professional artists, they also notably enriched the topological spectrum of Koller's actions: the 'cultural situations' recorded in Květoslava Fulierová's photographs. During all the years that he worked as a lecturer in the field of amateur art education (1967–1992), this activity was a committed realisation of Koller's attitudes and ideas towards art and its institutions. Hence, he saw the sphere of amateurism as having key significance in the binary dialectic of art and anti-art.

7 Cited according to the manifesto *Július Koller 1968, Konfrontácia (Antihappening)* [Confrontation (Antihappening)], handwritten text card in the collection of the City Gallery, Bratislava. Koller refers to the officially utilised term 'kultúrna osveta' (cultural enlightenment) rather than more general notion 'art pedagogy' also due to the introduction of his counter-project *Univerzálnokultúrna Futurologicko-kozmohumanistická Osveta (U.F.O.)* (Universal-Cultural Futurological-Cosmo-Humanist Enlightenment [U.F.O.]).

8 Július Koller gave some press interviews. In one of these, with Dagmar Gazdíková, he openly criticised the moral decline of professional art; see Dagmar Gazdíková, 'Farebné mesto' (Colourful City), *Kultura*'84, vol XVI, no 8, 1984, p 19. For further research see Dagmar Gazdíková, 'Nielen o výstave z Čičmian' (Not Just About an Exhibition from Čičmany), *Výstavníctvo, fotografia, film, Mesačník pre záujmovú umeleckú imosť*, vol XVII, no 7, 1979; Květa Fulierová, 'Malovali v maľovaných Čičmanoch' (They Painted in Picturesque Čičmany), *Život*, vol XXVIII, no 39, 1978, pp 24–25.

9 Koller devoted a number of texts to the methodological aspect of leading non-professional artists. Július Koller, *Životokolónás a v nás: Výstava tvorivých konfrontácií* (Life Around Us and In Us: An Exhibition of Creative Confrontations), Obvodné kultúrne a spoločenské stredisko, Bratislava III, Bratislava, 1981, manuscript text for an exhibition catalogue.



Július Koller, 'Universal Fictive Orientation (U.F.O.) 1', 1978, b/w photograph, image: courtesy Květa Fulierová), Július Koller Society

## Notation

It is, above all, Adamčiak's creative participation in happenings and concerts between 1969 and 1970 that has led art historians to characterise his practice as a parallel phenomenon to the Fluxus movement.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Milan Knížák, whom George Maciunas appointed director of Fluxus East, Adamčiak had no direct personal contacts with the movement during that period. 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 normalisation (1972–1989). To have continued with the activities he had launched earlier would have had unacceptable implications for his career. While he worked publicly as a scholar, columnist, and populariser of so-called contemporary music, in private he created for a narrow circle of recipients.

In 1970 Milan Adamčiak together with Róbert Cyprich (1951–1996) and Jozef Revallo (1944–1993), performed the legendary concert entitled *Vodná hudba* (Water Music) in Bratislava. It was no coincidence that the happening bore the identical name to John Cage's *Water Music* (1952) and through its manner of presentation, literally under the surface of the water, it radicalised the performative component. The musical happening took place in the covered swimming pool area in a student hostel. Casually seated on the floor in immediate proximity to the public, they allowed the traditional division of stage and auditorium to vanish. Subsequently a further part of the concert took place right in the swimming

10 Zora Rusinová, 'Milan Adamčiak a Robert Cyprich' ('Milan Adamčiak and Robert Cyprich'), in Zora Rusinová, ed, *Umenie akcie 1965–1989 (Action Art 1965–1989)*, Slovenská národná galéria, Bratislava, 2001, pp 89–93; Andrea Bátorová, 'Alternative Trends in Slovakia during the 1960s and Parallels to Fluxus', in Petra Stegmann, ed, *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, exhibition catalogue, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2007, pp 165–166



Július Koller, 'Universal Fictive Orientation (U.F.O.) 2', 1978, 3 b/w photograph, image: courtesy Květa Fulierová), Július Koller Society

pool, where the water united the performers with the public. Wearing diving goggles and carrying oxygen cylinders and violins, the musicians dived to the very bottom of the pool, followed by curious members of the audience, some of whom also used diving gear. The last of the series of documentary photos shows the enthusiastic applause of the participants, while in the background swimmers look on from a distance and another group of students are leaving the swimming pool area. What cannot be conveyed by the photographs are the acoustic qualities of the covered swimming pool area with its natural echoes bouncing off the water surface and the smooth tiles. These specific qualities of the chosen space unquestionably played their part in the happening. It is well known how significantly Cage's work influenced the artists associated with the Fluxus movement, and in this connection we may be reminded of the so-called 'event' scores by George Brecht, Yoko Ono and Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi.

In *Water Music*, in contrast to the works mentioned, Adamčiak does not use a written text as a method of notation, but his work is nonetheless premised, as we can see in the photographs, on a musical composition recorded in a graphic score. However, in other works which preceded *Water Music*, such as *Labours of Sisyphus* (Sizyfovské roboty, 1965–1969), we find unambiguous parallels with the event scores produced by the Fluxus artists. Unlike the latter, Adamčiak never published these works, nor did he realise them as actions in concerts. Rather, in the form of verbal instructions he allowed them to circulate among friends





Július Koller, 'Universal Fictive Orientation (U.F.O.) 3', 1978, 3 b/w photograph, image: courtesy Květa Fulierová), Július Koller Society

and randomly selected partners. They were transcribed in typewritten form on sheets of paper in 1969–1970. One of the recurring motifs is the triangle of performer–instrument–public:

Solo Per Gran Cassa

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

jama 1968

From the mid-1960s the ideas of the international Fluxus movement were making their way into Czechoslovakia and Adamčíak could have found them published in certain magazines or books, or he could have picked them up second-hand from artists in Prague. Jiří Kolář applied very similar principles in his cycle of exhortatory poems *Instructions for Use* (Návod k upotřebení [1965], 1969) as did Milan Knížák in the directions for his actions.<sup>11</sup> What is of interest to us here is not so much finding a solution to the problem of delayed development, dependency, or derivation from Western or other models. My concern is rather to show what part was played in these records by writing as an autonomous sphere, inviting the author and the recipient to enact a performative unity, a potential presentation in action

11 Pavlína Morganová, *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art behind the Iron Curtain*, Daniel Morgan, trans, Karolinum Press, Charles University, Prague 2014, pp 42–43 and pp 60–61





Milan Adamčiak and Róbert Cyprich in collaboration with Jozef Revallo, *Vodná hudba* (Water Music), 1970, documentation of musical happening in the covered swimming pool area 1, The Juraj Hronec student hostel, Bratislava (photo Juraj Bartoš), image: courtesy Juraj Bartoš



Milan Adamčiak and Róbert Cyprich in collaboration with Jozef Revallo, *Vodná hudba* (Water Music), 1970, documentation of musical happening in the covered swimming pool area 2, The Juraj Hronec student hostel, Bratislava (photo Juraj Bartoš), image: courtesy Juraj Bartoš

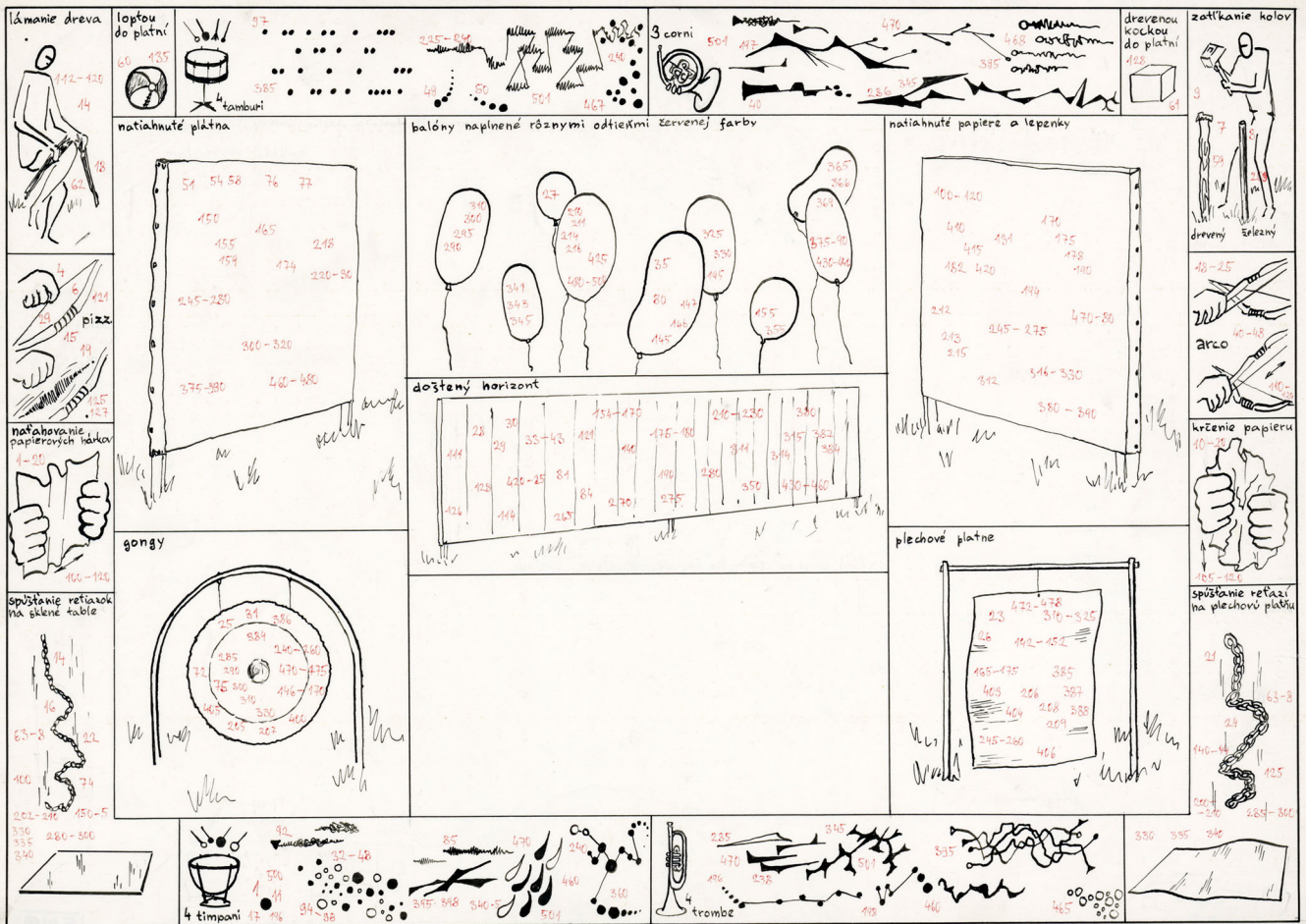
of the given piece. What Adamčiak managed to capture in *Labours of Sisyphus* was not merely a disjunction of the classical relationship between performer and public. His situations, staged in a minimal number of words, also allowed the utterance of emotions evoked by the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Since 1964, when he 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), Adamčiak's work had, on numerous occasions and at numerous levels, encountered the principles and procedures which that great inspirer brought into music and musical notation. It was only in 1992 that he first met Cage personally during his visit to Bratislava, when he organised an exhibition of his scores at the Slovak National Gallery.<sup>12</sup> One of Milan 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 notes, this statement reflects Adamčiak's polemical character, never content with the status quo, and there is also the multidimensional mode of artistic distribution of ideas which, under the conditions of marginal existence, is proceeding in many, often mutually conflicting, spheres of application.<sup>13</sup> At this point we might cast doubt on the originality of his work as 'art', since he created many of his works as paraphrases, pastiches of the work of world-renowned artists. *Hommage* for him was a conscious principle: he appropriated and adapted, polemicised, paraphrased and recontextualised.<sup>14</sup> Counting two composers among his teachers in graphic notation,

12 Milan Adamčiak, 'A few Words about J.C.', *John Cage*, Slovenská národná galéria, Bratislava, 1992, unnumbered pages

13 Jozef Cseres, 'John Cage in US: On John Cage's Influence among Czecho-Slovakian Artists', Katalin Székely, ed, *The Freedom of Sound: John Cage behind the Iron Curtain*, Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 2013, pp 80–81; published in conjunction with the exhibition (23 November 2012–17 February 2013) on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Cage at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest.

14 *Ibid*, p 80



Milan Adamciak, Sign'ings, ink drawing on paper, 1968, 32.5 cm x 45 cm, image: courtesy Slovak National Gallery





Jiří Valoch, *Hommage à Che*, 'not even for sex should we forget about revolution', 1969, photograph, newspaper, collage, 19 cm x 15.4 cm, Marinko Sudac Collection



Bogusław Schaeffer and Mauricio Kagel,<sup>15</sup> it was Schaeffer's scores that gave substance to the idea of polyversional music, whose ambition was the equalisation of composer and performer. Based on the principle of unpredictability and potentiality his compositions leave open possibilities for the performance of the score: hence Adamčiak's graphic scores also placed considerable demands on the performance, above all at the moment of improvisation. Although most of them can be played and often also contain verbal instructions for the performer, their visual resolution is sufficient for the reader simply to imagine the recorded auditory processes. For Adamčiak the graphic score was a field of permanent conflicts, movements and collisions. Hence this field is like a battery charged with a dynamic energy. The meeting of graphic signs in the score emits a stimulus which in reading triggers acoustic associations according to the suggested instructions and sketched spatial relationships. 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), and hence they correspond with the principles of invention, playfulness and improvisation. In all spheres of his work the creative potential of the reader/performer/viewer was emphasised. Poetry represented an active (performative) engagement of the reader in the completion of variations of the text units. The reader, consumer of a linguistic expression, is made equivalent to the author in the text; Adamčiak also used the designations 'programmer' and 'realiser'. Since the nature of Adamčiak's musical works is based on improvisation and openness he often engaged musicians, interpreters and non-artists to play with him, to realise or just to imagine his compositions.

## Desubjectivised Poetry

Besides working as a curator at Dům umění in Brno, writing extensively about new tendencies in Czechoslovak art, Jiří Valoch was a theoretician for his own work. Under the fictive name of Jan Pavlík he wrote a text for the first volume of his visual poems published in Rome in 1975 titled *Poesia Visiva*. At the end of the 1960s Valoch significantly expanded the field of visual poetry by extreme reduction of textual material and its semantic context. At that time he was a proponent of conceptual poetry, in which he generated the meaning of the work by setting the relation between word – written, painted or typed – and selected environments. Valoch worked with words not only as an artist, but also as a critic, theoretician, curator and collector in the field of contemporary art from the late 1960s.

As a theoretician he followed the rise of new artistic tendencies – concrete, geometric and computer art and soon afterwards also conceptual art, land art and minimal art. In the early 1970s Valoch opened Dům umění in Brno to progressive experimental art. Besides that, concrete poetry and conceptual art based on the use of minimal formats enabled him to communicate with a broad network of artists worldwide. In the first half of the 1970s Valoch expanded his work in the field of visual poetry into the photographic medium and participatory artistic modes. He documented semantic and verbal interventions on the human body, in semi-public environments or in the countryside with a photo camera.

15 Michal Murin, 'S Milanom Adamčiakom o grafických partitúrach, hudobných projektoch a muzikologickej tvorbe' (With Milan Adamčiak on Graphic Scores, Musical Projects and Musicological Work), in Michal Murin, ed, *Milan Adamčiak Archív III (Nóty): Notácie a grafické partitúry* (Milan Adamčiak Archive III (Notes) Notations and Graphic Scores), Dive Buki, Košice, 2013, p 66



Jiří Valoch, *My Art in My House*, 1972, marker, b/w photograph, typewriter text, paper, 29.7 cm x 21.2 cm, Marinko Sudac Collection



Jiří Valoch, 'Shadow Event', 1971, 4 x b/w photographs, 4 x (23.9 cm x 18.1 cm), Marinko Sudac Collection

Using the camera to document actions was not the ultimate goal for Valoch. Works such as *My Art in My House* (1972) or *Shadow Event* (1972) develop a distinctive methodology of reduced poetic speech expanding beyond its traditional usage and exploring new formats in everyday living environments. Here Valoch is invading everyday life situations by minimal expressions such as words like 'stone', 'love' or 'shadow', independent from their creator, autonomously producing meaning in relation to immediate surroundings. Valoch's works, as is the case of many other Czechoslovak artists, was not openly political, rather these works have a great semantic potential to be read and interpreted as desubjectivised poetry freed from any schemata of written language. In 1973 Valoch was forced to collaborate with the State Secret Police (StB) as a person who carried out multiple cultural activities, communicating with artists on a local as well as international level. He stated that he did not believe in the possibility of change in terms of political affairs and also that he was afraid of persecution. As a cultural worker and passionate art lover he was not able to do any other work than dealing with art and organising art exhibitions. It is striking that most of his artistic work was preserved by his friend J H Kocman who received and archived it.<sup>16</sup> His work remained unappreciated by other art critics and Valoch despite his personal dedication to art education remained to a great extent unknown as an artist. His role is defined in the extension of the field of contemporary art, in his tireless agency in favour of spreading information and presenting progressive art.

## Legitimacy

My intention here is to introduce and compare three figures whose artistic work is notably interrelated with their profession and public appearance but who at the same time, especially after 1972, disguised their creative activities to a great extent and shared them with limited audiences. They fostered public activity in neighbouring fields, such as art education at a

<sup>16</sup> Barbora Klímová, *Navzájem: Umělci a společnost na Moravě 70.–80. let 20. století*, tranzit.cz/FaVU VUT, Praha/Brno, 2013, p 199

local cultural centre of Bratislava city in Koller's case, a Slovak academic research institute in Adamčiak's case, and as a cultural worker and curator at Brno House of Arts in the case of Valoch. At the level of his artistic practice Koller declared his engagement with amateur artists to be part of his concept of *Universal Futurological Operations* and tirelessly processed photographic documentation within his own systematic records.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Adamčiak very rarely used photography as a means of communicating his concepts. Adamčiak often did not even sign his works, which was not the case with Valoch, who was obsessed with the author's signature. My point here is that their artistic practices were based on various modes of participative activities which often led to the formation of temporary communities. What all three artists have in common is that their role in spreading information and activating others for a stake in the avant-garde vision took place at the level of personal engagement. Amateurism is, however, understood here as an individual subversive political act within the frame of official culture and as a kind of unifying platform between author and ephemeral – sometimes even random audiences – and as a practice that was always unfinished, never revolutionary and indeed not even entirely oppositional to the given political system. Nevertheless, being contradictory to educational transparency, amateurism lay the foundations for its legitimacy through the 'respect for mutual forms of opacity' among the artists' circles, while opacity in the work of Koller, Adamčiak and Valoch becomes the basis from which, according to Glissant, lies the possibility of 'having entered into a political dimension'.<sup>18</sup>

17 However: 'Koller originally used the initials to mean 'Universal-Cultural Futurological Operations', but created many variations: the 'U' has stood for 'universal' or 'universal-cultural'; the 'F' has become 'futurological', 'fantastic', 'functional' or 'fictional'; the 'O' has stood for 'object', 'question mark' ('otaznik' in Czech) or 'revival' ('ozivenie' in Czech). The critic Jan Verwoert has commented on the significance of this constantly shifting reference.' See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/koller-universal-futurological-question-mark-a-d-u-f-o-t12441>

18 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, op cit, p 194