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FORMS OF EXPERIMENTAL POETRY IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CONTEXT SINCE THE 1960s

Abstract

In the present study, the author deals with the literary-historical and poetological circumstances of the notion of experimental poetry, noting this type of writing mainly in Slovak and Czech literature but against the broader background of Polish and Hungarian literature, i.e., in the Central European context. In particular, the author reflects on the communicability of texts constructed in this way. He chooses the 1960s as the initial period of his observations, but he also notes the experimental tendencies in poetry that preceded the 1960s, and at the same time, he moves from the 1960s to the 1990s and the developments in (Slovak) literature after the year 2000. From Slovak literature in the 1960s, he pays particular attention to the experimental work of M. Adamčiak, and from the most recent Slovak literature, he reflects on the work of P. Macsovszky and K. Zbruž. From a developmental point of view, the author focuses primarily on the significant influence of Czech literature on Slovak literature in the 1960s – especially the influence of the texts of L. Novák and V. Havel. The author also creatively builds on the metatexts of some literary scholars or creatively polemicalises with their findings or further conjectures them (K. Ihrinová, V. Křivánek, J. Šrank, M. Součková and others).

Keywords: experimental poetry, literary theory, aesthetic value, communicative contactability of the text, Central European literary context, Milan Adamčiak, Kamil Zbruz

In the Central European cultural space, the 1960s are undoubtedly considered the golden era or the peak of experimental tendencies in literature in the 20th century. In developing the idea of a Central European cultural space, we have in mind the Slovak, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian contexts, and the fact that we are more concerned with the Czech-Slovak sessions is not accidental or in any way irrationally subjective. The connection of Hungarian and Polish literature to European avant-garde movements naturally existed here, but we should immediately add that literary currents such as *experimental/concrete poetry* or *experimental writing* did not develop or were not fully separated. In the field of Hungarian literature, we can mention the poet, typographer, and graphic artist Lajos Kassák (1887-1967), who is considered by literary history to be the most important personality of the avant-garde movements in Hungary. In his work, one can find the practices of Dadaism, Futurism, Surrealism and Expressionism. He became famous as the author of the so-called “constructivist paintings” (“pictorial architecture”) and the poem *A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek* (“The horse dies, the birds fly away”) from 1922, which many experts place in the context of Apollinaire’s *The Passage* or the poetic composition *The Waste Land* from T. S. Eliot. The writer, poet and literary critic Peter Macsovszky also draws attention to Kassák’s “shorter, experimental texts, straddling the line between the short story and prose poems (*Tragic figures*, 1919)”¹. However, names such as Emil Szittyá (1886-1964; his prose *Das Kuriositäten-Kabinett. Begegnungen mit seltsamen Begebenheiten, Landstreichern* (“The Cabinet of Curiosities. Encounters with strange occurrences, vagrants”) from 1923 has been preserved in Hungarian), Sándor Barta (1897-1938), Erzsébet Újvári (1899-1940), Aladár Komját (1891-1937) and Andor Németh (1891-1953) also deserve attention. The latter two were close to surrealist poetry, while Barta consistently wrote Dadaist poems. Not to be overlooked is the poet Károly Sirató Tamkó, better known by his artistic name Charles Sirató (1905-1980) – the aforementioned Macsovszky notes about him: “with his

¹ <https://zurnal.pravda.sk/esej/clanok/362975-nebojme-sa-madarskej-literarnej-moderny/> [Accessed 23.03.2022].

visual poems – he wrote the first one in 1924 – he announced the advent of postmodernism. However, he approached the creation of visual poetry not through the typographic solutions of the typeface but the arrangement of words in space, and his themes and lexis are also remarkable, taking inspiration from science and, later, from certain spiritual tendencies². The appellation “Hungarian Joyce” or “Hungarian Musil” could undoubtedly be applied to the novelist Miklós Szentkuthy (1908-1988) – his debut novel *Prae* (1934) is a 1200-page eclectic collage prose that can form a unified poetological trajectory with J. Joyce’s *Ulysses* or R. Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*.

In Poland, the situation is quite different because the formal experiments in 20th-century literature have been entirely, even exclusively, applied in works for children. The literary scholar P. Winczer (2000) even considers the relatively direct influence of the linguistic experiments of the poet Julian Tuwim (1894-1953) on the work of Miroslav Válek (his translation of Tuwim’s *Cuda i dziwy* („Miracles and Wonders”) from 1961 is considered congenial by translation critics) and Lubomir Feldek from the mid-1960s onwards. Alongside Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa (1898-1966), later two extremely talented “pupils” of Tuwim, developed various mutations of linguistic experimentation in his work for children: Joanna Kulmowa (1928-2018) and Wanda Chotomska (1929-2017), who develop a “nonsense-fairy-tale type of writing that exploits the child’s joy in word-formation, in puns, in ‘breaking the language’, in creating imaginative playful situations in which the child’s perceiver is drawn into the game.”³

In Czech literature, these are mainly representatives of concrete and phonic poetry: Ladislav Novák (prepared texts and constellations in the collection *Pocta Jacksonu Pollockovi* („A tribute to Jackson Pollock“) from 1966), Václav Havel (collection *Antikódy* (“Anticodes”) from 1963), resp. poets such as Emil Juliš, Jiří Kolář, Josef Hiršal, Zdeněk Barborka, Vladimír Burda and others, whose varied texts form the anthology *Vrh kostek: Česká experimentální poezie* („Litter of Cubes: Czech Experimental Poetry“), which was compiled in the 1960s, but published by Torst up in the

² <https://zurnal.pravda.sk/esej/clanok/362975-nebojme-sa-madarskej-literarnej-moderny/> [Accessed 23.03.2022].

³ P. Winczer, *Súvislosti v čase a priestore. Básnická avantgarda, jej prekonávanie a dedičstvo* (Čechy, Slovensko, Poľsko), Bratislava: VEDA – Vydavateľstvo slovenskej akadémie vied 2000, pp. 270.

1993. From the terminological aspect, the general term *experimental poetry* is here “fragmented” into precisely nuanced categories and subcategories such as *processual texts* (Z. Barborka), *typograms*, *grotesque poems and binary poetry* (L. Nebeský), *structural poems* and *kinetic poetic formations* (J. Procházka), *constellations*, *annihilations*, *prepared texts*, *associative macromolecules* or *detective texts* (L. Novák), *contentless poems*, *illiterate poems* (J. Kolář) or *verbal permutations* or *stochastic texts* (J. Hiršal and B. Grögerová). An attempt to define a substantial categorial hierarchy, built from the tribal concept of *experimental poetry*, is offered in her study by K. Ihringová, for example, when she writes:

Often the term “experimental poetry” is used for a variety of literary and artistic expressions whose common denominator is precisely the experiment in the plane of form, i.e. in the plane of language. Therefore, under this common denomination we can include *visual* poetry, working with visual means of expression; *phonetic* poetry, in which the phonetic (sound) side dominates over the semantic side; *conceptual* poetry, built from complex language games and tautologies; *cybernetic* poetry, working with computer programs generating new texts; and *object-based* poetry, in which the words of a poem are rendered in the form of a visual object. However, classification was inevitably preceded by a new (experimental) way of writing such a previously unconventional poem. The poem abandoned its strong attachment to semantics, freed itself from the shackles of traditional signification, and turned toward purity of language, toward and sonority. In Max Bense’s words, a new variant of poetry emerged, the so-called *artificial poetry*, which renounced philosophical, psychological or personal statements and, under the influence of the proliferating semiotics and the theory of the sign, became an impersonal, non-subjective work, without any signs of individuation and subjectification.⁴

The considerations of V. Křivánek, who, despite his initial “reluctance” to categorise anything (“There is considerable terminological freedom in the labelling of individual types of experimental poetry”⁵), nevertheless proceeds to a strict distinction:

⁴ K. Ihringová, *Experimentálna poézia a jej podoby v slovenskom vizuálnom umení* [In:] „Slovenská literatúra“, 58, Nr. 4. 2011, pp. 317–318.

⁵ V. Křivánek, *Pět podob experimentu v české poezii dvacátého století* [In:] „Bohemica Olomucensia“ 1. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci 2010, pp. 22.

According to the material it works with and what it addresses in the perceiver, experimental poetry can be divided into concrete poetry (it works with language as a material, analyses it and creates various unusual compositions according to certain rules), phonic poetry (it is based on the arrangement of phonemes and other sounds into new phonorhythmic series, which it records – related to modern music), visual poetry (it uses graphic forms of recording, combining word and image – related to visual art).⁶

Among the fundamental views that shaped the Czechoslovak current of experimental poetry and new theoretical approaches to language from the 1960s onwards (Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová) were the theoretical concepts of A. A. Moles⁷ (*Manifesto of Permutational Art*) and E. Gomringer⁸ (*From Verse to Constellation*).

Constellation, permutation, realisation, variation or demonstration become the new artistic methods of constructing a poem for them. Abraham A. Moles says in his manifesto that we are entering a permutational art in which permutation is understood as a combination of simple elements with limited discriminative power. This artistic principle opens up new possibilities of perception. We can only truly grasp the full meaning of permutational art in the machine age. Eugen Gomringer, in his manifesto *From Verse to Constellation*, argues that each age speaks its own language. Today's man differs from those of the past in that he wants to understand very quickly, hence the formal simplification of language. Such simplification has become the essence of the new poetry, and poetry has been placed in a parallel position with the visual arts, which, also thanks to Kandinsky, Klee and Mondrian, have sought to uncover their original materials and means of expression. Constellation is defined as a group of words that are chained together or side by side, it is both unique and untranslatable. In this

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Abraham André Moles (1920 – 1992) was a technical engineer, doctor of physics in acoustics, philosopher and communication theorist. In his research, he was the first to attempt to find relations between aesthetics and information theory, or between aesthetics and the language of science. He tried to apply the strictly scientific definition of language and its communicative functions to the language of art.

⁸ Eugen Gomringer (1925) is a German poet of Bolivian origin who is considered by literary critics as the spiritual father of concrete poetry in Germanophone countries. In theoretical articles, studies and manifestos, he strives to find correspondences between the language of concrete poetry and the language of concrete art. Until recently, he was director of the Institut für Konstruktive Kunst und Konkrete Poesie (IKKP) in Rehau, Germany.

new game, Gomringer once again involves the reader as a fellow player in a game whose rules have been determined by the poet himself.⁹

The situation of experimental artistic (especially literary) production in Slovakia in the 1960s was somewhat more complicated compared to other Central European countries since the only information channel through which any information from Western countries could reach Slovakia was the Czech art scene. However, the Slovak specificity, also in comparison with the Czech context, was that while in other European countries, experimental poetry was overwhelmingly dealt with by poets and literary aestheticians, in the Slovak environment, it was the artists and composers who first responded to it. Admittedly, in Slovak literature of this period, we can also encounter attempts at visual poetic experimentation (e.g., Štefan Moravčík's poem *Reč páleného* or Vojtech Mihálik's poem *Tehotná*). However, these initiatives never grew beyond the horizon of an individual, solitary experiment. Hence they did not form into a collective output or perhaps a theoretically compact, manifestational programme, as was the case with visual artists. That was probably also related to the emergence and growing popularity of Lettrism, which emerged in France in 1949. The first artists who simultaneously responded to the creative impulses of Lettrism and the literary experiment that was just taking shape were Eduard Ovčáček and Miloš Urbásek. E. Ovčáček's activity in Slovak culture can be delimited by the years 1957-1965, i.e. from his student years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava to his definitive return to the Czech artistic area. His role models were mainly the visual poetry of the Russian avant-garde (the cubofuturist formation led by V. Mayakovsky and V. Chlebnikov), the Dadaist concept of pasted collages (the work of Kurt Schwitters) and structural painting and graphics based on the model of Jean Dubuffet. The history of Slovak experimental poetry was primarily influenced by Ovčáček's poetic cycle *Kruhy* (1962-1963), which is composed entirely of typewritten typograms.

The work of the versatile intermedia artist, poet, composer, performer, and musicologist Milan Adamčiak (1946-2017), who in the early 1960s was deeply influenced by the work of E. Ovčáček. If above we talked about

⁹ K. Ihringová, *Experimentálna poézia a jej podoby v slovenskom vizuálnom umení* [In:] „Slovenská literatúra“, 58, Nr. 4. 2011, pp. 320.

a specific genre, resp. Adamčiak's work is a good example to explicate the breadth and diversity of the creative "scope" of this type of work¹⁰: typographic experiments with Dadaist and pseudo-advertising treatments (*Hravopisy, Lavopisy, Praepisy, Reclamarie* – 1964), poems parodying urban street folklore (*Vývolávanky, Vyvo- and vivolávky, Psievanky* – 1964); in 1966-1967, typewritten visual poetry (the cycles *Konštelácie, Selektívne texty, Preparované texty, Montážne a Mixážne texty, Patexty a Bipoemy*); until 1971, when the creative enthusiasm of M. Adamčiak and his colleagues (A. Mlynárčík, R. Cyprich, M. Urbásek and others) was stopped by standardisation, the cycles *Tlačivá, Typorastre, Typoemy, Intenciogramy* and *Invenciogramy* were created. One of the last public declarations of experimental art in Slovakia, which the emerging normalisation had not yet stopped¹¹, was the publication of the *Ensemble Comp.* in the pages of the magazine "Mladá tvorba" (1969). The manifesto, signed by Adamčiak, was published in one issue with the script of the action *Čas slnka* by Róbert Cyprich (1951-1996). The remarkable contributions of both authors responded to the current impulses of experimental poetry, aleatoric music and action art. In his

¹⁰ In an interview of M. Murin with M. Adamčiak from 2011, Adamčiak recalls the beginnings of his first «touches» with alternative artistic currents and his beginnings as an author as follows: «It so happened that around 1964, when DADA, Futurism – both Russian and Italian, experimental poetry, op-art, pop-art, constructivism and concrete art, New Music, experimental theatre, hapening appeared in several magazines, Fluxus (The Fluxus movement is an international movement bringing together experimental artists, especially visual artists, designers and musicians, based on the work of Marcel Duchamp, as a result of which it is very often referred to as Neo-Dadaism. It was founded in 1960 in New York. – M.M.), events, action art, I was fascinated by the events, by my ignorance and by the extent to which I was fascinated by these unknown terrains. I dug up, and still occasionally find in my memory and writings, my early 'serious games' with letters, notes, lines, gestures and actions. I learned that my *Sizyfovské roboty* were actually events, *Chodecké kusy* and *Nákupy* were confrontable with Flux activities, *Záclony, Koberce, Výchivky* embroidery had their equivalents in the then current experimental poetry. I decided to continue this and tried to confront it with current events.» (Murin, M., *Milan Adamčiak známy aj neznámy: rozhovory Michala Murina s Milanom Adamčiakom o jeho experimentálnej poézii a iných literárnych a dramatických textoch* [In:] Adamčiak, M.- Murin, M. (eds.): *Archív I. [EXPO]. Experimentálna poézia 1964–1972*. Košice: Dive buki 2011, pp. 12-13).

¹¹ On the contrary, the project of M. Adamčiak and literary scientist V. Šabík (at that time editor-in-chief of the Review of World Literature) to publish the magazine *Experiment 0* in Slovakia had already encountered to hard ideological limits – its publication was stopped and the zero issue was scrapped...

manifesto, M. Adamčiak accentuated the interconnection of the three spheres of poetry, music, and event, which ultimately remained a notable aspect of his life's work. Here he emphasises the realising potential of the performer, the reader, and the spectator. Poetry, in his view, represents the active – performative – activity of the reader in completing the variations of textual units. In music, this is followed by a principled involvement of the performer of the composition and the audience – the musical work is not meant to be precisely determined but becomes an instruction for the performer's self-realisation. The event is understood as a fusion of the two categories mentioned above:

The involvement of the audience in the creative activity fully blurs the distinction between creator and consumer, levels the differentiation between artist and audience [...], allows the subject to activate his human creative abilities, to participate permanently and to manifest his real relation to the events of life and society.¹²

At this point, we would like to stress a fundamental fact – namely, we are convinced that a relevant part of M. Adamčiak's experimental textual production is analysable (interpretable) by the methods of literary science or literary criticism, ergo it does not fall under the reception "curatorship" of the theory of visual or musical art. We take the liberty to emphasise this perhaps banal fact because not only the name of M. Adamčiak but also that of his other colleagues – creators (see above) repeatedly, even chronically, drops out of the dictionaries of Slovak writers and the history of Slovak literature¹³. We, therefore, share the opinion of the art historian

¹² D. Grůň, *Performatívna poézia Milana Adamčiaka* [In:] M. Adamčiak, – Murin, M. (eds.), *Archív I. (EXPO). Experimentálna poézia 1964–1972*. Košice: Dive buki 2011, pp. 325.

¹³ The entry «Milan Adamčiak» is not to be found, for example, in the otherwise well-founded *Dictionary of Slovak Writers* (1999, 2005) edited by V. Mikula or the *Encyclopedia of Slovak Writers* (here, given the year of publication [1984], for more understandable reasons) edited by K. Rosenbaum, not to mention other popularization guides such as J. Rezník's *Journeys into literature* (2001), etc. What is more alarming, however, it does not appear in any context in the *History of Slovak Literature II*. (2009) compiled by I. Sedlák (1918 – about a year after its publication) or in the no less representative *History of Slovak Literature III*. (2006), written by a team of authors led by the literary scholar V. Marčok and whose important, if only subconscious, mission (since they are devoted to Slovak literature of the second

and theoretician Daniel Grúň, who, in his introduction to the selection of M. Adamčiak's works from 1964-1972, somewhat sadly remarks:

Adamčiak remained an unrecognised solitary in the context of Czechoslovak experimental poetry – his work has not been included in any of the existing anthologies, and thus remains unnoticed by literary scholarship. If Adamčiak is reflected by art history, it is rather in the categories of action art, intermedia art and unconventional music, but not in the categories of the literary canon.¹⁴

To illustrate, let us quote part of the opening poem, *Zvoľme si určitý prvok* (“Let’s choose a certain element”) from Adamčiak’s cycle *Matematické texty* (“Mathematical texts”, 1968):

zvoľme si určitý prvok. nazvime ho / prvok. prvok prvok bude patriť do / určitej množiny. nazvime ju množina. / prvok prvok je teda prvkom prvkom / množiny množiny. prvok prvok množiny / množiny je za určitých okolností / tvorcom určitej situácie. okolnosti / nazvime okolnosti. situáciu nazvime / situácia. prvok prvok množiny množiny / je za okolností okolností tvorcom / situácie situácie. situácia situácia / smeruje k určitému výsledku. výsledok / nazvime výsledok. teda prvok prvok / množiny množiny za okolností okolností / smeruje k výsledku výsledku situácie / situácie...¹⁵

half of the 20th century) was certainly also to fill in all the so-called white spots, which arose as products of ideological pressures and politically purposeful fumigating of authors and works from the literary map of Slovakia. On the other hand, one should highlight those, albeit partial, literary-historical projects of the (youngest) generation of literary scholars who are slowly trying to eliminate the aforementioned factual deficits. M. Adamčiak is mentioned, for example, in the publication of the editors R. Passia and I. Taranenkova’s *Hľadanie súčasnosti. Slovenská literatúra začiatku 21. storočia* (2014), where we read: «The possibilities of linking the pictorial component with experimental poetry were introduced into the coordinates of Slovak literature by Milan Adamčiak... in the 1960s (the book *Archív I (EXPO) / Experimentálna poézia 1964 – 1972* was published only in 2011). This line seems to be the most radical, it shows innovative attempts to move the written text more into a performative position, which is made possible for authors by multimedia...» (Passia, R. – Taranenková, I. [eds.], *Hľadanie súčasnosti. Slovenská literatúra začiatku 21. Storočia*, Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum 2014, pp. 117).

¹⁴ D. Grúň, *Performatívna poézia Milana Adamčiaka* [In:] Adamčiak, M. – Murin, M. (eds.), *Archív I. (EXPO). Experimentálna poézia 1964–1972*. Košice: Dive buki 2011, pp. 326.

¹⁵ M. Adamčiak, – Murin, M. (eds.), *Archív I. (EXPO). Experimentálna poézia 1964 – 1972*. Košice: Dive buki 2011, pp. 139.

Considering that this text was published in 1968, looking at some poetic compositions of Slovak postmodernists, namely, for example, representatives of the so-called text generation¹⁶, we cannot help feeling the return of certain poetological lines which, in the context of the second half of the 1990s and the noughties of the 21st century, according to several critics, seemed provocative, or rather innovative and peculiar.

In Macsovszky's collection of poems *Súmračná reč* ("The Twilight Speech") from 1999, for example, we find similar repetitive stylistic procedures, formal experiments with the preparation of the text (omitting lines, or the creation of "white" [paraphrased] spaces in the text, the so-called parallel columns, underlining of verses, underlining of autocommentary). In the sequence entitled 6.b: we read: "*telo je vrece strastí / – (a to sa práve malo dokázať): / telo je vrece strastí / – (a to sa práve malo tematizovať): / bremeno ktoré ťa vláči / – (a to sa práve malo popísať): / telo je vrece strastí / – (a to sa práve malo dokázať): / a v tom vreci myseľ*"¹⁷. Staying with the text generation poets, in 2013, a collective authorial book, *Generator x_2 Nové kódexy*, was published, a follow-up to the project *Generator X: Hmlovina* ("Generator X: Nebula") from 1999. In the continuation of the third millennium, which was made possible by the "founding fathers Michal Habaj & Peter Macsovszky & Peter Šulej and Andrej Hablák a.h." (quoted from the bookplate), we can find XXXVII and XXXVIII codexes, which are as if an explicit allusion to the experimental poems of Czech-Slovak literary provenance from the 1960s, respectively perhaps also to some specific compositions – texts by M. Adamčiak:

a to si pýta komentár (téza) / a to si pýta komentár (antitéza) / a to si pýta komentár (syntéza) (Codex XXXVII)

nechcel / nechcel som / nechcel som byť / nechcel som byť generator / nechcel som byť generator x / nechcel som byť generator x_2 / nechcel som byť generator x_2_8 / nechcel som byť generator x_2_8_alfa / nechcel som byť generator x_2_8 / nechcel som byť generator x_2 / nechcel som byť generator x / nechcel som byť generator / nechcel som byť / nechcel som / nechcel (Codex XXXVIII)¹⁸

¹⁶ See: J. Šrank, *Hľadania básnikov prichádzajúcich na sklonku tisícročia* [In:] Marčok, V. (eds.): *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry III*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum 2006, pp. 146–154.

¹⁷ P. Macsovszky, *Súmračná reč*, Banská Bystrica: Drewo a srd 1999, pp. 32.

¹⁸ *Generator x_2. NOVÉ KÓDEXY*. Bratislava: Občianske združenie Vlna / Drewo a srd 2013, pp. 106-107.

The quoted texts are quite objectively identifiable as textual “manifestations” of experimental poetry (especially the last poem even implies the genre of object-visual poetry). However, we add in one breath that we do not consider the work of M. Habaj, P. Macsovszský, P. Šulej, A. Hablák and others as a whole¹⁹. That is more about the occasional tendentiousness or fiddling with the experimental text-making techniques described above. We are not quite sure whether it is possible to think of experimental poetry in the 1990s in Slovakia as a platform that can be unambiguously delimited in terms of personality and time, as the literary scholar J. Šrank attempts to do when he identifies it as one of the key typological lines from the second half of the 1990s to the present.

The first stage or the first cycle in the transformations of the experimental-deconstructive tendency can be (roughly) defined by 1994 and the first third of the noughties of the 20th century. This period saw the publication of a series of decisive books that established poetic utterance as an intellectual game denying the productivity of evocative and confessional lyricism that directly referred to subjective experience.²⁰

¹⁹ The authors of the collective monograph *Hľadanie súčasnosti. Slovenská literatúra začiatku 21. storočia* define the Generator X project as «a group of poets participating in a collective poetic experiment» (Passia, R. – Taranenková, I. [eds.] 2014, pp. 159), when they «identified a virtual cyborg, a humanoid» (ibid.) as the author of their first joint book *Generator X: Hmlovina* (1999), while they consider the work of the incriminated quartet of poets (Habaj, Hablák, Macsovszky, Šulej) in the subsection *Mystifikácie a postkonceptualizmus*. They later inspiringly add about the second book – *Generátor x 2: Nové kódexy* (2013): «Thus, the poetic generation x does not imagine the creation of poems as a romantic musical act, in which inspiration and intuition play a crucial role in the outcome, but imagines poetic creation as the production of a text, with the poet functioning as a kind of machine for the production of poems and (poetic) language as a mechanism for the generation of utterances (verses).’ The method used is particularly interesting, unique in the Slovak context. Computers, especially electronic mail (emails), were used in the creation of the texts. Thus, the texts were indeed created with the abundant use of the machine and its program, by collective transcription, i.e. by the palimpsest method. The Generator X project is thus related to the phenomenon called *flarf poetry*, which is created on the Internet by a group of poets collaborating through a common discussion portal, electronic mail, or on social networks.» (ibid., pp. 159-160).

²⁰ J. Šrank, *Individuálna literatúra. Slovenská poézia konca 20. a začiatku 21. Storočia*, Bratislava: Cathedra 2013, pp. 382.

However, even the further “refinement” and poetological anchoring of this line in Šrank’s book does not, in our opinion, provide reliable differentiation “markers” by which experimental creative practices could be reliably identified:

As for the relationship of experimental initiatives from the second half of the 1990s to other varieties, during the first differentiation cycle it was characterised by distance, aversion and controversy, an attempt at a clear, ostentatiously polemical, ironic, negative definition. The cause was the rejection of subjectivity as the main fetish of other varieties of contemporary poetry.²¹

And elsewhere:

For deconstructive authors, the strongest restraint was in relation to the domestic tradition [...], they were mainly inspired by foreign literary, visual and musical (post)avant-gardes (futurism, dadaism, minimalism, conceptualism, experimental poetry, action art, process art, pop-art, etc.), as well as numerous distinctive individuals of modern literature who, for whatever reasons, resonated in the postmodern situation (G. Apollinaire, F. Pessoa, T. S. Eliot, E. Pound, etc.). They were also connected to local representatives of artistic experiment (M. Adamčiak, J. Juhász, M. Murin, J. Fajak and others). Unlike authors of other tendencies²², they had a more intimate relationship with popular culture, so they creatively responded to its various forms (cyberpunk, science fiction, comics, various, especially television, film and music products of the entertainment industry, advertising, computer games).²³

²¹ Ibidem, pp. 385.

²² In Slovak poetry after 1989, J. Šrank (ibid., pp. 53-58) distinguishes four basic «processual-typological tendencies» – *the poetry of non-conformist individualism, the poetry of privacy, spiritual poetry and experimental-deconstructive poetry*, which he also tries to define on the basis of four basic morphological types. To the first typological tendency he assigns, for example, the poetry of Jozef Urban, Ivan Kolenič, Viliam Klimáček (*Až po uši* [1988], *Karamelky* [1992]), V. Puchala, M. Grupač, P. Bilý, M. Bančej, A. Turan, J. Litvák and others; to the second (poetry of privacy) he ranks e.g. the poetic work of K. Chmel, M. Brück, L. Bendzák, R. Tomáš, M. Hatala, P. Hudák, B. Mihalkovič and others; as the third processual-typological tendency (spiritual poetry) he identifies the poetry of E. J. Groch, M. Reisel, M. Milčák, R. Jurolek, D. Pastirčák or J. Gavura, while the fourth – experimental-deconstructive group of poets includes e.g. P. Macsovszky, P. Šulej, M. Solotruk, A. Hablák, M. Habaj, N. Ružičková and others.

²³ Ibidem, pp. 387.

In principle, we do not have the slightest reservations against Šrank's enumerated text-forming procedures of this poetic line (although here, we can already speak without any doubts about an autonomous zone of creative methods and procedures, which are equally immanent to postmodern prose creation):

Collage, bricolage, assemblage, installation or ready-made have become the main text-forming practices, bringing to the fore the intertextual dimension of the statement, working with explicit, transparent and hidden intertextual references in the whole range from quotation through allusion or paraphrase to persiflage, pastiche and travesty. Bricoleur no longer aimed to bring art and life as close as possible, but to point out the enclosure of literature in fiction. Intertextual continuity allowed authors to come to terms with the tradition in a commentary-especially ironic-parodic way, and to creatively transcend its limits through extra-literary borrowings and interludes.²⁴

It is important to note that the announced deconstructive practices in Slovak post-revolutionary literature (as identified by J. Šrank) may not yet correlate with or confirm a belonging to experimental poetry – at least in the methodological and personal context in which it has been considered since the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, ultimately, we do not consider Šrank's assertion that “the experimental-deconstructive tendency represented the only processual-typological tendency of our poetry that was an intrinsic product of the post-embargo period”²⁵ to be literary-historically consistent or correct. On the other hand, we agree with J. Šrank when he considers the more authentic manifestations of experimental tendencies in Slovak literature to be the work of a few “non-conformist individualists”²⁶, who were “rather on the borderline between second-avant-garde and postmodern approaches to the text (K. Zbruž, M. Kubica)”²⁷. Kamil Zbruž (1964), poet, prose writer, mystifier, publicist and member of the so-called barbarian generation of writers, is probably a much more explicit (genre-pure) experimenter in the history of Slovak literature than any poet from the experimental-deconstructive line (P. Šulej, K. Kucbelová,

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 389.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 393.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 386.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

M. Solotrúk, N. Ružičková, A. Hablák, P. Macsovszky, M. Habaj and others). That has been already evidenced by his 1993 publication *Spitý imidž: Magazín pre dolných 10.000* (*Drunk image: Magazine for the lower 10.000*), which is very difficult to classify, artistically very awkward and rejected by literary critics, and which shows the parameters of a formal experiment. The diction, such as the one in *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry III*. (2006), chosen by J. Šrank in the relevant chapter (Searches for poets arriving at the end of the millennium), says it all:

Kamil Zbruž's book-length outputs [...] are the most radical, but also the most problematic reactions to the unmanageability of life through the poem. He first attempted to astonish the reader with the dadaistically recessive provocation *Spitý imidž (Magazín pre dolných 10. 000)* (1993), which he mystifyingly called a 'smiling novel'. In this 'magazine' texts range from fictional journalistic formations through persiflages of classical and popular literary genres to the aforementioned Manifesto of a barbarian generation.²⁸

However, Zbruž's book (with its appearance giving the impression of a workbook or an improvised samizdat in A4 format) fits the year of its publication into the contemporary context of the turbulent and desperately searching 1990s, or rather their beginning²⁹. However, Zbruž is credited with another first in Slovak literature in the 1990s, which is again the product of a desire for radical experimentation, although (again) perceived by many critics as an unprecedented anachronism: the publication of an "excerpt" of a poetic (although, given the textual "surroundings" of the

²⁸ J. Šrank, *Hľadania básnikov prichádzajúcich na sklonku tisícročia* [In:] V. Marčok, (eds): *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry III*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum 2006, pp. 149.

²⁹ The developmental value of Zbruž's book outputs in the context of this decade is not denied even by the literary scholar M. Součková, who has systematically published theoretical studies and critiques devoted specifically to the poetics and axiology of Slovak literature after 1989, or after 2000: «An interesting experiment in terms of development was the one in 1989. 1993, especially Kamil Zbruž's recessively created and graphically striking debut – a 'composite' created as a kind of installation of journalistic and artistic genres – *Spitý imidž (Magazín pre dolných 10.000)*, which foreshadowed various lines of desemanticized writing in Slovak prose (from Koloman Kocúr's experiments to Macsovszky's 'sterils'). A similarly extreme, but not original gesture in the context of world literature, was *Ticho (excerpt)*, or more than twenty blank pages, which Zbruž published in his book *BARBAR(u)SKÁ RULETA* (1998).» (Součková 2011, pp. 282).

source publication, one might as well say prose) composition, *Ticho* (“Silence”), consisting of 22 completely blank pages. Zbruž published his *Ticho* in a collective (together with J. Litvák, R. Bielik and A. Turan), manifestly stylised publication *BARBAR(u)SKÁ RULETA* (“Barbarian Roulette”)³⁰ from 1998, which, as we announced above, once again encountered the so-called broad-spectrum objections of literary critics. These, in turn, were directed not only at the nature and substance of Zbruž’s authorial achievement but at the character of the book as a whole:

This book is a bastard child of all kinds, but above all of the dissident times. In its composition (pêle-mêle) and authorial attitudes – here vengeful (A. Turan), here pleasantly all-forgiving (K. Zbruž), here stupidly complacent (R. Bielik), here pleasantly unreal (J. Litvák) – it is almost a typical samizdat. [...] Our four orphaned (by Kolenič) ‘brothers’, proclaiming Indian love, had to publish it on their knees, in a modest edition for the quiet pleasure of themselves and their loved ones – and all this at least ten years ago. For today, along with the artistic, it is already the moral kitsch that all proclamation is – whether proclamation of Love, Art or Silence.³¹

Returning to Zbruž’s *Ticho*, i.e., to the twenty-two unsigned sheets of paper, to publish them in 1998 after the Dadaists, the Beatniks, the neo-avant-garde, or the minimalist and prepared texts of the 1960s, is to consciously subscribe to a kind of institution or perhaps to a stylised ignorance of things. It is as if someone, a few decades after John Cage, were to re-compose a piece like *4’33’’* for piano, only to call it, for example, *5’22’’*, but in principle, it would be an application of an identical structural or, indeed, destructive method of composition³². That is why, even in Zbruž’s rather

³⁰ The title can also be read as a pun: Barbar-russian Roulette.

³¹ V. Mikula, *5×5 a jiné kritiky*. Levice: L.C.A. Publishers group 2000, pp. 120.

³² The American composer of aleatoric and other experimental music, writer and creator of audiovisual art John Cage (1912 – 1992) published his composition *4’33’’* for solo piano in 1952. Its essence lies in the fact that it is de facto 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence for piano: in a concert performance, the performer sits on stage behind the piano grand piano and, with a stopwatch in his hands, counts out the exact duration of each of the three movements of this composition. When the prescribed time has elapsed, the pianist bows and leaves the stage. This is undoubtedly one of the most ground-breaking, yet controversial recitals for piano in the history of 20th century music.

extensive instructions on how to approach the “reading” of his *Ticho*, we read incredulously:

The reader remains in constant confrontation with himself while reading (leafing through). One cannot be disturbed by the author’s reasoning, but for the author this kind of literature is no fun either. They are, after all, working on a common work. So we think of silence, so that it can come to us as everything we think about for longer comes to us. John Cage found in silence an alternative to sounds and tones, he discovered music in silence. Since, according to his idea, everything is music (even the sound of coffee stirring), the listeners of silence also create their own “music”, even if by expressions of impatience...³³

If we “look around” for poetologically similar book projects in the Central European cultural space at the turn of the millennium, the name of the Hungarian experimental poet, critic, translator, and conceptual artist Márton Koppány (1953), the author of the only collection of poetry to date, *Bevezetés ugyanebbe* (“Introduction to the same”) from 1993, cannot fall out of our reception folio. Koppány would probably not have been mentioned, however, if a selection of his poetic, prose, essayistic or other works, which are rather difficult to classify in terms of genre, had not been published in a Slovak translation by P. Macsovszky under the conceptual title *Náhoda nie je metóda* (“Random is not a method”) from 2000. After a cursory glance through it, the whole author’s project looks more like a mystifying concept of its translator (excerpts from the author’s familiarly tuned correspondence with the translator are interspersed among the author’s texts). However, an unmissable fact is the republication (in the context of the Slovak post-embassy literature, a highly symptomatic one) of blank pages. In Koppány’s selected work, these are the parts *Trochu času* (“A little bit of time”) and *Vlny* (“Waves”). Two years after the publication of Zbruž’s manifestation controversies, few would have expected to see similar “works” on paper. What is certain is that this act of translation by P. Macsovszky has, metaphorically speaking, put a symbolic end to the reflection on the productivity of specific experimental techniques in literature³⁴ and especially

³³ K. Zbruž, *Srdce vždy hovorí áno*. In: kol.: Barbar(u)ská ruleta, Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov 1998, pp. 38.

³⁴ Other sequences in M. Koppány’s book also arouse embarrassed reactions, even if they are textual – e.g. the self-referentially conceived epilogue entitled *TERAZ: ČO MÁM*

in poetry, and we dare to say that the meaningfulness and viability of the label “experimental poetry” in our latitudes seems to end at the dead end of that publication of “silence”.

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(TERAZ) NAPÍSAŤ?: „Márton Koppány (1953, Budapešť) repreZENTuje/nerepreZENTuje (? ten (onen?) smer (?) súčasnej maďarskej literatúry, ktorý... Nijaké ktorý! Nijaký smer! Nijaké story! Totiž: dá sa (vôbec) literatúra repreZENTovať iným ako tým spôsobom, ako už samu seba (doposiaľ) repreZENTovala? Aj keby sa dala (nechala) (tá literatúra) (nejako) repreZENTovať a aj keby sa dalo (počas tej dejúcej sa repreZENTácie) niečo o nej (o tej literatúre) ešte (navyše, nadôvažok) povedať, Márton Koppány by sa takej repreZENTácie (s najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou) asi vzdal“ (Koppány 2000, pp. 72) etc.

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