

Tracing Ruptures: Fifty Years of Organised Sound in Slovakia¹

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In Slovakia the roots of sound experiment and the kind of music that may be conceived as organised sound (contrary to music handling mainly pitch material) go back as far as the late 1950s. This study is a brief probe into the history of production of organised sound; it also attempts to sketch superficially the cultural and political contexts of its emergence.

During the first decades, Slovakia was an integral part of Czechoslovakia, a joint state, which lasted until the end of 1992. Nevertheless, there were many cultural aspects very specific to the Slovak part of the country that played a significant role in the rich history of experimental music production going back to the 1950s. Numerous interesting activities, which took place in institutional as well as unofficial or semi-institutional domains, had an international element to them. Productions by pioneers of electroacoustic music and live electronics joined avant-garde manifestations of the New Music and later combined with influences of American experimental music, the Fluxus intermedia movement, audio-visual arts and improvised music.

Many experimental sound-related projects in Slovakia originated under a totalitarian system, which restricted free artistic production in favour of party-prescribed preferences. Periods of political detente (1962–1968 and from 1987 until the collapse of Communism in 1989) were rather short but ranked among the

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most fruitful creative periods. The development of Slovak experimental music can be perceived as a shift from the first establishment of a classical music avant-garde to a full-fledged pluralistic setting, but also as a shift from the phenomenon of a university-educated composer to a creative sound engineer and then to a general democratisation of music-making during the 1990s.

THE BEGINNINGS

Music production after 1948 was subjected to ideological screening, and avant-garde approaches were considered to be in conflict with the officially pursued aesthetics of so-called socialist realism. Political pressure on art started to be relaxed gradually after the fall of Stalinism in 1956. At that time a new generation of composers was studying at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava; these composers did not identify with the traditionalist and politically motivated direction of their teachers and they tried to find their own way, inspired by contemporary international developments. Notable representatives of that generation include Ilja Zeljenka (1932–2007), Peter Kolman (1937), Roman Berger (1930), Ladislav Kupkovič (1936), Jozef Malovec (1933–1998), Ivan Parík (1936–2005) and Pavol Šimai (1930).

The first simple experiments with recording technologies in Slovakia were made as late as 1958 by Roman Berger and Ilja Zeljenka. The interest of a new generation of composers, later to be called the 'Slovak musical avant-garde of the 1960s', in new means of expression can be understood as a response to conservative teachers and as a need for individual composers to define their voice in the context of what was going on in the world at that time.

The beginnings of electroacoustic music in Slovakia were long considered an experiment at the periphery of musical events, and the status of that kind of music moved between being tolerated and being banned.² However, the Sound Workroom of Czechoslovak Television (Zvukové pracovisko) was established in 1961 as the very first studio of its kind in Czechoslovakia and joined the family of a few other similar studios abroad. The Sound Workroom was the first workplace for teamwork between composers and sound engineers, which from then on became the working model in Slo-

2 See *Slovenská hudba*, 1-2/1996, vol. XXII. Bratislava : Slovenská hudobná únia 1996.

vak production. In 1961 Ilja Zeljenka, with assistance of the sound engineer Ivan Stadtrucker, made music to the film *65 miliónov* (65 Millions) directed by Miro Horňák.

The idea of having an independent electroacoustic music studio – detached from television or film production – within Czechoslovak Radio appeared in 1964. The studio, called *Triková réžia* (Special Effects Studio), was eventually established, and in June 1965 it became the Experimental Studio of Czechoslovak Radio. The studio was managed by Peter Kolman until his emigration in 1977. Composers who were interested in electronics moved from the television Sound Workroom, which ceased to exist in 1966, to the Experimental Studio.

The first independent electroacoustic composition in Slovakia goes back to autumn 1966. Jozef Malovec produced the composition *Orthogenesis* using genuine synthetic sounds with assistance from sound engineer Peter Janík. Two years later the stereo version won an award at the First International Electronic Music Competition at Dartmouth College, USA.

THE AVANT-GARDE PIONEERS

In early Slovak electroacoustic music, procedures of *musique concrète* were applied, and electronic sound generators also shaped the final sound array. A strong fascination for exotic sound structures predominated, but the formal outlines of the compositions were firmly anchored to rational compositional thinking. The approaches by individual young composers soon developed into varied profiles.

Roman Berger composed his first autonomous electroacoustic composition *Elégia in memoriam Ján Rúčka* in 1969, drawing from older film music. Peter Kolman produced seven electroacoustic compositions before 1976 in which he applied an interesting way of using specific sounds and electroacoustic material. Ivan Pařík (1936–2005) arrived in the Radio Studio in 1969. His works of the following period included recordings of his own or borrowed compositions, or modifications of sounds produced on acoustic instruments.

Coping with, or rather having a dialogue with, classical traditions and historical musical materials can be found in electroacoustic works by composer and mathematician Miro Bázlik (1931).

Tadeáš Salva (1937–1995) tested out electronics in 1965 for the first time and took an interest in folklore and its combination with avant-garde means of expression.

EVENT, HAPPENING, PERFORMANCE

Ladislav KUPKOVIČ (1936), an educated violin player and conductor, and a self-trained composer, is one of the key personalities of the musical avant-garde who came to the scene in the early 1960s. His activities covered an unusually broad scope, including compositions for classical instruments, electroacoustic music, conducting of contemporary compositions, but also organising concerts and intermedia events. Kupkovič was the first artist in Slovakia to experiment not only with use of electronics in concerts, but he also explored spatialisation, graphical scores, indeterminism and improvisation in an array of works ranging from chamber music to large ensembles.

In 1964 he established the *Hudba dneška* ensemble (The Music of Today), which specialised in performing contemporary works by domestic and international composers for the following five years.

The works by Kupkovič of this period display conceptualism, an open form and playful search for non-traditional solutions – they aim to break stereotypes in musical performance practice. Many of the experimental concerts by Kupkovič were held after his emigration to West Germany in 1969. A concert experiment with a remarkable scope and variety of ideas was the project *Musikalische Ausstellung* (Musical Exhibition), held in the West Berlin Art Academy in 1970, where musicians called “playing exhibits” played on nineteen stages for several hours.

The Slovak musical avant-garde was mostly oriented towards the European cultural context until the 1980s. The influences from American experimental music, such as indeterminism, improvisation, the compositional use of the space, and a related intermedia approach, were first present in works by Kupkovič, and only later in the creative and organisational work of Milan Adamčiak (1946), who became a key personality in early Slovak experimental music.

Adamčiak has always been interested in a creative linking of several media and art forms, including music, experimental poetry, performance and visual art. A characteristic feature of his

works is a natural crossing of borders between several genres and media, realised in the form of graphical scores, installations and environments including various sound objects, the production of non-traditional musical instruments and also various action-forms typical of intermedia art at that time.

In 1969 he and Róbert Cyprich (1951–1996) established an art and music group called Ensemble Comp. Their Manifesto included a definition of the new perception of music as a participative, creative process in the intermedia spirit of the Fluxus movement, and it favoured indeterminism and the open form of Anglo-American experimental music as well as the latest tendencies of improvised music.

THE SMOLENICE SEMINARS AND “NORMALISATION”

One of the benefits of détente during the 1960s, and also proof of the involvement of the young generation of Slovak composers and theoreticians in engaging in active exchange with the international community, were three editions of the Smolenice Seminars. These were small presentation-festivals for contemporary music featuring internationally acclaimed guests, including Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti, Vinko Globokar, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Peter Kotík, Mauricio Kagel, as well as local composers such as Ladislav Kupkovič, Ivan Parík, Milan Adamčiak and others. The Seminars were an important part of experimental music history in the country, and they took place from 1968 to 1970 (after 1968 the organisers struggled to keep the seminars alive for two years).

The more-or-less free period of electroacoustic music production intersecting with global developments that appeared in the 1960s was abruptly brought to a halt by the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968, an event which caused a major turning point in the then-emerging democratisation. The following three years were used by the ruling elite to strengthen their control over art, to close the borders, and to cut off communication lines with the Western world. Many personalities who were the drivers of musical events and innovation emigrated from the country (Šimai, Faltin, Kupkovič, Kolman).

The cessation of the Smolenice Seminars, the *Slovenská hudba* journal, and Czechoslovakia leaving the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) were just some of the signs of the process going on that was euphemistically called "normalisation". The early 1970s saw the end of any continuation of trends and brought a downturn in creative art, a withdrawal of certain authors from the public scene, and an end to public happenings and other non-traditional forms of free art communication. New electroacoustic compositions were made but they were banned from public presentation for several years.

"POST-MODERN GENERATION"

Public performances of electroacoustic music resumed in 1977, and the end of the decade also saw activities develop around the Electroacoustic Studio (the former Experimental Studio). Juraj Ďuriš became the sound engineer in 1978, and young composer Vítazoslav Kubička was appointed the programme director. Members of a new generation started to be interested in electronic music, and their positions could be described as post-modern and leaning away from the previous avant-garde tendencies.

Martin BURLAS (1955) is perhaps the most universal and productive personality who enjoyed crossing borders between genres and was actively involved in several music contexts, from electroacoustic studio works, pieces for classical musicians, through alternative and experimental rock, alternative pop and the use of elements of electronic dance music. Burlas was the first musician in Slovakia whose multiple musical identities can be perceived as a specific expression of the post-modern era. Starting from the late 1980s, Burlas has also been active as an improviser in various projects (Transmusic Comp., later VAPORI del CUORE, OVER4Tea). In his solo projects he drew sound inspiration from electronic dance music, used sampling in his avant-garde rock project Sleepy Motion and also worked with computer music.

Vítazoslav KUBIČKA (1953) is another member of the post-modern generation who arrived at the end the 1970s. His electroacoustic works have distinct features, such as tonality, the use of atmosphere, orchestral sound, pathos, the variation principle and references to pre-modern musical traditions.

Sound engineer Juraj ĎURIŠ (1954), who later in 1991 became the art director and driving personality of the Experimental Studio and other projects related to electronic music, entered the scene

of electroacoustic composition in 1983. Since the end of 1980s, he has been interested in combinations of sound with other media such as video, sculpture and laser.

Since the 1970s, experimental methods and innovative work with sound (collage, improvisation) appeared also in the music of Marián Varga, which is usually labelled as classical rock and is characterised by the juncture of the elements of classical music and rock.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CENTRES OF ACTIVITY

The end of the 1980s brought political detente and a revival of free art experiments going beyond official culture to seek ways of reaching the public. This occurred also because of a new creative generation seeking new inspiration in addition to historical connections – to art exploring the potential of new technologies, Fluxus inspirations, improvisation and indeterminacy, performance art, and intermedia projects ranging from theatre through music to visual art. After 1987, centres of unofficial activity developed, and subsequently interconnected; these usually surrounded active artists and later turned into organised events, festivals, happenings or new established art groups.

After the regime change, the years from 1989 to 1993 experienced a strong surge in cultural activities. International contacts were re-established and new civic associations were established. This further development was driven mainly by the organisational efforts of artists associated under the umbrellas of non-profit associations, which, from their own initiative, bridged the gap brought about by absent or poor infrastructure, including alternative and unofficial cultural venues.

In 1987, Štúdio Erté was established in Nové Zámky upon the initiative of performer József Juhász, and a year later it marked the start of an annual performance art festival Transart Communication. The event was the first significant platform that brought together musicians working with new technologies, visual artists, performers and theatre artists after years of an attenuation of artistic activities.

One of the most important moments at the turn of the decade was the establishment of Spoločnosť pre nekonvenčnú hudbu (SNEH, Society for Non-Conventional Music) in 1990.³ SNEH was founded on the initiative of Milan Adamčiak. The founding members were active musicians, performers and theoreticians – Peter Machajdík, Jozef Cseres, Michal Murin, Oľga Smetanová, Peter Martinček and Zbyněk Prokop. This represented the first platform ever in Slovakia for the long-term promotion, presentation and documentation of shifts and developments in experimental music, covering both sound and its combination with other media. SNEH played the role of an umbrella organisation, affiliating collective members such as art ensembles, Transmusic Comp. and the Balvan theatre group.

The SNEH projects (festivals Konvergencie – 1990, FIT – Festival of Intermedia Creation – 1991, 1992, Musicsolarium concert series – 1993–4) covered a large array of genres and were open to a variety of styles, with emphasis on creativity, free art expression and intermedia drawing from the Fluxus tradition; they combined visual art, music, theatre, performance and experimental poetry. After 1995, SNEH focused on organising the festival of “contemporary progressive music in intermedia overlappings” – Sound Off, upon an initiative by Michal Murin and Jozef Cseres, and held in Bratislava, Šamorín, Nové Zámky and Nitra. 2003 marked the official end of SNEH, but its agents are still active and have implemented numerous projects.

Daniel Matej, the founder of VENI ensemble and an intern and programme director of the Music Fund in 1989, initiated the establishment of the first festival of contemporary music in Slovakia called Večery novej hudby (Evenings of New Music), which were held from 1990 to 2009. The festival was organised by the Slovak Section of ISCM, and the program included presentations of world and Slovak contemporary art in various areas (composed works inspired by the Anglo-American experimental music tradition, post-minimalism, improvised music) and often showcased new special projects that interlinked domestic and international musicians. The festival, which featured John Cage in 1992, reflected the trend of combining composition and improvisation, inviting for collaboration improvisers or composers of experimental music.

3 See Avalanches 1990–95 : Zborník Spoločnosti pre nekonvenčnú hudbu. MURIN, Michal (ed.). Bratislava : SNEH 1995, 216 p. ISBN 8096720643.

Melos-Ethos, the largest (biennial) festival of contemporary music in Slovakia, was established in 1991 upon the initiative of several members of the avant-garde generation of composers of the 1960s. Its principal idea was to overcome the historical deficit through presentations by authors who had been banned under the previous political system and for that reason were unknown to the public. The idea of having a representative festival of contemporary music, which, for political reasons, could not take place in the 1960s, materialised after the fall of the totalitarian system. The program has focused predominantly on 20th-century classical composers but has included also concerts of electroacoustic music.

The Experimental Studio resumed its original name after the regime change in 1989 and started flourishing then, inspiring cooperation and numerous new works by the younger generation of composers who were interested in electronics (Peter Zagar, Robert Rudolf, Alexander Mihalič, Marek Piaček and others). Juraj Ďuriš became the art director of the Studio in 1991, and together with Andrej Zmeček, they started a civic association Centre for Electroacoustic and Computer Music (CECM) in 1992 to implement projects of electronic music presentation in a somewhat less formal setting than that of a state-run institution.

The Centre produced the first CDs with electroacoustic music by Slovak composers and organised seminars for the professional community, namely the International Forum of Electroacoustic Music (IFEM) '92 in Dolná Krupá with a follow-up in 1994. The most extensive CECM projects were an interlinked series of events called BEE95CAMP and BEE96CAMP (Bratislava European Electronic Computer Art & Music Project). This network platform was an umbrella for several festivals, presentations and exhibitions held in cooperation with other organisers.

INTERMEDIABILITY, IMPROVISATION AND PLURALITY OF IDENTITIES

Slovak experimental music from the end of the 1980s and especially from the following decade embraced a multitude of concepts including studio electroacoustics, live electronics, and improvised music with various degrees of freedom, Fluxus impulses, audio-visual combinations and post-modern ways of working with various genre manifestations.

Compositional strategies included the idea of a blurred musical identity, for the fear of falling under a genre category, or at least an individual style, appeared in Slovakia around that time. One of the signs of the second wave of post-modern musicians of the 1990s was the feeling of a need to master several musical languages and incorporate these into new musical works.

In 1989 Adamčiak, Murin and Peter Machajdík initiated the establishment of a unique intermedia performance group, the Transmusic Comp. It had operated as an integral part of the Society for Non-Conventional Music up until 1996, and its members included professional musicians as well as visual artists and non-professional members: the founders, plus Martin Burlas, Peter Horváth, Peter Cón, Zuzana Géczová, Daniel Matej, Vladimír Popovič, Oľga Smetanová, Peter Strassner, Michaela Czinegeová, Peter Zagar, Juraj Bartusz, Zbyněk Prokop and others.

Referring to the fading Fluxus tradition, Transmusic Comp. focused on the interpretation of graphical scores, free improvisation, the use of electroacoustic components and frequent combinations with the theatre, experimental poetry and strong visual elements. Performers used traditional instruments and Adamčiak's collection of several hundred home made musical instruments, ready-mades and sound objects.

THE SECOND POST-MODERN WAVE

Peter Machajdík left for Berlin in 1992. His activities include the composition of electroacoustic works, cooperation with dancers and improvised music (cooperations with David Moss, Jon Rose, Malcolm Goldstein) and numerous sound environments.

Daniel Matej (1963), the art director of several contemporary music ensembles with various focuses, developed graphical scores, implemented improvisations with the use of electronics (gramophone, CD-players, objects with sound) and implemented a studio-based electroacoustic composition SATIollagE (1995). With the VAPORI del CUORE formation (since 1993) he made improvised music and composition at the edge of both, frequently with visiting international personalities of the experimental scene.

Ľubomír Burgr (1964), author of several electroacoustic compositions and a peculiar violin/guitar improviser (later he also used live electronics in the project Pink Big Pig with Marek Piaček) is

also known for his role in alternative rock and pop domains (Ali Ibn Rachid, Dogma) and theatre. He has been active as a member of VAPORI del CUORE and other improvisational ensembles.

Peter Zagar (1961) worked with studio electronics at the beginning of his career and subsequently has focused mainly on composing for classical instruments. He is also a piano player and an active improviser in collective projects (VAPORI del CUORE, don@u.com).

Robert Rudolf (1963), living in Paris, has been extensively using electronics, including in live contexts (project Joystick Radio Melody Orchestra with conducted electroacoustic improvisation).

Another composer working with live electronics and living in France is Alexander Mihalič (1963), who is also known a constructor of music instruments/interfaces who studied at IRCAM in Paris.

In 1997, Michal Murin and the aesthetician Jozef Cseres started the duo Lengow & HEyeRMEarS, whose performance and other activities range between “discursive and non-discursive ways of expression”, eliminating the boundaries between artistic performance and its theoretical interpretation, between the real and virtual worlds, and also between seriousness and intellectual humour.

The above-mentioned authors, whose work can be mostly included in the second post-modern wave, are still distinct actors on the Slovak scene. Yet another creative generation made their voices heard towards the end of the 1990s. They display even more variety in styles, a pluralism in genre settings, including sub-cultures (post-industrial, glitch, noise, ambient, DIY-scene), an easy attitude to technologies (computers, both analogue and digital electronics) and also the abandonment of academic composition education.

AFTER Y2K: INFRASTRUCTURE

At the turn of the century, the organisational activities in sound production were maintaining the continuity with the existing movements realised by state institutions (Experimental Studio, Melos-Ethos festival) as well as following-up several projects from the non-profit scene (festival Evenings of New Music, Sound Off, Transart Communication). At the same time a new generation of artists, curators and organisers emerged, who started to build new layers of independent cultural infrastruc-

ture of two kinds: a “hard” one, e. g. venues, and a “soft” one – record labels, festivals, publication activities as well as short-term projects. The creative and organisational efforts of groups and individuals with different cultural backgrounds became increasingly fragmented and pluralistic. Because in the academic education of composers little accent is given to experimental and electronic music and new compositional trends, and the awareness of the significance and history of sound experiments in Slovakia is relatively low, and with respect to the increasing international cultural exchange, only a small part of the generation emerging in the new millennium sets out to follow this tradition. Musicians interact with the contemporary international discourse more readily than they adhere to a historical continuity. Since the creative scene in Slovakia is small, we see cross-generational collaboration together with spontaneous co-operation between the official and independent scenes.

Initiated by the head of the Experimental Studio of the Slovak Radio Juraj Ďuriš in 2001, a multimedia web portal and database Radioart.sk documents the experimental electroacoustic production and fosters reflection upon it. Digitisation of the radio archive enabled online access to a substantial part of original electroacoustic pieces produced in the Experimental Studio during its history, and to the archive of the Ex Tempore radio programme. Other activities included the organisation of concerts of electroacoustic music which featured also non-academic composers, and the publication of recordings of Slovak music.

Apart from the Evenings of New Music festival, the Slovak Section of ISCM began organising in 2002 the (New) Music at Home concert cycle in Šamorín, and from 2003 to 2011 the Space festival focused on music for classical instruments.

From 1999 to 2007 Julo Fujak organised and programmed in Nitra the Hermovo ucho (Hermes' Ear) concert cycle of non-conventional music. Since 2011 this tradition has been followed by the festival POSTMUTART. In 2000 Fujak also founded the association Animartis, which for eight years served as an organisational and publishing platform.

In 2000 Oliver Rehák and Slávo Krekovič founded an association named Atrakt Art, which in the following years focused on the organisation of cultural projects and support of contemporary production. Some of these projects (concert cycles, issue of recordings, a festival, international projects of artistic exchange, the 3/4 magazine) concentrated also on experimental

and innovative music. Annually since 2000 the festival Next has been taking place, and this features contemporary Slovak and international projects, the origination of which was helped also by Jozef Cseres from SNEH. The Next festival works to combine various genres with an accent on the current music language, innovativeness, and the paradigm of real-time sound organisation ranging from free jazz and electroacoustic improvisation to audiovisual projects, interactivity, non-traditional musical instruments and sound art. Atrakt Art participates also in the preparation of the festival of new media culture Multiplace and administers the ever growing web database of Slovak experimental sound projects Kraa.sk.

In 2004 the association Atrakt Art was one of four organisations establishing the independent cultural centre A4 – Space for contemporary culture. This space in Bratislava city centre has brought regular programs focused on current production and experimentation in various artistic fields. The musical part of the program concentrates on modern approaches, from improvised and electronic music to multimedia performances. Apart from concerts, the A4 space also offers educational activities – presentations, workshops for the creative work with sound, collective improvisation, hardware and software, etc. During its existence, A4 has evolved into a place with a pronounced artistic profile, as well as an open space in which many festivals take place.

Multifunctional independent cultural centres have emerged after 2003 also outside the capital and have become the venues for concerts of contemporary music: Stanica Žilina-Záriečie, IC Culture Train and later Kasárne/Kulturpark (Kulturpark Barracks) and Tabačka Kulturfabrik in Košice, Nástupište 1-12 (Platform 1-12) in Topoľčany, Banská St a nica in Banská Štiavnica.

Also, a decentralised art and culture festival of new media named Multiplace, which originated in 2002 under the initiative of the Buryzone association, is devoted to electronic music and multimedia projects, and it united several independent organisers from several countries into an expanding international net. Part of its music program is formed by projects including the whole spectre of technology-using contemporary sound production – from a DIY approach and hardware hacking, through new music interfaces, to live-coding, algorithmic composition or net improvisation, and it includes educational activities as well as workshops and lectures.

In Banská Bystrica a similarly oriented festival named Intermedia has existed since 2008. Experimental electronic music based on the overlapping of various genres is presented also by the concert cycle Music Laboratory and post-industrial festival Hradbysamoty (Walls of Solitude).

FRAGMENTED AESTHETICS: ACADEMIC AND RADICAL

We have seen a growth of music production in the field of organised sound in Slovakia since 2000, something made possible also by ever more accessible technologies. A rare stylistic pluralism and stratification have occurred in response to different cultural surroundings. Besides academically educated composers representing the continuity with the past, others have emerged whose inclination towards sound experiment has a different origin – even subcultural origin (industrial, techno, noise). Unlike previous generations, the new generation brings about a great widening of the spectrum of sonic material and a differentiation of stylistic attitudes, ranging from composed and improvised electroacoustic music to pop-cultural inspirations and multimedia projects, to the most extreme elements of expression.

We may compare the movement in Slovakia to the development on the international stage, where genre classifications of the used elements have become only an auxiliary device and play no real role in music practice. Free jazz, however, and the kind of free improvisation based on it have no strong basis in Slovakia, contrary to many other countries of the Western Europe. Improvisational techniques occurring since the late 1980s are more probably following Cage's tradition of experiment in classical music, and later they lean on the idioms of music making without a score such as are common in popular music genres. The scene is increasingly populated with groups and ad hoc projects, and artists often create parallel musical identities.

FROM COMPOSED ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC TO IMPROVISATION

Since the middle of the 1990s a new generation of institutionally trained composers has started to be active, one that works with electronics alongside their production for acoustic instruments.

Let us mention Marek Žoffaj (1970), who was once active also in the Experimental studio, and Boško Milaković (1973), a member of the non-formal composers' association Soozvuk.

Marek Piaček (1972) entered the experimental musical world in 1991 with an award-winning electroacoustic composition *Flauto dolce*. Aside from his electroacoustic works, the scope of his projects has developed far and wide. Many of his works share certain features, such as drawing from platitudes and pop-culture, transitions between genres, the creative use of the newest technologies, an equality of composition and improvisation, experimentation with new approaches and a specific musical humour.

Lubomír Burgr, Martin Burlas, Daniel Matej, Marek Piaček, Ronald Šebesta and Peter Zagar are engaged in improvised music, including electroacoustic improvisation. The improvising ensemble VAPORI del CUORE led by Daniel Matej was active since the 1990s, and it frequently collaborated with foreign guests (Otomo Yoshihide, Jon Rose, John Oswald and others). Later it was replaced by the similarly oriented Slovak-Austrian ensemble don@u.com. In 2004 Matej, Burlas and J. B. Kladio founded the trio OVER4tea, which presents electronic instruments accompanied by conceptually tinged videoprojection.

J. B. Kladio (Richard Sabo), formerly known as a songwriter in the context of alternative popular music, also started to compose experimental electronic music in 2003. Alternating both of these approaches, he has released a number of albums.

Marek Piaček is engaged not only in his solo projects with composed music. He is also known as a member of various ensembles working with electronics, improvisation, multimedia and scenic rendition. Piaček's improvisational electroacoustic duo Pink Big Pig (2005) with Lubomír Burgr was replaced by a "live plunderphonic" project of the laptop trio Voice Over Noise (2007, with Slávo Krekovič and Oliver Reháč), as well as Mio-Mio (2008) with Stanislav Beňačka, conceptually focusing on experiments with pocket computers.

The composer and saxophonist Miro Tóth has become a distinctive representative of the young generation due to his ensemble projects of various kinds, which bridge genres – from classical music through free jazz and free improvisation to the usage of pop- and subcultural elements. He is the founding member of the groups Shibuya Motors (with Slávo Krekovič), Dunkeltherapie and My Live Evil (with Alexander Platzner).

In 2006 Tóth initiated the improvisational orchestra *Musica falsa et ficta*, which brought to the Slovak scene new forms of conducted improvisation and games with references to the classical forms realised in compositions of longer durations. The members of the ensemble are predominantly music students. The project *Frutti di mare* (2007–2008) also belongs to Tóth's collective projects. This cycle of thematic audiovisual performances combined sound, video and text with musical multigenre elements in a live setting.

The creative surroundings of the *Musica falsa et ficta* ensemble resulted also in the origination of other formations, e.g. improvisational electroacoustic trio *LEaD* (2012), made up of composition students (Lenka Novosedlíková, Matúš Wiedermann, Marián Zavarský).

Likewise, Julo Fujak has been engaged in acoustic improvisation for a long time in varied manifestations of the group *tEóRia OtraSu* (*thEoRy Of diSruption*). There is also *Spoje & Škvíry* (*Joints & Fissures*, and its members Dalibor Kocián, Michal Matejka, Jozef Krupa and Petr Vrba, who work also independently), *Ankram*, Alexander Platzner, Robert Kolář, Paulína Rónaiová and other young musicians.

The methods of controlled improvisation in the context of performing 20th- and 21st-century music are partly applied also by the student ensembles *VENI ACADEMY* and *studEND.doc* led by Daniel Matej.

POSTDIGITAL POETICS: GLITCH, DARK-DRONE, AMBIENT, PLUNDERPHONICS

In 1998 Daniel Tóth (1982) and Róbert Bittner (1980) originated a distinctive new post-digital aesthetics in the project *Poo*, which is filled with complex, evolving sound structures and influenced by the elements of post-industrialism, glitch, ambient and noise (often also with live projections of the visual artist Zdeno Hlinka). Both later performed as soloists, too, and in other groupings (*::::*, *1/x*, *Amen Tma*, *Angakkut*, *Rentip*).

Likewise, the solo projects *Casi Cada Minuto* (Slávo Herman) and *Strom Noir* (Emil Matko) move in the ambient-expressive area. The visual artists Jozef Tušan and Boris Sirka established an audiovisual group *BIOS* (in 2010), using both analogue and digital electronics for the creation of slowly evolving drones. Each of them is also active in other projects (*OMM*, *Æ*, *Brada*).

An example of an experimental “bedroom producer” is the extremely productive musician and filmmaker Andrej Danóczy from Trenčín, who produces and releases at his own expense recordings in which he creatively elaborates various materials into new works, ranging from noise to plunderphonic collages.

Digitally generated music ambiences are used by Jonáš Gruska (multimedia project Binmatu, 2012), who also constructs his own instruments, and Matúš Kobilka (Bolka, 2012), who explores different possibilities of digital synthesis, programming and controlling music with the help of sensors.

DIY-SCENE AND SUBCULTURAL INSPIRATIONS

Since the 1990s a tradition of industrial music has existed in Slovakia represented by the internationally established group *Einleitungszeit*, known for its extreme performances using visual elements. Matej Gyarfáš claims his affinity to the industrial approach with his electronic project *Phragments* (2002). Postindustrial and drone ambient inspiration is present also in the production of Aidan Zaal (2012, Peter Kerekes) from Rožňava.

The appearance of experimental electronic music based originally on a subcultural do-it-yourself scene has been distinctively influenced since 2001 by the artistic collective *Urbsounds*. Its members use computers and home constructed hardware, performing either together, or as soloists, and in various combinations. They are active also as publishers and concert organisers. *Urbsounds* group members are Michal Lichý (*Urbanfailure*), Tobiáš Potočný (*rbnx*), and Daniel Kordík (*Iskra*) with Monika Šubrtová, all living in London and performing together under the project *Jamka*. Their recordings were released also by the Belgian label *Sub Rosa* (2011).

The stylistically more heterogeneous collective, more radical in sound and variable in line-up, *Noize Conspiracy* (2005) is also rooted in the underground DIY scene. It regularly releases compilations of experimental music. The members of the group, demonstrating a rather wide scope of musical abilities, are Lukáš Sigmund (*Hlukáš*, *Total Trash*, *Morda Noise System*), Juraj Ďurček (*Avoided*) and Slávo Herman (*Casi Cada Minuto*). The elements of metal, ambient, noise, cut-up collage, spoken word and pop-cultural genres open a wide expressive range of surprising sound combinations.

Extreme expressive means – various appearances of noise generated mostly by analogue electronics – are used by several musicians acknowledging the aesthetics of noise music: Noise Mortanna (Vavro Záhradník, 2005), Drén (Erik Ochránek, 2006), goopiesek (Matúš Mikula, 2007) and their common project "...lesom" (2011), as well as Sigi Tobias (Lukáš Sigmund and Tobiáš Potočný, 2008) and Slovak-Czech duo Jack Jack (Ladislav Mirvald and Barbora Šedivá, 2007) working with feedbacks on no-input mixing boards.

POP-CULTURAL CROSSOVER

The young musicians Pjoni (Jonatán Pastirčák) and Ink Midget (Adam Matej) are engaged in music experiments with acoustic and electronic instruments, sometimes at the intersection of several (including pop-cultural) genres.

A different, more ironical post-production approach to pop music is applied in the dance mashup electronica aesthetics of Batcha de Mental (Alex Gutrai). Similarly Samčo, brat dáždoviek (Samčo, Brother of Earthworms, Samuel Szabó) works with the adopted material using it conceptually for cultural and social critique.

Interactivity, multimedia concepts, poetics of (pop)cultural recycling are close to the projects of Jakub Pišek (Halogenerator, Turbosampler). The music alter egos of Michal Šuranský named Zelený Antoin and Jacques Kustod are connecting the elements of noise and dance electronics; the same can be said about the production of Ľubomír Panák (Drakh, Vrtačky po desáté hodině).

BOOM OF SLOVAK EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC?

The number of authors engaged in the organisation of sound or experimental creation has been growing immensely in the recent years. They are, as in other countries, musicians from various backgrounds using variable compositional or improvisational techniques and sound material in the sense of some kind of an "open paradigm".⁴ The music is released not only by the artists themselves, but also by many labels on physical media as well as

4 Web database <http://kraa.sk> registers more than 70 projects. About the creation related to new media see also <http://www.monoskop.org>.

online (Atrakt Art, HeyeRMEarS Discorbie, Construct.Destroy. Collective, Animartis, Urbsounds, LOM, Easterndaze, Nomad Sky Diaries, Exitab, Hudobné centrum/Music Centre Slovakia).

Contrary to this explosion of a great breadth of activities taking place typically independently, there is relatively small interest in official institutions and rather limited possibilities for such support – a gradual reduction of activity has been observed also in the long-working Experimental Studio. There is an increase in international collaboration; however, it seems that an international awareness of the work done in Slovakia – and in other Eastern European countries – has yet to come.

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