

**Diana
RAUCHOVÁ**

Musical Tendencies in the 1980s and 1990s in Slovakia and their Developmental Determinants

„In all its infinite colourfulness the world did not manage to offer anything more than superfluously coloured alternatives of notoriously familiar themes.

Why again, the xⁿ time, describe this or that strange mechanism that was born from the imagination of Nature in its effort to fulfil all its commitments?

One of such “invariants” is – if we speak generally enough – undoubtedly music.”¹

Pierre SCHAEFFER

The Death and Evaporation of the Author

Philosophy and culturology, as well as the discourse in the field of literary science have been emphasising for several decades the themes of the elimination of reality, the death of metaphysics, the end of history or the death of the author. A gradual sublimation of the author from several types of discourse provoked Michel FOUCAULT to pose the BECKETT-like question, whether it is important at all who is talking. In his effort to find a satisfying answer FOUCAULT came across the relatedness of writing (*écriture*) and death. He maintains that contemporary culture turned the Oriental and Antiquity convention of recounting – as a prolongation of the hero’s life or even her/his eternalisation – upside down and sacrificed the author, often at the expense of the work of arts.

“The work, whose task was to bring immortality, got now the right to kill its author, become her/his murderer.”² And even though this unfavourable state of affairs is according to FOUCAULT caused by the authors themselves, since they mask and blur their individual identity, it is our duty to try to lay down the axes of the space that the

¹ SCHAEFFER Pierre, *Trychtofané (O hudbě)*. In SCHAEFFER Pierre, *Promiňte, umírám*. Praha, 1990. 128–144.

² FOUCAULT Michel, *Co je to autor?* In FOUCAULT Michel, *Diskurs, Autor, Genealogie*. Praha,

author has left behind, or diagnose the functions freed through her/his vanishing. FOUCAULT does not claim that the author does not exist (s/he just eludes or is overshadowed by forms), he just admits the existence of a culture (even if just fictive) that does not know the institution of authorship – some sort of a “copyrightless” culture functioning as a circulation of discourses.

The name of the author is according to him not just a passive component of a given discourse. On the contrary, through the fact that s/he co-operates actively in re-grouping, mutual interlinking and juxtapositioning of texts, or even in their elimination, s/he serves as an instrument of manifesting the “way of being” or character features of individual texts. In this understanding culture appears as a sum of expressions, in the framework of which the function of the author might or might not come into effect. Or as the most renowned investigator of the death of the author Roland BARTHES puts it – the author had to be sacrificed so that the reader, spectator or listener might be born.

Sacrificed Author – Newborn Audience

New language – new listening, we could paraphrase John CAGE, risking, however, the babylonisation of the musical universe. The code which suppressed the author weaves texts according to a new note scale and no language causes it trouble. Texts get more dynamic, they open up and become crossroads of new types of writing, semiotic monads, generators of meaning. They are not subject to the laws of evolution anymore, because in the semiosphere in which they constantly circulate, create layers, swallow each other, get recycled or merge, they do not die but only suppress and deactualize each other. And they devour their authors – the spiders that wove them.

In connection with the sublimation of the author, the interconnection of the communication model author–artefact–addressee I am attracted to the fantasies elaborating on the non-traditional relationship between the addressee and the work of art. The idea that creative criteria and parameters of works of art would not be determined by their creators but by addressees (customers, clients and consumers) is terrifying, evoking the image of prostitution. The hypothetical consequences of such a scenario would degrade all theory, philosophy or aesthetics of arts to ephemeral physiological hobby.



This could potentially lead to a communication chain brought to absurdity, having its origin in fashionable technocratic reduction of artistic production to a sign-construction of a multi-interpretation character (easily decipherable). But communication has been profanized in the last decades above all by the artists and curators themselves, when they expanded (hypertrophied) it at the expense of expressional and meaning-related qualities of works of art. Also in music the process of preparation and realisation of the musical intention is often more attractive than the final artefact itself and as a consequence the communicational aspects of creation have been pushed into the foreground. In short, we are living in an age in which media are artificially aesthetised and at the expense of the contents of transmitted information their formal characteristics and technological parameters are fetishised.

Active and Passive Reflection in Art

One of the basic characteristics of art is the reflection of the actual state of the world in which the artist lives. If the state of the world is rich in difficult and controversial events, they simply have to be reflected in the art, as it is a highly sensitive sensor. *Reflection in art* can be basically of two kinds: a *direct reaction* to the events of the age, or an *indirect reflection*, be it in the form of resignation, counter-reaction or seeming disinterest in the events of the age. In both cases there is an expression of the life-feeling of the artist in relation to her/his surroundings, but contrary to the first case, in which s/he uses her/his art to affect *actively* the course of events and change them for the better, in the second case s/he approaches them rather *passively* and creates art which is seemingly detached from the world in which s/he is living.

Reflections in Contemporary Slovak Music

So how does contemporary Slovak music reflect the problems of our age? What determined the origin and development of its characteristic orientations? Before we focus on these questions, let us specify the term *contemporary music*. Everything what is being performed or produced in the present moment can be considered contemporary music. Even if it sounds paradoxical, this term includes the performance of music of older style periods of the European music, as well as music imported from different corners of the world.

We include simply all that can be heard, known and absorbed now, ie. as present art. Similarly the newborn music could not remain untouched by the advanced interpretational practice of old music in the framework of historical imitation which developed in the last fifteen to twenty years. It is our ambition to evaluate briefly the production of Slovak composers of the present age, with an emphasis on those who in the last twenty years came up with new concepts. This will be accompanied by a characterisation of fundamental developmental determinants that contributed to the rise of these tendencies. I pay more attention to professional authors with academic or non-traditional autodidactic (or non-academic private) education,

whose art does not have commercial entertainment character. From this point of view a large jazz, folk and rock scene would be of interest but is not treated in this article.

Developmental Determinants

The following trends and developments, essential to the shaping of tendencies in Slovak music, can be distinguished:

Social and cultural isolation during the Communist regime after August 1968, which produced a wave of counter-reactions in art.

Democratisation processes and the desire for self-realisation after the revolution of 1989, which led to the rise of festivals and groups of new and non-traditional music, projects and compositions of broad scope of orientation.

New possibilities of exchange in the form of scholarships abroad, active and passive participation in festivals, concerts and other artistic events, import and export of art.

Presently performed music and arts of different historical periods and of different nations naturally influences newly formed musical production.

Information explosion, email and internet are incentives for a rise of new kinds of art, as well as new tendencies.

The rising interest in the problems of the age, eg. the threat of an ecological or military catastrophe, to which artists respond with a critical stance.

Inclination towards spiritual values is linked with the increasing familiarity of Eastern philosophies and life-styles, as well as with the feeling of excessive desire and desperate quest for property and material goods, which are necessarily reflected in artistic production.

Co-existence of generations and a number of diverse groups and personalities, whose background was formed in different cultural and political conditions.

The speeding up of development at the end of the millennium.

Styles and Genres

Due to the platform of the mentioned developmental determinants, the following tendencies are partly similar to broader style-trends in Europe and the USA, but nevertheless they are characterised by specific features conditioned by the different socio-political development in Slovakia, as well as by the individual contribution of authors. Their enumeration manifests a *plurality of expressions, styles, sub-styles, types and genres, as well as fusions of different kinds and genres, or even art-styles themselves*. These are characteristic for the Slovak music of the 1980s and 1990s.

Public expressions aimed against official music, produced by young composers, graduates of the University of Fine Arts in late seventies and early eighties include the work of: Vladimír GODÁR, Martin BURLAS and Peter BREINER. *Non-public (underground), unofficial alternative music* of young professional and non-professional musicians and artists in the eighties before the Velvet Revolution include: Martin BURLAS, Peter MACHAJDÍK; the groups Maťkovia, Ospalý pohyb – Zabudnutý ohyb (Sleepy Move – Forgotten Bend).

New public, unofficial, West-oriented performances of young professional composers, which appear in the second half of the eighties include: Peter ZAGAR, Peter MARTINČEK, Alexander MIHALIČ, Róbert RUDOLF, Daniel MATEJ, Ivan BURLAS, Pavol MALOVEC, Juraj ĐURIŠ; group VENI ensemble, event Obraz a hudba (Image and Music). *Non-conformist production* of young professional and non-professional composers and musicians after the revolution of 1989 includes: Milan ADAMČIAK, Peter MACHAJDÍK, Michal MURIN, Martin BURLAS, Daniel MATEJ, Marek PIAČEK, Peter ZAGAR; Transmusic comp., Sneh, Požož sentimentál, Vapori del Cuore.

Postmodernist orientations in the nineties arising simultaneously with broader progressive tendencies in the world include: Vladimír GODÁR, Martin BURLAS, Iris SZEGHY, Alexander MIHALIČ, Róbert RUDOLF, Daniel MATEJ, Peter MACHAJDÍK, Peter MARTINČEK, Peter ZAGAR, Egon KRÁK, Kristián SEIDMANN, Miloš BETKO, Róbert GAŠPARÍK, Miloš KROUPA, Mirko KRAJČÍ, Jevgenij IRŠAI, Juraj ĐURIŠ, Marek PIAČEK, Igor JANČÁR; group VENI ensemble, Societa rigata, Opera aperta. These represent new “*neo-retro-style*” orientations in the latest production of the

youngest composers who turn more towards the European *moderna* and older traditions of European music, emphasizing structural sophistication and compositional virtuosity.³

Newly Lived Ancient Elements

Postmodernity is understood in this article as a collection of style orientations connected by a common paradigm. This paradigm originated through a change of the old paradigm, which was represented in music and art by the desire for originality, experimenting, efforts to deviate from the tradition and from the known, as well as by the rise of new norms that would determine the further course of art (parallelisms with Atticism). Contrary to these, postmodernity represents a return to the tradition of European as well as non-European music, to the art and thinking of the present and the near and far past.

In this sense we can speak of a certain “recycling” of known material (in the form of quotes, allusions, affinities, analogies, transformations, insertion of myths, symbols or signs) in order to produce new ideological substance. It is a new wave of Asianism (contrary to Atticism as a pure expression created according to norms). It represents a living (passionate and pathetic) expression in a heterogeneous, in terms of norms “unclean” form, not respecting any limits of genre or style. In music, postmodernity is characterised by fusions of diverse styles and genres, which can reach deep into the past; the recycling of already produced and known material; a simplification of means and the return to the primary magic role of music affecting the addressee.

Future without Live Art?

Which of the mentioned newborn tendencies has the highest chance to influence the course of musical development? The prophetic text *The Future of Music* from the pen of John CAGE, his creed from 1937, begins with the following words: “I believe that the use of noise to make music will continue and increase until we reach a music produced through the aid of electrical instruments which will

³ MARTINÁKOVÁ Zuzana, *Súčasná slovenská hudba z konca tisícročia*. In *Slovenská hudba*. 1997/3–4. 235.

make available for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard.”⁴ Today we can claim that his prophecy has been fulfilled.

The linear speeding up of technological and informative progress, the aggressivity of media and efficiency of distribution might have trivialised CAGE’s words a bit, but still they undeniably had a large-scale effect on the current structuring of music. CAGE could not have presumed the destructive potential of the virtual space, neither could he have guessed all its negative consequences for human creativity. His philosophical optimism, however, dispersed the worries about the future of live and meaningful music “*in the era of its digital reproductivity*” and he possibly prevented even higher losses caused by its technocratic prism.

There is, however, an increasing number of voices prognosing the elimination of art as such. I am not pointing to a loss of faith into its power of representation, neither to nihilist scepticism, but to natural integration, which was some time ago formed into an optimistic conviction by Marvin MINSKY (research pioneer in the field of artificial intelligence), claiming that we are facing an era of symbiosis of science, art and psychology. In fact, something similar has been for long in the day-dreams of many inter-media and action artists.

Marina ABRAMOVIČOVÁ formulated her creed ten years ago in the following words: “I believe that the XXIst century will be a world without art as we know it today. It will be a world without objects, in which the human will reach such a high degree of consciousness and such a powerful state of mind that a transmission of thoughts and energy will be possible without intermediary objects. There will be sculptures, paintings or installations. Just the artist will face an audience with highly developed capacity of reception of message or energy. They will be seated as samurais in ancient Japan, watch each other and transmit energy.”⁵

Jozef CSERES maintains in his book *Musical Simulacra* that “art gave up a long time ago mimetic conventions, broke the bonds with objective reality and resigned to its former Messianic ambitions. Already

⁴ CAGE John, *Budúcnosť hudby: credo*. In *Slovenská hudba*. 1996/1–2. 294.

⁵ ABRAMOVIČOVÁ Marina, *Interview*. In TISDALL C. – WIJERS L. – KAMPHOF I. (eds.), *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy*. ’s Gravenhage – Amsterdam, 1990. 298.

in the era of early Modernism it focused its attention on its own language, accentuating its non-discourse specificities and in the post-modern stage this orientation was further enriched by the knowledge of the non-existence of a universal language, perspective or criterion. This thorough Babylonisation was injected even into the discourse of humanistic sciences. Art reminds us today of WITTGENSTEIN's language games and returns elegantly to the Dadaist concepts of the beginning of the century, stripping them off political overtones and innovating them through technological and media-related novelties. These games, however, by no means lack an intellectual spark, it is only masked in a sophisticated way by the "innocent" nature of *homo ludens*. The playful character of contemporary art, with fiction, nostalgia, banality, irony, camouflage and humour is at times bound to reflect the metaphysical, as well as academic dimension of art. Serious things cannot be presented in a serious way today, since it often leads to a false pathos, which consequently trivializes the original intention. Even cultural institutions, theory and criticism have to adapt their presentational and explanatory strategies to the altered situation."⁶

Contrast and Complementarity

Slovak music of the end of the millennium (especially its last twenty years) shows certain common features with the *art nouveau* of the late XIXth and early XXth century. New elements can be seen in mixing and *fusing different styles* of the European music of the past and the present, European and non-European music, folk, jazz, rock, pop and other genres with so-called classical music.

It is probable that this phenomenon is a consequence of the elimination of the antagonistic systems of socialism and capitalism, of the fast information exchange, development of computer science, electronics, mass media, fast transmission of data, easy import and export of cultures and migration. As a consequence of this development, when through internet and software one can receive and generate an arbitrary number of compositions without any deeper

⁶ CSERES Jozef, *Hudobné simulakrá*. Bratislava, 2001. 176.

knowledge of compositional processes and principles the *authorship of a work of art loses its importance*.

Authorship is dubious in works of art which are a collective project (Transmusic comp. or Požož sentimentál) or are a *product of a computer program*, which was produced by a different author than the one who generated a composition through it (PIAČEK). It may be worthwhile to mention also works of art that are *compositions of quotes or allusions* (GODÁR, MACHAJDÍK, MATEJ or PIAČEK). Insertion of an already existing musical material of the past into a new context is by these authors referred to as the *process of recycling*. This process is analogical to the increasingly promoted recycling of used paper or other garbage.

Another characteristic feature is the *mixing of different artistic disciplines*, which led to the rise of *multimedia music and art* (MACHAJDÍK, Transmusic comp. or ĐURIŠ). In connection with this multi-layered process there have appeared *counter-reactions* in the approach of younger composers who point out the *seriousness of the artistic mastership of a musical work* and thus of the authorship itself.

This development is subject to the expected inner metabolism, to certain rules and principles. One of the main ones is the principle of *complementarity*. This means in practice that everybody tries to produce something different, which, however, creates a complementary whole with the production of her/his colleagues (BURLAS, GODÁR, BREINER, groups Požož sentimentál, Vapor del Cuore or Opera Aperta).

The principle of *contrast* is to be seen in reactions to preceding philosophico-aesthetic conceptions (the generation of BURLAS, GODÁR and BREINER versus the generation of the sixties; or the generation of MATEJ and PIAČEK versus both of the generations). Many of these tendencies do not originate as a reflection of the desire for originality or uniqueness, but rather as a consequence of the need to *fill blank spaces* caused by the uneven development in a formerly Communist country. They are also expressions of the *moment of joy* linked with collective musical production, the participation of the listener in the "game", the activation of her/his emotional interestedness.

The art of the end of the millennium brought an extraordinary *plu-*

ality of expressions: everything is allowed and everything is accepted. This is most probably linked also with the much emphasized democratisation activities in all spheres of life of the former Socialist Bloc. We can claim with silent humility and pride at the same time, that one of the most prestigious “trophies” of the last two decades of Slovak art is the fact that artists have not only been continuing the broader progressive trends of the music of the contemporary world, but have also been their co-creators.

Suggested Reading

- ABRAMOVIČOVÁ Marina, *Interview*. In TISDALL C. – WIJERS L. – KAMPHOF I. (eds.), *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy*. 's Gravenhage – Amsterdam, 1990.
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- FOUCAULT Michel, *Diskurs, Autor, Genealogie*. Praha, 1994.
- MARTINÁKOVÁ Zuzana, *Súčasná slovenská hudba z konca tisícročia*. In *Slovenská hudba*. 1997/3–4.
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- TISDALL C. – WIJERS L. – KAMPHOF I. (eds.), *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy*. 's Gravenhage – Amsterdam, 1990.

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