Encyclopedias and other information sources present Milan Adamčiak (b. 1946) as a composer, cellist and musicologist; some of them also mention that he is a visual artist. This characterization is correct, as he practices all of these professions, but incomplete and partial, as he was also active as a performer, poet and creator of the acoustic objects, installations and homemade musical instruments. Moreover, it is an inadequate description, as the main features of Adamčiak’s personality involve intermediality and interdisciplinarity. Adamčiak’s work simply defies conventional classifications and institutional schemes. He always fit better in between—in between media, codes, sorts, genres, forms, instruments and institutions (Fig. 1).

From 1962 to 1968 he studied cello at the Conservatory of Music in Žilina. After completing his musicology studies at Comenius University in Bratislava in 1973, he worked at the Institute of Musicology of the Slovak Academy of Arts and Sciences on research in contemporary music and its relations to the visual arts. A natural outgrowth of Adamčiak’s...
miscellaneous activities that he carried out continuously since the mid-1960s was the ensemble Transmusic comp., which he founded in 1989 and which was fully devoted to unconventional music. Adamčiak crowned his longtime theoretical reflection on and promotion of unconventional music in Slovakia with the Society for Non-conventional Music (SNEH), which he founded in 1990, and the Festival of Intermedia Creativity (FIT), which he organized in Bratislava in 1991 and 1992.

The musical thought of Adamčiak represents, after the post-Weberian poetical starting points (multiserialism, punctualism and other extensions of sound possibilities) of the late 1960s, a radical departure from tradition and a shift to conceptual art, which was a rare attitude in the context of the Slovakian art scene. This development proceeded hand in hand with a thorough deconstruction of "pure" media and the intermedialization of creative activities. In music, open form, broadly conceived sonority, unconventional scores, improvisation and action (here meaning unconventional "performance" emphasizing the gestural and procedural aspects of the sound-making) became symptomatic signs of Adamčiak’s musical thought; these elements contributed to the resulting synergetic form to varying extents, inclining alternately to the more expressive or more minimalistic poles. Adamčiak is the author of many electroacoustic and concrete compositions, but live electronics best fit his poetic principles.

In Transmusic comp., Adamčiak surrounded himself with younger artists (Martin Burlas, Peter Cón, Peter Machajdík, Michal Murin, etc.), and thus an original intermedia avant-garde was born from a poetic merging of two generations. The group based its creative philosophy on the deconstructed fusion of various forms of music and stage action with improvisation and conceptual composing, based on the aleatoricism and sonic interpretation of visual structures. Continuing in different variations until 1996, the group resisted the sterile sonoric transparency of the electronic music of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as jazz mannerisms and the stylized expressivity and excessive narratives typical of some performance art. Transmusic comp. offered audiences an authentic art form, based on spontaneous, vital eclecticism. Nevertheless, this was not the textbook postmodern for the sake of postmodernism. Aware of Cage but not knowing Foucault, the group dissolved Adamčiak’s purpose in its collective “unconsciousness.”

Each member of the group added to the collective work his own imagination and experience from other projects, mixing them into a multilateral dialog in a vital flow of musical theater. Individual inputs were transposed, overlaid, rearranged and fused in unforeseen relations. Sometimes the results had a sharp, more composed shape, as in Dialogues With Accorddd (the title is linguistic gameplay referring to chord [in Slovak “akord”] and accordion) by Adamčiak (Fig. 2) or in String Trio by Machajdík; at other times there were more precisely coordinated theatrical actions, as in the case of Adamčiak’s Office Concerto. Often the open form was suddenly obstructed, the improvisation was purposefully manipulated, the composed passages were dissolved into free improvisation, the uncompromising experiments were replaced by conventional techniques, the broadly conceived sonorities were reduced by the limitations of homemade and readymade instruments and unconventional sound sources—it all happened in a mutual ataractic interaction between performers and environment. Sometimes, as in the collective piece String Room, the environment had not a spiritual but a material character. The group’s varied cast offered equal performance possibilities to musicians and non-musicians. However, visual artists best used this opportunity meaningfully: In the hands of musicians, wood sculptures and objects by Juraj Meliš were transformed into musical instruments; Juraj Bartus materialized his “second” prints (the prints that were made live within a few seconds) during a concert, accenting the acoustic traces of the production process; Peter Strassner made acoustic objects in response to Adamčiak’s commission (Fig. 3).

The avant-garde poetics of Transmusic comp. was not resigned to the heritage of the past. Dialogue with traditions of various kinds and origins was evident through various symbols and symptoms, but the amount of transparency and stylization would change. Their poetics was...
radical, but at the same time liberal, revising rather than negating. Even in its most aggressive excesses (e.g. when breaking a violin, burning gramophone records) their work took into consideration contextual relations when establishing new ones. They openly avowed direct influences (Kagel, Cage, Fluxus and even Slovakian folk music), never hiding or camouflaging them.

The repertoire of the ensemble is open; it accents predominantly the works by members and partners of Transmusic comp.: fusion projects of various types of music, aleatory and improvisational concepts, instrumental theater, projects with unconventional sound sources, audio art, etc. The ensemble, performing with a cast of 2–n members, is open to other activities and partnership collaboration with the assumption of tolerance, creative verve and seriousness of presentation.

So wrote Adamčiak and Peter Machajdík in the founding document of the ensemble [1].

From the late 1960s on, Adamčiak tested the possibilities of unconventional applications of traditional instruments—mostly with his cello. Later he experimented with non-musical sound sources and constructed his own instruments. Adamčiak-the-constructor is a true Lévi-Straussian bricoleur; his train of thought and working algorithm had to operate in a limited space and to be satisfied within a limited set of means. In this framework he needed to cultivate the ability to reorganize signs and to recontextualize the related meanings. The bricolages therefore reflect the unpredictability of the results; that is why they are so attractive and magical. Their symbolism is arbitrary and rigorous at the same time. The arbitrariness is due to his imagination; the rigor is a result of the above-mentioned material, technical and functional limitations. The creative efficiency of Adamčiak’s acoustic objects and the whole ensemble’s performance is apparent in performance. Quite clear also is their functional-pragmatic nature as conditioned by the material specifics of found objects as well as by the compositional possibilities of sound-making with them. Adamčiak found Cagean-Partchian musical possibilities all around—hidden in a metal beer-bottle cap, a wooden sheep-cheese firkin, a cowbell, a rustic axe, an ancient Hussite mace and a sewing machine. Adamčiak breathed new cultural contexts into found objects, resulting in his pine-tree-phone (borofón) and the Transmusician sound installation-environment “string room.” Similar things can be said of Adamčiak’s visual and instructive scores—often they do not graphically fix tones in a conventional way, nor contain any clear instructions to lead to concrete sounds (Fig. 4).

The members of Transmusic comp. did not strictly follow Adamčiak’s scores. They relied on invention, empiricism and intuition, and accepted the use of chance in the works. Spontaneously uniting their individual expressions, they caught Adamčiak’s lawless chaos in more or less organized structure. When the situation required it, they ignored convention and explored new possibilities; at their best they were also able to stop and follow their own ways.
Cseres, Jozef (b. 1961) lectures on aesthetics and the philosophy of music and visual arts at Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia), the University of Ostrava in Ostrava (Czech Republic) and the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno (Czech Republic). The structural relations between music and myth, the problem of artistic representation in the arts, artistic intermedia and experimental and improvised music stand at the center of his research and theoretical interests. Since 1997 he has been the director of the international project the Rosenberg Museum in Violín, Slovakia, and since 1999 an editorial board member of the international journal for literature and arts Hungarian Workshop. In 2000 he co-founded the Kassák Centre for Intermedia Creativity and since 2001 he has run the label HE"RM-E"S/DISCORBIE, devoted to experimental and improvised music and intermedia creativity. Under his artistic nickname HE"RM-E"S Cseres balances on the borders between the discursive and nondiscursive modes of expression and between art and games in performances, installations, audiovisual collages and various intermedia.

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