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THE MEANING OF A WORD IS ITS USE IN THE LANGUAGE: JIŘÍ KOLÁŘ – YOKO ONO

PAVLÍNA MORGANOVÁ

I was prompted to write this text by what I perceive to be the fascinating similarity between two slim volumes of poetry. The first is the last collection by Kolář *Návod k upotřebení* (*Instructions for Use*) from 1965, and the second is the cult book by Yoko Ono *Grapefruit*, which was originally published in a limited print run of five hundred by the Tokyo-based Wunternaum Press in 1964. The poems comprising *Instructions for Use* were written at the end of the fifties, though the collection is dated 1965 and only came out in 1969.¹ After breaking with verbal poetry and turning to the poetry of silence, evident poetry and concrete poetry, Kolář finally fell back on the word. The result was a set of instructions, poems that incited action and encouraged the reader to become a creative collaborator, through realisation of the poem in their own fantasies or in real-life action. *Grapefruit* by Ono is a book of instructions that similarly await realisation.² In terms of their conceptual character, verbal economy and metaphorical content they are reminiscent of Japanese haikus, and have much in common with the experimental approaches of the New York neo-avant-garde of the late fifties and early sixties. At this time, Kolář and Ono were separated by the supposedly impenetrable Iron Curtain. Kolář and Josef Hiršal would sit in the Slavia coffee bar in Prague overlooked by the 12-metre tall statue of Generalissimo Stalin on Letná Park and attempt to connect up with the most progressive trends in experimental art and poetry at that time. The still unknown Yoko Ono was part of the New York neo-avant-garde and married to one of Cage's students.

¹ Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Návod k upotřebení*, Most: Dialog 1969.

² When writing this essay I used a reprint of the book from 1970 with several actions and a transcript of the lecture "To the Wesleyan People" added later by Ono. Yoko ONO, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono*, New York: Simon & Schuster 2000.

Later she lived with La Monte Young, and at the end of the sixties became the wife of one of the most famous musicians of the twentieth century.

How is it possible that two such seemingly similar approaches could have arisen within such dissimilar environments? Could one imagine more different personalities than Jiří Kolář and Yoko Ono? Is it possible that, notwithstanding the Iron Curtain, Kolář was familiar with some of the early ideas and activities being developed by Fluxus? Or did he draw on different sources altogether, in which case any similarity to the “event scores”³ invented by George Brecht and taken up by Fluxus is simply coincidence? There is no unambiguous answer to these questions. First, we must chart the development of Kolář’s work and look at the complicated circumstances accompanying the creation of Fluxus. Only then can we re-examine the permeability of the Iron Curtain.

Language games

The starting point of much of the work of both Kolář and Ono can be found both in modern poetry and a new relationship between art and everyday life. In *Instructions for Use*, the reader is offered a cluster of words for each week, the final meaning of which depends on the decisions they take. Ono operates in a similar way, though her collection is somewhat more conceptual and is based on the relationship to individual media. In the case of both artists the reader is encouraged not only to read the poem but to actualise it. With the benefit of hindsight and in the wake of the phenomenological interpretation of body art of the seventies,⁴ it is clear that both Ono and Kolář are interrogating the boundary between idea and physicality. In addition, new aspects of their work are being revealed by contemporary theory and its concept of participative art.⁵

Instructions for Use came out in 1969 and contains fifty-two poems, each assigned a collage. The book is not paginated, but each pair is given a number.

³ The term *event score* refers to a performance art script that can be acted out on stage (as happened often at Fluxus festivals) or take the form of an unobtrusive intervention in everyday reality.

⁴ See Petr REZEK, “Setkání s akčními umělci”, in: *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*, Prague: Jazzová sekce 1982, pp. 95–102.

⁵ See Claire BISHOP, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso 2012.

To begin with it seems as though Kolář is interested only in some form of mental realisation on the part of the reader, even though in essence none of the poems is unrealisable. As Josef Hlaváček writes in an afterword entitled “Instructions for Use of *Instructions for Use* by Jiří Kolář”, we must not be misled by the lyricism of these poems. Their material is not language but human behaviour: “if all we do is read them, we are not being true to the author’s intention”.⁶ So these poems really are intended for enactment, just like the event scores used by Ono. Some hold out the promise of an intimate experience of their everyday quality (*Tváří ke zdi* [*Face the Wall*], ⁷ *Již nikdy* [*Never Again*]), while others call out for intrepid performance (*Rty* [*Lips*],⁸ *Tanec* [*Dance*], *Jméno* [*Name*]) or happening (*Cesta* [*A Trip*],⁹ *Vyvěs vyznač podej* [*Hang Mark Give*], *Dopis* [*Letter*]). *Instructions for Use* is Kolář’s last collection of poetry and was written in the fifties during his mature phase. His journey to this point in time had featured many literary and artistic experiments, and these are put to good use in poems explicitly examining creativity, be this literary (*Báseň ticha* [*Poem of Silence*], *Sonet* [*Sonnet*]) or artistic (*Socha* [*Statue*], *Cokoliv tě napadne* [*Whatever Occurs to You*]).

Grapefruit too is in part a reflection upon the nature of the creative act. It is divided into eight parts, each dealing with a different topic: music, the image, the action or event, poetry, the object, film, dance, and architecture. The idea was clearly to encompass all available media, though the sequence is a matter of personal preference. Ono enjoys challenges of a Zen-like character, such as “Breathe Piece”, “Breathe Together” and “Breath at Dawn”.

⁶ Josef HLAVÁČEK, “Návod k upotřebení Návodu k upotřebení od Jiřího Koláře”, in: Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Návod k upotřebení*, Most: Dialog 1969, unpaginated.

⁷ *Face the Wall*

Take down the pictures from the wall
remove the rugs
push the furniture together into the middle of the room
cover it with wrapping paper
as if you were about to paint the room
step into the corner facing the wall
and stay there as long as possible

⁸ *Lips*

After washing and eating breakfast
paint lips on your face
twice the size of your own
and keep them all day
until you eat dinner
and go to bed

⁹ *A Trip*

Walk away
or depart empty handed
to a city
where you know nobody
and spend three days there
When you’re hungry
ask for bread
when you’re thirsty
ask for water
Sleep where you can
and each day ask
nine people about a person
with your name
with your life

Many of Ono's instructions call for performance (*City Piece*, *Central Park Pond Piece*) or happening (*Hide-and-Seek Piece*).¹⁰ Some address creativity as such (*Painting to See the Room*,¹¹ *Painting to Exist Only When It's Copied or Photographed*, *Blood Piece*).¹² It is interesting to compare *Number Piece I* by Yoko Ono with *Sonet [Sonnet]* by Jiří Kolář. The Ono reads: "Count all the words in the book instead of reading them", while *Sonet* reads as follows:

Take a novel
you don't know
cut out the spine
remove the pages
and jumble them up as much as possible
Read the book
in this sequence
and summarise it in fourteen lines

In both we are witness to a new conceptual thinking anticipating the emergence of conceptual art as it was to become established on the art scene in the US in the mid-sixties in the work of Joseph Kosuth, for instance. However, both works still lay claim to a lyricism that in the work by Ono is probably related to Zen Buddhism and in that by Kolář is more about his background in poetry.

Ono's *Grapefruit* then goes on to nudge the reader/viewer/participant into the space of their own mind. For instance, in *Painting to Be Constructed in Your Head*, the reader is asked to examine carefully three images and then mix them thoroughly in their head. Something similar is going on in *Sun Piece*: "Watch the sun until it becomes square", and *Fog Piece*: "Think of what the next person is thinking". Ono has a real ability to induce dream-like states and open the reader's mind in a manner highly reminiscent of Zen kōan (a story, dialogue, question or statement used

10 *Hide-and-Seek Piece*

Hide until everybody goes home.
Hide until everybody forgets about you.
Hide until everybody dies.
1964

12 *Blood Piece*

Use your blood to paint.
Keep painting until you faint. (a)
Keep painting until you die. (b)
1960 Spring

11 *Painting to See the Room*

Drill a small, almost invisible, hole in the center
of the canvas and see the room through it.
1961

to provoke the “great doubt”).¹³ In *Fly Piece* from 1963, comprising one word, she invites the reader to fly. For all these instructions might appear somewhat impractical, Ono herself repeatedly performed the pieces in public. In 1964, in the Naiqua Gallery, Tokyo, participants were invited to fly, each according to their ability. Ono repeated the piece in London at the Jeanette Cochrane Theatre, where she invited viewers to approach the podium and jump off ladders of different heights that had been strategically placed for this purpose. Though many of her instructions cannot be carried out literally, Ono learned a crucial lesson from the circle surrounding John Cage: “everything is possible”.¹⁴ As far as I am aware, Kolář never acted upon his own instructions. It is more likely that he relied on the reader to imagine what it would be like to carry them out. This is an interesting paradox that offers insights into the different intentions of the two artists.

When articulating her instructions, Ono is more economical with words than Kolář, though she rarely achieves the monolexical minimalism of George Brecht. Kolář usually conveys his ideas using several words and structures his texts, at least at first sight, by means of versification. Despite considerable differences in the contours of the quotidian, several pieces by Ono might almost be by Kolář (e.g. *Whisper your name to a stone. Send it to a stranger*, 1961, *Go to the middle of the Central Park Pond and drop all your jewelry*, autumn 1965. A similar tone and subject matter is to be found in the instructions entitled *Map Piece*¹⁵ and the poem *The Path*, as well as *Laundry Piece* and *Celní báseň (Customs Poem)*.

¹³ See David T. DORIS, “Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus”, in: Ken FRIEDMAN (ed.), *Fluxus Reader*, London: Wiley 1998, pp. 91–136.

¹⁴ Dick Higgins was convinced that the most important lesson to be learned from Cage’s lectures was that “everything is possible”, at least potentially. Liz KOTZ in the essay “Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the ‘Event’ Score”, *October*, 2001, no. 95, p. 64, quotes from the book by Dick HIGGINS, *Jefferson’s Birthday / Postface*, New York: Something Else Press 1964, p. 49.

¹⁵ *Map Piece*

Draw an imaginary map.
 Put a goal mark on the map where you want to go.
 Go walking on an actual street according to your map.
 If there is no street where it should be according to the map, make one by putting the obstacles aside.
 When you reach the goal, ask the name of the city and give flowers to the first person you meet.
 The map must be followed exactly, or the event has to be dropped altogether.
 Ask your friends to write maps.
 Give your friends maps.
 1962

Despite these unmistakable similarities, there are distinct differences between the two collections. If we leave to one side the political and social conditions under which each was created, the fact that *Grapefruit* marks almost the beginning of the young Ono's career as artist, while *Instructions for Use* represents the culmination of Kolář's imposing body of work, suggests an entirely dissimilar context.

Yoko Ono

In 2018, Yoko Ono celebrated her eighty-fifth birthday. Her life has been eventful. In the 1960s and 70s she moved in the most avant-garde art and music circles before becoming a peace activist blamed for the breakup of The Beatles, successful entrepreneur, and artist in her own right. John Lennon is supposed to have said that Ono was the "world's most famous unknown artist. Everybody knows her name but no one knows what she actually does". She has been honoured with many retrospectives of her work,¹⁶ and in 2010, her *Wish Tree* was installed in MoMA's Sculpture Garden in New York.

Unlike Kolář, whose background was humble, Ono was born into a wealthy, cultivated Japanese family from the highest social circles. In 1952, the family moved to New York, where her father headed a branch of Tokyo Bank, and Ono enrolled at the famous Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville. While still an adolescent, she began to take an active interest in the New York music scene, where she got to know Toshi Ichiyanagi, a young composer studying with Aaron Copland and John Cage. This provided an entrée into the circle of students around Cage at the New School of Social Research, including George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, La Monte Young and Dick Higgins. In 1956, to the horror of her family, she married Toshi Ichiyanagi, and when in 1957 her family returned to Japan, she remained in New York. Though still married, she lived with several different artists. In 1960, she stepped out with the writer Michael Rumaker, and later with La Monte Young, with whom she organised concerts of new music, events and performances in her loft on Chamber Street. In 1961, Ono presented her five-hour long multimedia collage *A Grapefruit in the World of Park* at Carnegie Hall. In 1962, she returned to Japan, where her husband Toshi Ichiyanagi was now

¹⁶ In 2009, she was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the 53rd Venice Biennale. The most important of the retrospectives was probably *Yes Yoko Ono*, New York: Japan Society 2001.

living. He introduced her to Anthony Cox, a young artist from the New York neo-avant-garde scene. The two accompanied John Cage and David Tudor on their tour of Japan and later got married, even though Ono was still married to Toshi Ichihyanagi. A year after she gave birth to a daughter, Kyoko, with Cox, *Grapefruit* was published in Tokyo. Ono returned to New York and plunged into the conceptual revolution that, along with other artists associated with John Cage, she had helped initiate. As Lucy Lippard writes in a new introduction to the reprint of the cult *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, the work of art dematerialised and was transformed into idea and action, and “conceptual art offered a bridge between the verbal and the visual”.¹⁷ Ono is undeniably one of the artists present at the birth of these radical changes. In the introduction to her lecture “To the Wesleyan people”, which she delivered at Wesleyan University in January 1966, she writes:

I think it is possible to see a chair as it is. But when you burn the chair, you suddenly realise that the chair in your mind did not burn or disappear. The world of construction seems to be the most tangible and therefore final. This made me nervous. I started to wonder if it were really so.¹⁸

Lippard quotes from this lecture on page three of *Six Years*, after which there are examples of Ono’s early pieces, some of them from *Grapefruit*. However, Lippard opens the book with a reference to *Chance Imagery* by George Brecht from 1957.¹⁹

George Brecht is undoubtedly a key figure in this story. A trained chemist and holder of several patents, Brecht was one of the few participants at Cage’s lectures able to follow the latter’s mathematical and technical analyses of music.²⁰ Even in the late fifties, Brecht had been writing short instructions and challenges

¹⁷ Lucy LIPPARD, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1997, p. x.

¹⁸ Yoko ONO, “To the Wesleyan People”, in: *Grapefruit*, unpaginated.

¹⁹ Lucy LIPPARD, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1997, p. 11.

²⁰ Liz Kotz draws attention to the comments Brecht made in his diaries, which were published as a book, see KOTZ, “Post-Cagean Aesthetics”, pp. 65–67.

on cards, monolexical calls to action, poetic challenges characterised by a subtle, unusual aesthetics. Moving into the sixties he dubbed these “word pieces”, “card events”, “performance scores”, and finally “event scores”.

THREE LAMP EVENTS

- on
- off.
- lamp.
- off. on.

Summer, 1961.

The structure systematically developed by Brecht features a simple everyday action written on a card and extracted from reality, which becomes a signpost that can point in the direction of performance, installation or poetry realised in the space of the mind. Brecht focuses on the lighting of a lamp, a dripping tap, a ringing telephone, i.e. precisely those situations we experience every day, and frames them within a monolexical injunction. He distributed these event scores amongst his friends and acquaintances, and in 1963 published *Water Yam*. This featured a box designed by George Maciunas containing several dozen such cards. Maciunas would later take this form of record, something between an alternative recording of music (Cage’s students were of the belief that music was not simply an acoustic event but everything going on around them) and standalone concept, and promote it as a key form of the Fluxus movement.

One of the basic ideas of Fluxus was that everything can be music. This was how George Brecht saw things, and most of his event scores represent an “extension of music”.

FLUTE SOLO

- disassembling
- assembling

G. Brecht

1962

Brecht self-profiled as composer rather than poet. His event scores were rarely read aloud but regarded more as musical scores. However, alongside him were many artists who adopted different approaches and moved freely and flexibly between different media.**21**

Ono, on the other hand, was regarded as a poet, even though many of her instructions had strong links to music and painting. For an idea of just how broadly based were the activities of the circle of neo-avant-garde New York artists in and around Fluxus, it is instructive to take a look at the anthology compiled by La Monte Young and published in conjunction with Jackson MacLow in 1963.²² This anthology, like *Water Yam* featuring graphic design by George Maciunas, represents a multidisciplinary potpourri ranging from neo-Dadaist concrete poetry via sound poetry and aleatory compositions to event instructions. Of this chaotic concatenation of methods, the feature of the event scores that proved most popular was their enigmatic simplicity and ambiguity. They allow the artist to experiment with the formats of particular types of publication, exhibition and event. Their realisation is ephemeral, and, like a musical score, they can be “played” in public, on their own, or not played at all but simply read. Language remains their main medium, though this is a language that hints at a place beyond itself. Fluxus was active in the sphere of new music, dance and fine art. Literary circles conducted their own parallel experiments within the framework of different networks. Just how close these parallel worlds were is plain from the remarkable encounter of *Instructions for Use* and *Grapefruit*.

Jiří Kolář

Kolář’s work has been placed under the spotlight in many catalogue texts and specialised analyses.²³ Mention is often made of the fact that, as far back as

- 21** The name as well as the very concept of intermediality emerged from the Fluxus movement, where it was coined by Dick Higgins.
- 22** La Monte YOUNG (ed.), *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Indeterminacy, Concept Art, Anti-Art, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Stories, Poetry, Diagrams, Music, Dance Constructions, Plans of Action, Mathematics, Compositions*, by George Brecht, Claus Bremer, Earle Brown, Joseph Byrd, John Cage, David Degner, Walter De Maria, Henry Flynt, Yoko Ono, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyangi, Terry Jennings, George Maciunas, Ray Johnson, Jackson Mac Low, Richard Maxfield, Malka Safro, Simone Forti, Nam June Paik, Terry Riley, Diter Rot, James Waring, Emmett Williams, Christian Wolff, La Monte Young (1963), New York: Heiner Friedrich 1970.
- 23** James LINGWOOD (ed.), *Jiří Kolář: The End of Words – Selected Works 1948–1970*, Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art 1990; Vladimír KARFÍK (ed.), *Příběhy Jiřího Koláře*, Praha: Gallery 1999; Karel SRP, “Návody Jiřího Koláře”, in: Vit HAVRÁNEK (ed.), *Akce, slovo, pohyb, prostor: Experimenty 60. let* (exh. cat.), Prague: GHMP 1999–2000, pp. 206–223; Milada MOTLOVÁ (ed.), *Jiří Kolář*, Praha: Odeon 1993 (this book contains some crucial texts relating to Jiří Kolář’s work: Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, “Příběh Jiřího Koláře”, pp. 19–40; Jiří PADRTA, “Básník nového vědomí”, pp. 65–96; Miroslav LAMAC, “Kolářovy metamorfózy”, pp. 117–143; Raoul-Jean MOULIN, “Otázka koláže”, pp. 187–194). Astrid WINTER, *Metamorphosen des Wortes: Der Medienwechsel im Schaffen Jiří Kolářs*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2006.

1937, Kolář had exhibited his collages alongside other surrealist artists in the corridors of the E. F. Burian Theatre in Mozarteum in Prague. He had been a poet and member of the wartime Skupina 42 (Group 42), a group that set out to address the world in which we live.²⁴ Kolář's wartime and post-war poetry grew out of these experiences.

He was from a humble background. His father had been a baker and his son learned the trade too. In one poem dated 10 February from *Roky v dnech* (*The Years in Days*, 1946–1947) he wrote:

How many jobs have I had? At the age of seven I was a baker's assistant. Then I picked fruit, stomped cabbage, collected tennis balls, learned carpentry, wrote cowboy and Indian stories and whodunits, was unemployed, a construction labourer, editor, servant, layabout, worked in sewers, helped in the fields and dragged a cart through the woods, was a joiner, driver's mate, piecework labourer on an excavator, concrete layer, carver, watchman, waiter, writer, hospital orderly, member of a workers' collective, helped out at a butcher's, a hairdressing salon, an editorial office, I've been a news vendor, speaker, headed a weekly magazine, publisher and written poems.²⁵

Kolář championed the ordinary life. In his very first poetry collection, published in 1941, he uses fragments from overhead conversations and includes them collage-like in his poems. His methods become even more radical in his post-war collections, in which he uses diary entries, stories recounted by third parties, and conversations with the reader. He calls his work of this period "authentic poetry". He also drew on diary entries in *Prométheova játra* (*Prometheus's Liver*),²⁶ in which he reacted to the rise of Stalin. After February 1948, Kolář published only children's books such as *Jeden den prázdnin* (*One Day of the Summer Holidays*),²⁷

²⁴ Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Svět, v němž žijeme", *Program D* 40, 1939–1940, no. 4, pp. 88–89. Reprinted in: Jiří ŠEVČÍK – Pavlína MORGANOVÁ – Dagmar SVATOŠOVÁ (eds.), *České umění 1938–1989: Programy, kritické texty, dokumenty*, Prague: Academia 2001, pp. 35–37.

²⁵ Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Dílo Jiřího Koláře I*, Prague: Odeon 1992, p. 478.

²⁶ The manuscript of this collection, which had no chance of being published given its searing commentary on the late forties and early fifties, was found during a search of Václav Černý's house. Kolář subsequently spent nine months in prison. The collection was first published in 1985 in Toronto by the publisher-in-exile Sixty-Eight Publishers: Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Prométheova játra*, Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers 1985.

²⁷ *Idem*, *Jeden den prázdnin*, Prague: Orbis 1949.

illustrated by Kamil Lhoták, or *Kocourkov* (*Wise Men of Gotham*),²⁸ written in collaboration with Josef Hiršal. In private, however, he was rethinking the principles of poetry as such. One might point to the collections *Mistr Sun o básnickém umění* (*Master Sun on the Art of Poetry*) and *Nový Epiktet* (*The New Epictetus*),²⁹ as well as the “evident” poetry and concrete poems he began writing in the late fifties.

Poetry has not progressed so much as one centimetre since Eliot’s *The Waste Land* – this statement, which I wrote in 1957, was one of the gloves that in my head I threw in the face of everything I read at the time that was still called poetry. It was one of the feelings that led me down the path of evident poetry.

Thus opens Kolář’s manifesto “Snad nic, snad něco” (Maybe Nothing, Maybe Something),³⁰ which was published along with several poems on 4 September 1965 in the magazine *Literární noviny*. Kolář defines evident poetry as poetry that disdains the written word as the central pillar of creation and communication. Kolář played games and experimented, and was unafraid to investigate how many unknown layers life, and by extension poetry, was composed of. This then gave rise to his anagramgrams, cvokograms, blind poems, deep poems, immersive poems, concrete poems, etc.³¹ It was around this time that Kolář became as significant an artist as he already was poet. Nevertheless, his first solo exhibition *Depastie*, which took place at Mánes in spring 1962, provoked confusion.³² Kolář the artist soon became one of the pivotal members of the group Křižovatka (Crossroads) and a key protagonist of objectivist/constructivist trends.³³

²⁸ *Idem* – Josef HIRŠAL, *Kocourkov*, Prague: SNDK 1959.

²⁹ Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Mistr Sun o básnickém umění*, Prague: Čs. spisovatel 1957; *idem*, *Nový Epiktet*, Prague: Mladá fronta 1968.

³⁰ *Idem*, “Snad nic, snad něco”, *Literární noviny*, vol. 14, 1965, no. 36, pp. 6–7. Reprinted: ŠEVČÍK–MORGANOVA–SVATOŠOVÁ, *České umění*, pp. 290–292.

³¹ See *Idem*, *Slovník metod: Okřídlený osel*, Prague: Gallery 1999.

³² Josef HIRŠAL – Bohumila GRÖGEROVÁ, *Let let*, Prague: Torst 2007, p. 352.

³³ The Křižovatka group was formed in 1963 around Jiří Kolář. Members included Zdeněk Sýkora, Karel Malich and Vladislav Mirvald. In 1968, the theoretician Jiří Padrta, who had collaborated with the group from the start, put together an exhibition entitled *Křižovatka a hosté / Nová citlivost* (Prague: Mánes 1968), which showcased a wide range of Czech constructivist art of the 1960s.

Leaving aside his later journal entries, methodological glossaries and other texts, Kolář returned to the word and poetry for the last time in *Instructions for Use*. He dated the collection 1965, though it is clear that several of the poems had been written earlier. Some of them had already been published in that same year³⁴ as part of Kolář's manifesto "Maybe Nothing, Maybe Something",³⁵ in which he explains the origin and meaning not only of "evident poetry", but also "de-static poetry", as he called his instructions. "De-static poetry" differs from traditional poetry in that it is not static. It reflects and respects the randomness of life itself. Kolář alludes to his proximity to the neo-avant-garde: "I know that this poetry will perhaps be closest to those who are assaulting the world with everything we summarise using the term 'happening'."³⁶ As far as I know, this is one of the first times the concept of the happening is referred to in any Czechoslovak cultural publication.³⁷ However, if we want to discover whether, when writing *Instructions for Use*, Kolář sought inspiration from the actions associated with Fluxus, we must first attempt to reconstruct the flow of information that entered Czechoslovakia through the Iron Curtain.

Fluxus in Czechoslovakia

If we leave to one side Kolář's isolated reference to "happenings" in *Literární noviny* in 1965, the first relatively compendious study of the topic, entitled "Experimental Art: Happenings, Events, De-collages", was published by Jindřich Chalupěcký in 1966.³⁸ It was around this time that his book *Umění dnes* (*Art*

³⁴ This includes *Sonet* (*Sonnet*), *Návrat* (*The Return*), *Cesta* (*The Path*), *Rty* (*Lips*), *Na rozloučenou* (*Farewell*), *Dopis* (*Letter*), *Svatební oznámení* (*Wedding Announcement*), *Pocta J. P.* (*A Tribute to J. P.*), *Dotyk* (*Touch*), and poems from previous collections, e.g. *Porovnej* (*Compare*) and *Návod k upotřebení* (*Instructions for Use*), as well as several collages.

³⁵ KOLÁŘ, "Snad nic, snad něco".

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁷ According to an entry in Bohumila Grögerová's diary, Kolář referred to the happening at a gathering at the Medek's back in 1958, see HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Let let*, p. 225. However, the term began to appear in published articles in the Czech press only around the mid-sixties.

³⁸ Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Experimentální umění: Happeningy, Events, De-koláže", *Výtvarná práce*, vol. 14, 1966, no. 9, pp. 1, 7.

Today)³⁹ was published, which includes a short section on Fluxus and the happening. As far as I can tell, prior to 1965 there was no information in the public realm in Czechoslovakia regarding the American neo-avant-garde, though there was an awareness of its existence.⁴⁰ As always, personal contacts played an important role. George Maciunas attempted to forge Fluxus into an international movement, and given his Lithuanian origin it was only natural that he strongly supported contacts between East and West. The first contacts behind the Iron Curtain were made via new music and concrete poetry, as documented by Petra Stegmann when researching the exhibition *Fluxus East*.⁴¹ Stegmann also describes the trip taken in 1964 and 1965 by the Danish members of Fluxus, Eric and Tony Andersen, which included Prague. This visit was a private affair and there is unfortunately no documentation whatsoever of the performance soirée that was held in Herbert Masaryk's apartment. Far more importantly, the Andersons managed to travel across Ukraine to Russia. Here, the materials they left behind and the contacts they made during a trip to Leningrad found their way into the hands of the Czech critic Jindřich Chalupický, who in turn wrote to Willem de Ridder, founder and director of the European Mail Order Warehouse (the nearest to an HQ Fluxus had in Europe), requesting that he send more information.⁴² And so in 1965, the material on Fluxus was sent not only to Chalupický, but from him to Milan Knížák. In return, Chalupický sent information on the movement Aktual⁴³ and its first events to America. George Maciunas was so taken with the movement that he appointed Knížák director of Fluxus East. In 1965, Knížák wrote a manifesto entitled "Aktual: Another Life". Looking at some

³⁹ Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, *Umění dnes*, Prague: Nakladatelství čs. výtvarných umělců 1966. (Fluxus and its broader context receives a mention on pp. 39–40, and Chalupický also refers to Kolář's concrete poetry, though not his de-static poetry.)

⁴⁰ In 1964, John Cage and the Merce Cunningham dance company appeared in Prague and Ostrava. See Boris KLEPAL, "John Cage na cestě z Československa do New Yorku", *Ateliér*, 2012, no. 25–26, p. 3.

⁴¹ Petra STEGMANN (ed.), *Fluxus East: Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mitteleuropa – Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* (exh. cat.), Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien 2007.

⁴² A copy of this letter dated 5 April 1965 is held in the Silverman Fluxus Collection, which at present is administered by MoMA in New York. I am most grateful for this information to Petra STEGMANN, who quoted the letter in the catalogue to the exhibition *Fluxus East*, p. 25.

⁴³ In 1964, Milan Knížák, along with Soňa Švecová, Jan Trtílek, Vít and Jan Mach, founded the group Aktuální umění, which in the mid-sixties was renamed the Aktual movement. For more details see Pavlína MORGANOVÁ, *Czech Action Art, Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art Behind the Iron Curtain*, Prague: Karolinum Press 2015, pp. 50–79.

of the passages contained in the manifesto, it is clear how powerfully it resonates with Kolář's poetry:

To utilize each situation for the purpose of demonstrating, of attacking one's environment and oneself. To use means with the most direct intensity of effect. To make a game of many of life's everyday situations and to rid them of their convulsiveness and monstrosity. To affect with each gesture, word, act, look, appearance, with EVERYTHING. A simple anonymous activity. Walks, lunches, excursions, games, festivities, taking the tram, shopping, conversations, sports, fashion shows, etc... just a little different. Spontaneous street rituals. Conflicts. Conflicts of all kinds. Conflicts that must be created so that they can be resolved. It does not matter which means are used, but always those which are the most extreme. Christ, Karel May and a police officer can be co-creators.⁴⁴

An element of "civilism" is common to both Kolář and Knížák, though in the mid-sixties each was pursuing a radically different objective. Knížák attacks the quotidian through the action and yearns to break free of the embrace of the art world. Kolář on the other hand was busy establishing a place for himself on the art scene and attacks the quotidian with only the word, a habit he gradually gives up in favour of collage. In 1965, the circle around Kolář did not take Knížák too seriously. It was during that year that the editor of the magazine *Die Sonde*, seeking to publish a monothematic issue, asked Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Híršal whether anything was taking place in Czechoslovakia that could be called an action. Grögerová wrote in her journal: "By action he means happening, which so far in this country is simply a concept occasionally to be found in foreign magazines. While it may be true that the name of Milan Knížák is to be heard in this context, we have no details of him."⁴⁵ It was only the interest subsequently displayed by Chalupecký⁴⁶ and the Fluxus festival in Prague that balanced out the standing of the two artists. The Fluxus festival took place in Prague in October 1966. There was a kind of

⁴⁴ Milan KNÍŽÁK, "Aktual – žít jinak", in: ŠEVČÍK–MORGANOVÁ–SVATOŠOVÁ, *České umění*, p. 304. Translation in MORGANOVÁ, *Czech Action Art*, pp. 64–65.

⁴⁵ HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Let let*, p. 549.

⁴⁶ Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, "Úzkou cestou", *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 18, 1966, no. 5, pp. 365–370; "Příběh Milana Knížáka (The Story of Milan Knížák)" appeared alongside "Příběh Jiřího Koláře (The Story of Jiří Kolář)" in *idem, Na hranicích umění*, Munich: Arkýř 1987.

double booking involved: Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, American members of Fluxus, travelled to Prague upon the invitation of Chalupecký in order to exhibit avant-garde publications and give performances, and at the same time Ben Vautier, Jeff Berner and Serge Oldenbourg also travelled to Prague, but on the invitation of Knížák, in order to organise the festival. The three evenings of partially improvised performances in which Knížák was an active participant ended slightly differently than planned.⁴⁷ Many articles on the event appeared in the Czech press offering information not only regarding similar activities taking place around the world, but also home-grown protagonists.⁴⁸ Terms like happening and event crept coyly out of the shadows, as did conceptual approaches and forms such as event scores.

Internal sources

As I have said, Kolář brings *Instructions for Use* to a close by dating it 1965. In September of that year, i.e. shortly after the first information regarding Fluxus found its way across the Iron Curtain, he published several poems to accompany the manifesto “Maybe Nothing, Maybe Something” in *Literární noviny*. The sources of what was an extraordinary step even by Kolář’s standards must therefore be found in his own aesthetic development. When reading Kolář’s post-war poetry we very quickly come across many instances of what could be deemed precursors to the *Instructions*. The concept and graphic form of *Instructions for Use* can be traced back to Kolář’s early collection *Dny v roce* (*Days in the Year*),⁴⁹ as well as to the prose part of the volume *Roky v dnech* (*The Years in Days*), which only came out in the 1990s in Kolář’s collected works.⁵⁰ The journal-like style, the interest in everyday affairs

⁴⁷ In the samizdat anthology *Correspondence of Fluxus*, issued in a series edited by Petr Rezek from the seventies onwards (archive of the Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts – VVP AVU), there is a “Draft programme of the Fluxfest in Prague 1966” by George Maciunas. It is accompanied by many letters from Knížák clarifying other organisational plans and requirements. However, as is clear from the programme and photo-documentation of the festival, under the makeshift conditions Prague was able to offer, Maciunas’s ambitious plans were only partially realised. The course of the festival, which took place in Prague on 13, 14 and 17 October 1966, is reconstructed by Petra STEGMANN in the catalogue to the exhibition *Fluxus East*, pp. 31–34, 211–214. For more details, also see Petra STEGMANN (ed.), “*The lunatics are on the loose...*”: *European Fluxus Festivals 1962–1977*, Potsdam: DOWN WITH ART! 2012, pp. 391–414.

⁴⁸ Pavlína MORGANOVÁ, “Fluxus in the Czech Period Press”, in: STEGMANN, *Fluxus East*, pp. 177–196.

⁴⁹ Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Dny v roce. Básně 1946–1947*, Prague: Borový 1948.

⁵⁰ *Instructions for Use* takes the form of notional “weeks in the year”. The book contains fifty-two pairs of poems and collages, each of which is given a week number that replaces a page number.

and the poet's close relationship to the reader is manifest in many different ways. For instance, a poem dated 10 July 1946 from *Days in the Year* begins as follows:

SHUT THAT KID UP... CLOSE THE WINDOW... stay in the bathroom...
turn down the radio... stop clomping around... switch off the phone,
No, I'm not hungry or thirsty or anything.

In his post-war poems, Kolář concretises poetry using recordings of everyday conversations and stories. And in these poems he often issues a direct call to action to the reader. The collection *Nový Epiktet* [The New Epictetus] from the end of the fifties sees Kolář, now in the position of a mature poet, offering advice to someone just starting out. For instance, in the twelfth poem⁵¹ we find the following:

a.

If you want to devote your life to modern art
Don't think that you'll die of hunger
That you'll ruin your family
That you'll end up on the pavement or in an asylum

Poetry is more about ending in poverty
Abandoning your wife and kids
Being thrown into the street and being sent to an asylum or prison
Than it is living in the peace of slavery and sufficiency
And not daring to sacrifice anything
Modern poetry is the sister of freedom and risk
And all three are the daughters of revolt
And that is no company for a servant, lazy bastard, cop or pussyfooter

b.

Start your task with a verse
Do you have the feeling it doesn't match correspond and relate?
That it doesn't clash and confront?

Speak!
Call out!

⁵¹ KOLÁŘ, *Nový Epiktet*, p. 21.

Kolář's poems constantly reflect upon poetry itself. The collection of journal entries *Dny v roce* (*Days in the Year*)⁵² includes an outline of Kolář's study entitled "On the Problem of Poetic Composition", in which he writes:

I take as my title the words of Jindřich Chalupecký from the time I sent him the first part of my variations: Poetry remains far behind painting, and don't even speak of music. This statement still forces me to think of the demand, the necessity, the ideal, of returning the place to poetry given it by Edgar Allan Poe, shifted to modern man by Mallarmé, brought in line with the fine arts by Apollinaire and recently fertilised by the surrealists. [...] I have an implacable resistance to everything time-tested, promising success, guaranteeing a result. I hate a strange roof, I'm sick and tired of meaningless recommendations regarding a "bed of verses". This is no way to work with words, it is a sin that seeks vengeance, the words take revenge, thank God, not even the tradition of poets speaks to my language differently, just look at what poems are made from words, whoever thinks about the production of verses never produces a poem.⁵³

Kolář tirelessly experiments with and reflects upon the possibilities of poetry. In the collection of experimental, visual and concrete poetry entitled *Y61*, he arrives at the very boundary of poetic semantics. Yet in the following collection, *Básně ticha* (*Poems of Silence*), he uses words, letters and punctuation simply as visual signs divested of linguistic content. In *Y61* he develops several methods in parallel, the most interesting of which for our purposes involves the use of different instructions.⁵⁴ The collection includes the poem

⁵² KOLÁŘ, *Dílo*, pp. 467–475.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 467–468.

⁵⁴ E.g.: a deep wrinkling of the forehead
a slow clarification of the face
a tilting of the head
a helpless smile
a sneeze
a sigh of relief
a sharp jibe
a long yawn
a light hiccup
deadly indifference
sadness
a flush

(Repeat faster. Once more even faster.
Faster still. Again, faster. Again, until the entire game
becomes a two-second grimace)

Porovnej se svými vzpomínkami (Compare with Your Memories),⁵⁵ which invites the reader to compare their memories with the poet's.⁵⁶ In Y61 we find several such comparative poems, as well as *Vyškrtni-přidej (Cross off, Add)*, with its list of insults, at the start of which Kolář issues an invitation to the reader:

I have had these insults and names hurled at me, mostly from the police and from people I both knew and did not know, as well as from friends and family. In fact, I have heard many from a public tribunal. Why not underline or add the words you have had applied to you?

Kolář writes that his interest in instructions dates back to the latter half of the fifties, when he began incorporating them into his poetry. He would read the instructions on canned goods and packets, for recipes and appliances, and the instructions contained in manuals. Around this time he wrote a poem called *Návod k upotřebení (Instructions for Use)*, which later became the title of an entire collection that in early drafts had been called *Jak se vám líbí (As You Like It)*.⁵⁷ This collection, which clearly predates Kolář's de-static poetry of 1965, features several of its precursors. For instance, the first poem of *Abeceda osudu (Alphabet of Destiny)* features the following verse:

55 *Compare with Your Memories*

The first of my friends was hit by a train
the second drowned
the third hanged himself
another four were taken by tuberculosis
the eight fell from a tree
the ninth remained in a mine
the tenth in a steelworks
the eleventh was executed
the twelfth was beaten to death
the thirteenth was tortured
the fourteenth shot

the fifteenth fell
the sixteenth killed himself on a motorbike
the seventeenth jumped out of a window
the eighteenth shot himself the nineteenth had
leukaemia
the twentieth had syphilitic myelopathy
three died of cancer
four of heart attack
two of pneumonia
mother's heart and kidneys gave up
and father's strength gave out

56 Josef HIRŠAL – Bohumila GRÖGEROVÁ (eds.), *Experimentální poezie*, Prague: Odeon 1967, p. 57 (in this publication the poem is dated 1958).

57 This collection was published in an anthology of Kolář's poetry from the latter half of the fifties entitled *Vršovický Ezop (The Vršovice Aesop)*, Prague: Mladá fronta 1966) under the title *Instructions for Use* (the other collections featured in the anthology were *Černá lyra [The Black Lyre]*, *Marsyas*, *Pozůstalost pana A. [Mr A's Estate]*, *Vršovický Ezop [The Vršovice Aesop]* and *Česká suita [Czech Suite]*). Kolář's collected works, published by Odeon, also appeared under the title *Instructions for Use*. It should be emphasised that these were two completely different collections with the same name. See the publisher's note by Vladimír Karfik in Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Dílo Jiřího Koláře III*, Prague: Odeon 1993, p. 247.

When you get up in the morning
recite a poem you love
find a book
open it
take the first letter of the first verse
and search in the following alphabet

The actual poem *Instructions for Use*⁵⁸ is a kind of voodoo guide to writing poetry. However, unlike the de-static poetry from the later collection of the

58 *Instructions for Use*

Take a golden statuette of Apollo
A snake made of woven bluebottles of the steam of
a poppy and a mountain trail steamboat
An Apple stuffed with propellers
Whose number corresponds to your age
Tears cried through bread and salt at
a woman's burial
Knead everything with the whisper of wind and
wave
With the narration of fish and clouds
With the coloring books of plant dreams
With primers of animal imagery
With a shout of uselessly shed blood
With prayers of love beaten by misfortune
With a shredded veil bearing the faceprint of the
moon or a sunflower
With the thoughts of an old man who lived in vain
With the songs of a child destined for the gallows
With the dust remaining after breaking the bells
sacrificed for war
With the edge sharpened from execution axes
With drops of alcohol wiped from the lips of
a judicial murder victim
With the solitude of a prisoner and the joy of
a tyrant inebriated with victory
Add three times more a mixture of thorns of knots
of cat-o'-nine-tails of vinegar of silver coins
sprinkled with crushed frozen grapes
Work it all into a ball
and read at midnight to the slumber of walls under
starless skies
a page from the prophet Daniel
Then go and stab three times into each house you
pass
Wrench from the sidewalk a paving stone stained
with spit
Take a handful of asphalt from a highway covered
with mud
That left in your fingernails from the scrapings of

lampposts of the inside of chimneys of drains of
shutters and of benches
Wrap it with everything else into a poster and throw
it with your eyes closed from a bridge into a river as
the sun rises

If a swan doesn't fly from your mouth continue as
follows:
Put your right hand in a fire
burning the picture you love the most
but never without a memory of your mother
Then plunge your sufficiently charred hand into the
freshly turned soil
and wait until it heals
Now before touching anything else
Take a pen
Dip it in milk honey and poison
And write
The first words you hear

If you hear a bird's song
your poem arches
like a rainbow
Anyone evil reading it will go blind
If you feel an animal's voice
Compose a song that rings of beauty of the
lyre's voice from the heart of night
and the beats of the city's drums will forever be only
for the fear of worms
Anyone hateful hearing it will go deaf and dumb
When you encounter a human word
Anything you write will be weighed down by the
boulders of hell and strewn with the roses of
purgatory
Each grain and leaf will be a key to the secret of life
and time fate and death will lie down by your feet...

same name, these instructions are to be followed/implemented outside reality, i.e. in the space of poetry and the reader's imagination. In a note from 1965, Kolář states that the poems from *Jak se vám líbí* (*As You Like It*) were written in reaction to attempts to seek inspiration in folk poetry. However, Kolář's approach differs from that of more traditional authors. He does not seek inspiration in songs, but in "dream books, prophecies, lies, monthlies, instructions, superstitions, testimonies, humour, litanies, taunts, etc."⁵⁹ Kolář's position can be regarded as the ideal outcome of the ideas of interwar poetism.⁶⁰ Reading Teige's first poetist manifesto of 1924 it is impossible to overlook the connections with Kolář's poetry:

In medieval times even legal codes and school grammars were written in verse. Tendentious ideological verse with its "contents and plot" is the last surviving remnant of this kind of poetry. The beauty of our poetry has no intentions, no grand phrases, no deep meaning, no apostolic mission. A game of beautiful words, a combination of ideas, a web of images, if necessary without words. It calls for the free mind of a juggler of ideas, who has no intention to apply poetry to rational axioms and contaminate it with ideology; rather than philosophers and pedagogues, modern poets are clowns, dancers, acrobats, and tourists. The sweetness of artificiality and the spontaneity of feelings. Communication, poem, letter, lovers' conversation, improvised drinking sprees, chitchat, fantasy and comedy, a quick card game light as air itself, memories, good times when people laugh: a week of colours, lights, and scents.⁶¹

Kolář belongs to a group of artists who built on the foundations laid in the interwar period by Devětsil, an association of Czech avant-garde artists

⁵⁹ Jiří KOLÁŘ, "Dovětek autora", in: *Vršovický Ezop*, p. 182.

⁶⁰ Karel Srp (SRP, "Návody", p. 206) goes so far as to suggest that in a certain sense Kolář could be regarded as a late representative of the original avant-garde, since his first exhibition was in 1937 in the vestibule of the E. F. Burian Theatre. Notwithstanding this tempting thought, Kolář is viewed in Czech art history as a key representative of the sixties neo-avant-garde.

⁶¹ Karel TEIGE, "Poetismus", in: Květoslav CHVATÍK – Zdeněk PEŠAT (eds.), *Poetismus*, Prague: Odeon 1967, p. 111. English translation by Alexandra Büchler from *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2002.

founded in 1920. Even his turn away from the poetry of words to evident poetry can be seen as an attempt at a visual poem in the style of Teige, albeit under new conditions. As he writes in “Maybe Something, Maybe Nothing”, the traumatic experience of visiting Auschwitz might express these new conditions. Though Kolář’s break with verbal poetry might appear radical, we must not forget that he sought to convey a universal message. He regarded poetry to be the equivalent of creation itself. Such ideas are to be found in Teige’s second manifesto of poetism of 1928,⁶² which calls for the establishment of a government of pure poetry that would cultivate in innumerable ways the meaning of the Greek word *poiesis* or creation, i.e. a creative act that both transforms the world and is at the same time the continuation thereof. The reasons for this striking homology between Jiří Kolář’s work and the experiments of the New York avant-garde must be sought outside of any first-hand influence or information that managed to get past the Iron Curtain. Kolář was a close friend and collaborator of Josef Hiršal, and together the two doggedly blazed a trail of “expanded poetry” rather than “expanded music”, as in the case of Fluxus. Hiršal and Grögerová witnessed the new poetry movement from its very inception. As Grögerová writes in *Počátky a vývoj konkrétní a vizuální poezie (The Beginnings and Development of Concrete and Visual Poetry)*,⁶³ the inaugural moment was a two-hour long lecture that Grögerová and Hiršal organised at the end of 1962⁶⁴ at the Mánes Fine Artists’ Club. At this lecture, entitled “O filozofii jazyka, statistické estetice a současném literárním experimentu (On the Philosophy of Language, Statistical Aesthetics and Contemporary Literary Experiment)”, the two writers offered an example of concrete poetry and spoke of Max Bense’s theory of text, the manifesto of permutational art by Abraham A. Moles, the constellations of Eugene Gomringer, and the poetic constructions of Helmut Heisenbüttel. The lecture became a kind of theoretical epilogue to several already spontaneously created works, such as *JOB-BOJ*,⁶⁵ and the experimental

⁶² Karel TEIGE, “Manifest poetismu”, *ReD*, vol. 1, 1928, no. 9, pp. 317–376.

⁶³ Bohumila GRÖGEROVÁ, “Počátky a vývoj konkrétní a vizuální poezie”, in: *Báseň, obraz, gesto, zvuk: Experimentální poezie 60. let (exh. cat.)*, Prague: Památník národního písemnictví 1997, p. 15.

⁶⁴ The first solo exhibition of Kolář’s collages and visual poetry took place in May and June 1962 at Mánes.

⁶⁵ Bohumila GRÖGEROVÁ – Josef HIRŠAL, *JOB-BOJ*, Prague: Československý spisovatel 1968 (the collection was created between 1960 and 1962).

poetry of Kolář⁶⁶ and Ladislav Novák.⁶⁷ On 12 December 1963, a second lecture was held, again at Mánes, entitled “O poezii přirozené a umělé (On Natural and Artificial Poetry)”, in which theory was again illustrated by audio and visual examples. These activities unquestionably set in motion the movement of Czech visual and concrete poetry of the mid-seventies.

This period of exploration, establishing first contacts and discovering kindred spirits on the Czechoslovak and world art scene is depicted in *Let let (The Flight of Years)*.⁶⁸ The methods used, which combined journal entries, subjective observation, and reflections upon events on various different levels of society,⁶⁹ remain the most authentic testimony to the development of this movement and its links to Czechoslovak artists. Kolář was undoubtedly one of the central figures of this movement. In *Let let* it is clear that, though the circle of “expanded poetry” engaged with the same questions and aesthetic principles as practitioners of “expanded music”, these were parallel activities with few points of contact.

The circle surrounding Kolář revived interest in the relationship between image and word through its visual poetry. This model was developed on a theoretical level in Czechoslovakia by Jiří Padrta, the curator of several key exhibitions during the seventies: *Konstruktivní tendence (Constructive Tendencies)*, *Obraz a písmo (Image and Letter)*, *Křižovatka a hosté / Nová citlivost (Crossroads and Guests / The New Sensitivity)*.⁷⁰ Several persons associated with Czechoslovak experimental poetry and represented in the anthology *Experimentální poezie (Experimental Poetry)*⁷¹ put in an appearance at the last of these exhibitions. Around the same time, Hiršal and Grögerová were preparing the anthology *Slovo, písmo, akce, hlas (Word, Letter, Action,*

⁶⁶ This involved mainly visual and evident poetry, such as *Pocta Kazimiru Malevičovi, Y61* and *Básně ticha*, created in 1959–1961, see Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Básně ticha*, Prague: Český spisovatel 1994.

⁶⁷ This included Novák’s “prepared texts” and the later developed *Básně pro pohybovou recitaci (Poems for Moving Recitation)*. Ladislav Novák’s experimental poetry was later published in the anthology Ladislav NOVÁK, *Receptář*, Prague: Concordia 1992.

⁶⁸ HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Let let*.

⁶⁹ Jiří Kolář practiced these methods in his poetic events. Several post-war collections are of a diary-like character (*Dny v roce [Days in the Year]*, *Roky v dnech [The Years in Days]*, *Očítý svědek [Eye Witness]*, *Jásající hřbitov [Exultant Graveyard]* and *Přestupný rok [Leap Year]*).

⁷⁰ *Obraz a písmo*, Prague: Galerie V. Špály 1965; *Konstruktivní tendence*, Louny: Galerie B. Rejta – Roudnice nad Labem: GVU – Jihlava: Oblastní galerie Vysočiny 1966; *Nová citlivost / Křižovatka a hosté*, Brno: Dům umění – Karlovy Vary: Oblastní galerie umění – Prague: Mánes 1968.

Voice).⁷² This completed a kind of trilogy, of which the other two works were a translation of *Theorie der Texte*⁷³ by Max Bense and the anthology *Experimental Poetry* already alluded to. This latter was a meticulous selection of essays, manifestos and neo-avant-garde artistic programmes created from the fifties onwards. It concluded with several texts about Fluxus that included Burda's translation of the pivotal essay by George Brecht "Chance-Imagery" of 1957 and Maciunas's chart (a diagrammatic chronicle of the historical development of Fluxus).⁷⁴ Despite these connections, it is clear that the roots of Czech experimental poetry and the New Sensitivity movement, with which Kolář was associated during the sixties, come only into marginal contact with those of Fluxus. As I have said, the collection *Instructions for Use* was published in 1969 by the Dialog publishing house.⁷⁵ Understandably it was regarded as the culmination of Kolář's attempts to transform poetry. Any links it may have had with Fluxus and event scores are very much the result of retroactive interpretation. The growing awareness of the aims and methods of Fluxus brought about thanks to *Fluxfestival*, along with the many texts written in the latter half of the sixties, opened up a new perspective on Kolář's final collection.

In a text from 1975, Jiří Padrta even mentions *Instructions for Use* in the same breath as "action poetry".⁷⁶ This is a false analogy. Kolář's path out

⁷¹ HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Experimentální poezie*. Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová included Czech personalities (Jiří Kolář, Josef Hiršal, Bohumila Grögerová, Václav Havel, Ladislav Nebeský, Zdeněk Barborka, Ladislav Novák, Jindřich Procházka, Emil Juliš, Jiří Valoch, Eduard Ovčáček, Miloš Urbásek, Běla Kolářová, Josef Honys) alongside world renowned figures in the anthology. As well as the early experimentalists Raoul Hausmann and Michel Seuphor, the anthology included Helmut Heissenbüttel, Max Bense, Gerhard Rühm, Franz Mon, Carlo Belloli, Gunter Falk and Achille Bonito Oliva. Of the artists associated with Fluxus, only one poem by Emmett Williams made it into the anthology and the flyleaf featured "Spatial Poem Nr. 2" by Chieko Shiomi.

⁷² HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Slovo, písmo, akce, hlas*.

⁷³ Max BENSE, *Theorie textů* (1962), Prague: Odeon 1967.

⁷⁴ The anthology also contains Kolář's "Snad nic, snad něco".

⁷⁵ The publishing company was linked to the magazine *Dialog*, which first came out in 1966 in Ústí nad Labem. Many of the New Poets had their work published in the magazine, including Vladimír Burda, Zdeněk Barborka, Ladislav Nebeský, Václav Havel, Josef Honys, Jindřich Procházka, Miroslav Koryčán and Ladislav Novák.

⁷⁶ Jiří PADRTA, "Básník nového vědomí", in: MOTLOVÁ, *Jiří Kolář*, p. 90.

of poetry was not in the direction of performance and the happening, as it might appear from a cursory glance at his final collection of poetry, but on the contrary toward work with collage. Unlike Milan Knížák, who was already performing his events in Prague, the circle around Kolář was not especially sympathetic to this approach.⁷⁷ Most members of Fluxus believed, with Cage, that everything and anything could be music, and that the physical action was key. Not all of them appeared on stage as did Yoko Ono in her famous *Cut Piece* (1964). Many had their events, scores and instructions realised by other people, either on stage, in concert halls and experimental theatres, or in galleries and on the street. Kolář was not interested in having his poetry staged in this way. Communist Prague during the fifties and sixties knew nothing like the New York world of experimental art spaces. Events could only be held in private apartments or on the street, and this option was taken up in the mid-sixties in Prague only by Knížák and his circle.

Unlike Knížák, who tried to teach his viewers to “live”, Kolář wanted his de-static poetry to be a private, accessible and non-symbolic affair devoid of any ulterior motives. In the manifesto “Maybe Nothing, Maybe Something”, he rejects all models and remains committed to a human and, as far as possible, pure creativity. He does not manipulate the reader, a feature characteristic of the relationship between artist and audience in happenings and performances, but gives them free rein: “everything apart from the guide-poem is up to the reader”.⁷⁸ Though Kolář continued to deconstruct systematically everything he turned his attention to, be this verse, words, symbols, paintings, newspapers, everyday objects, etc. up until his death in 2002, he remained steadfast within. Despite being misunderstood by his contemporaries, his spirit and zest for work were undiminished. Yoko Ono too was faithful to a kind of nebulous internal spirit of resistance. Events and the accompanying instructions represented “wishes” or “hopes”.⁷⁹ She threw herself into new adventures with the same recklessness as Kolář. By some miracle of happenstance, in the midst of the turmoil taking place in post-war art, two slim volumes, *Instructions for Use* and *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawing*, encountered each other.

⁷⁷ HIRŠAL–GRÖGEROVÁ, *Let let*, p. 549 or 644.

⁷⁸ KOLÁŘ, “Snad nic, snad něco”, p. 6.

⁷⁹ LIPPARD, *Six Years*, p. 13.