ADAM THIRLWELL'S *KAPOW!* – THE MONTAGE BOOK

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In the context of new times, new types of writing are created in order to meet the demands and wishes of the contemporary public. Printed books make no exception especially given that the reading of (especially printed) books has declined, despite variable statistics over the years. The book reading habits have thus decreased, so making printed books attractive to readers has been a matter of concern for contemporary writers like Adam Thirlwell, as illustrated in his novella *Kapow!* (2012). In line with the contemporary mind-set of revolutionizing the way in which narrative is presented and the technique in which it is composed, Thirlwell plays with readers' conceptions and expectations about literary texts, producing a highly experimental work. Along with the montage/collage technique, which will be discussed in the present paper, such concepts as ergodicity, autofiction, metatextuality, paratextuality, metamodernism or altermodernism are central to a proper understanding of how Thirlwell's novella works and represent highlights of the exploratory undertaking of this article.

Keywords: ergodic literature; metamodernism; altermodernist fiction; contemporary autofiction; revolution of the text; intra-notes; collage/montage.

1. Introduction – contexts and contextualization

Adam Thirlwell was recognized as one of the best contemporary British novelists – more precisely, he was elected twice Best of Young British Novelists by *Granta* literary magazine in 2003 and 2013.

In a mixture of politics and personal life characteristic of his novels, Adam Thirlwell presents in his novella, *K¹*, recent global unrest – the students' riots from 2010 and the Arab Spring, particularly the uprising in Egypt. The 49 short chapters, thrusting ordinary people in the middle of important societal movements, develop into a critical commentary of such socio-historical aspects. All this is done on the background of a dynamic text that speaks not only at the level of narrative voices, story threads, but also, in fact, especially at a visual level. The text strikes at first sight on the level of the paratextual elements: typographical variation, layout of the text on the page (vertical, slantwise or upside down), fold-out pages, insertion of the dedication in the metadata of the book, texts almost "stepping out" of the page by their positioning on an

¹ *Kapow!*

“extreme” margin (K 45). All of these paratextual elements that make the book speak on a level that is clearly meant to challenge the idea of spatiality of the printed text and create a new type of image – what we call the montage book. It is especially in section 3 of the article that we expand upon the issue.

On the one hand, it is from the very first page that it becomes clear for readers that the book experiments with the form of the novel by laying out levels of stories, but also longer or shorter sentences are placed in text boxes various positions and directions. On the other hand, the author introduces the reader from the very first page into matters of the actuality: revolution, crisis and the problem of the / are announced from the very first page of the novel as an invitation to an analytical investigation of the aspects under scrutiny. Rather than develop into a plot (when the author confessed to hating the idea of plot) and the novel does not develop into a clearly analytical social aspects connected to the investigation of the as they are just a pretext towards aspects connected to the reader and direct him the crisis of writing and the revolution of the text (or at least a revolt against the type of top-to-bottom writing),

In my first book I'd played with space, then in my second I had the same kind of fun with time. But now I was done with these major categories. I was hoping that I could go minutely anywhere. (K 10)

the dilemmas and emotional stirrings of the characters and, especially, the portrait of the / of the author interspersed between the pages of the work. On the first page of the novel the author speaks about the fact that “everywhere they were starting revolution” and the fact that he was in “a blissful state of suspension” and that “total seamlessness” (K 5) had arrived in his thinking from nowhere. However, this state is not apparently synonymous with confusion or loss, but rather with search, as on page 10 he states the objective of the novel: “in my suspended state I was developing a theory that the important thing was to make connections between as many disparate objects as possible” (K 10). And, despite his “doped but caffeinated state”, the author seeks for clarification and meaning. That is why, by changing perspectives in a text box laid at 90 arc degrees, he allows and is apparently justified to very level-headedly analyse himself (see text box with quotation from page 10 above). One of the most important paradigms in this quotation and in the entire book is the adverb “anywhere”. “Following the usual modern neurosis” (K 16) the author is fully aware of the fact that, in the age of globalization, the half-Jewish, raised in the suburbs (K 17) had to “become international” (*ibid.*). The author claims to have been “into an ideal of mestizaje” (a broad use of the term *miscegenation*, seen in the

given context as cultural intermixing) (K 17). The author also claims he wants “to be as contaminated by other people as possible” (*ibid.*) in an attempt, perhaps, to know himself better by analogy and/or contrast or, to certify what van den Akker et al. call the “structure of feeling” of metamodernism (starting from Raymond Williams’ theory of the concept) (6). It may also clarify why the collage technique embodies and gives material form to his internal wish to connect to diverse, unrelated aspects of the world and to individuals from various parts of the world, as if fighting against the increasing fragmentation of the self and communities despite the pluralisation of the contemporary society.

The facts mentioned up to this point have directed us towards looking for a label for such a text. The first we have come up against was Espen Aarseth’s syntagm of *ergodic literature*. From the perspective of constructing and delivering the text or, put differently, the “mechanical organization of the text”, he posits that this kind of novel can be seen as belonging to what he calls cybertext (1) – a type of text (both electronic and printed) in which “the intricacies of the medium [are] an integral part of the literary exchange” (*ibid.*). Such a text is posited to engage and integrate the reader to a greater extent than classical types of text. Aarseth dubs this “ergodic literature”, using a term borrowed from physics to designate literature for which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning “work” and “path” (*ibid.*)). Therefore, the text works on more paths than one, or the reader decodes the text on more levels than one by using various paths. Aarseth’s theory expands a new perspective of interpretation on all types of texts (printed, digital and mixed media and so on) focusing attention on the reader’s/consumer’s/user’s effort not simply of moving his/her eyes on the page and turning pages, but of doing so much more and making different choices. One novel which comes to mind when giving an example of such writing which requires the reader’s effort in the reading process is B. S. Johnson’s “book-in-a-box” *The Unfortunates* (1969), in which the twenty seven sections of the book appear to the reader from an actual box-cover; the sections, as announced in the note on the cover, are “temporarily held together by removable wrapper” (so we hold in our hand tiny chapters just stapled together) which “are intended to be read in random order” because only the first and the last sections are marked as such. The readers are invited either to read the novel as it comes in the box or to create their own order of reading by re-arranging the sections themselves; as the act can be decided by the readers performing the combination of the 25 sections in the middle, they are faced with a situation of having 25! (factorial of 25) possibilities of reading (which amounts to a number with 26 figures, an almost impossible number to read, let alone possibilities of reading as such).

We find other examples of ergodic literature in a novel by B. S. Johnson, *House Mother Normal (A Geriatric Comedy)* (1971), in which he plays especially

with spacing. Another interesting example is Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971), in which the beginning is marked with the title "This Is Not the Beginning", the first 9 pages are numbered from 0 to 000000000 (and even a note to the text on page 000000000.0), the entire novel inviting readers to follow hundreds of layout on the 259 + 11 pages of the novel. Another more recent example is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010) in which, by using the die-cut technique – words are cut off from the page by the help of a punch press, the book becomes what was called a "sculptural object", as the author declares in an interview with Stephen Heller in *The New York Times* (2010).

Another concept circulated in the first decade of the third millennium (in fact, in the exact year when *K* was published) which tried to describe the new emerging form of the novel was "*translit*". After "lad lit" (emerging in the early 1990s), "chick lit" (popular in the late 1990s), "lab lit" (coined in the 2000s), we now come across the term (introduced by Douglas Coupland) which speaks about a hybrid form of fiction that transgresses spatial and temporal boundaries:

I mention this because it has been only in the past decade that we appear to have entered an aura-free universe in which all eras coexist at once – a state of possibly permanent atemporality given to us courtesy of the Internet. No particular era now dominates. We live in a post-era era without forms of its own powerful enough to brand the times. The zeitgeist of 2012 is that we have a lot of *zeit* but not much *geist*. I can't believe I just wrote that last sentence, but it's true; there is something psychically sparse about the present era, and artists of all stripes are responding with fresh strategies.

This new reality seems to have manifested in the literary world in what must undeniably be called a new literary genre. For lack of a better word, let's call it Translit.

Trying to project Thirlwell's fiction against the general backdrop of the age in which it was written, critics come up against the major problem of denominating the age and focusing on one or another pervading facet of the current times. Gibbons (2015) and Vermeulen & van den Akker make a comprehensive presentation of the theorists and their proposed terms. Thus, in turn, they speak about hypermodernism, digimodernism, pseudomodernism, automodernism, alter-modernism, etc. Vermeulen & van den Akker dub the period *metamodernism*, employing to the maximum the meanings of the prefix: "we contend that metamodernism should be situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism" (2). The theorists stress upon the concept of oscillation between limits:

between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, a modern commitment and a postmodern detachment, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity (*id.* 6).

They conclude by saying that “the metamodern is constituted by the tension, nay, the double-bind, of a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all” (*ibid.*; see also van den Akker et al.: 4–12).

Alison Gibbons (2015), while trying to find the place of such works as Thirlwell’s novella in the context of the contemporary times, employs the term introduced by Vermeulen and van den Akker and states that:

Metamodernism is concerned with global ethics. [...] Metamodernist writers share with global ethicists a commitment to justice, though while global ethicists seek to shape debates and find solutions, the writing of metamodernist authors has the ability to raise the consciousness and conscience of the general public: fiction thus becomes a vehicle through which to increase awareness of contemporary insecurities – environmental, social and political (31).

But Gibbons had also used another term to describe contemporary fiction to which *K* could be subsumed. Thus, in Bray et al. (2012: 238–252) she discusses the physical context of the book projected against the backdrop of the world’s mentality after September 11, 2001 and after the financial crisis of the 2000s: “altermodernist art and fiction represent a contemporary experience that is pluralized, decentralized, and itinerant” (239–240). She continues by presenting the features of *altermodernist fiction* which is “formally experimental [...] mixing genre (literary, autobiographical, historical, artistic) or mode (words, drawings, sculptures, photographs)”. In what *time* is concerned, Gibbons (in Bray et al.) calls it heterochronic – history is seen as a series of pluralized accounts and the concept of identity is explored under the perspective of setting roots in motion. As for the third coordinate which accomplished her presentation of altermodernist fiction – *identity* – Gibbons places the figure of the traveller, the nomad in the centre claiming that it “provides a character whose movement through time and space traces out intersubjective memories and identities” (*ibid.*)

In another study, Gibbons (2012: 1) calls this “multimodal printed literary fiction” and claims that these novels use a “plurality of semiotic modes in the communication and progression of their narratives” (*id.*: 2) with no mode prevailing over the other: “narrative content, type-face, type-setting, graphic design, and images all have a role to play” (*ibid.*), all of these being potentiated by the communicative and technological developments. At the same time, their authors build these artistic representations as artefacts (“highly sophisticated

art forms” as Gibbons calls them, *ibid.*) with an increased self-consciousness developing a metafictional discourse.

Further on, she lists a series of features of multimodal novels: (1) unusual textual layouts and page design; (2) varied typography; (3) use of colour in both type and imagistic content; (4) concrete realisation of text to create images, as in concrete poetry; (5) devices that draw attention to the text’s materiality, including metafictional writing; (6) footnotes and self-interrogative critical voices; (7) flipbook sections; (8) mixing of genres, both in literary terms, such as horror, and in terms of visual effect, such as newspaper clippings and play dialogue.

According to this grid of interpretation, Thirlwell’s *K* fails to meet only feature 3 as in terms of colour and imagistic content it does not manage to reach the complexity of multimodal novels such as Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) or Nicola Barker’s *H(A)PPY* for example. It is rather closer to Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) and Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012), which it actually surpasses in terms of graphic design.

In a more recent study by van den Akker et al. (2017), Gibbons introduces another term and speaks about “Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect” (117–130). Even if she enumerates Thirlwell’s *K* in the list she provides for what she calls “broader examples of autofictions”, and not of “examples of autofictions in the strict sense” (122), we can observe that the syntagm underpins important features of the novel: “autofiction is an explicitly hybrid form of life writing that merges autobiographical fact with fiction” (120). She also quotes the French critic Serge Doubrovsky who coined the term in 1977 by referring to “fiction of facts and events strictly real” (121). Gibbons enlarges the perspectives with Marion Sadoux’s definition of the concept of autofiction seen as “a resilient attempt to deal with notions of self and subjectivity in an age of multiple crisis” (*ibid.*). These two definitions comprise precisely aspects that Thirlwell tackled in *K*: merger/mixture of perspectives, identity, or crisis.

2. Style or a new topology of the novel

The first aspect that strikes the reader when opening *K* is the aspect of form. The text boxes of different sizes, shapes and layouts appearing on 71 pages of the total of 81 pages of the novel remind us of concrete poetry. And the analogy is not forced as long as Thirlwell himself, in an interview with Anita Sethi, confessed to having discovered the idea of the poetic form of the novel in Milan Kundera’s *The Art of the Novel*:

I was 18 and I’d gone to Prague and visited Kafka’s house. I bought Milan Kundera’s *The Art of the Novel*. I’d never thought of the novel as a poetic form. What I’ve got from Kundera is that a novel can be as playful as a poem. More and more, I think of writing as a way of creating your own

map of the world, discovering what is possible, and describing a reality that is most Adamish. You can impose your own patterns on what is lacking in pattern. One of the games of writing is that some repeats are fruitful. It's also a game of constant contradiction.

Brian McHale actually denominates such writing as “concrete prose” or “concrete fiction”, going back to Apollinaire as a source:

Like concrete poetry, many pieces of concrete prose are literally ‘verbal icons,’ imitating through their shapes the shapes of objects or processes in the real world. The model for this type of concrete prose can be found in the *calligrammes* of Apollinaire, where the text is shaped into a visual representation of an appropriate object. Other pieces mime not objects or processes, but rather invisible concepts; here the iconic relation between the shaped text and the ‘thing’ imitated is metaphorical or allegorical, and depends upon the reader’s interpretation (184).

McHale lists several possibilities of laying out the text on the page: various exploitations of the horizontal space (including use of blank horizontals), tampering with margins, exploiting the vertical and the diagonal axes in laying out words on the page (arrangement of type vertically or diagonally across the page), the arranging of the text *upward* vertically or diagonally, the printing of the text in the shape of a square or circle, or the printing of the text upside-down or sideways. In *K*, Thirlwell makes use of all of these possibilities, engaging the readers in a playful gliding on the page and challenging them into shifting perspectives, becoming fully aware of a metafictional voice speaking directly with them, expressing a digressive comment or simply introducing an explanation in a reporting sentence.

In an interview with Yuka Igarashi, Adam Thirlwell also admits to having been influenced by Laurence Sterne through *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, an experimental novel from the age of the emergence of this literary form, in which Sterne’s characters “totally allowed themselves to talk around a subject, as it were, they weren’t just limited to the single narrative of the story” also allowing the narrator to “leap around the subject”. Thirlwell speaks about a “flipping novel” (referring to another novel of his, *Politics*), but we think he applied this device literally to *K*. The reader has to flip the novel from the very first page in order to read the upside down text box, or he has to flip from one narrator to another and from one level of narration to another – from the social stirrings in Egypt to the personal stirrings of one or another from the characters, or to the stirrings of the narrator in the act of writing. The author confesses to wanting to steal the voice and the stories of one narrator who is “a nickelodeon

of stories" (K 16). The author also acknowledges the use of foregrounding and backgrounding narrations and characters, and the reader sometimes moves from one to another through what a hyperlink would be on an Internet page or on an electronic page. In this respect, the text-boxes, termed by us as intra-notes further below, are an interesting case to discuss. Therefore, the form of the novel is not simply a flippant experience of writing or reading, but it is also a matter of contemporary cognition.

The major novelty of the text comes from the introduction of some text boxes that "bifurcate the main text" (Gibbons 2014: 613). Marked with a graphic sign very close to , the text introduces more digressions than the number of pages it has. They can be digressions, additional comments, but also develop as levels of narration that may have easily been placed between brackets, commas, or separate paragraphs, but are instead positioned as text boxes of various shapes and sizes: squares (K 6), rectangles (K 8), triangles (K 16, 19), circles (K 20), mere lines (K 7), regular columns from a newspaper (K 5), or irregular shapes reminding us of the horse from the game of chess or maybe even of Sterne's hobby horses (K 22); there are also blank boxes (K 37), arrow-like lines (K 70), or criss-crossing lines (K 72). These graphic elements make the book a genuine work of montage.

Alison Gibbons (2014: 613) calls these texts embedded within the text "footnotes", but we believe they

are definitely not classical footnotes, rather they could be seen as intra-notes, interstitial text boxes upturning perspectives, enlarging the frame of the reading/text into planes without constricting borders/margins, hyperlinks on the page of a book, trying to replicate the manner in which our thoughts float in our

In what the position of these text boxes is concerned, we can notice that sometimes they are simply (if this can be simple in the act of reading) written with the text box/column being turned upside down. It seems that this paratextual elements make the text interactive in the relationship it develops with the reader beyond the level of the narrative thread.

brains, but also rendering the manner in which levels of thinking, but especially of receiving information, unfold nowadays: we watch TV but quickly change the channel sometimes in search of the same item of news on a different channel (other times of programmes with different topics); or we have multiple screens while watching the same TV channel; or we have multiple screens with different TV channels; or we watch TV while also looking for additional information on a cell phone, a tablet or other smart devices; we read things on Twitter, we see photographs on Instagram or see videos on Youtube and these typographical interventions render the way in which we add a new dimension with each item of information we receive from these media. Kapow! Pop comes a new picture

in a newspaper or clip on TV apparently to enlarge and complete the perspective or, on the contrary, to make things more confusing. The interstitial information introduced by the text boxes in the main text as intervening contents make us think of a webpage and the way it looks like, with interstitial ads between or among other (textual or visual) matter, with all of them, together, forming a complex, multi-dimensional, multi-framed, multimodal representation of contemporary life, with its many forms and (sometimes unrelated) meanings.

These text boxes are sometimes separated by a comma, making the reader clearly understand that they are part and parcel of the larger body of the text; or they could be taken as captions to the main narration; however, some other times, they appear as isolated ideas which could be taken separately from the large body of the main text, as parallel or alternate levels of the narration, or they could be taken entirely separate as aphoristic text boxes. At the visual level, they create the effect of frame-within-a-frame story that the author is reminding of through the mentioning of the *Arabian Nights*.

In other parts of the novel, these text boxes, not columns, but miniature paragraphs or just lines are written in a making the reader's head tilt to the right or to the left, depending on the direction of the writing (i. e. downwards or upwards) – thus, the text physically influences the readers, developing another level of communication between reader and text – a “kinaesthetic interaction” (Gibbons 2012: 97). In a symbolic stretch these could be taken as showing the verticality of things, or, on the contrary, the bottom-upness of things, but, in fact, in typical contemporary manner, they are sometimes mere trivialities, or sarcastic remarks whose use amplifies the ridiculous of the situation or merely adds to the ludic nature of the text. Thus, the function of text boxes in media – to draw particular attention to an item of information, to announce the sensational or to isolate a quotation – is lost and sometimes rendered as unnecessary or meaningless.

The text becomes even more ludic with the employment of other paratextual elements, out of which the unfolding or the folding outwards of pages are some of the most interesting. Gibbons (2015: 33) calls them “throw-out pages”, book designers/editors such as Tom Clark label them “throw-outs”, but the author speaks about “concertina pages of stories” (K 18) as the pages are supposed to fold and unfold in a multiplicity of stories, or voices or perspectives.

The effect of using such devices is that of increased interactivity of the text and of an increased interaction between the reader and the author's/narrator's voice – if a linear layout of the narration on the page makes the reader sometimes get lost in narrative levels or voices, the digressive leakages of text make the reader immerse in the reading experience more physically engaged, more cognitively aware and more emotionally activated.

In terms of identifying narrators, the reader experiences an evasion of authority because the narrator says he knows the story from another narrator, who knows it from another narrator. The narrator also admits to being under the influence of dope or he is highly caffeinated, or in a state of suspension (K 5) and also a self-acknowledged sarcastic. The main narrator, therefore, shirks the matter of authority in speaking about the social movements as an excuse for tackling the issues from afar, or for interpreting them incorrectly. The evasion of the narratorial authority also reinforces the role of the reader, whose interpretative liberty and analytical or critical effort are encouraged. However, we feel the fully engaged voice of the author in the metadiscourse. In the middle of his characters' stories, the author slides into telling us the "story" of writing this text, he presents the torments of the fictional / that is the supposed author of the text. The novel becomes metafiction and it gives us more clues into decoding it by following one path or another or it justifies Alison Gibbons' syntagm of "contemporary autofiction" (in van den Akker: 120) – a montage/collage of fiction and metafictional discourse.

3. The art of the image – the art of the text

In terms of using the technique of presenting a "grand" story (the Arab spring) which, in fact, becomes a background for many other personal stories, *K* is not the first work to make use of such a support. Thus, the novel reminds us of Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* in which the backstory – the horrors from Auschwitz – is just a pretext to foreground the individual(ized) story of the main doctor (a former doctor in Auschwitz) and the technique – antinomic narrative. Similarly, in *K*, the historical events headed under the syntagm of the Arab spring are simply a pretext to create an actual rendition (visual representation) of the social turmoil and personal stirrings of the participants and to use this technique of digressive text boxes. Though on page 32 the author declares that "this story is historical" (K 32), he further lays the stress on the story of the individuals, on the layering and juxtaposing of stories, but especially on the metadiscursive expounding in the body of the text or in the text boxes.

The strong focus on the visual in the text is also supported by the direct sending of the reader towards the act of visualization. In addition to the paratextual elements, the author suggests a series of techniques through the names of the artists he inserts between the pages, mainly those of collage, montage or pastiche. On page 32 he clearly explains his creative principle: "I wanted montage. [...] I wanted a system where as many things as possible were visible at once" (K 32).

Used in painting or photography, filmmaking or sculpture, drama or prose, collage, montage or pastiche enable the author to bring together various levels of narration in a nexus. Thirlwell is, in fact, preoccupied with putting reality on page. In the novel he declares wanting to achieve "a meeting of two

more or less separate realities" (K 10–11), but he sometimes feels the pressure of the ones who declare "The real! The real could never be described" (K 16). Thirlwell wanted to obtain or (re-)create "reality" in *K* by means of language: "My theory was that language was a trampoline which pushed you everywhere, even inside-out, even into an apartment block I had never visited in a country I didn't really know" (K 10).

Graphically/visually, this effect of overlapping reality is helped by means of the text boxes (similarly to the multiple screens on TV). The text builds a meta-textual discourse through which it explains itself by introducing the perspective of various artists and immersing us into the reality of the writer, of a historical event, of some characters who, though fictional, could exist anywhere in the world. Poets, painters/sculptors/photographers, novelists, film directors are mentioned in the text to create a net of supporters, promoters of new ideas and forms, ways of mixing materials and perspectives, of defying borders and genres.

Kenneth Koch (1925–2002), American poet and playwright, is quoted on page 10 by the narrative voice in the novel so as to send to the idea of making connections and making a collage of ideas: "in my suspended state I was developing a theory that the important thing was to make connections between as many disparate objects as possible" (K 10). The author supports this declared "theory" of his by introducing the name and works of *Jean-Luc Godard* (born 1930), Swiss-French film director, screenwriter and film critic who regards the image as "the bringing together of two distant realities", as Robin MacKay points out. The film director (closely connected to the concept of collage through the project which he had at Centre Pompidou and with the idea of "image book" and the Arab world) is used by Thirlwell to support the idea of strength of the image which can be created in the mind of the reader/viewer: "[...] an image shouldn't be a comparison so much as a meeting of two more or less separate realities." (K 10–11)

In *K*, *David Hockney* (born 1937, English painter, draftsman, printmaker, stage designer, and photographer) (mentioned in K 16) seems to have been taken as a source of inspiration for Thirlwell; through his photo-collage technique (see his "joiners"), Hockney transcended the fixity and the fixed temporal boundaries of one photograph; his multiple frames bring multiple perspectives, angles and temporal sequences. The discourse of his photographs defies linearity, he defies the limits of space in his paintings which he makes larger and larger as if wanting to make the viewer more aware of the (spatial) "reality" of the painting. So does Thirlwell challenge the limits of the books by pushing the text on extreme margins (literally) and so does he make the book larger and larger by making pages unfold.

The writer-character also acknowledges the experimental nature of the work he is creating by enumerating the Russians he "adored" (K 18): *Vladimir Mayakovsky* (1893–1930, Soviet poet, playwright, artist and actor), known for

his preference for formal experimentation, or *El Lissitzky* (1890–1941, Russian artist, designer, photographer, typographer, polemicist and architect) with his innovation in typography and photomontage. The quotation from El Lissitzky on page 19 in the novel, in a text box, is meant to reveal how the visual is processed with much greater speed than the acoustic; similarly, Thirlwell declares that he wants to speed up reading and age the reader – therefore the reader would only age at a cognitive level, not a physical one, because the rhythm of reading would be rather similar to any book, but the knowledge accumulated by the shifting perspectives, by the multiplicity of angles (of reading and interpretation), by the pluri-perspectivized view upon the material space of the book would bring with it the experience that comes with age. It is as if the text becomes a touch screen onto which we have to handle the different text boxes/ icons and we move from one hyperlink to another, from one page to another in a digressive manner which sometimes dislodges or elicits us from the main line of the text. The writer himself explains his writer-narrator's attempt to create a work that would draw as closely as possible to an artistic form of writing through which he would manage to drive readers to making connections and reaching the "integrity" (K 18) of the act of reading:

And to present this new way of thinking I began to imagine new forms, like pull-out sentences, and multiple highspeed changes in direction. I imagined concertina pages of stories, pasted pictures. And why not? It wasn't that I wanted to make words visual, like the former futuristi. [...] But I was imagining a story that was made up of so many digressions and evasions that in order to make it readable it would need to be divided in every direction (K 18).

Cy Twombly (1928–2011, American painter, sculptor and photographer), through his free scribbling technique, acknowledging the creator's freedom to express himself, but also introducing the idea of letting out one's escalating crisis (see the description for his *Ferragosto* paintings in the article by Alastair Sooke) seems to have inspired Thirlwell with his technique as the testimony in the novella reads – on page 31, the writer-narrator reveals the form he is looking for:

Yes kid, I was saying to myself. I'd grown bored of messing around with the hifi splicers and spools, the tape decks you had to deal with just because you wanted to tell a story – a story which was, by definition, a sequence whose conclusion you knew but which the reader didn't. Instead a wanted scumble and crossings out, like those notebook scrawling paintings of Cy Twombly (K 31).

Marcel Duchamp is introduced in Thirlwell's novella so as to give a hint of his kinetic work, but also as a figure reconsidering the reality around and in-

roducing mundane objects in his collection of “Readymades” (which are mentioned in *K* 54) as a means of revaluing the trivial in our lives, in fact, completing the perspective upon the reality we inhabit.

In a similar undertaking of rendering the reconsideration of ways of transmitting messages and complying with the rules of the genre, the author uses the art of the American sculptor *Claes Oldenburg* (born 1929) whose vision of the everyday objects triggers a mundane perspective upon character portrayal and becoming. Thus, when describing his female character, Nigora, Thirlwell uses his metafictional voice to make us see behind the curtain of the process of creation:

And I know that every story is meant to have its moment of truth or epiphany or revolution but that’s only a convention. It’s only a genre after all. If she had an epiphany, then it just leaked out of her. She was like a giant squished cigarette butt as constructed by Claes Oldenburg. And in this new kind of story I’m only trying to make you as crushed and stained, dear reader, as Nigora was that evening, as she tried to unfold all her thoughts. [...] I’m trying to turn you into her (*K* 60–61).

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008, American painter and graphic artist) lends to Thirlwell his artifice of combinations (see his collection “Combines”); his hybrid creations (mixing materials) render the blurry boundaries between various aspects of life sometimes put together (as in the pages of a newspaper or as in the feed of some TV news channels) in a most abusive manner. So does the author of *K* adhere to the technique and qualifies his novel as “a small exploded story, just a place, like Rauschenberg’s combines, where some things are” (*K* 80).

As playful as this would seem, we consider that this is, in fact, the ultimate purpose of the author, to make us move (by moving our eyes through the text) with the characters, to draw us closer to certain types of realities, turning and upturning (pages and) hierarchies, topics and theories. It also sends to the hybrid and multi-faceted nature of contemporary reality which, in many cases, consists of a mixture or combination of diverse facts, events, feelings or emotions whose simultaneous occurrence can constitute an overwhelming or ‘explosive’ experience for the individual.

But Thirlwell also uses cinema figures to complete his artistic creed – thus, he makes his writer-narrator adhere to the views of *Pier Paolo Pasolini* (1922–1975), “the sarcastic novelist and movie man” (*K* 17), in his search for reality/the real, according to Chris Fennell. The film director was known for his opinions that valued cinema as a better means of rendering reality than through the limited language offered by the written word. Pasolini (film director, poet, novelist, playwright, intellectual, actor, journalist, and political figure) is used

as a figure able to vouch for the best means of rendering reality/life experiences which is/are different for/from one person to another. That is why, the concept adopted by Pasolini and, declaratively by Thirlwell in his turn, is that of “contamination”: “Contamination! I want to be contaminated too! Why should I be only the kid my mother bore when I could also be the kid of my choice?” (K 17) Therefore, the author invited the reader, too, to be an accomplice in “contaminating”/mixing perspectives of the “reality” of the novel and of decoding this “reality”: the fictional with the metafictional, the photographic with the cinematographic, the poetic with the pictorial, the mental (act of reading) with the kinetic (act of turning the book upside down or unfolding pages) in an effort to render the complexities of the contemporary world and of the way in which we live, but also of the way in which our senses are challenged.

Thirlwell also mentions the technique of other film makers such as the French couple *Jean-Marie Straub* and *Danièle Huillet*, known for their work which required the audience’s full attention and change of perspective, but also for dealing with the topic of revolutions – the first two being typical to any ergodic discourse. Other references from the world of cinema include: Iranian Abbas Kiarostami (known for his use of mixing fictional and documentary elements), Palestinian Elia Suleiman (known for using juxtaposition in his films) who together with Jayce Salloum made their “montagemovie” (K 78) *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, or German Harun Farocki (as a follower of Jean-Luc Godard), but also American Joe Swanberg known for his mumblecore films which focus on personal relationships. This plethora of film makers are supposed to constitute an element in the metafictional discourse through which the author implicitly or explicitly presents one/some of his techniques.

So as to complete the metafictional picture, Thirlwell also mentions the works of Austrian satirist Karl Kraus and his play *The Last Days of Mankind* drawing mainly on the technique of textual collage, of Indian political essayist Pan-kaj Mishra who debated upon cultural changes in the age of globalization, of Slovenian philosopher and sociologist Slavoj Žižek known for his theories upon revolutions, of American musician John Cage quoted in the novel (K 52) for his preference for multiplicity of visual and audible events in a situation so as to create experience, or of jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton, known for his mixture of instruments in his composition, but also for his mixture of styles (written notes and improvisation) and for his traveller figure in his tours.

Thirlwell also evokes the names of authors such as Thomas Pynchon (K 32) for his penchant for “variety of forms”, Milan Kundera and Philip Roth (K 51) as developers of political thought.

But, if throughout the text, the author seems to use the names of others artists in order to shape a declaration of his artistic creed and style, towards the end of the novel Thirlwell steps outside the literary world and cynically observes

such perspectives manifest in the “reality” of the street. For instance, the author quotes *Thomas Hirschhorn* (Swiss artist, born 1953, known for his eclectic approach in his works) so as to complete the declaration of his view upon reality put between the pages of a novel by using what the author himself calls the “revelation of [...] montage”: “As students we were always encouraged to go beyond the Rolls Royce juxtaposed with the Third World country child” (K 74). Thirlwell uses this technique of juxtaposing stories, but he is also aware of and signals the absurdity of this overlapping of levels in our world – our life/reality in which we sometimes complain about petty things is set against/juxtaposed with the lives/reality of people we see in the street. The juxtaposition brings up a social theme regarding the socio-economic discrepancies lying at the heart of this mixed reality, yet basic humanity should ultimately be linking both rich and poor. In a text box which makes us turn the book upside down, entering a new (level of) “reality”, he witnesses the following scene:

And as I left the cinema going up to Waterloo Bridge I was treated to my own version of crude montage, as I walked behind two people saying that they could only text if they were using predictive text except maybe the iPhone if you used the qwerty keyboard, while passing a guy begging on the bridge’s steps. I felt ashamed. I looked at him and he looked at me. It was like that moment in the book where the aristocratic poet realises that all the clochards in Paris are grinning at him, because they know he’s one of them (K 74).

Using Hirschhorn, also known for his political art (his work *Touching Reality* creates a similar impression drawing on the tactile experience of the work of art under/at the tips of our fingers), as a support towards the end of the novel, Thirlwell reinforces another dimension of *K* – it is the metamodern quality (as discussed by van den Akker and Vermeulen in van den Akker et al.) of rendering in fiction “the waning of the logic of television (or mass media) culture and the emergence of the logic of network (or social media) culture” (K 15). If narrative used to mean following a story as if in a cinematographic frame-by-frame footage, Thirlwell’s *K*, through its digressive text boxes, is closer in style to the photographs on Instagram, the videos on Facebook and the tweets on Twitter. The logic of network may also be illustrated by the syntagm of chained reality, where one thing/reality never stands alone but coexists with a mixture of other things/realities, as suggested by the use of the text boxes and the other strategies mentioned so far. The viewer’s/reader’s experience is continuously challenged both visually and cognitively, in an endless chain/network.

Looking at the book from another perspective – with a focus on its unfolding pages – it would seem that the book of fiction draws close in form to the newspapers: it either recreates for us of the image of the broadsheet that

the reader would have to tactfully unfold in front of his eyes and onto his/her knees, or it reminds us of the online newspaper in which, one hyperlink after another, the reader is taken to another and another page of “related”, or “recommended”, or “similar” or “also read” articles. The text boxes look like cut out bits from newspapers that a collector might clip out of a paper in an attempt to cling on to a slice of reality.

Conclusions

We consider that the range of artists identified between the pages of the novel, united by the same employment of montage/collage/pastiche in their specific art certify Adam Thirlwell’s undertaking in making out of the body of the book a canvas on which the brush goes either way it wants, overlapping texts, changing fonts and annulling fixed borders, creating a hybrid work that combines styles of writing, topics, printing fonts, directions of writing, or that allows texts to cascade out of the main frame, as it was classically acknowledged, of a book. “I just cherished this idea of writing something that would keep unfolding out of itself, a story that would take in as many other stories as possible” (K 18), his character openly declares to his “dear reader” (*ibid.*). The entire book presents, implicitly or explicitly, the efforts of the novelist in the new world invaded by politics and technology, by a general idea of revolution, used both with the proper and the figurative meaning to render reality, to encapsulate it between the covers of a book. The questions that seem to have guided Thirlwell in the choice of his form are: “Can the novelist render a revolution in writing when one can see it live on TV or on the Internet?”, “Is the novelist compelled to revolutionize the written text so as to appeal to the new kind of public/audience/reader?” or “Is the new form of the novel dictated by the new medium/media through which information is delivered?”

At the same time, the book also stands firmly on its principle of recreating the pleasure for reading. And this is done through its ludic nature. Alison Gibbons, quoting an interview by Toby Lichtig with Adam Thirlwell (2015: 34), mentions the author’s very words when saying that he prefers a kind of “serious playfulness”. This places the author and his fiction in a state of oscillation between limits, the same kind of oscillation that Vermeulen and van den Akker present in their theory. There is also the paradox, or irony or challenge of the rather inert narrator that engages the reader in a highly dynamic and interactive act of reading.

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KAPOV! ADAMA TIRLEVELA – MONTIRANA KNJIGA

U kontekstu novog vremena nastaju nove vrste pisanja u svrhu ispunjavanja zahtjeva i želja savremene publike. Štampane knjige nijesu izuzetak, pogotovo ako imamo u vidu da je čitanost (naročito štampanih) knjiga u opadanju, uprkos različitim statistikama tokom godina. Navika čitanja knjiga se gubi pa je za pisce poput Adama Tirlvela važno pitanje postalo kako knjige učiniti privlačim čitaocima, što ilustruje njegova novela *Kapow!* (2012). U skladu sa savremenim mišljenjem o revolucionarnoj izmjeni načina prezentacije narativa i tehnika kojima je sačinjen, Tirlvel se poigrava s čitalačkim očekivanjima i koncepcijama književnog teksta, stvarajući izrazito eksperimentalno djelo. Uz tehniku montaže/ kolaža, o kojoj će biti riječi u ovom radu, za pravilno razumijevanje načina na koji funkcionišu Tirlvelova novela centralni su koncepti poput ergodičnosti, autofikcije, metatekstualnosti, paratekstualnosti, metamodernizma ili altermodernizma i predstavljaju vrhunce istraživačkog poduhvata u ovom članku.

Ključne riječi: ergodična književnost; metamodernizam; altermodernistička fikcija; savremena autofikcija; revolucija teksta; intra-bilješke; kolaž/ montaža.