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Eva Stehlíková

The *Laterna Magika* of Josef Svoboda and Alfréd Radok

Multimedia experiments have proliferated since the 1890s and have apparently gone through the same stages everywhere – in the first stage: a narrator is added to a silent film; in the second stage: projection on a backdrop in a theatre is combined with live actors; in the third stage: the projection of the film and the events on the stage are alternated; in the fourth stage: interactions take place between the live actors onstage and the figures on the film screen (WALTZ 2000: 543). From this point of view, the artistic collaboration between Josef Svoboda (1920-2002) and the film and theatre director Alfréd Radok (1914-1976)¹ is an example of a very successful attempt to realise ‘polyscenicness’² of the fourth type. Svoboda and Radok worked together in the theatre from 1946 to 1970. A great many of their productions – especially the productions of Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffman* (1946), Osborne’s *The Entertainer* (1957), Gorky’s *The Last Ones* (1966) and Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1967) – belong amongst the best dramatic

1 See the portrait in BURIAN 2002: 59-76.

2 ‘Polyscenicness’ is defined by Burian as: ‘an expression of a free and many-sided time-space operation, in which one and the same action is observed from several optical and ideational angles [...] it means breaking up the linear continuity of theatre action, and its transformation into separate events or moments’ (BURIAN 1971: 21).



Laterna Magika at *Expo 58*. A popular gag: a live dancer dancing with the filmed image of his partner.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

output that Czech theatre has produced.³ However, their cooperation in the cultural programme for *Expo 58* in Brussels, known as the *Laterna Magika*, attracted the greatest international attention (GIESEKAM 2007: 53-58). The vast majority of the work of Svoboda and Radok is connected with the Avant-garde director E. F. Burian and his scenographer Miroslav Kouřil, who together developed the famous ‘Theatergraph’.⁴ This invention was, of course, based on numerous earlier experiments (particularly those undertaken in Germany by Piscator and Brecht, and in Russia by Meyerhold). However, it should be pointed out that there was also a longstanding tradition of using a combination of live actors and film in an entertaining manner in Bohemia,⁵ and that Radok admired this technique. It is

3 It should be pointed out that, except for *The Tales of Hoffmann*, all three plays were produced at the National Theatre in Prague.

4 ALBERTOVÁ 2008: 57 uses the term ‘Theatergraph’ to refer to the linking of projections and the play of live actors on stage. The static projection (in whole or in macro detail) lands on the transparent projection screen behind the proscenium arch. The actor is behind the projection, cut out of the dark by spotlights whose light falls on the back of the projection screen.

5 The renowned presentation by the famous actor Karel Hašler in the Prague *Variété* 1917

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Laterna Magika at Expo 58. A popular gag: a live dancer dancing with the filmed image of his partner.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

also often stated that the predecessor of the *Laterna Magika* was the production of Šamberk's comedy *The Eleventh Commandment* (HEDVÁBNÝ 1994: 271; BURIAN 2002: 63; GIESKAM 2007: 53), in which, as early as 1951, Svoboda and Radok had fully implemented the principle of interactivity between actor and film, and had resolved a number of specific technical problems. Nevertheless, it is equally true to say that the combination of theatre with film fascinated Radok from the time when he was an apprentice to Burian. This principle was due to be examined in his first solo production, which was unfortunately never realised (ŠMÍDTOVÁ 2008). Radok and Svoboda were interested in synthetic forms from

(ŠÁBLA 1973) is similar to that of Horace Goldin in 1970 (cf. WALTZ 2000: 574). Before the beginning of the production, the director announced that the actor had been delayed somewhere and that a film about Czech castles would be shown in the meantime. Views of famous castles were shown on the screen together with views of romantic trysts, during which the actor discovers that he is to appear in a cabaret and begins a race against time. He runs, stops a car, experiences a breakdown, steals a bicycle, misses a boat, steals a motor boat, changes into evening dress, runs over roofs until he gets to the roof of the *Varieté*, opens a trapdoor in the roof, climbs down a rope made of film screen and lands live on the stage.



Laterna Magika at Expo 58. The live pianist is multiplied in the projection.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

the very beginning of their collaboration, especially in their productions of *The Tales of Hoffmann* and *Rigoletto*, which took place immediately after the Second World War (STEHLÍKOVÁ 2007: 245-247).

The so-called First Programme of the *Laterna Magika* at Expo 58

The final form of the *Laterna Magika* at Expo 58 (i.e. a revue in twenty four scenes), which Václav Havel called a ‘tasteful, living and intelligent show’ (HAVEL 1999: 251), was created by the montage of parts of an already-completed film, pre-existing musical recordings, original film and musical numbers created especially for this occasion. This pre-filmed and recorded material was supplemented by live pantomime, ballet and acting on the stage. Thus, static and kinetic images were combined (slides, black-and-white film, colour film, film with a classic aspect ratio and wide-screen film), together with live actors. The premiere was held in Brussels on May 26th, 1958.⁶

This was a rare opportunity for the artists concerned. Josef Svoboda put it simply:

One day, I realised that large exhibitions can experiment with things that theatre can’t afford to think about. At the same time, I should add that we developed

⁶ Artistic director Alfréd Radok; creative artist and scenographer Josef Svoboda; scenario Miloš Forman; directors V. Svitáček, J. Roháč; choreography J. Němeček; costumes E. Veselá; camera J. Novák; masks G. Hrdlička; original music Jiří Šlitr (JANEČEK and KUBIŠTA, 2006).

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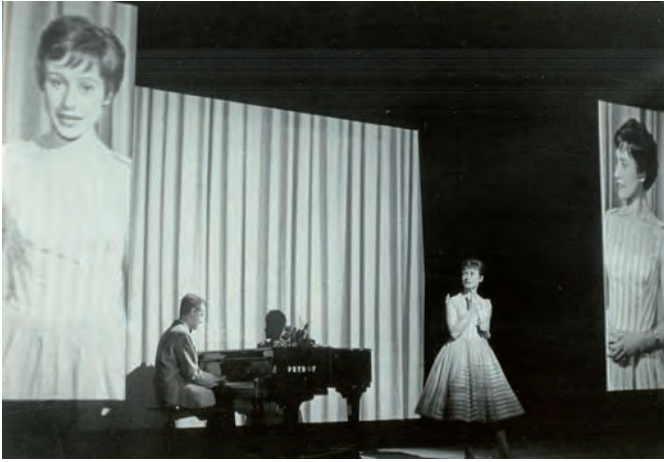
nothing new during our exhibition work that we hadn't already begun to experiment with in theatre. The problem was that we were not [habitually] able to experiment on [such] a large scale. (SVOBODA 1993: 104)

For the occasion of *Expo 58* (which constituted a convenient opportunity for the Czechoslovakian state to promote culturally a social system with which many artists were in reality in a very tense relationship), Radok and Svoboda managed to present Czechoslovakia as a country with enormous creative potential. Later one of Radok's co-workers, Miloš Forman, observed that, fortunately:

[...] none of the bosses realised that the 'propagandist' theatrical collage [we ostensibly presented] was only a backdrop for our own inventiveness and poesy. There was no lack of obligatory shots of contemporary Czechoslovakia and its culture; but the thing that dazzled Brussels was Radok's method and invention [...] (FORMAN 1993: 93).

It is interesting that a number of reviews (both domestic and foreign) of the first programme concentrated on describing several of the comic gags that made the performance famous. It was as if the greatest surprise in the combination of theatre and film remained amazement over their capabilities, and spectators became aware that 'the act of viewing [provided] excitement based on curiosity and its satisfaction' (GUNNING 2004: 156). The most celebrated gags included: (i) the so-called triptych; (ii) the dancer with a ring; and (iii) the musical joke with multiplication of the musician (KRATOCHVÍLOVÁ 1985: 30). The triptych, which Radok considered to be his invention, was basically a conversation between a live actress and two filmed figures, whose roles the performer also played (i.e. a sort of triplication); the filmed characters, however, spoke different languages to the live performer and this accordingly led to a sophisticated dialogue in three languages (French, English and German). Through this dialogue, the viewer learned, in an unobtrusive way, about a great deal of otherwise rather boring information. For example, the two filmed figures shown on the side screens were looking for a third one, who was still putting on her makeup backstage and, not to lose time, was repeating various statistical figures. This awaited character then entered from backstage, and the film scene merged with her actual appearance on stage.

The musical joke was a sort of variant on this trick; here a live musician (in this instance a piano player) was multiplied on film, so that gradually a whole jazz orchestra of musicians playing various instruments was created. However, in contrast



Laterna Magika at Expo 58. The so-called *triptych*: a conversation between the live moderator and her two images on the screens. Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

to the awaited actress, the piano player did not emerge from the film screen but was instead brought onstage with the piano.⁷ Another attractive gag was the performance of a live dancer. This character's partner was a ballerina whose filmed image, escaping from him across the wide screen, he caught in a ring, and with whom he danced before finally pulling his female partner 'live' onstage from out of the screen.

Consequently, in all cases, there was significant interaction between a live actor onstage (a dancer, a musician, etc.) and action shown on screen. The separate actions were set in counterpoint: either the live performer could move or, to the contrary, movement occurred on the film screen and the important thing was the counter-movement of two corresponding actions. It is obvious that this 'polyscenically' constructed image required the production's stage managers to synchronise perfectly the two actions, and to maintain them in perfect rhythm. This technique therefore required unprecedented spectatorial activity from the public. The viewer – as in the cinema of attractions, which was typical of the early period of cinematography but later re-emerged in Avant-garde practices (STAIGEROVÁ 2004: 284) – could not simply be a passive observer and mere consumer of illusions. Active participation was required. The role of the viewer was accordingly much more demanding than in other forms of more conventional theatrical spectatorship. The attention of the viewer in the *Laterna Magika* was (and is) not directed to a single (film or theatre)

7 This was not an attempt at a different gag, but rather bare necessity: musician Jiří Šlitr was not a person of great agility, so it was simply better to have him carried on.

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'field', but to a combination of individual film images and simultaneously created action on the stage.⁸

The enormous success of the *Laterna Magika* in Brussels led to a number of offers of permanent residencies from abroad.⁹ However, in Prague, the official state powers decided that the *Laterna* should be moved to the Czechoslovakian capital; there it had its premiere on May 9th, 1959. Extensive articles in all major cultural magazines heralded its arrival, and a great deal of attention was devoted to advertising in foreign-language periodicals also published in Prague. The *Laterna Magika* was called an 'experimental theatre' and numerous critics discussed the potential of developing a future dramaturgy for this kind of production, for which they had great expectations. It seemed that a new dramaturgical vehicle had emerged, permitting presentation of complicated romantic dramas or plays that were considered difficult to produce (such as the second part of *Faust* or *Peer Gynt*). Optimists assumed that this was even an innovative genre that would lead to the emergence of new dramatists. In Radok's opinion, the *Laterna Magika* would also lead to comprehensive developments in stage structures. Václav Havel could see two possibilities: to rewrite existing plays for the specific language of the *Laterna Magika*, or to compose new texts that would accept and respect its specific features (HAVEL 1999: 266; see also KAŠLÍK 1987: 110). Jan Grossman, the only real Czech theoretician working on the *Laterna Magika*, published its most comprehensive definition in 1959:

the *Laterna Magika* can be briefly defined as a stage form principally based on the combination of theatre (drama, opera, ballet and pantomime) and film (alternating between classic and wide format, black and white, or colour). The two groups are neither juxtaposed in mechanical rotation, nor do they merely serve to complement or illustrate each other. They are basically equal partners

8 The case of *polyecran* is even more complicated. It was 'polyphonic composition of multiple images and high-fidelity sound', according to SVOBODA 1993: 105. Josef Svoboda and Radok's brother Emil created the technique. Emil Radok remained in the shadow of his brother throughout his entire life. However, his Canadian 'multiscreen shows' (especially the cosmological vision *The Taming of Demons*) were highly successful and his inventions in the area of design and audiovision have been compared to McLuhan's contributions in the area of literature (VORÁČ 2004: 63-68). For an analysis of *polyecran*, see MCKINNEY and BUTTERWORTH 2009: 68-70; on the connection between *polyecran* and Svoboda's polyvision, see also HAVRÁNEK 2002: 123-126.

9 For example, according to Radok, the Nestlé company wanted to finance any further programmes and only required that its sponsorship be mentioned (GRYM 1967: 30).



Otvírání studánek (The Opening of the Wells). The Groom with his Bride, and a throng of old men and women symbolising past generations. Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

that generate diverse relationships and a new organic whole. (GROSSMAN 1968: 74; English translation HAVRÁNEK 2002: 129).

However, the official powers had different plans for the *Laterna Magika* than the artists who had created it, and instead of granting full imaginative freedom to the artists who had developed the medium, they intended instead to use the results primarily for further promotion of the state ideology of Czechoslovakia at that time.

The so-called Second Programme

The so-called Second Programme of the *Laterna Magika* was intended for export (and was thus called the ‘tour programme’). It was completed in 1960 and presented privately on April 22nd, 1960.¹⁰ Radok and Svoboda tried to improve their performance, but remained – undoubtedly for lack of time and numerous limitations

10 The premiere of the tour programme (but without Radok’s *The Opening of the Wells*) was held in Leningrad on December 5th, 1960. The authors of the scenario and the directors were given as: A. Radok, J. Roháč, M. Forman and J. Svitáček; chief creative artist J. Svoboda; music Z. Liška; J. F. Fischer, J. Šlitr, J. Vomáčka and O. F. Korte; choreography Z. Šemberová, M. Ťapák and J. Němeček; camera J. Kučera and J. Novotný; costumes J. Hirschová; masks G. Hrdlička (JANEČEK and KUBIŠTA 2006).

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that required constant compromises – only half way. Instead of a precise and simply focused undertaking, there was now a more complicated sort of composition in three movements. These sections were, however, frequently put together from older programme numbers that had already been presented in Brussels. The first movement was a general introduction; the second was devoted to folk art (this was *The Opening of the Wells*, inspired by a text of Miloslav Bureš and set to a cantata by Bohuslav Martinů);¹¹ and the third had the character of a comedy. The preserved programme, similarly to the order of the numbers contained in the technical scenario,¹² indicates that the looser structure of the second programme paved the way for many other programmes. These additional offerings were composites of various more or less demanding individual numbers. However, the new programme was certainly much more complicated than that in Brussels, if for no other reason than because the rapidly learning creators had made progress in synchronising the combination of elements on stage and in film.

A great many participants have given similar reports about the scandal connected with the first performance of this second programme, which was seen by political representatives who did not like it at all. According to these partisan figures, the new output was unacceptable. Foremost ideologist Václav Kopecký declared flatly that it was a ‘bad programme’: a completely destructive ideological manifestation of ‘Jewish expressionism’. The programme was consequently prohibited; and Radok was not allowed to revise it. Moreover, this case was connected with great personal disappointment: Radok expected that his young co-workers would support him; but, for a variety of reasons, this did not happen (for full details, see STEHLÍKOVÁ 2007: 228-238). It was ordered by the authorities that the film material for *The Opening of the Wells* be destroyed; however, Radok’s colleagues did eventually rally round and hid the reels, managing finally to arrange for a new premiere in 1966. This performance was held on May 17th, 1966; and *The Opening*

11 Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) was a prolific Bohemian Czech composer, who wrote symphonies, operas, ballet scores and a large body of orchestral, chamber, vocal and instrumental works. He continued to use Czech and Moravian folk melodies throughout his *oeuvre*, for instance in *Otvírání studánek* (The Opening of the Wells) with the text of the Moravian poet Miloslav Bureš (1909-1968).

12 For the programme, see the Archive of the *Laterna Magika* 2A III-1. The technical scenario of the *Laterna Magika*. Second section (authors of the idea and scenario Alfréd Radok, Miloš Forman, Ján Roháč, Vladimír Svitáček, Emil Radok), was duplicated by the Barrandov Film Studio and is stored in the Archive of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.



Otvírání studánek (The Opening of the Wells). The mysterious figure of a young woman.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

of the Wells subsequently became part of the *Variace 66* program (which the *Laterna Magika* sometimes performed on its trips abroad). Only a few written reactions to this performance have been preserved, and the reports of this staging also include expressions of doubt, or even rejection:

The fragile beauty of the cantata is rounded off on stage by similarly harmonised film and dance variations. However, I cannot suppress the feeling that the insertion of the cantata into the rest of the programme wasn't the happiest idea. *The Opening of the Wells* requires another, similar scenario form to round off the completeness of the evening. (*Večerní Praha* on May 31st, 1966; signed 'Hš').

Notwithstanding this ambivalence towards its aesthetic and theatrical qualities, all those who remembered the disgraceful political prohibition of 1960 followed the performance with great attention. Radok was apparently aware that the performance was somewhat out-dated, but he was not given an opportunity to revise it. After 1966, Radok did not enter into further cooperation with the *Laterna Magika*; whereas Svoboda remained loyal to the *Laterna* as its artistic director until his death in 2002. It is not clear whether and how this difficult affair affected their relationship; but their cooperation was also interrupted when the Prague City Theatres engaged Radok. However, after Radok returned to the National Theatre, he and Svoboda collaborated in the creation of two highly praised performances (Gorky's *The Last*

Ones in 1966 and Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* in 1967). Their cooperation did not end even when Radok emigrated – in 1969 they still cooperated on a new performance of *The House of Bernarda Alba* (in Brussels), as well as an adaptation of Böll's *The Clown* (in the *Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus*) in 1970.

Resurrection of *The Opening of the Wells*

Collective memory recalls that Radok's and Svoboda's *The Opening of the Wells* had been an extraordinary event and a fascinating theatrical experience; however, less has been recorded about its specific structure. Even the producers closest co-workers had only vague memories. In a text called *A Few Comments on the Second Programme of the Laterna Magika*, Jan Grossman gives a precise explication of Radok's intentions:

[...] Martinů does not only illustrate the folk (probably heathen) custom of cleaning the wells. He emphasises its broader, more general, synthetic applicability and gives it full resonance so that it speaks urgently even to people who have no feeling for this country and for this region. The opening of the wells is no longer a charming folk custom. It is a delightful musical poem about human life, which begins and must end, but nonetheless does not perish: it lives on in the further lives that it created and with which it is connected – From hand to hand is passed the heavy key – the key to our home. Radok emphasises and escalates this idea in the given material [...]. The film and stage composition and their 'dialogue' are a sort of metaphorical acronym for new life, whose limits lie in love and death and, after death, the beginning of new life. The motto of Bohuslav Martinů ('from hand to hand') permeates all of Radok's work in the form of intense feeling and the expression of collectiveness, the social aspect of human life. Human life does not take place only within oneself and especially for oneself – but is connected with the lives of other people, is joined with the lives of those that love, and is a guarantee of future life. The interpretation of *The Opening of the Wells* in the *Laterna Magika* lends the work of Bohuslav Martinů a noteworthy accent of moral responsibility of human beings for one another. The optimism of this composition is deeply cathartic and impassioned.¹³

13 The text of J. Grossmann was published by HEDBÁVNÝ 1994: 279-280; the quotation is based on fragments preserved in the Archive of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.



Otvírání studánek (The Opening of the Wells). The Groom and the Bride.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

However, even Grossman did not provide any more specific information about the structure of the work. We can form a certain idea from preserved photographs (that survive from the shooting of the film, as well as from the performance), from various texts and scenarios, and, lastly, also from the letters of Radok's friends. In addition, we can compare this archival evidence with a modern reconstruction of the performance that took place on December 8th, 2003 (by the Bohuslav Martinů Society, together with the *Laterna Magika* in Prague). Of course, there were new dancers; however, these were choreographed with the assistance of Zora Šemberová (the choreographer of the original performance) and with further contributions from the original ensemble.¹⁴ It is apparent from the preserved material that both the film and stage parts of the performance underwent gradual changes during the realisation; of these, the most important in the film part was the gradual abandonment of direct illustrations of the folklore ceremony of cleaning the wells in springtime. In the stage performance element, the set design and the action on the stage were

14 Petr Kaňka made a fifty-eight minute film according to his own scenario about the reconstruction of *The Opening of the Wells* for the *Laterna Magika* in 1960 and 1966; this film had its premiere on April 7th, 2004 and was then shown on Czech Television (Channel ČT2) on April 12th, 2004. This director also made a film of his own reconstruction for study purposes; however, this is unfortunately rather confusing as it alternates wide shots with close-ups. Thus the sense of confrontation between the film and the action onstage is frequently lost. The single presentation of the reconstruction met with great interest from the public, but only one extensive review was written about it.

simplified. Radok apparently originally intended a closer association between the action on stage and in the film. The guide called ‘Pilgrim’ was to leave the stage for the film and the film pair of the ‘Bride and Groom’ was to be identical with the corresponding pair onstage. Through this interconnection, Radok sought initially to develop the bi-partite ‘tricks’ of the first programme; however, he gradually abandoned his plans, probably for pragmatic reasons. If Radok and Svoboda were to insist on the identity of the film and stage performers, the actors would have to be the same at all times, or it would be necessary to prepare a new film for each new performance (which was technically and financially demanding, especially for any tour performances). On the other hand, it is clear that, if Radok and Svoboda wanted to progress towards projects that would not be primarily entertaining, they would have to abandon the popular gags.

Svoboda’s stage set was very simple: the whitewashed wall of a country parlour with windows was complemented with only a few pieces of furniture. Some of them (chairs, benches) were brought on and off stage as required. The only permanent fixture was a chest of drawers, above which holy pictures painted on glass were hung. The drawers of the chest symbolised everything that we collect and save during our lives. And this is also why the dancers carried out a drawer on their shoulders like a coffin at the end. The accoutrements were also symbolic – a painted jug with the *viva aqua* of our life, a sheaf of grain, a red ribbon binding lovers together.

Radok’s film (this time screened on a single wide-angle screen) did, of course, have to respect the music of Bohuslav Martinů; however, it omitted passages in Bureš’s text¹⁵ and greatly abbreviated some recited passages, while others were repeated (for example, ‘I am at home, walking along that familiar path, / In my footsteps follows the memory of spring’ is repeated three times). The picture of a romantically stylised Pilgrim (wearing a long black cloak and a hat) visually supported the motif of homecoming by passing through the spring landscape, in which we first feel the presence of (and then later see) a typical country cemetery. It is this motif that forms the basic theme of the film, together with the fascinating end in which processions of black-clothed villagers merge into clusters of human beings symbolising the past (‘does it matter that their days are counted?’) and hand down the baton of life (‘From hand to hand is passed the heavy key. / Key to our home’). Here we clearly follow the course of human life – the Bride and Groom lead the wedding procession, sit down at the wedding table, the pregnant Bride stands with

15 The translation of Bureš’s text is given according to the booklet supplied with the Supraphon recording in 1988.



Otvírání studánek (The Opening of the Wells). A contrast of youth and old age.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

the Groom at the threshold of their house, lies down and a child is born, the heart-broken Groom looks down somewhere, as if into a grave, and the former happy expression of the Bride is replaced by the tragic visage of a woman with tears in her eyes. This ‘story’ seems to unfold linearly, but ends with repetition of the picture of the pair at the wedding table. Similarly, several ‘portraits’ of women pass through the film, beginning with the happy face of a whirling little girl, followed by a treble picture of an adolescent girl (passing through a ploughed field in a white chemise, standing in a pink dress amongst green and then ripe grain) and complemented by the faces of old village women. However, at the end, we enigmatically return to the picture of the girl in the ploughed field. Thus, linear time passes unobtrusively into cyclical time, supported by the absolute parting of the time of the film and the time of the text – the procession of villagers passes through the landscape from spring to winter, the seasons of the year change without any logical connection. ‘The sky’s ablaze with the flames of rowanberries, / And you can smell the perfume of the last hay’, sings the Pilgrim, as the procession passes through a snowy landscape.

The action on the stage, of course, keeps consistently to linear time. It progresses from the meeting of the Bride and Groom, their courtship, their coming together, to a peaceful conclusion. Thus the Groom and Bride (the latter with a black scarf on her shoulders to symbolise mourning) walk across the stage, sit down next to one another on chairs to the left, their expressions express accord and empathy, they hold hands and slowly stand at the front of the ‘mourning’ procession following two men

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carrying symbolically a drawer from the chest of drawers. All the actions – with the exception of the dynamic courtship dance and an erotic dance of submission – are ceremoniously slow. The emphasis is on the pair, the other dancers tend to form a backdrop to the action and transport two chairs onstage, the only pieces of furniture, without which the action could not occur.

There can be no doubt that *The Opening of the Wells* was a truly extraordinary work. In setting to music the lyrical composition of the same name by Miroslav Bureš, Bohuslav Martinů elevated it to a magnificent ode celebrating the bond between the individual and his or her homeland. Radok's congenial film even further augmented the power of the music and transformed it into a magnificent mystical experience. Later, when he could speak openly, Alfréd Radok wrote of this production:

That the medium of the production of *The Opening of the Wells* was not without consequences is also reflected in the fact that the organisers of the *Laterna Magika* delayed the public performance of the production. They realised that the production was not unambiguously clear as a form of propaganda; so that a deeper text can be heard, which is not stated in the original, external plan of the film images or in the actions on the stage alone. The function of the production thus extended beyond the function of exhibitional propagation, gags and artistic poetry for the sake of poetry. Conventions of feelings excited duplicity of appearance and the appearance of 'duplicity'; it posed questions that resonated amongst the viewers. (RADOK 1968: 21-22).

Nevertheless, questions still arise over this production. Although the ratio of film and theatre in the *Laterna Magika* was always variable, according to the ideas of Radok and Svoboda, there should be a constant inseparability of theatrical and film media, the 'complete merging of these two principles in the final action' (SVOBODA 1968: 99). However, from this point of view, Svoboda saw *The Opening of the Wells* as problematic:

The film part was novel and truly excellent ([due largely to the] camera [work] of Jaroslav Kučera); however, we were of necessity faced with a key problem: we couldn't find a sufficiently strong form of theatrical expression [to go along with] the film and this meant that we broke the quite essential rule that binds *Laterna* to the theatre. (SVOBODA 1990: 204).

It cannot be denied that the film component of this production has a quality that justifies its independent existence. Those who saw the film without juxtaposition against the production's theatrical components and had no experience of the original form of the *Laterna Magika* discovered this.¹⁶ This feeling of excellence in the filmed elements was further supported by the 2003 reconstructed performance (which was, however, very problematic despite the attempt to perform it with the greatest degree of veracity possible).¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is apparent from this reconstruction that the theatrical component could not exist independently. Both the film and the theatrical strategies of *The Opening of the Wells* are constructed independently and exhibit some parallel features in the context of their plot and figures. There is only sporadic pictorial interconnection, which is primarily at a symbolic level: the mouldboard of a plough turns over virgin ground – on the stage, the Groom dances the dance of amorous surrender with the Bride, the horse harnessed to the plough slowly walks off to the horizon – the dancers onstage join the 'mourning' procession. However, what Leoš Suchařípa wrote is true:

Their more or less complicated interrelatedness must be deciphered; however, it is not necessary for the process of 'reading' the entire context to take place 'consciously', on an intellectual level. It is more probable that the content of this structure will be comprehended in a global sense, in the entire fullness of associative connections, that the viewer will 'experience', that it will be read emotionally 'through the viewer's activity'. This makes it even more probable that the concrete 'contents' of individual passages cannot be brought to life with any veracity in a logical context. (SUCHARÍPA 1967: 18).

We will certainly not be far from the truth if we say that, in the context of Radok's work, *The Opening of the Wells* occupies a fundamental position, comparable with the position of his first film, *Distant Journey*. Just as *Distant Journey* is apparently a dirge, a lamentation over the tragic fate of human beings who – as one of the main characters in the film says – 'belong here', *The Opening of the Wells* is a passionate identification with life in its endless cycle, a life whose roots are in the homeland. For Josef Svoboda, the second programme was only a step along the

16 The screening of the film for study purposes took place prior to the reconstruction in the *Laterna Magika*.

17 P. Veselý, who, as a dancer, had experience of performing in *The Opening of the Wells* in both the original and restored versions, is of the opinion that the action on the stage in the reconstruction was 99 percent identical to that of the original version.



Otvírání studánek (The Opening of the Wells). The figure of the Wanderer in the background.
Archive of the *Laterna Magika*.

way on a journey that ended only when he left the stage of life. His many years of experimentation led to a much closer combination of theatre, television and film in the period from 1981 to 1987, which is not very well known outside of its land of origin (SEKYROVÁ 2007). However, this is another aspect that is connected with cooperation with other directors, especially with Evald Schorm.

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