

Editorial

[yorick]

The historical avant-garde in the European context

Similarly to other European avant-gardes, Czech historical avant-garde was marked by originality and innovation (DREWS 1975; ŠMEJKAL and ŠVÁCHA 1990, etc.). It has been and remains a burning issue. Actually, in publications preceding 1989, the political orientation of the country and its culture overestimated, if not deformed, the understanding of certain themes (i.e., collaboration with countries of Western Europe, but also Surrealism as such), personalities (e.g., Karel Teige, Toyen, Závěš Kalandra, etc.) or periods of their work, and did not allow the development of others, nor a plurality of points of view. Moreover, since the 1990s, the access to new sources has been made possible, such as personal archives or personal testimonies, including of persons living outside the country (e.g., Petr Král, Jindřich Toman). Therefore, various white – or grey – spots in research concerning the avant-garde were bridged over in the Czech Republic only within the last decade. To name but a few of these achievements, the reprint of the ‘revolutionary volume’ *Devětsil* from 1922 in 2010, showing the roots of Czech avant-garde, or Vojvodík and Wiendl’s reconstruction of the main concepts characterising Czech avant-garde, stressing intermediality (2011), and the three-volume project by Papoušek (2010–2017), dedicated to the ‘new modernism’: it is observed from the point of view not of the result, but of the process – how, in contact, or concurrence, with which trends, persons, historical and social events, this modernism had sprang.

The situation of Czech avant-garde theatre is similar to the one of Czech avant-garde culture in general: highly innovative and containing spots which deserve to be (better) named. In the last few years, researchers who have heavily dedicated themselves to this topic include Helena Spurná, focusing on Emil František Burian and his opera works (SPURNÁ 2014) and the avant-gardistic director Oldřich Štíbor (SPURNÁ 2015); Vlasta Koubská, dealing with scenography and costume, and personalities such as Antonín Heythum and František Muzika (TĚTIVA and KOUBSKÁ 2012; KOUBSKÁ and SEDLÁKOVÁ 2022); Andrea Jochmanová, who has researched on Jiří Frejka, the Liberated

Theatre, Voiceband, and the theatrical avant-garde in general (e.g., JOCHMANOVÁ 2011a, b, 2012; JOCHMANOVÁ and PETIŠKOVÁ 2022); Ladislava Petišková, focusing on the history of the Liberated Theatre (JOCHMANOVÁ and PETIŠKOVÁ 2022), populariser of Jiří Frejka's work, still active in writing avant-garde members headwords for *Czech Theatre Encyclopaedia*; and Eva Šlaisová, especially interested in the relations of avant-garde, structuralism, and ethnology, or avant-garde and primitive art (e.g., ŠLAISOVÁ 2016, 2021). The *Theatralia* journal has also contributed to this renewed debate, besides what has already been mentioned, for instance, by publishing in 2019 a Supplementum dedicated to modern Czech plays (1896–1929) (*Theatralia* 1/2019).

However, as far as we know, an issue which has remained almost untouched is a general reassessment of Czech interwar theatre, which would be built up in confrontation with the particularities of the avant-garde theatre in Europe and the way the individual European countries influenced one another in this respect. Several steps are being made in this direction, among others by one of the authors of this editorial, Mariana Orawczak Kunešová, through her research project 20–22490S, supported by the Czech Science Foundation, which regards the reception by Czech interwar theatre of the French historical avant-garde.

This issue of *Theatralia* intends to contribute to the same effort: it is dedicated to historical avant-gardes and their development in Europe and Czechoslovakia. Thus, the reader finds here a bigger picture inside which the Czech avant-garde evolved. The aim is to provide a better understanding of the crossroads at which the Czech interwar theatre was built – specific aspects of European theatre avant-garde in general, avant-garde theatre practice in Central and Eastern Europe and the cultural exchange between Czechoslovakia and another European country.

With these topics, *Theatralia* wishes to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Devětsil ('butterbur'). Founded in October 1920 in Prague, it became the most influential Czech avant-garde circle, linking artists across a very wide range of fields, from architecture to performance, and from aesthetics to sociology. Its members, e.g., Karel Teige, Vítězslav Nezval, Toyen, Jindřich Štyrský, Adolf Hoffmeister, Josef Chochol, Jiří Frejka, Jindřich Honzl, Emil František Burian, Jiří Voskovec, and Jan Werich were constantly following European avant-garde trends, seeking to exchange and collaborate with colleagues from other countries, just as this volume does.

We dedicate this issue to the memory of Petr Král, poet, translator, and critic involved with surrealist activities in Czechoslovakia and France, who published among others various particularly clarifying texts on the specificities of Czech avant-garde (KRÁL 2009, 2015, 2017). Petr Král, born in 1941, wished to participate in the conference 'The Czech Historical Avant-garde in the European Context' which preceded this publication, but he untimely passed away in June of 2020.

The essays in this volume

The Yorick section comprises five essays. It opens with an article ‘Western European Avant-garde Theatre and Puppetry: A Reappraisal’ by **Didier Plassard**, dedicated to the experiments in the field of puppetry by the Cubist, Futurist, or Dadaist poets compared with those of the Symbolists and Modernists several decades earlier. It also examines the visual transformations introduced in puppetry by avant-garde painters and sculptors and what impact those transformations had when put into action.

The following three essays concern the East- and Central-European avant-gardes. **Hanna Veselovska** in ‘Technicism in the Ukrainian Avant-garde Theatre: A Clash of Meanings and Forms’ explores the subject of industrialisation on stage and develops it with examples especially from Ukrainian avant-garde productions and stage design, by Les Kurbas, Alexander Tairov, Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov, and others. It also contains a reflection on stage parodies of technicist ideas. In ‘Alexandra Exter Theatre and Ukrainian Scenography in the 1910s and 1920s’, **Valentyna Chechyk** takes the reader on another tour of Ukraine and develops the characteristics of Exter’s stage design in Ukrainian theatres, which signified a decisive transition for Ukrainian scenography. The productions addressed are those by the main Ukrainian theatrical avant-garde figures, such as Vadym Meller, Anatol Petrytsky, or again Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov, among others. Finally, in ‘The Slovene Historical Avant-garde and Europe in Crisis’, **Tomaž Toporišič** aims to show how the aesthetic concepts in Central Europe and the Balkans were a response to the crisis after World War I and provides some examples of work and thoughts by Srečko Kosovel, Ljubomir Micić, Ferdo Delak, August Černigoj, and Slavko Grum to illustrate this.

In the last essay in the Yorick section, ‘André Breton on French and Czech Stages’, **Mariana Orawczak Kunešová** examines the productions of two plays by Breton in Paris and Prague and explores the differences between a Parisian Dada production and later stagings by Jindřich Honzl in the Liberated Theatre. The intention of the article is to contribute especially to the debate regarding the specificities of French and Czech Surrealism.

The topics of Yorick are continued in the section Spectrum, which contains the study ‘Between Brueghel, Surrealism, and New Realism: Wachsman’s Stage Design for *Heavy Barbara*’ by **Eva Šlaisová**. The article examines the production, and especially the scenography, of the play *Těžká Barbora* [Heavy Barbara] – inspired by the art of Pieter Brueghel the Elder – written by Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich and staged in 1937.

The Guests section offers two texts, also corresponding to the topic of this issue. The first one is an interview with Professor **Henri Béhar**, one of the founders of research concerning the historical avant-gardes in France, and the author of the first monograph on Dada and Surrealist theatre in France. The interview, undertaken by Mariana Orawczak Kunešová, regards the historiography of the avant-gardes, and Mr. Béhar’s witnessing of more than fifty years of research dedicated to the avant-gardes. The second text is an essay by **Dariusz Kosiński**, Professor at the Performance Studies Department of the Jagiellonian University, Cracow. Professor Kosiński shares with the reader his

experience with his current project 'Reclaimed Avant-garde. The Theatre Avant-garde of Central-Eastern Europe' (IMRE and KOSIŃSKI 2018) and his thoughts on the historical avant-gardes as well as on the concept of Central Europe.

The Reviews section contains the assessments of four books. Three reviews are written in English. **Iveta Slavkova** comments on Mariana Orawczak Kunešová's monograph (written in French) dealing with the notion of the absurd in Dada and Pre-Surrealist French theatre, especially by Tzara, Breton, Soupault, and Vitrac, and thus links again with the main topic of this issue. **Pavel Drábek**, reviewing *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice* by Massimiliano Morini, attracts the reader's interest to a subject often considered as marginal, between literary translation and adaptation for the stage. **Šárka Havlíčková Kysová** introduces *Opera as Hypermedium* dedicated to the relation of the opera with the other media, by the Prague musicologist Tereza Havelková. Finally, **Kateřina Šalounová** comments in Czech on the fourth volume of the bilingual (Czech/English) version of the review *Taneční aktuality* [Dance Actualities] dedicated to dance education in the Czech Republic.

In the Events section, **Eliška Raiterová** reports from the conference *The Ever-expanding Horizons of Theatre* hosted by the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts Brno, in November 2021.

The Archive section follows the main topic of this issue and proposes a study by **Andrea Jochmanová** on the personality of an actress, director, and teacher Lola Skrbková (1902–1978), based on all carefully collected available archive material connected to Skrbková's theatre work. The archive of Lola Skrbková is placed in the Department of Theatre History, Moravian Museum Brno, and entails one of the most important sources for avant-garde studies.

In the end, we would like to thank the team of the Department of Theatre Studies and the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University who supported our efforts in editing this volume, the translators and proofreaders who worked on the English issue, the authors who contributed to the journal, the peer-reviewers of the papers, the editor-in-chief and the executive editor of *Theatralia* for their commitment, and also, to the scholars and friends who took part in the conference 'The Czech Historical Avant-garde in the European Context' in June 2021.

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