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The Renaissance of Czech puppetry and the cinema

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The Renaissance of Czech Puppetry and the Cinema

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Czech puppetry underwent a significant change.[1] The activities of enthusiasts led by the literary historian and grammar school teacher Jindřich Veselý (1885–1939) brought about a revived interest in traditional puppets and transformed the reality of Czech puppetry from a stagnating practice of itinerant folk puppeteers into 'literally an organised movement' (BLECHA 2009: 19) of amateurs and societies with an international renown. This period, generally known as the Puppetry Renaissance, can be delimited by the years 1895, when the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague (*Národopisná výstava českoslovanská*) presented an exposition of Czech puppets, and 1929, when UNIMA (the Union Internationale de la Marionnette) was founded in Prague. The central events of the Puppetry Renaissance were the establishment of the Czech Union of the Friends of Puppet Theatre (*Český svaz přátel loutkového divadla*) in 1911 and the launching of the first journal on puppets in the world – *Český loutkář* (*The Czech Puppeteer*) – a year later. Members of the Union and contributors to the journal from the ranks of puppeteers and culture workers contributed to a wide-ranging reform of the aesthetics, organisation and public significance of puppetry. In the 1930s, some puppeteers, such as the director and later president of UNIMA Jan Malík (1904–1980), started to find inspiration in avant-garde theatre forms and practices and criticised the conservatism of the Union's executives (see MALÍK 1977: 505–6). Without the pioneering efforts of members of this movement, the development as well as the professionalisation of Czech puppetry – culminating in the 2014 request

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to have Czech and Slovak puppetry recognised as significant material cultural heritage with UNESCO – would have been impossible.

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, puppets were associated with popular culture and rural entertainments. From the start of the twentieth century, thanks to the widespread dissemination of family toy theatres, puppets became part of a popular mass culture in cities as well as a pastime practised among soldiers during the Great War. The most significant puppetry activists of the early 1900s were teachers, members of the National Theatre, visual artists and university professors. Amongst the most proactive initiators were educationalists and members of the mass gymnastics organisation Sokol.[2] These movements were accompanied by the serial production of puppets and scenic decorations specific to marionette theatres, by adaptations and new editions of old plays and by discussions of the aesthetic specificities of puppet theatre (BLECHA 2007: 23–43; JIRÁSKOVÁ and JIRÁSEK 2014).

However, this was not exclusively a Czech phenomenon. On the contrary, Czech activists found inspiration – with varying degrees of acknowledgement – in the artistic puppet companies that were coming into existence in German cultural centres such as Munich and Salzburg. In the Czech lands and in post-war Czechoslovakia, the synergies of puppet collectors, documentarists, publishers and editors, as well as inventors of new technologies, underpinned by the development of the puppet industry led to the most significant spreading of amateur puppet theatre in Central Europe. The complex nature of this reform encompasses theatre and cinema, as well as the spheres of media education, cultural industry and nationalist cultural politics. This change may be interpreted not only as an instance of aesthetic and artistic emancipation, but also as an attempt at an adequate arrangement and institutionalisation of staging practice, audience habits and performance programmes and a standardisation of the design of theatres, their equipment and of the collective activities of puppet performers.

In this essay, I analyse period documents in order to outline the changes in Czech puppetry in the first decades of the twentieth century, not only as part of the developments of puppet and theatre aesthetics, but also as a phenomenon connected with wider developments in Czech culture and society. My discussion first addresses the seminal exhibition of Czech puppets of 1895 (in connection with the ambivalent self-presentation of modern Czech society that combined traditionalist with nationalist orientations); it then turns to analysis of the similarities between Czech puppet performance and cinema practice in the early twentieth century. I will argue that such analogies offer more general grounds for a comparison of theatre and cinema. The next part of my article is dedicated to an analysis of the key players and circumstances of the emancipation of Czech puppetry and its parallels in similar developments abroad, namely in German-

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2   The *Sokol* movement was a Czech youth sport and fitness initiative founded in Prague in 1862 by Miroslav Tyrš and Jindřich Fügner. Whilst it began as a fitness initiative, the Sokol developed to include education through lectures, debates and field trips. It also engaged with the arts as part of a programme intended to provide for the physical, moral and intellectual life of the nation.

speaking countries. Finally, I will focus on period concepts of 'primitiveness' and 'liveness' in puppet theatre and I will theorise these two concepts as tools for defining the specific features puppetry, as well as the rhetorical figures that differentiate it from film and cinema, and from what I will here term 'large' theatre.

The Ambivalence of Czech Modernity and Puppetry

The practical and aesthetic development of puppet theatre in the early twentieth century may be seen as part of the overall changes in culture that started in the 1890s and continued until the post-WW2 period.[3] It is therefore interesting to consider how puppet theatre transformed during these years from being an archaic, folk culture phenomenon (its nineteenth-century identity) to become in the early twentieth century a feature of modernity connected with the emancipation of Czech culture and society. The seemingly paradoxical nature of puppetry in these times corresponds to the ambivalent character of the period's construction of Czech identity, as Kateřina Svatoňová has pointed out:

> The continuing techno-industrial revolution coincided in our regions with the efforts of a national emancipation and an Austrian-Czech compromise [*Ausgleich*]. Audio-visual inventions, optical toys and images were required to fulfil a political role, and as such were born out of a tension between Modernist progressivity and nationalist-imbued traditionalism. (SVATOŇOVÁ 2013: 270)

Contemporary Czechs – until 1918 living under the Austro-Hungarian Empire – saw themselves as a modern and fast-developing society, capable of emulating the leading countries of the world; they admired the cinema, the telephone and the arc lamp, and the light fountain invented by František Křižík;[4] however, this progressive vision was simultaneously enriched by images of the frequently mythologised grand past and iconic events of Czech history – intended to evoke national pride and not accidentally connected with a struggle against German opponents, as was the case with evocations of the medieval Reformation movement of the Hussites, or by folk costumes and folk architecture (see ČESÁLKOVÁ and SVATOŇOVÁ 2011).

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3   For modern Czech history see (SAYER 2000); for a detailed overview of the history of modern and avant-garde Czech theatre see (JOCHMANOVÁ 2011); a thorough analysis of puppet theatre aesthetics in relation to Modernism can be found in (JIRÁSKOVÁ and JIRÁSEK 2014).

4   The 'Light Fountain' was created for the Jubilee Exhibition of 1891. It deployed twenty-six of the arc lamps invented by Křižík, in an area of approximately thirty by forty metres. The lamps were housed under a glass ceiling, with approximately fifty water jets located around it. An electrical engine forced water at high pressure several metres into the air, and, simultaneously, the arc lights located under the water surface illuminated the display from below. The display used strongly coloured gels that rotated in front of the arc lights using an adaptation of the conventional colour wheel. The colour and appearance of the jets were synchronised, and the device was used at night to create impressive displays. The installation was refurbished in 1991 and is still in use in Prague. It is combined with live music, ballet, opera and dance shows for the entertainment of tourists to the city.

To understand of the so-called Puppetry Renaissance that took place during this period, it is essential to recognise the ambivalent construction of the specificity of puppet theatre as a (both old-and-)new form, and the ways in which it defined itself in opposition to other forms. Of crucial importance are also the pragmatic, quotidian activities of the movement, from practical organisation, through publications, embracing industrial initiatives and educational activities, which often outweighed the artistic achievements of the same movement in their significance.

In 1887, the publishing house of A. Štorch launched a series entitled *Theatre with Puppets* (*Divadlo s loutkami*), featuring the oldest play-texts for children (BLECHA 2009: 18). The undoubted start of a wide interest in puppet theatre dates from the exhibition of Czech puppets mounted at the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague in 1895 (see PARGAČ 1996). This extensive exhibition presented not only puppets, but more widely folk architecture and the costumes and customs of various regions of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. The event was accompanied by what can be considered the first seriously set out methodological and theoretical reflections on ethnography and museology relating to the Czech and Slovak peoples (HOLCNEROVÁ 2007: 8). The collections gave rise to the founding of the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Museum (1895). The Exhibition (open from May 15th to October 23rd 1895) attracted over two million paying visitors (JAKUBEC 1895: 518). The interest in puppets corresponded with the general interest in folk culture; scholarly and collector-related activities were a key part of the construction of the Czech nation as a culture with a strong and ancient tradition. This construction of identity, exemplified for instance in Leoš Janáček's or Otakar Zich's phonographic recordings of folk songs in 1909, was often realised by means of modern media (KRATOCHVÍL 2013: 266). However, it has also to be noted that the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition presented puppets not as part of the theatre displays but rather as 'a didactic aid for minors' (*vychovatelská pomůcka pro dětskou drobotinu*) in the section 'Education outside School' (*Výchova mimo školu*) which was located in the Educational Department of the exhibition. Puppet theatre scenes, marionettes and memorabilia relating to renowned marionettists were shown side-by-side with toys and books for juniors (DUBSKÁ 2004: 137–8; HRNČÍŘ 1895). On the green of an archetypal 'Czechoslavic village' constructed for the Exhibition, regular Czech theatre shows with the marionettes of Antonín Kopecký were given in the afternoons and evenings. The surrounding buildings created a panorama of the Czech countryside, featuring a charcoal kiln, a functional wine cellar and a pub; in this setting, over the duration of the Exhibition, Kopecký delivered around three hundred performances. His shows belonged to the cheapest attractions of the Exhibition: the fee was five kreuzer, with children paying half (HRNČÍŘ 1895: 49). The day entrance fee was forty kreuzer.

This ethnographic exhibition – similarly to the Land Jubilee Exhibition (*Všeobecná zemská výstava*) of 1891 and the Architecture and Engineering Exhibition (*Výstava architektury a inženýrství*) of 1898 – was aimed at encouraging national self-awareness.

In 1891 and 1895, these events were well supported by the General Sokol Assembly in Prague (*všesokolský slet*). A puppet theatre production, similarly to Luděk Marold's colossal painting *Panorama of the Battle of Lipany* that was displayed at the 1898 exhibition, could function as a suggestive mediator between the past and the present. These exhibitions also became temporary 'sites of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*, NORA 1989) in which Czech society presented and represented its self-image, negotiating the relation between traditions and modernity in the collective memory. These exhibitions became venues in which the Czech public came to be acquainted with Edison's phonograph and phonogram, and with X-rays; it was here, in 1898, that the first 'Czech cinematograph' was presented (ČESÁLKOVÁ and SVATOŇOVÁ 2011).

An interest in Czech folk puppetry was thus born within the framework of the growing nationalism and Czech pedagogical and educational efforts; Czech puppets were presented in a tension between museum forms (in the display case) and live versions (on the simulated village green). Nationalist and educational motives, just like the ambivalence between traditionalist conceptions of puppets and tendencies towards modernising puppetry (with the help of electrical technologies, newly produced sets, adaptations of old scripts and the search for a Modernist stage practice), would come to form the activities of puppetry pioneers in the following decades. The nationalist dimension of the interest in puppetry can be seen in the very name of the toy theatre of paper puppets based on the designs of Karel Štapfer; published by Josef Vilímek in 1894, the series was called '*Národ sobě*' ('The Nation to Itself' – the motto of the Czech National Theatre). However, detailed analysis of the ways in which this sense of national theatrical pride and precise understandings of the scenographic strategies of such auto-ethnographic mimesis cannot now be undertaken, because the larger part of the stock was lost in the fire of the publishing house in 1899 (BLECHA 2009: 112). Notwithstanding this loss, some hypotheses can still be ventured through connections between personnel: the visual artist Karel Štapfer (1863–1930), who designed the arrangements, the interiors and figurines for the 1895 exhibition, was later (1900–1923) head of scenography at the Czech National Theatre (Karel Štapfer 2014) and also contributed to the activities of the shadow theatre in Čákovice (1909–1911). Nationalist motivation is visible in the activities of the puppet theatre of the Club of Patriotic Friends of Dr. Pařík and Třebenicko (*Klub vlasteneckých přátel dr. Paříka a Třebenicka*; 1902–1909) that was founded in order to raise funds for charity purposes and to support Czech activities in the nationally mixed region surrounding the North Bohemian town of Třebenice. The company produced 'high' repertoire, such as Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (*Prodaná nevěsta*), Goethe's *Faust* or Weber's *Freischütz*, as well as new plays. According to Alice Dubská, this approach surpassed a narrowly traditionalist or pedagogical attitude to puppetry and served as an inspiration for other companies (DUBSKÁ 2004: 156). Nevertheless, the showcase presentation of puppet theatre at the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895 and the ensuing 130th anniversary of the birth of the legendary marionettist Matěj Kopecký,

with the unveiling of his monument in 1905, led to a perception of puppet theatre as a predominantly historic phenomenon (DUBSKÁ 2004: 139).

Following the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, emancipatory activities were joined by efforts at professionalisation, better financial support, the establishment of 'a national Czech theatre of puppets' (*Umělecká loutková scéna* 1920; VESELÝ 1919: 43) and the securing of an appropriately respected position in the new state. Puppeteers played a significant political role in the new nation, an example of this being the fact that their performances were involved in the campaign promoting the newly established Czechoslovak state in the Silesian borderland at the time of the disputes between the Czechoslovak Republic and Poland over the Těšín/Czeszyn region in January 1919 (WIEDEMANN 1919). Puppet theatre makers also tried to negotiate a more adequate legislative framework for their activities and attempted to bring them in line with governmental educational and cultural policies. In 1921, the Artistic Puppet Stage (*Umělecká loutková scéna*) issued a Memorandum to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment (*Memorandum Umělecké loutkové scény Ministerstvu školství a národní osvěty* 1921) in which positive effects of puppet theatre as a formative tool were emphasised; the document also contains proposals for the establishment of state-owned puppet theatres and for the issuing of performance concessions only to competent puppeteers. Other proposals pertain to the prospective (but never realised) Theatre Law. These requirements were met only by the new Socialist regime on the basis of the Theatre Law of 1948, which established the Prague-based Central Puppet Theatre (*Ústřední loutkové divadlo*) in 1950 and the Puppetry Department at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU) in 1952.

However, it cannot be assumed that culture is directly determined by political and social circumstances. What then were the causes of the Puppetry Renaissance phenomenon within Czech culture itself? For Czech puppetry activists who tried to emancipate a stagnating art form connected with the lower cultural strata it was essential to define it against the actors' theatre and the cinema. Their emancipatory efforts roughly coincided with the establishment of cinematography as a commercial venture as well as an art form. The transformation of cinema from one of a number of innovative audio-visual forms into the dominant popular mass medium dynamised relations within the entire cultural sector; the new medium of cinema became endowed with an economic as well as a symbolic capital, and assumed an iconic cultural role in the modern era. With the institution of the cinema, the structure of many cultural forms underwent transformation, with the re-negotiation of status and relations in the field of culture during the early 1900s; puppet theatre was not exempt from these movements. For these reasons, the acceleration of the Puppetry Renaissance after 1912 can be interpreted as a consequence of the developments in and of cinema. My hypothesis can be supported by period commentaries. The aesthetician, dance theorist and pedagogue Emanuel Siblík (1886–1941) observed:

Peculiar though it may seem, yet so it is! Puppets have been reinstated by the cinemato-graph. As with everything new whose potency has not been proved in practice, also the cinematograph has been entrusted with an overly large sphere of authority; it assumed it with a weak hand, yet somewhat boastfully so that its incompetence in many instances is not so striking. […] The cinematograph was to take over the cultural mission of the theatre, spreading it eventually among all the layers of the population. […] After what we have just said it will come as no surprise that adult audiences have started to understand the true greatness and inherent significance of the puppet theatre whose world is dia-metrically so distanced from the world of cinematography. (SIBLÍK 1918: 2–3)

To the best of my knowledge, the majority of comparative theoretical works and his-toriographical texts dedicated to cinema, or to puppetry and modernity, are oblivious of the relationship between puppet theatre and cinematography, despite the fact that the dynamics of their correlation were of crucial importance to Czech puppetry activ-ists in their efforts at emancipating the old art form. It is more common in criticism to interpret the relationship between media during the cinema's constitution and develop-ment as an opposition to the linguistic-literary model of the theatre – as instantiated, for example, by Christopher Balme (BALME 2008: 195–208). However, such an approach is unnecessarily narrowed down to a discussion of changes occurring in the dominant art form – drama-based theatre. The imitation of and inspiration from the so-called literary-declamative model of the theatre form only one element of the more complex connections with and forces operative between theatre and cinema.

The most widespread audio-visual form of the turn of the nineteenth and early twen-tieth centuries was illustrated lectures – slide shows using photographic images on glass – which were in use by numerous societies and educational organisations (MUSS-ER 2005). The moving cinematographic image belonged to a range of period optical innovations and entertainment enterprises (such as mechanical theatre or stereoscopic peep shows); these productions were often accompanied by live music and a lecturer (see LACCASE 2006). Entrepreneurs operating with a variety of attractions generally transferred to a predominantly cinematographic programme after 1902 (KLÍMA 2010: 35). Travelling cinematographers thus probably shared with itinerant puppeteers not only their audiences but also their touring venues, and adopted similar production and performance practices in the delivery of their programmes. Tom Gunning has claimed that the dominant form of cinematography of the early period 1895–1907 was the so-called cinema of attractions, based on showing short sensational movies that invoked shocking reactions and used a variety of effects stimulating the visceral pleasures of viewing. The cinema of attractions corresponds with the modern aesthetics of aston-ishment and differs from the contemplative modes of perceiving (such as the long-es-tablished tradition of wall paintings and the cinema of narrative integration), which began taking over from around 1907 (GUNNING 2000, 2004; SALOMON 2008). The individual fictional motion pictures that could be taken as intentional imitations of the

drama-based theatre start to be produced and screened in bespoke cinemas only after 1905 (GARNCARZ 1998: 249–50). These films would often be adapted on the basis of the performance venue, for instance by adding other films, by the accompaniment of a live commentator, or of live music. Various forms of photographic slides (diapositives) and short motion pictures came to be used also by educational organisations that required of their spectators concentration and assessment of the programme. Charles Musser has characterised this type of spectatorship as cinema of contemplation and discernment (MUSSER 2006).

Hand in hand with the efforts of puppetry activists, the early 1910s saw a rapid growth of stable theatrical cinema houses. This expansion was accompanied by a discussion of the social effects of cinematography and of the usefulness of film for upbringing and education (ČESÁLKOVÁ 2009: 65–76), as well as of its legal regulation. During the preparations of the ministerial ordinance 'On Organising Public Productions of the Cinematograph' of 18 September 1912 (valid as of 1 January 1913) that was institutionalising the new practice in Austria, it was conventional theatre managers who belonged to the most outspoken opponents of cinema (KLIMEŠ 1998, 2002a, 2002b). Studying relatively marginal art forms such as the puppet theatre helps us to re-think received notions of what the specific features of the theatre and the cinema are. These specifics are often formulated with the help of comparison between ahistorical, ideal types; in this way, they confirm the dominance of a particular, historically conditioned model, such as the literary-declamative type of theatre (see BALME 2008: 195–208; PAVIS 1987: 100–5). To understand the modernisation of Czech puppet theatre in the early 1900s does not mean only to enlarge the horizon of knowledge by a single particular theme, but rather using it as a paradigm that evidences the overall changes in modern culture.

The Lines of Puppetry Activism

In the early 1900s, Jindřich Veselý, the initiator of the establishment of the Czech Union of the Friends of Puppet Theatre (*Český svaz přátel loutkového divadla*, 1911), differentiated between the puppet theatre of the travelling comedians, the puppet theatre of enlightened pedagogues and the puppet theatre of visual artists and writers (VESELÝ 1912: 25–9). According to Miroslav Česal, folk puppetry, based on marionettes, was part of the complex series of changes that took place at the turn of the century. The stagnating theatre of folk marionettists was losing touch with contemporary aesthetic norms of actors' theatre, and yet was trying to imitate it. For that reason it became a source of amusement for live actors. The comic principles of parody and puppet-like style influenced glove puppet theatre; and the amateurs active in this theatre form, in turn, had a revitalising influence on the practice of the marionette theatre (ČESAL 1992: 43–4). With the development of new cultural forms and the arrival of realism in the arts, the

range of audiences formerly willing to accept puppets shrank considerably. Puppet theatre responded to the realistic trends in the arts by concentrating exclusively on child audiences (DUBSKÁ 2004: 137). The novelty of this period was fairy tale scripts; these had not previously been in the repertoires of folk marionettists. According to Dubská, the issue at stake was not the declining quality among folk marionettists but a growing differentiation between their unchanging style and a rapidly changing Czech society. New attractions and ways of self-presentations among Czechs, as exemplified by the magnificent exhibitions in Prague in the 1890s, also transformed audience habits and expectations (DUBSKÁ 2004: 135). In this period, some travelling marionettists joined up with newly established amateur companies. For instance, the author of an early publication on Czech puppet theatre Ladislav Novák (NOVÁK 1905) started to collaborate with the Pilsen-based Marionette Theatre of the Holiday Resorts (*Loutkové divadlo Feriálních osad*), also known as Holiday Camp Theatre, organised by charity educationalists in a camp for poor children. Puppetry enterprises of the last third of the nineteenth century often also combined with other attractions, such as stereoscopic peep shows (BARTOŠ 1963: 242–3). At the turn of the century, some marionettists, such as Robert Swrchek of Olomouc, abandoned puppet theatre and transferred to cycloramas and, around 1910, to cinematography.[5]

The bridge between folk marionettists and new amateur companies and the application of puppet theatre in education was formed by the Czech Union of the Friends of Puppet Theatre (Prague, 1911). The central figure of the Union, as well as of the movement, was Jindřich Veselý. Among his first activities were the puppet exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum in the Kinský Park (1911), at which he also started to perform marionette theatre, and the establishment of the journal *Český loutkář* (1912–1913), published by Antonín Münzberg's company. The Union also organised the guest performances of the folk marionettist Arnošta Kopecká in Prague in 1912 and 1913, and eventually bought her marionettes and theatre for its collection. This event, according to Alice Dubská, concluded the development of Czech folk puppet theatre despite the fact that 'folk' marionettists still continued to practise (DUBSKÁ 2004: 139–40). Such activities would further stress the traditionalist conception of puppet theatre, as would the iconic cultural and mythical image of the 'founding' figure of marionettist Matěj Kopecký, and the exploitation of the myth of national revival (DUBSKÁ 2004: 129) in the work of painter Mikoláš Aleš that met with great popularity in its time. It is of interest that Aleš not only created parts of the decorations of the National Theatre in Prague, but also a series of popular portraits of Matěj Kopecký.

The Union instigated the actions that led to the Münzberg company (BLECHA 2009: 29–30) being the first to bring Czech serially produced puppets to the market in December 1912; these puppets were modelled by Karel Koberle, after Aleš's designs. In the

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5   Moravský zemský archiv (Moravian Regional Archive), collection B 14 – Moravské místodržitelství (mladší) [1881–1919], sg. 108, fasc. 7587, pp. 824–893.

following year, the first series of *Dekorace českých umělců pro loutky Alšovy* (Stage Sets by Czech Artists for Aleš's Puppets) was also produced. By 1931, this series had published ten collections with 146 original print folios (BLECHA 2009: 40). In 1914, a joint product was launched onto the market, combining *Aleš's Puppets* and the *Stage Sets by Czech Artists – Aleš's Puppet Theatre* (*Alšovo loutkové divadélko*). These products were publicised through advertisements in the *Český loutkář* as well as in Jindřich Veselý's publications and lectures (which combined a reflection of puppetry with the promotion and advertising for Münzberg's products; see VESELÝ 1915: 15). These activities were framed by nationalism – verbally at least. The Union claimed in its programme:

> We also want to provide Czech families with Czech toy theatres and puppets in order to push out German products that parents are now purchasing in stationery stores for their loved ones. (*ČESKÝ SVAZ PŘÁTEL LOUTKOVÉHO DIVADLA V PRAZE* 1912: 21)

The publication of serial stage designs for puppet theatre formed the core of the reform of puppetry poetics in the visual sphere. However, it should be noted that changes in staging practices were markedly out of balance regarding the relative degree of progress in scenographic and acting elements. Serial production led to the mass dissemination of puppet theatres and also to a conservation of a rather traditional form of the puppetry apparatus. Another element of amateur puppet theatre was the self-help creation and adaptation of puppetry equipment; do-it-yourself inventiveness with regards to the stage environment and the puppets themselves tended towards imitating live actors' theatre and its realism – often disregarding functionality, as Alice Dubská has observed (DUBSKÁ 2004: 153). However, these self-help creations and adaptations of puppetry equipment later led to the transformation of puppet theatre scenography; in the 1920s and 1930s, puppeteers, such as Jan Malík, were influenced by Modernism and the avant-garde and started to promote bespoke scenography for puppet productions and a dramatically functional concept of the stage (see MALÍK 2004 [1933]). They would also often publish reflections on their own technological innovations, such as the circular backdrop (MALÍK 1933), or developments in the lighting technologies (SRNEC 1933). According to Jan Malík, the Union became:

> a true stronghold of diehard conservatism and was gradually losing the more distinctive and innovative personalities who had initially approach the Union's work with authoritative respect. (MALÍK 1977: 505–6)

The Union can thus be perceived as a conservative player in the artistic development of Czech puppetry after 1912.

The interest of pedagogues and educationalists in deploying puppets in education also served as a means of redefining the significance of puppetry and of distinguishing its new

form from the previous practice of folk marionettists. As early as the 1850s and 1860s, educationalist František Hauser (1822–1889) made the first attempts at introducing puppet theatre into the school curriculum at his private teaching institute in Prague; in the 1880s, the application of puppets in education was a theme widely discussed in specialist journals (see THOMAYER 1896: 184). According to Ladislav Novák, after a period of decline, puppet theatre of the new century became 'once again a noble entertainment of our youth, correcting their minds and contributing to their patriotic formation' (NOVÁK 1905: 74–5). The concept of 'noble entertainment' grew in significance in connection with the period fight against 'pulp' and 'trash' culture (see KLIMEŠ 2013) as well as against cinematographers at the turn of the century; this concept gradually became a key element in puppetry discourse. According to Jindřich Veselý, unlike the cinematograph:

> puppet theatre may be, alongside the Czech book, not only a source of joy and the noblest of pastimes for children but also the vehicle of Czech culture in the broadest popular strata; in brief: a significant factor in popular education. (VESELÝ 1914: 7)

It was Veselý in particular who emphasised the artistic qualities of puppetry as opposed to didactic utilitarianism. He voiced this standpoint also in his organisational activities although his efforts were not fully successful.

The activities of the Union were part of a Central European trend. The early 1900s saw increased interest in puppets in artistic and intellectual circles, corresponding with the Symbolists' earlier fascination with the puppet. The core of inspiration in the practical endeavours for a stable puppet theatre venue was the Munich Puppet Theatre (*Münchner Marionettentheater*) that was established in late 1858 by Josef Leonhard 'Papa' Schmid (1822–1912). Schmid based his repertoire on new play-scripts and on adaptations of older traditional texts for the puppet theatre made by Count Franz Pocci. The philologist Paul Brann (1873–1955), one-time collaborator of Max Reinhardt, continued in the staging practices of Schmid's theatre in his own company, Munich Artists' Puppet Theatre (*Marionettentheater der Münchner Künstler*), established in 1906 – in which he also started producing Pocci's texts and adaptations of the traditional repertoire. However, his work tended towards a Modernist and Symbolist repertoire and a stylistically and materially homogenous theatre based on high artistic quality (JURKOWSKI 2004: 10). He staged Maurice Maeterlinck, Alfred Poglar and Alfred de Musset and frequently toured to Vienna; so in the spring of 1911, he performed Arthur Schnitzler's *The Gallant Kassian* (*Der tapfere Kassian*) and Mozart's singspiel *Bastien und Bastienne* (WYMETAL 1911: 9). There were further attempts at serious puppet theatre in Munich in early twentieth century. The writer Magdalena Janssen staged a fairy tale in which humans, animals and plants 'with the right for their own life' appeared together on a bare stage 'according to principles of the Munich Art Theatre' (*Münchner Künstler-Theater – Eine Renaissance des Puppenspiels*, 1914). This Modernist dramatic theatre, founded by Georg Fuchs in 1908,

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emphasised the visual aspects of performance and experimented with a relief stage (*Reliefbühne*) (GRUND 2002: 34–47). This endeavour could be seen as one of the models and inspirations for Jansen's production, which was linked in the period press explicitly to 'The Renaissance of Puppetry' (*Eine Renaissance des Puppenspiels*, 1914); it was also a model for other reformist puppet theatres.

The Munich theatres also inspired the designer Ivo Puhonny (1876–1940), who founded a similar Artistic Puppet Theatre of Baden Baden (*Baden-Badener Künstler-Marionettentheater*) in 1911. Puhonny also produced the puppeteers' box-office hit of the times, *Bastien und Bastienne*, as well as texts by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Frank Wedekind, Ludwig Thoma and Hans Sachs.[6] A year later, the visual artist Richard Teschner (1879–1948), collaborator of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, opened a puppet theatre in his workshop in Vienna. Among the guests of his productions, based on *wayang golek* puppets, were Gustav Klimt and the architect Josef Hoffmann (MAYERHÖFER 1970: 5). In Salzburg in 1913, Anton Aicher (1859–1930), a professor of the State Industrial School, opened his Artistic Puppet Theatre (SERBACH 1930: 1–2), based on the style and practices of Schmid's Munich theatre. All these theatre makers excelled with their demanding repertoires, their focus on the visual aspect of theatrical production and the emphasis on the artistic profiles of their theatre companies.

Jindřich Veselý brought news of these theatre initiatives to the Czech public, arguing against a purely didactic conception of puppet theatre and aiming to emphasise its aesthetic dimensions and artistic qualities (DUBSKÁ 2004: 160). Just like the German companies, Czech activists shared an interest in traditional puppetry; but their orientation was markedly traditionalistic. According to Dubská, the staging possibilities of small theatres, as well as families, schools and clubs, could not offer the appropriate conditions for more ambitious professional work; moreover, some of the cultural elites perceived puppets as no more than visual artefacts (DUBSKÁ 2004: 161).

The key event of the Czech reform movement was the establishment of the Art Hall's Puppet Theatre (*Loutkové divadlo Umělecké besedy*) in early 1914. It was founded on the impulse of a group of educationalists who approached leading artists with the intention of creating a modern puppet theatre for children (DUBSKÁ 2004: 161). The Art Hall (est. 1863) is the oldest Czech artistic society, created alongside other Czech organisations after the détente of Habsburg absolutism in the early 1860s. It reached the apex of its activity in the 1880s in which decade its members played a central role in the building of the Czech National Theatre (MATYS 2015); however, after this zenith its importance waned. Nonetheless, an interest in the puppet was strong amongst representatives of Czech Modernism in the early 1900s. The educationalists' initiative that led to the establishment of the new puppet theatre was based on the shared interest in the traditionalist national revival

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6   See the catalogue of artefacts and photographs in the online collections of the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen* Dresden (*Baden-Badener Künstler-Marionettentheater*, 2014).

that the prestigious, though ageing, organisation professed. The Art Hall at the time of its fiftieth anniversary in 1913 was in the state of 'decline and insignificance' (MATĚJKA 2013) as seen from the point of view of progressive artists, such as the leading interwar writer Karel Čapek, then aged twenty-three. Nevertheless, inspired by the Munich Artistic Puppet Theatre, the new company attracted a number of members of the National Theatre as well as, for instance, the aesthetician, musicologist and composer Otakar Zich (1879–1934). The first performance of this group took place on the stage of the National Hall (*Národní dům*) in the Prague district of Vinohrady on 8 January 1914. The founders of the puppet theatre selected a work for their production symbolically, the first opera to have a Czech libretto, František Škroup's *The Tinker* (*Dráteník*, 1826). The set design was undertaken by painter Ota Bubeníček, the puppets were made by the sculptors Hanuš Folkmann and Ladislav Šaloun, and the piece was studied by the National Theatre's former opera soloist Růžena Maturová. The Art Hall's Puppet Theatre attempted a realistic expression in the visual component and a less stiff movement of the marionettes (for instance by removing the head wire). *The Tinker* was performed in what is known as split interpretation (that is, by dividing the roles of the puppet manipulator from the speaker of the voice). Despite numerous positive reactions, the outcome was ambivalent (DUBSKÁ 2004: 163). Further activities were discontinued by the outbreak of the Great War and were resumed later by the Artistic Puppet Stage (DUBSKÁ 2004: 165).

The central platform of the above reforms of Czech puppetry in the first decades of the twentieth century was the journal *Czech Puppeteer* (*Český loutkář*, 1912–1913),[7] later renamed to *The Puppeteer* (*Loutkář*, 1917–1939) – a publication that continues its activities to the present day. The journal published texts on national and international puppet traditions, commentaries on period puppet plays and their productions, as well as experiences and reflections on the practice of individual performers. A significant part of the journal was dedicated to do-it-yourself advice and to suggestions of various constructional innovations. Unlike other period Czech theatre journals, such as *Scena* or *Divadelní listy* (Theatre Papers), *Český loutkář* published such views as those of George Bernard Shaw or Maurice Maeterlinck, side by side with descriptions of electrical circuits and instructions on how to make a projection device. The journal became not only a means of defining the thematic direction of Czech puppetry but also a practical handbook of instructions as to what a puppet theatre should technically look like, and how it should function. *Loutkář* can therefore be perceived both as a document detailing contemporary theatre practice, and as an example of an analytical and synthetic presentation of the theory, history and practice of puppetry, reflecting the complex nature of the puppetry reform of the early 1900s.

At the end of the Great War, when the publication of *Loutkář* was resumed, its pages comprised theoretical reflections on the relationship of puppet theatre to cinematography

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(ŠÁRECKÁ 1917) and to dance (SIBLÍK 1918), essays on contemporary artistic theatre practice (MATHESIUS 1917; VESELÝ 1918), or on pedagogical practice (RYDLO 1917; PURKRÁBEK 1919); there were also articles on technical and production management topics (FUČÍK 1917; KOPENEC 1917; PROCHÁZKA 1919) and, after the founding of Czechoslovakia, on the new socio-political situation (WIEDEMANN 1919; VESELÝ 1919). The journal *Loutkář* also documents the linguistic and ideological construction of puppetry's specificity, which does not always correspond with contemporary reality. Proving the significance of the puppet became the agenda of educationalists, or traditionalists from the Czech Union of the Friends of Puppet Theatre, as well as of progressive visual artists such as Ladislav Sutnar, who designed wood-turned puppets for the Artěl Union. Although the authors of the texts discussed below came from different standpoints, their idioms share similar concepts and constructions. A defining feature that these discourses have in common is the differentiation of puppet theatre from cinematography and live actors' theatre. By analysing the arguments on the specificity of the puppet theatre that are based on this distinction, it is possible to understand the contemporaneous concepts of the puppetry activists' own positions and the on-going reform of puppetry generally.

The section that follows analyses the ideological self-determination of the art form in the time of the Puppetry Renaissance in opposition to other media. The keywords of these discourses are the concepts of 'primitiveness' and 'liveness'.

The 'Primitiveness' of Puppetry

The relation of puppetry to cinematography (and other technical apparatus and projection technologies) had been occasionally theorised before the Great War in *Český loutkář* and in Jindřich Veselý's lectures. With Maryša Šárecká's 1917 'Cinema, or puppet theatre? A reflection on Pavel Rilla's article in *Das Literarische Echo* magazine' (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917) the discussion enters a new phase. The unambiguous pre-war appreciations for the positives (of puppet theatre) and condemnations of the negatives (of cinematography) undergo a transition into a more profound reflection on the differences between the two art forms. Through commentaries, approvals and quotations, Šárecká examines the article 'Das Puppenspiel' (*The Puppet Theatre*), published in the influential magazine *Das Literarische Echo* by the theatre and literary critic and writer Paul Rilla (RILLA 1917). Rilla presents the work of Schmid's Munich Puppet Theatre and comments on the relation between the puppet theatre and the cinema. He can be credited for first introducing the concept of a Puppet Theatre Renaissance, used in German speaking countries (see *Eine Renaissance des Puppenspiels*, 1914), into the Czech context. Apart from the concept of *Renaissance des Puppenspiels*, Rilla uses also the terms 'awakening' (*Wiedererlebung*) and 'revitalisation' (*Neubelebung*). Czech sources had occasionally used

such terms as *obrození* (revival; NOVÁK 1905) and *vzkříšení* (resurrection; ZÁKREJS 1913). Rilla understands this renaissance as the synergy of two projects: the literary activity of Count Pocci, who revived a public interest in traditional German puppet play texts, and Schmid's theatre productions, for which Pocci provided appropriate scripts. Around 1917 came a heightened interest in Pocci in the Czech culture and his plays were translated and produced on stage (MALÍK 1977: 513). It may be for that reason that he attracted the attention of Czech journalism. However, Šárecká takes Rilla's concept of a Puppet Theatre Renaissance and presents his views, 'translating' and adapting them for the Czech context. Whilst Rilla discusses marionette theatre and Pocci, Šárecká shifts the reference of Rilla's sentences, quotes them literally and using them characterises the views and 'sensibility' towards puppets of the leading Czech writer, dramatist, poet and translator Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912). In 1908, Vrchlický published a novel with romance plot entitled *Puppets* (*Loutky*). In the year of Šárecká's article, the Czech critic and writer František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937) published his novel *God's Puppets and Workmen* (*Loutky i dělníci Boží*); in 1902, the Czech translation of Bolesław Prus's Polish novel *Lalka* (*The Doll*; translated as *The Puppet*). These novelists present a pessimistic vision of society at the turn of the century, describing the objectification of interpersonal relationships and comparing humans to puppets (VŠETIČKA 1998: 42–3). Šárecká finds this grave symbolism in Vrchlický, actualising Rilla's attitude towards Pocci in the contemporaneous, war-influenced circumstances. She emphasises the symbolic significance of the puppet in contrast to the grotesque and farcical concept as represented by the figure of the clown Kašpárek (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 3). She also opposes Rilla's assessment of puppet theatre as mere 'popular entertainment', stressing its artistic value with reference to Maeterlinck's, Schnitzler's and Shaw's texts that she had translated for *Loutkář* (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 3). According to Paul Rilla, as translated by M. Šárecká, an (artistically conceived) puppet theatre around the year 1917 is on its finest path of development:

> Puppet theatre is on its best way [… It] does not necessitate the costly and complex apparatus of the large stage, and therefore, at a minimal expense, it can achieve as perfect a performance as can possibly be imagined. It is certainly enfranchised to be a locus of popular entertainment, at which there can be no objections from an artistic perspective. In the battle against the harmfulness of the cinema (though it is not necessarily always bad and condemnable, though in most instances it is such), it may be a weapon of high value and one much more effective than the thundering polemics of the 'danger of the cinema' in journals that are not read by those in question. (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 3)

This 'best way' of puppetry during the Great War was winding a new path between the forms and practices of live actors' theatre, popular entertainment and the cinematograph. According to Šárecká, 'two stage forms have dominated the metropolis: the operetta and the cinema' (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 2). The hegemony of the operetta was allegedly to

be replaced by the cinema, which is also nearing 'its zenith'. Puppet theatre was described as the new rival to cinema, which based its attractiveness on external effects. Puppet theatre was capable of surpassing cinema since scenic decorations had their limits and could not be escalated infinitely (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 2–3). Šárecká understands cinema as incomparably better than the operetta, which she considers immoral. These views are somewhat unusual. Although contemporary cultural elites criticised the operetta, immorality (of plot and characters) was generally attributed to the cinema. Towards the end of the Great War, operetta was perceived in the Czech lands as a receding dominant art form closely associated with the culture of Vienna and the Habsburg commonwealth – a point voiced for instance by the puppeteer Milan Fučík (FUČÍK 1917: 40). Cinema was understood as a newly established (and therefore unstable), even if dominant, art form, and 'the old venerable theatre' (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 2) was deemed incapable of competing with these formations. In such a defined field, puppetry was considered by its apologists as a new and modern form, adequate to the changing circumstances, all despite the traditionalistic orientation of its preceding activities. The starting point for enhancing the significance of puppetry against other forms of the performing arts was the opposition of its decorative plainness (or, *ad absurdum*, the contrast between a 'vain' cinema and 'ascetic' puppetry).

Since the dominant cultural forms were shown by puppetry elites as inadequately rich in decor and scenery, the crucial stylistic difference – and therefore positive feature – of puppet theatre was considered its *primitiveness*. With the help of this notion of primitiveness, puppet theatre was construed:

   (1) negatively, as an opposition to:
       (1.1) the complexity of modern life full of disturbing sensations and effects;
       (1.2) the complicatedness, decorativeness and financial demand of the cinematographic 'palace of wonders' and the grand theatre of live actors,

  and;

   (2) positively, as:
       (2.1) a wholesome reaction for children and adults to the complexity of life and the dominant cultural forms (see point 1.1);
       (2.2) a more accomplished and attractive cultural form than the others (namely the live actors' theatre) due to its simplicity and disciplined ways;
       (2.3) a cultural form linked with the Czech national tradition.

It was specifically in the interplay of these qualities that puppet theatre was presented as 'a weapon of high value' in the battle against 'the harmfulness of the cinema', as Šárecká formulates it (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 3). An appreciation of the perfection and discipline of

the puppet as opposed to the live actor can be found in a number of other contemporary texts (such as KARÁSEK 1907: 5–7; SYMONS 1912: 3; SIBLÍK 1918: 4; MAHEN 1987: 21–3 [1923]).

As I evidence below, this positive conception of puppet theatre's 'primitiveness' served well the traditionalists and the didactically orientated educationalists as well as the Modernists. This can be documented by two period texts written by ideological opponents: Bohumil Schweigstill (1875–1964), the author of puppet plays and the trustee of the Prague-based Society for the High-Minded Pastime of Youth (*Spolek pro ušlechtilou zábavu mládeže*) on the one hand, and Václav Fryček (1897–1969) the journalist, playwright and dramaturg of the most progressive contemporary theatre company Dragon (*Drak*) on the other. The amateur Puppet Theatre of the Workers' Academy (*Loutkové divadlo Dělnické akademie*) was founded in Prague in 1918; in autumn 1924, Ladislav Sutnar (1897–1976) became its director; Sutnar collaborated with Fryček in promoting a modern programme based on left-wing ideological standpoints and on topical recent trends in the visual arts. The company also changed its name to *Drak*. However, after efforts at effecting the new programme failed, and after harsh criticism from traditionalistic puppeteers, Sutnar resigned and with the end of the 1924/1925 season, the company broke up.

Schweigstill, in his article 'Skioptikon, biograf a marionetty' (Skioptikon, Biograph [Cinema] and Marionettes), expresses the need for 'high-minded pastime' for the child and the adult 'in today's life full of work and toil' (SCHWEIGSTILL 1912: 85). In his view, the child with its 'primitive' soul is the embodiment of movement, and as such the child will prefer 'that which contains within itself life, movement or at least part of that' (SCHWEIGSTILL 1912: 86). Puppet theatre – 'plain , primitive' – combines the qualities of graphic instructiveness and of the beautiful word in an otherwise tedious skioptikon, and the attractiveness of movement and liveness in an otherwise unwholesome and 'mute' biograph (meaning 'cinema') (SCHWEIGSTILL 1912: 86). According to Lucie Česálková, audience experiences after 1900 were formed by the practice of presenting luminous images of the skioptikon and the cinematograph (as two instruments of similar cultural-media practice). Schweigstill's comparison of puppet theatre with the cinema (biograph) and the skioptikon can therefore be interpreted as a tactics of foregrounding puppet theatre by including it in the discussion of *high-minded pastimes* and a contemporary cultural fight against pulp and trash (see KLIMEŠ 2013).

A little over a decade after Schweigstill, Václav Fryček uses the concept of primitiveness in connection with the tools and stylistic features of modern art. In his theoretical and polemical text 'The Problems of Puppet Theatre Making', he states:

> […] primitiveness and objectivity are the most substantial qualities of the puppet theatre and from them follow, for the purpose of our comparison, formal laws that must be reflected in both types of stage direction. A stage with live actors may never be as primi-

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tive, nor as objective. However, the circumstance that theatres have recently had much desire for simplification may serve the puppet theatre with an exquisite material that its own economic means would never allow [its practitioners] to reach as it would never be able to allure so much attention, effort and emulation of productive artists as the great theatres have done by their programme of simplification. What arose was a theatrical environment full of primitivism that could never do without puppet theatre types, and the spark of the art, specifically of the visual one, turned back in turn to the puppet stage and, in so doing, paid back to the puppet theatre what had been received of it. (FRYČEK 1924: 108)

Somewhat vaguely, Fryček comments here on the artistic *niveau* of the 1920s at which time the general tendency towards simplifying aesthetic means, the interest in abstraction and inspiration found in puppets, and the beauty of models in the live actors' theatre returned as influences back into the puppet theatre. Fryček also presents here a theoretical explanation of his and Sutnar's practical work. He criticises the organisational and artistic conservatism of puppetry and the excessive orientation towards educational rather than artistic aims: a valuable theatre (and a guarantee of artistic progress) can be created only by an artist, not by an pedagogue (FRYČEK 1924: 106).

Fryček opens his ideological treatise with a reflection on the impact of cinematography on puppetry. He engages polemically with Bernard Shaw, who would not find it awkward if the puppet theatre took the place of the cinema because the latter provokes the imagination too little (SHAW 1920 [1913]). Unlike Šárecká, Fryček doubts the ability of puppetry to compete with cinematography, the reason being its didactic mission and the unintended consequences of the ideological orientation of *high-minded pastime*. According to Fryček, puppetry can never match the biograph's (cinema's) audience attractiveness as it 'literally rots [under] mountains of rules for paper-rustling edification' and it is 'unable to compete with even the silliest films, giving the fact that people share nothing that could make them better' (FRYČEK 1924: 103). Despite the framing of puppetry as a primitive form, club and family puppet theatre can be, from a technical perspective, considered as 'decorative' miniatures of the grand theatrical and cinematographic 'palaces of wonders'. Puppet theatres often had the flair of do-it-yourself enterprises, and the use of projection (*laterna magica*) and other optical and acoustic effects was common in the early 1900s (see KOPENEC 1917; PROCHÁZKA 1919; VERNER 1917). Puppeteers often deployed this decorativeness and effectiveness through self-help, that is with more or less *primitive* means.

During and after the Great War, puppet theatre had the opportunity to assume the cultural position of an adequate establishment combining several potentially contradictory functions and practices. It could provide entertainment and a pastime in an economically and politically unstable period and also be a factor of national cohesion. Contemporary reactions voiced the notion of renewing puppetry at a time when:

the prospectless Czech political future (before the war), the horror of the political party life, the cult of the Viennese operetta, the biograph, the detective stories and if you will, cubism and *tuttiquanti* […] was tiring out thousands of the more refined minds. (FUČÍK 1917: 40–1)

There were also suggestions such as:

let every school set up a little theatre that will bring relief to the distressed heart that will in turn awaken the slumbering national awareness. With the motto: Children – for children, we're educating humanity – for humanity. (RYDLO 1917: 133; see also RILLA 1917: 860)

With its *primitive* return to the national tradition, puppet theatre could appear, to organisations and individuals practicing censorship, as a relatively safe rhetorical medium that seemed to strengthen national awareness and criticise the Habsburg Empire. The puppet apparatus itself was also sufficiently *primitive* and lent itself to use in a variety of environments, including the war front. In wartime, its minimal economical demands and primitiveness could be a positive feature, as opposed to costly theatrical and cinematographic productions.

This perceived peculiarity of puppet theatre thus enabled it to be interpreted as a modern, novel cultural form that differed both from its rival art-forms (theatre and cinema), as well as from its own history (connected with folk puppetry). The comparison with cinema helped some puppet performers as a result of their being perceived as proponents of a traditionalistic medium, as opposed to a modern art form. For Modernists such as Fryček and Sutnar, the positive concept of primitiveness was associated with visual simplicity and expressive intensity and played a defining role in emancipating puppetry from the didactic utilitarianism and other forms of theatre. It also became a link between prospective puppet theatre trends and modern visual arts. Primitiveness and the object status of puppets (which I will here term their *objectivity*), corresponding with an interest in abstraction and pure forms, can be seen in other avant-garde artists, such as Oskar Schlemmer whose views on the 'artistic figurine' (SCHLEMMER 1961 [1925]) were published at that time in Czech translation in the avant-garde journal *Pásmo* (see, for example, SCHLEMMER 1925). Formal simplifications appeared also with Czech authors writing on live actors' theatre (ČAPEK and ČAPEK 2008 [1910]: 105).

Live Puppets, Deadly Cinema

Many contemporary commentators claimed that puppet theatre with 'the beauty of the word' (ŠÁRECKÁ 1917: 3) excelled over the muteness of the biograph, before which 'children would devour with their eyes the "deadly life" on the screen, passing by without

words and noise' (SCHWEIGSTILL 1912: 86). The binary opposition of *live/deadly* is used also by Vilém Mathesius in his comparison of adaptations of Shakespeare for the puppets and for film. He 'sides with the puppets against the biograph' and claims that the biograph can deliver 'the stupendous wealth of Shakespeare's plots in all its busy multi-scenic-ness […] but [that] it silences the poet's word, turning his plays into mere pantomimes'. In comparison, puppet theatre is 'ordinary' and requires 'simplifying the plays' but it allows the audiences to hear 'the words of Shakespeare' (MATHESIUS 1917: 7).

The concept of *live word* appears in its most extreme form in the lectures of Jindřich Veselý, who went as far as to formulate the relation between puppetry and cinema in his occasionally repeated and modified 'Ten Puppet Commandments':

> Against the skioptikon, which is no more than a complement to the teaching of what's graphic, the cinematograph has movement that the child voraciously consumes; it has life but – this life is dead, passing by without word or noise […] But puppet theatre not only has the movement but also the word, so it is only in puppet theatre [that one] has all the miracles that the child is interested in, and only some of them have other interests. The movement and the word of puppet theatre is closer to the child than the movement and the word of the great theatre – the Liliputian empire of wooden manikins charms children in the utmost measure. (VESELÝ 1915: 5)

The *liveness* discourse thus construed puppet theatre as a form providing:

(1) a representation of movement, or as 'an embodiment of a form brought to life through movement' (VESELÝ 1987 [1910]) that equals the moving images of the projection apparatus;
(2) the contact between the participants who are secured access to:
    (2.1) the simultaneity of the perceiving subject and the perceived world (URICCHIO 2005: 129), and
    (2.2) an active participation, i.e. 'mental cooperation' of the audience;
(3) the vocal expression of a live human, which guarantees an adequate mediation of the dramatic poet's text.

A similar antithesis *live word/deadly, mute life* can be found also in contemporary comparisons between live actors' theatre and cinema. The notion of a shadow acquired a contradictory significance; cinema was described as 'a very poor shadow play' (*Kinematograf* 1915), 'a pantomime of shadows and surrogate drama; little more than shadows on the wall made by a child's hands, a deceptive art, dumbness, falsehood and sensation; not a painting, or theater, or concert, just film' (ČAPEK 2008: 112 [1917]) as well as 'a mysterious shadow play' (BARTOŠ 1921: 185). Sometimes film was called outright as 'deadly art' whereas theatre, or 'good dramatic production', was dubbed 'live art' and the art form that will stay alive (see ČERNÝ 2003: 321; ČAPEK and ČAPEK 2008: 105 [1910]).

The author of one of the earliest texts on the cinema, both in national and internation-al contexts, Václav Tille (1867–1937) – an ethnographer and folklorist with an interest in fairy tales, specialist in Romance languages, and a theatre and film critic – considered shadow plays as the precursors of cinematography.[8] According to Tille, the cinemato-graph as a technology was created from a combination of the mutoscope (a pocket-size flip book capturing phased movement), the photograph and the camera obscura, making the moving image permanently capturable and therefore dissociating it from the object (TILLE 2008 [1908]: 79). He opens his historically seminal study *Kinema* (1908) with an extensive description of the history of the shadow play, considering cinematography as a new entertainment brought to life through the old visual means of the shadow. He understands the puppet, the shadow and principally also the filmic image as visual instruments capable of creating live movement in the arts (TILLE 2008: 71) and claims that '[t]he shadow is a more workable and obedient visual medium than the puppet' (TILLE 2008: 72). Unlike later commentators, for Tille in the cinematograph 'a medium was invented that generated animated shadows on a screen, mechanically faithful repro-ductions of objects' (TILLE 2008: 79). Within the cultural discourse the concept of the shadow operated as a distinctive feature of the puppets' as well as the live actors' theatre. Tille, calling cinematography 'a modern shadow play' (TILLE 2008: 91), appreciates the shadow play's ability to develop 'most bizarre and grotesque creations' (TILLE 2008: 72) and 'to comically and skilfully transpose reality into the realm of impossibility, dreams and wild fantasies' (TILLE 2008: 88). Here it is also worth mentioning Tille's own earlier practical attempts at creating a puppet theatre based on caricatures (ZÁHOŘ 1911). The aesthetic power and the artistic principle of the moving image as facilitated by the grotesque and the comical is a crucial feature of 'this visual medium [that] proves much more rewarding in creation of grotesque and comical scenes than in the creation of seri-ous dramatic works' (TILLE 2008: 88). Both cinema and the shadow play therefore 'pro-vided creative artists with a medium with which living pictures of moving reality can be used to create the moving, living world of human fantasy on a screen' (TILLE 2008: 91). Karel and Josef Čapek, the leading Czech Modernists, remarked on a 'new grotesqueness' based on the disconnection and the subsequent synchronisation of images and sounds in the processes of filmmaking and showing, through which 'something approaching a modern fairy tale for adults and decadents shall come into being' (ČAPEK and ČAPEK 2008 [1910]: 106). A visual artist (Josef, 1887–1945) and a writer (Karel, 1890–1938) may be seen to react here to the contemporary literary decadence connected with Czech Modernism of the turn of the twentieth century. The movement's leading representative, the literary critic and writer Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871–1951) expressed his fascina-tion with the sublime nature of the puppet in the introduction to his Symbolist, oriental fairy tale for puppets *Sen o říši krásy* (A Dream of the Empire of Beauty; KARÁSEK

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8   Łukasz Biskupski notes in Łódź an event at which a shadow puppet theatre piece was shown after a film screening (*Lodzer Tageblatt* 1 and 4 August 1896, quoted in BISKUPSKI 2013: 145).

1907). The use of the puppet as a symbol of pessimism in the works of Prus, Vrchlický and Šalda has been mentioned above. Observations on the grotesqueness of film based on the disconnection of the voice from the body returned to the discussions of relations between the theatre and the cinema in the late 1920s with the constitution of the sound film. For instance, the avant-garde stage director Jiří Frejka described the grotesqueness of the film in such terms when perceiving film as a 'robot' (FREJKA 1929).

Unlike Tille or the Čapeks, contemporary puppetry elites aimed at no more than overcoming the grotesque and farcical nature of puppetry style. Although they emphasised the appropriateness of puppet theatre for adult audiences, their practice was dominated by a junior target audience and their discourse turned around the notion of a *high-minded pastime* delivered to children. The highlighted feature of the puppet was its specific gestic quality, that is, the correspondence between a puppet's external visual expressions and movements, and the dramatist's ideas, which the puppet is mediating to the audience (SYMONS 1912: 3; SIBLÍK 1918: 4). Period aestheticians of puppet theatre therefore put value on the pregnancy of the onstage gesture that 'is the equivalent of rhythm in verse, and it can convey, as a perfect rhythm should, not a little of the inner meaning of words' (SYMONS 1912: 3). Siblík claimed that the puppet's unchanging visual aspect gives the spectator the possibility to 'complete the character with a whole range of shades in its external gesticulation and through that in its internal nature' (SIBLÍK 1918: 3). A representative theoretical framework to these views was given by Otakar Zich in his 1923 study 'Loutkové divadlo' (Puppet Theatre; ZICH 1923; reprinted in this volume). He distinguishes puppets as a function of the double way in which they are perceived: 'puppets may be understood either as live people, or as live puppets' (ZICH 1923: 8). If puppets are perceived as live beings, they are disposed to highlight the manifestations of life such as movement and speech; due to this, their effect is uncanny and solemn. Adversely, if the un-live material and inanimate characteristics of the puppet are emphasised, the puppet is disposed to comical effects, grotesqueness and caricature; in these instances, the shows of life cannot be taken seriously (ZICH 1923: 56–9). Zich develops this distinction into 'the dual stylisation of the puppet theatre'. He does not fail to stress that the grotesque stylisation is more common in the Czech context due to its folk tradition. That could, he claims however, be supplemented by a modern stylisation 'on the basis of the serious visual arts' (ZICH 1923: 140). It is worth noting in this context that almost contemporary with the puppetry discourse operating with the distinctive opposition of *live word/deadly, mute film*, Jindřich Veselý commented on the reduction of verbal accompaniment in puppetry practice. In his book on hand-operated puppets, *Bramborové divadlo* (Potato Theatre; VESELÝ 1913), the author comments that (in his day) 'Czech puppeteers generally limit themselves to a play of gestures' that complemented the diminishing verbal component. Despite this reality, puppet theatre was still associated with notions of *liveness* and productions of dramatic texts, and was presented as an attractive and participatory form of *live speech*.

Discussions of the 'live word' in puppetry can be framed by the broader usage of the concept of *liveness* in the differentiation of cultural forms in the constitution of cinematography as cultural form in the 1900s and its search for an institutional legitimacy. In connection with cinematography, William Uricchio highlights the fascination with movement and sensationalism around 1900. He interprets the usage of the concept of *liveness* in the period in connection with the perception of the medium not only as a representation of space but also a representation of duration and movement (URICCHIO 2005: 129–30). In contemporaneous discourse on *liveness*, no clear distinction was made between *live simultaneity* and the *liveness* of the storage media. According to Uricchio the creation of the medium of cinema was preceded by and pervaded with the notion of *televisual simultaneity*. The contemporary techno-imagination expected the cinematograph to provide the *liveness of simultaneity* and, in connection with the tradition of the *camera obscura*, to provide 'spatial proximity and even the optical contiguity of the world viewed with the viewing subject' (URICCHIO 2005: 129). Uricchio's description of contemporary audience expectations could be extended to puppet theatre too. The concept of *primitiveness* also operated in differentiating between individual cultural forms in period discourses relating to cinematography and the live actors' theatre. Cinema was characterised here, similarly to puppet theatre, in terms of its 'mysteriousness' and 'enigmatic fantasy' and was also appreciated as an adequate form of 'popular entertainment' (BARTOŠ 1921).

Puppet theatre enjoyed a period of high popularity. According to testimonies, many puppet performances were so well attended that the play had to be repeated several times to accommodate the spectators (PURKRÁBEK 1919). Productions were often accompanied by introductory talks, sometimes stylised in the genre of the fairy tale (JECH 1919) and the programme was enriched with *entr'acte* music (KLIKA 1920). It was also common for a production to comprise several plays: the main piece was variously supplemented with puppetry epilogues and variety scenes (VESELÝ 1918). So, for instance, in the performances of the Ladies' Union of the Czech Holiday Resorts in Pilsen (*Dámský odbor českých feriálních osad v Plzni*), individual plays were interspersed with concerts or the playing of gramophone music (KIESWETTEROVÁ 1918: 69). It would therefore be misleading to approach puppet productions as presentations of one single piece, as had been the practice among the artistic, Modernist companies since the late 1880s. If the performances are to be analysed as events and not only as realisations of a theatrical concept, then puppetry performance practice of the times was based on composed programmes of often disparate individual parts. The musical component can then hardly be taken for incidental music corresponding with the play, but rather as a variant of *entr'acte* music that served to attract attention or to separate individual parts of the production. In this, the productions of puppet theatre and of cinema corresponded with the general contemporary convention of popular culture that composed programmes out of a variety of artistic elements, or 'numbers'.

The cinematographic programmes, in the first decade of the century at least, were composed of numerous shorter films, or of a series of static luminous images that would be introduced by a master of ceremonies and interspersed or accompanied by music (see for instance LOIPERDINGER and HALLER 2011). Works on the arrangement of cinematographic productions around 1900 emphasis their relative multimedia nature (see for example ALTMAN 1992). Until and around 1906, the phase of the transition of the cinema from a mode of attractions to that of narrative integration (GUNNING 2004), there were in evidence numerous variants of the synchronisation of the moving image and the live voice (be it from a commentator, musician(s), or performing singers); the homology with puppetry practice was self-evident. Ivan Klimeš observes that applause was a common feature of cinematographic productions; the audiences responded also to the musical numbers and the live stage appearances (KLIMEŠ 2013). As Rick Altman demonstrates in relation to performances of collective sing-alongs to the projected slides in what were known as *illustrated songs*, the gradual suppression of audience participation by the cinematographic industry was connected with the rise of independent picture venues (movie houses) as cinematographic institutions (ALTMAN 2006: 190).

The more both cultural practices resembled each other, the more necessary it was to differentiate between them rhetorically. Thus the distinction between *live/deadly* was reiterated in a diminutive antithesis: smaller/greater audience participation; whereas the theatre requires audience participation, the cinema leaves the spectator passive. As the dramatist Jan Bartoš put it:

> In the theatre we can hear and see; our perceptive participation is qualitatively greater. In the biograph we can see [but] we are not in a physical contact with live nature and the live human. (BARTOŠ 1921: 184)

His contemporary, František Langer, a leading dramatist and critic, made observations on the democratic features of the smaller audience participation in the cinema and spoke of the theatre's 'superiority' for the spectator (LANGER 2008: 95 [1913]). According to Siblík, the joy and aesthetic pleasure of watching lies in the experience of this 'involvement', in which the spectator is:

> somehow taken in as the necessary co-creator of everything that the puppet stage brings; each individual lives much more intimately with the stage. How much more profound the relation to the stage is than to the screen of the cinematographic projections! How much more joyfully lively the spectator's soul is! (SIBLÍK 1918: 3)

Performances produced by the serially made puppet theatre could tacitly be considered *live* in the early decades of the twentieth century in large part because the cinematographic productions, as much as they were accompanied by live commentators and live music, were simply considered a *deadly* cultural form.

Numerous texts emphasised the possibility of (adults') covert observation of children's joyful play. Toy theatres, just like cinematographic technologies and their predecessors in projection starting with the magic lantern, were not only used in public productions in the Czech lands but also often for private productions at home; at these one can assume a greater intimacy and physical proximity. The family environment, the reduced aesthetic distancing and therefore the specific nature of the child audience played a crucial role in the forming of the participants' experience of both cinematographic and puppetry performances. It was therefore on the agenda of contemporary theorists to establish an adequate definition and form of puppet theatre in relation to cinematography – one that would suit the needs of a young as well as of an adult audience. That could lead to an emphasis on the 'seriousness' of puppet play (as was Symons' case) or to stressing that adults could take pleasure in children's joy rather than in the theatre performance proper.

Discussions on the concept of the puppet theatre as a *primitive* form endowed with an enlightened *live word*, the unification of the puppet equipment through industrial production and the how-to-stage guidelines published in *Loutkář* may also be interpreted as an attempt at promoting drama in Czech – a trend known as the *normalisation* of puppet dramaturgy – and as a reform of puppetry stage speech. The cultivation of stereotypical speech modes in puppetry was the effort of Liběna Odstrčilová (an actress at the National Theatre and founder of the Artistic Puppet Theatre, see MALÍK 1977: 519). Newly established puppet companies occasionally also launched competitions commissioning new puppet drama (MALÍK 1977: 506, 517–8). These efforts corresponded with the balancing of the quality (and aesthetic value) of the dramatic texts and of the scenographic designs of the apparatus; an imbalance of quality in the dramatic and scenographic aspects had been a continuing problem of puppetry and had been frequently criticised by the innovators of the 1920s (see FRYČEK 1924; SOJKA 1925: 136). The emphasis on the *literature* and the *liveness* of puppet theatre can therefore be interpreted as an activity trying to institutionalise and stabilise the art form in a time of an overall culture change. The concept of *liveness* may be perceived as a concept that expresses the *animation* of a puppet that comes from the combination of (live, not photographically captured) movement and the pronounced (live, not recorded, post-synched or overlayered) word – as well as the mental participation of the audience.

Conclusion

From an aesthetic point of view, the period of the Puppetry Renaissance, delineated here within the timeframe 1895–1929, was a period of transition from traditional folk puppetry to Modernism and the gradual professionalisation of puppet theatre. I have presented the period of emerging modern Czech puppetry within a context of a conservative/modern binary of cultural emancipation. This transformation was part of the

similarly ambivalent changes occurring in Czech society at the turn of the twentieth century – a culture whose cultural and political emancipation created and made ample use of folk culture and images of the past. This self-historicisation becomes part of the process of modernity for both Czech society and Czech puppetry; in this process, the old and the traditional were revived and reinvented for the conditions and aims of the new age. The interest in puppet theatre was accompanied by serial publications of folk play texts and by reflections on their utilitarian application in education and on the art form's aesthetic specifics. These aspects cannot be separated; an account of the modernisation of Czech puppetry would therefore not be given adequate justice if discussed only in terms of its aesthetics.

The establishment, legitimisation and prestige of the restored art form within changing Czech society and culture were accompanied by a distinguishing of puppet theatre from other forms, namely live actors' theatre and cinematography. The developments in puppet theatre in the early 1900s were also simultaneous with the development of the cinema from a popular pastime into a dominant mass cultural form. With this impulse, the mutual relations in the entire structure of culture were renegotiated; from this perspective, The Puppetry Renaissance can be interpreted as one effect of a wider cultural shift attendant upon the establishment of cinema. By distinguishing theatre from cinema, the concept of 'primitiveness' in puppet theatre was posited as the source of its aesthetics. Similarly, contemporary discussions on the relations between these cultural forms operated with some of the first philosophical articulations of the concept of *liveness*, drawing comparisons between what was 'live' and what was 'deadly'. It is within the framework of these relations that the changes occurring in early twentieth-century Czech puppetry need to be considered. Studying the changes in this relatively marginal art form may therefore have a more general validity, and lead to an understanding of the cultural processes and historically conditioned constructions of an individual art forms' specificity.

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Summary

This article discusses the establishment of Czech puppet theatre as an institutional part of modern society in the early 1900s, at a moment of cultural change, known as the 'Puppetry Renaissance'. Czech puppet theatre changed from a traditional form of folk art to an integral part of Modernism and the Avant-garde; this development took place hand in hand with developments in cinematography, as well as in social institutions and societies. The article demonstrates the ways in which modern Czech puppet theatre defined itself not only in contrast to live actors' theatre, but also as an alternative to the new mass culture form that enjoyed a boom simultaneously with it: the cinema.

Keywords

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