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The Diaries of Jindřich Honzl: 1912–1952

Eva Šlaisová¹

In the present decade, we can still find little-known or previously undisclosed archival material, which has the potential to shed new light on historical periods and contribute to a fuller image and better understanding of previous times. One such unique and as-yet unexplored source are the diaries of Jindřich Honzl, a theatre and film director, theoretician, and one of the leading figures of the Czech avant-garde movement.

Honzl's estate, currently managed by his heirs, namely by Zita Skořepová Honzlová, includes about 40 diaries, kept by Honzl between the years 1912 and 1952; that is starting in his youth up to almost his death.² The vast majority of Honzl's notebooks exists only in handwritten form; the only exception being two notebooks from the mid-1930s that were transcribed by theatre scholar Milan Obst in the 1960s. The notebooks vary in their form, extent, and scope. Entries range from brief records of important dates, including appointments, meetings, rehearsals, and premieres, to lengthy reflections on Honzl's personal life as well as the artistic, social, and political situation in Czechoslovakia.

The diaries from the 1910s mainly include excerpts from books Honzl was reading, his own poetic attempts and records of his personal life: reflections on the events and feelings of a young man. The diaries of the 1920s consist mostly of brief notes of dates of meetings, rehearsals, premieres, lectures, etc. Sadly, these diaries do not provide an extensive window into the artistic period of the 1920s, which saw the beginnings of the avant-garde movement in Czechoslovakia (namely the activity of the Děvetsil [Butterbur] group, and the Osvobozené divadlo [Liberated Theatre], in both of which Honzl participated).

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2 The list of Honzl's estate was made by Honzl's wife, Marie Honzlová, in 1950–1960. In 2015, it was reorganised by Andrea Jochmanová. The diaries are not listed either in the original or the revised list.

The most remarkable notebooks are those from the 1930s. In this decade, Honzl sometimes wrote two parallel kinds of records: he used one notebook to record important dates and another to keep more extended reflections on various topics and areas of his life. They contain records of his personal and family life, including family trips, daily routines, and reflections on his relationships with his wife Marie and son Jan (Jenda). They also include a miscellany of other notes, for example the train schedule to Řež, where Honzl's family had a cottage; instructions for the preparation of fertilisers and how to trim fruit trees; chess strategies, etc. These entries are juxtaposed with Honzl's more personal reflections on social, political, cultural, and artistic aspects of his life, which I consider to be the most significant ones.

Many of Honzl's entries from the 1930s are devoted, of course, to theatrical life. He reflects on various events, including premieres and performances in Czechoslovakia and abroad; visits and lectures of international theatre directors in Prague (e.g., Erwin Piscator and Vselovod Meyerhold); and the work of his colleagues (e.g., E. F. Burian, Jiří Frejka), among other topics. In addition, Honzl's diaries include lengthy reflections about his own work. He captures thoughts and uncertainties about his work and talent and reflects on his role within artistic circles. He also documents his plans for theatrical productions (including some that were produced and some that were not) and the whole course of preparation for various shows for different Czech stages. Voskovec and Werich's Liberated Theatre, in which Honzl worked as the theatre director in the 1930s, receives particular emphasis. Honzl's entries include reflections on the negotiation process with theatre managers, signing contracts, the search for a script and its transformation or even creation. He also describes difficulties with various playwrights, stage designers, and actors, and provides positive and negative details from the rehearsal process. Last but not least, he captures the changing social and political situation of the 1930s, which affected the operation and repertoire of theatres. Honzl's synopses of Voskovec and Weich's gags based on improvisation at the Liberated Theatre stand out among these entries as unique and significant material. The following excerpt from Honzl's diaries captures the rehearsal process of Voskovec and Werich's adaptation of Eugene Labiche and Marc-Michel's play *The Italian Straw Hat*, which had its premiere on 27 February 1934.

Čtvrtek 1. II. 34

Ráno zkouším Slaměný klobouk. První zkouška. Nebude z toho nic jiného než vaudeville. Protože u V&W by režisér mohl být jen vynálezce gagů. Nejde o aranžmá: člověka – nebo rytmus scény – jde o smích. V&W chtějí své obecenstvo bavit; nic víc. Mají-li fašismus látkou, je ten fašismus pro zábavu. Jak jsem řekl V&W svým humorem nikoho neponižuji. A jde v tomto divadle konec konců jen o peníze. S Plachtou je těžko zkoušet: u něj je humor jen to, co improvizuje. Všechno ostatní: herectví, to už nemůže být humorné, protože to není pro Plachtu dost spontánní. Věšení klobouku na zeď aby spadl, když mu to řeknu, už to neudělá. A když mu nápověda řekne vtip brnk/brnk! – už má zlost a zrovna to neřekne. W. má nevyčerpatelnou invenci. Jeho humor není vtip, ale fantasie. Humorné přiblížení

dvou skutečností k sobě. Nonancourt chce do pokoje. W: Tam nemůžete jít. Je tam stádo slonů a reje (meje) mi tam podlahu – Jindy: W: Tam nemůžete jít, jsou tam tančící derviši, mají na nohou kartáče a tančí, leštice podlahu. A jindy: zámečníci, zedníci atd. – W: Honzl je v plavkách na nohou vysoké boty a revolver a režíruje Strach.”

[...]

Odpol. si připravuji Sl. kl. V noci jdu do divadla. Feurestein dělá výpravu. V. říká, že je to studené, neměl vtip. Jediná vtipná dekorace byla ta krabička sirek, co měla značit Prahu. A Feuer. maluje scénu. Mám už toho malovaného pro vždy dost. Buď „Malované“ – a nebo stavěnou scénu. Ne jako Burian ze skla. Ale ze skutečností. (HONZL 1934: 25–26)³

Thursday 1. II. 34

In the morning I am rehearsing the Straw Hat. The first rehearsal. It will be nothing but vaudeville. Because with V&W, the director could only be a gag inventor. It's not about the arrangement: the man – or the rhythm of the scene – it's about the laughter. V&W want to entertain their audience: nothing more. If fascism is their subject, that fascism is for entertainment. As I said, V&W are not denigrating anyone with their humour. And it's all about the money in this theatre, after all. It's hard to rehearse with Plachta:⁴ with him, humour is just what he improvises. Everything else: acting, it can't be humorous anymore because for Plachta it's not spontaneous enough. Hanging a hat on the wall, so it falls down, when I tell him, he won't do it again. And when the prompter tells him a joke brnk/ brnk! – he's already angry and doesn't say it. W[erich]⁵ has inexhaustible invention. His humour is not a joke, but a fantasy. A humorous combination of two realities. [The character of] Nonancourt wants to go to his room. W[erich]: You can't go there. There's a herd of elephants in there and they're digging (mopping) my floor. – Another time: W[erich]: You can't go in there, there are dancing dervishes; they have brushes on their feet and they're dancing, polishing the floor. And other times: locksmiths, bricklayers, etc. – W[erich]: Honzl is in a bathing suit wearing high boots, holding a revolver, and directing Fear.⁶

[...]

In the afternoon, I am preparing the Straw Hat. At night I am going to the theatre. Feuerstein⁷ is doing the set. V[oskovec] says it's cold; he didn't have a funny idea for it. The only funny decoration was the matchbox that was supposed to stand for Prague. And Feuer[stein] is

3 All the excerpts published here were taken from Milan Obst's typewritten copy of Honzl's diaries and were re-typed and translated by the author of this text.

4 Jindřich Plachta (1899–1952) was a popular Czech comic actor, who was casted in several roles in the Liberated Theatre in the 1930s.

5 All the passages published here are kept in their original form; they were not edited. The only exception is these insertions in the brackets to facilitate readers' understanding.

6 *Strach* [Fear] is a surrealist play by Vítězslav Nezval written in 1930 and staged by Honzl in 1934 (prem. 11. 1. 1934).

7 Bedřich Feuerstein (1892–1936) was a Czech architect, painter, and scenographer who collaborated with renowned Czech theatres, such as the National Theatre and the Liberated Theatre.

painting the set. I've had enough of painting for one lifetime. It's either 'Painted' – or a set being built. Not like Burian⁸ made of glass. Rather of facts.

Another significant focus of Honzl's entries is on his theoretical opinions and reflections on the concepts and ideas of theoreticians which he had been reading (e.g., texts by Henri Bergson, André Breton, Petr Bogatyrev, Sigmund Freud, Roman Jakobson, Maurice Maeterlinck, Jan Mukařovský, Alexander Tairov, Voltaire, Otakar Zich, to name a few) or discussing with someone (Bogatyrev, Mukařovský, Karel Teige, etc.). These range from brief notes to elaborate reflections; they reveal Honzl's critical reading processes and the development of his own theories. Unlike Honzl's published studies, they are sometimes rendered in a less clear or comprehensible manner, and they are often more open and critical.

20. 1. (1934)

[...] Večer jsem volal Mukařovskýho. Chtěl jsem se dovědět něco o Strachu, ale neřekl mi nic. Upozornil jen, že jsem si udělal o noc víc (hráči mají být ve světnici denní). A říkal, že kritika neporozuměla, že všechny osoby jsou hlavní. Protože slouží oslabování thematu strachu, zklamávání: typické: strážník, který vyběhne proti primáři. A pak vykládal jen o sobě, o svém problému formalismu a Šklovského. Čte mi článek proti kritikům formalismu a Šklovského; nehájí formalismus, ale strukturalismus. Proti psychologii, formalismu, sociologii. Říká, že není těžko hájit Šklovského větu: zajímá mne kvalita a technika bavlněné látky, ale nezajímají mne poměry na bavlnářském trhu. Muk: Právě proto, že nás zajímá technika, jakou je udělaná látka, právě proto mne zajímají poměry na bavlnářském trhu. Mám strach, aby Nezval svým manifestem trochu nezdůraznil neodvislost od funkce díla.

A vykládá o struktuře literárního díla a funkce: vztahu ke skutečnosti [...] Postavíme-li vedle sebe dvě slova, libovolná na lexikálním plánu, spojením jejich nezasahuje se buď intencionální skutečnost nebo se může zasáhnout např. kamenný budík – není to ještě věta – může zasáhnout intencionální skutečnost: kamenný budík není. Věta rozhodne o zasažení obou skutečností.

Věda dosahuje transcendentální skutečnosti – proti intencionální – někdy musí svůj soud odvolat, ale to nerozhoduje o tomto zasažení.

Umění dosahuje intencionální skutečnosti, ale obrací se jako háček zpět před skutečností transcendentální.

[...]

Myšlím, že je to příklad myšlení bláznů. Čistě vědecké myšlení, má tu neúprosnou logiku, že se docela podobá bláznivé absurditě. [...] (HONZL 1934: 9-10)

20. 1. (1934)

[...] I called Mukařovský tonight. I wanted to know about Fear, but he didn't tell me anything. He only pointed out that I had made an extra night (players are supposed to be in the day

8 Emil František Burian (1904-1959) was a Czech composer, musician, actor, poet, and one of the most gifted Czech theatre directors, the founder of theatre D, one of the most experimental stages of the avant-garde period.

room). And he said that the critics did not understand that every character in the play is a protagonist. Because they serve to weaken the theme of fear, the letdown: typical: the policeman who darts out against the chief physician.

And then he was just talking about himself, about his problem of formalism and Shklovsky. He reads to me an article against the critics of Shklovsky's formalism; he defends not formalism but structuralism. Against psychology, formalism, and sociology. He says that it is not difficult to defend Shklovsky's sentence: I am interested in the quality and technique of cotton cloth, but I am not interested in the conditions of the cotton market. Muk[ářovský]: Precisely because we are interested in the technique by which the cloth is made, precisely for that reason I am interested in the conditions of the cotton market. I'm afraid that Nezval's manifesto might slightly stress the independence of the work on the function.

And he expounds on the structure of a literary work and the function: the relation to reality. If we put two words arbitrarily on the lexical level next to each other, by combining them, either the intentional reality is not affected or it can be affected, e.g., a stone alarm clock – it is not yet a sentence – the intentional reality can be affected: a stone alarm clock does not exist. The sentence decides about impacting both realities.

Science reaches transcendental reality – against intentional reality – sometimes it has to retract its judgement, but that does not decide the hit.

Art reaches the intentional reality but turns backwards like a hook from the transcendental reality.

[...]

I think this is an example of the thinking of fools [how the fools think]. Purely scientific thinking has such an inexorable logic that is quite similar to crazy absurdity. [...]

Or elsewhere:

26. 12. 1935

[...] A chci napsat něco jiného o divadelní řeči, než mohou ze sebe dostat ti formalisti i s E. F. Burianem. Přišlo mi to na mysl, když jsem si pročetl stať Mukařovského: Čistým subjektivním výrazem je např. spontánní výkřik bolesti nebo radosti. Napadlo mne, že to je jediná divadelní řeč. Spontánní výkřik bolesti nebo radosti. Báseň jej dává hotový nebo zrozený, drama a divadlo má možnost ukazovat, jak se rodí. Lyrismu tam právě proto může nabývat nejprostší věta a je nesmysl užívat verše nebo stylisované prosy. Výklad není nikdy spontánnost. Výklad, tak jak mu rozumí Schiller, Ibsen, nebo všichni ostatní dramatikové. – Čím vším byla řeč na jevišti – říkal jsem Nezvalovi, když mi přečetl v sobotu 21. prosince 1935 v kavárně SIA Zlověstného ptáka. Čím vším už byla?: vyprávěním, veršováním lyrickým nebo epickým, konverzací, přesvědčováním, dokumentováním, líčením, divadelní deformací přednesovou – ale nikdy nebyla spontánností emocionálního výrazu.

Jaká je vůbec spontánnost divadla? Je možné vůbec divadlo jako míra spontánnosti? Breton a Eluard prý chtějí aranžovat náhlá setkání. Mohlo by se i u nás udělat. Setkání Nezvala a Teige u nich – reprodukovat místo – byt Teigův a přenést tam Nezvala. Převést obecenstvo do míst, které zná, které jsou tak známé a přece zapomenuté. Ukázat kus skutečnosti jinak než ve skutečnosti. Bylo by to strašlivé. Asi tak strašlivé, jak se mne zmocnila hrůza, když jsem si

nemohl představit ulici za Novou radnicí, zapomněl jsem ulici a nedovedl jsem si myslit, co je za tímto blokem domů. Vzpomněl jsem na Durychovu povídku o domě, který zmizel v řadě domů. Tento otrěs, kterým si teprve uvědomujeme skutečnost určitých věcí, ten je podobný tomu, když potkáme na divadle věci, staré známé, ale které jsme nikdy nepředpokládali, že uvidíme. Vidět známé v neznámém – tento protiklad je v podstatě každého umění – i dramatického. –

Ale k citátu z Mukařovského /Dialektické rozpory v moderním umění Listy pro umění a kritiku 27.VI.1935/Umění, nebo lépe výraz umělcův není spontánní VÝKŘIK bolesti nebo radosti ačkoliv "nelze popřít, že v uměleckém díle je cosi, co se tomuto výkřiku podobá." Neboť nejde jen o výkřik. Ten není sám výrazem emocionality řeči. Zvykli jsme si, že emocionalita – zvláště emocionalita dramatická je něco společného nebo shodného s výkřikem bolesti, leknutí, vzlyku, zlosti – krátce emocionálního pobouření, kdy se člověk blíží animalitě emocí – pes se také léká, vykřikne a pláče. Ale dramaticčnost, skutečné drama má více společného s člověkem než se psem. Skutečná dramaticčnost je to, co – jak jsem řekl – lyrika nemůže sprostředkovat, protože jí k tomu chybí materiál – má jen skutečnost slova, z níž může dělat všechny osoby, věci a svět – a divadlo má věci, má skutečné objekty, z nichž může stavět svět fantazie. To co je společné skutečné lyrice a skutečnému dramatickému umění je proměna skutečnosti do tvarů emocionálního světa. Dramatické slovo je slovo jednáčícího, proměňující se – a musí už jednou súčtovat s představou dramaticčnosti jako tragismu, hádky, zlosti, sváru. Domovnícká nebo vojenská dramaticčnost. Dramaticčnost myslícího a cítícího člověka, který nezapomíná na svět, pro vzbouřenou žluč.

Tedy proti Mukařovského "emocionalitě řeči", bych postavil Bretonovu větu emocionální, která se vynořuje z paměti nebo ze sna: /hledal jsem Spojité nádoby a otevřel jsem je rázem na stránce, kde je ta věta a začal jsem na onom místě číst:/ "Nazítí, v půl sedmé ráno, při probuzení jsem si poznamenal tuto větu: "V krajinách krajního kraje severu, pod lampami, které táhnou v řadách.....bloudí tebe čekající Olga.' Věty, které mají emocionálnost nikoli fyziologickou ale psychickou. (HONZL 1934-1937: 92-93)

26. 12. 1935

[...] And I want to write something different about theatrical speech to what the formalists and E. F. Burian can get out of themselves. It came to me when I read Mukařovský's⁹ essay: Pure subjective expression is, for example, a spontaneous cry of pain or joy. It occurred to me that this was the only theatrical speech. A spontaneous cry of pain or joy. A poem presents it ready-made or born; drama and theatre have the opportunity to show how it is born. That is why even the simplest sentence can become lyrical and using verse or stylised prose is nonsense. Interpretation (výklad) is never a spontaneous process, as Schiller, Ibsen, or all other dramatists understand it. – What was all the speech on the stage – I told Nezval¹⁰ when he was reading The

9 Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975) was a Czech aesthetician, and literary theorist, one of the founders of the Prague Linguistic Circle, and one of the main proponents of the structuralist approach to analysing works of art.

10 Vítězslav Nezval (1900-1958) was a Czech poet, writer and translator, one of the leading figures of Poetism, a Czech avant-garde movement, and Surrealism.

Sinister Bird¹¹ to me on Saturday, 21 December 1935, in the SIA café. It was already narration, lyrical or epic versification, conversation, persuasion, documentation, depiction, theatrical deformation of presentation – but never the spontaneous emotional expression.

What is the spontaneity of theatre anyway? Is theatre as a measure of spontaneity even possible? Breton and Eluard are said to want to arrange sudden encounters. It could be done here. The meeting of Nezval and Teige¹² at their place, reproduce the place – Teige's apartment and transfer Nezval there. Take the audience to the places they know, which are so familiar and yet forgotten. To show a piece of reality in a different way than in reality. It would be terrible. About as horrible as the horror that seized me when I couldn't imagine the street behind the New Town Hall; I forgot the street and couldn't imagine what was behind that block of houses. I remembered Durych's¹³ short story about the house that disappeared into the row of houses. This jolt, by which we are only becoming aware of the reality of certain things, is similar to when we meet objects at the theatre, old things we know but never expected to see. Seeing the familiar in the unfamiliar – this contradiction is at the heart of all art – even dramatic art. –

Concerning the excerpt from Mukařovský's /Dialectical Contradictions in Modern Art Letters for Art and Criticism 27.VI.1935/Art, or rather the artist's expression, is not a spontaneous EXCLAMATION of pain or joy, although 'it cannot be denied that there is something in a work of art which resembles this exclamation.' For it is not just an exclamation. It is not itself an expression of the emotionality of speech. We have come to think that emotionality – particularly dramatic emotionality – is something similar or identical to the cry of pain, fright, sobbing, anger – short of emotional outrage, when one approaches the animality of emotion – dogs also become frightened, cry out, and weep. But drama, a real drama, shares more in common with the human than with a dog. A real drama is what, as I said, the lyricism cannot convey, because it lacks material, – it has only the reality of the word from which it can make all persons, things, and the world – and the theatre has things, has real objects from which it can build a world of fantasy. What real lyrical and real dramatic art have in common is the transformation of reality into the shapes of an emotional world. The dramatic word is the word of the actor, transforming – and it must already reckon with the idea of the dramatic as tragic, quarrelsome, angry, contentious. A janitorial or military drama. The drama of a thinking and feeling man who does not forget the world because of rebelling bile.

Thus, against Mukařovský's 'emotionality of speech', I would contrast Breton's sentence of emotion, which emerges from memory or from a dream:/I searched the Communicating Vessels and opened it at once to page, where the sentence is, and began to read at that point:/ "The next morning, about six thirty, on waking, I jotted down this walking sentence: 'In the regions of the far Far North, under the smoking lamps . . . wandering, waiting for you, Olga.'¹⁴ Sentences that have emotionality not physiological but psychological.

11 *Zlověsný pták* [The Sinister Bird] is a surrealist play by Vítězslav Nezval.

12 Karel Teige (1900–1951) was one of the leading theoreticians of the Czech avant-garde movement, critic, and visual artist, who maintained contacts with leading figures of European avant-garde movements, including Bauhaus, Dada, and Surrealism.

13 Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962) was a Czech writer of Catholic-oriented literature.

14 English translation is taken from (BRETON 1990: 100).

Honzl's diaries also include reproductions of conversations among leading figures of Czech avant-garde circles, which often took place in Prague's cafés. These entries are valuable as they capture the atmosphere of these encounters and offer a unique testimony about the turbulent exchange of thoughts, opinions, works of art, studies and journals, as well as jokes and gossip, which took place among these artists, critics, and theoreticians. Some of the most frequently recorded conversations are between Vítězslav Nezval, Karel Teige, Toyen (referred to as Manka in the diaries), and Jindřich Štyrský.

Ve středu: Nezval, Štyrský, Teige, Manka a já v Mánesu. Štyrský je velmi nespokojen, že nepřipravuje časopis, že se nic neděje. Nezval sepisuje program časopisu, ale to Štyrský nepsolouchá, ani to necení. „Ty si to tady píšeš, ale bude-li to.“ Teige chce psát proti Dalimu – (jeho článek o architektuře) Nezval je dotčen – a vyčítá Štyrskému – když Teige odešel – že dával návrh, aby Teige vzal věc časopisu na sebe. A pak jde o dopis Nezvalův Bretonovi. Štyrský ho čte, podrážděn „Hrozně posranej před Bretonem.“ Teige hned totéž. Nezval: v čem. Št: No tady jak říkáš o tom, že každý řádek chceš znát. „N: Ale to je tedy pravda. Zeptej se Teige, Honzla, který se pro mne obětoval a překládal mi celé Vases communicants, co já jsem se Teige natrápil.“ Št: Já ti nemohu říct v čem, ale celý ten dopis je tak uctívá, že se mi to zdá sebezpodceňování. Nezval se dovolává mne. „To je můj poměr k Bretonovi. A to je moje přednost, že když něžnost, tak jsem v ní celý. Že když jde o obdiv, že se nebojím ho přiznat. To aniž bych sebe podceňoval myslím, že Spojité nádoby jsou taková kniha, že pro ni musí být obdiv, vzpomeň si, co před druhým manifestem a před Vasami jsme o Surrealismu věděli my. A myslím, že je to má přednost že se nebojím přiznat se k věci, a že se to ukáže nakonec správným. A také myslím, že Breton je člověk, který z těchhle řádek pozná mne celého – a zeptej se Honzla, že s námi jednal docela otevřeně a přátelsky.“ Já: myslím, že v dopisu není nic, co by neodpovídalo pravdě, a že ten dopis vyjadřuje opravdu zamilovaný poměr Nezvalův k Bretonovi. [...] Teige mlčí. Štyrský mlčí – Manka mlčí – já říkám, že zatím je rozhodující, jak odpoví Breton – a loučím se. (HONZL 1934: 116–117)

Wednesday: Nezval, Štyrský¹⁵, Teige, Manka¹⁶, and I in Mánes¹⁷. Štyrský is very unhappy that he is not preparing the magazine, and nothing is happening. Nezval is writing the programme for the magazine, but Štyrský doesn't listen, nor does he appreciate it. 'You are writing it here, but will it ever be.' Teige wants to write against Dalí – (his article on architecture) Nezval is offended – and reproaches Štyrský – after Teige has left – for suggesting [making the suggestion] Teige should take charge of the magazine. And then there is Nezval's letter to Breton. Štyrský reads it, irritated, 'absolutely chicken-shit in front of Breton.' Teige does the same. Nezval: in what way? Št[yrský]: Well here, as you say about wanting to know every line. 'N[e]zval: But that's true, then. Ask Teige, Honzl, who sacrificed himself for me and translated

15 Jindřich Štyrský (1899–1942) was a Czech Surrealist painter and scenographer, one of the founders and leading figures of the Czech Surrealist group.

16 Manka, i.e., Toyen (1902–1980) was a Czech-French painter, one of the founders of the Czech Surrealist group in Prague, as well as one of the renowned representatives of European Surrealism.

17 Mánes is an exhibition hall, which was built in the 1930 on the banks of the Vltava River. In the 1930s it included a restaurant and a coffee shop where Czech avant-garde artists liked to meet.

for me the whole Communicating Vessels, which I bothered Teige with.' Št[ýrský]: I can't tell you in what way, but the whole letter is so reverential that it seems self-deprecating. Nezval appeals to me. 'This is my affair with Breton. And that is my virtue, that when tenderness is there, I am all in it. That if it comes to admiration, I am not afraid to admit it. That without underestimating myself, I think that Communicating Vessels is such a book that there must be admiration for it, remember what we knew about Surrealism before the second manifesto and before Vessels. And I think it's my advantage that I'm not afraid to admit things, and that it turns out to be correct in the end. And I also think that Breton is a man who will know the whole of me from these lines – and ask Honzl, he has been quite open and friendly with us.' Me: I think there is nothing in the letter that does not correspond to the truth, and the letter expresses Nezval's truly amorous affair with Breton. [...] Teige is silent. Štýrský is silent – Manka is silent – I say that for the time being we shall have to wait and see how Breton responds – and I say goodbye.

The interest in or even admiration of Surrealism, one of the leading avant-garde movements in 1930s Prague (the proponents of which were all the participants of the above-quoted meeting), is clear from Honzl's 1930s diaries. Inclined toward the poetics of Surrealism, Honzl often describes his dreams and erotic experiences in his diaries; some entries show associative linking of ideas. Apart from this, Honzl's diaries include excerpts from and translations of French surrealist authors, reflections on their ideas, reproductions of numerous discussions on the theme of Surrealism, as well activities and plans of Czech and French surrealists, etc. Through entries such as these Honzl's diaries offer a unique view of the reception of French Surrealism in Prague, the cooperation between French and Czech surrealist groups, and the role of Surrealism in artistic circles in the 1930s. Honzl's diaries provide some of the most valuable testimonies available on Czech-French connections at this time. Among his entries is, for example, an account of his 1933 trip to France with fellow Czech artists Nezval and Vančura, an important part of which is their encounter with French surrealists in Paris. He also captures a visit by French surrealists to Prague in 1934.

29. III. pátek

[...]

Večer Bretonova přednáška v Mánesu. Okouzlovatel – retor – hlava se Stínem – jasné a přesné formulace. Poesie je nejvyšší na žebříku hodnot. Hegel citován. Krizi humoru po Sercym/?.

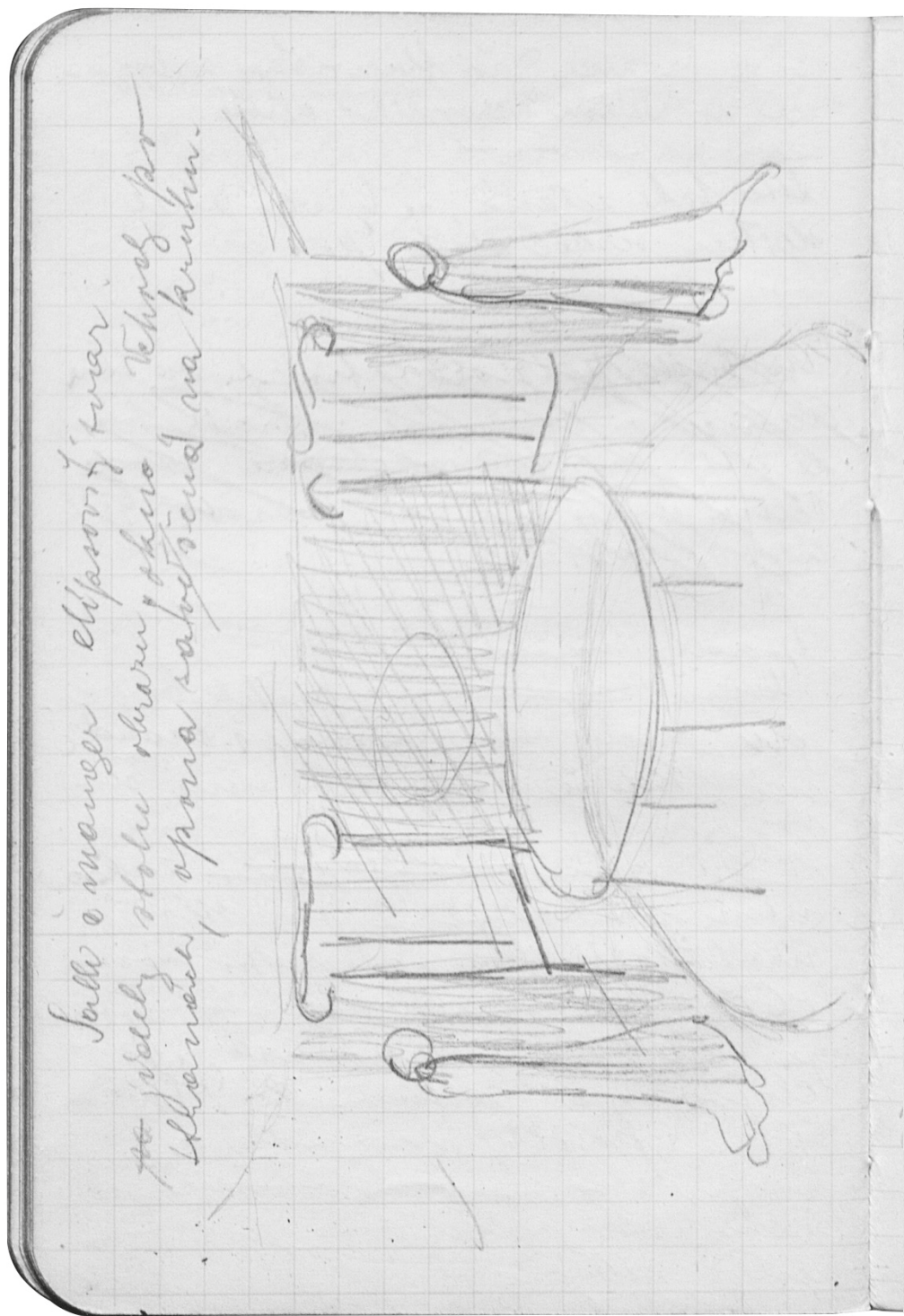
Potom večerí se v sále Mánesa. Eluard: Proč lidé omalovávají obrazy? To je lepší omalovávat přírodu. Třikrát umíral. Lékař v Davosu po velkém krvácení z ucha: Vy jste ještě živ? Bylo to tuberkulosní krvácení. Nemá 1/2 plic. A žaludek nemá zdravý. Vypráví o Ernstovi, který u německé artilerie ostřeloval místo, kde byl Eluard, francouzský pěšák. Vzpomene na to při přednášce. Podati si ruku.

Br. a El. byli u Štýrského – jsou nadšeni – autentické je jejich nejvýznamnější slovo – na obvodu surrealismu.

Hoffmeister odtáhl Eluarda od nás – naproti Majerové, která kouří dýmku. Hnusná teplota. (HONZL 1934–1937: 55–56)

[archive]

Fig. 1: A drawing from Honzl's undated notebook.
(Notebook with black-gray checked cover, no pag.) Jindřich Honzl's Archive.

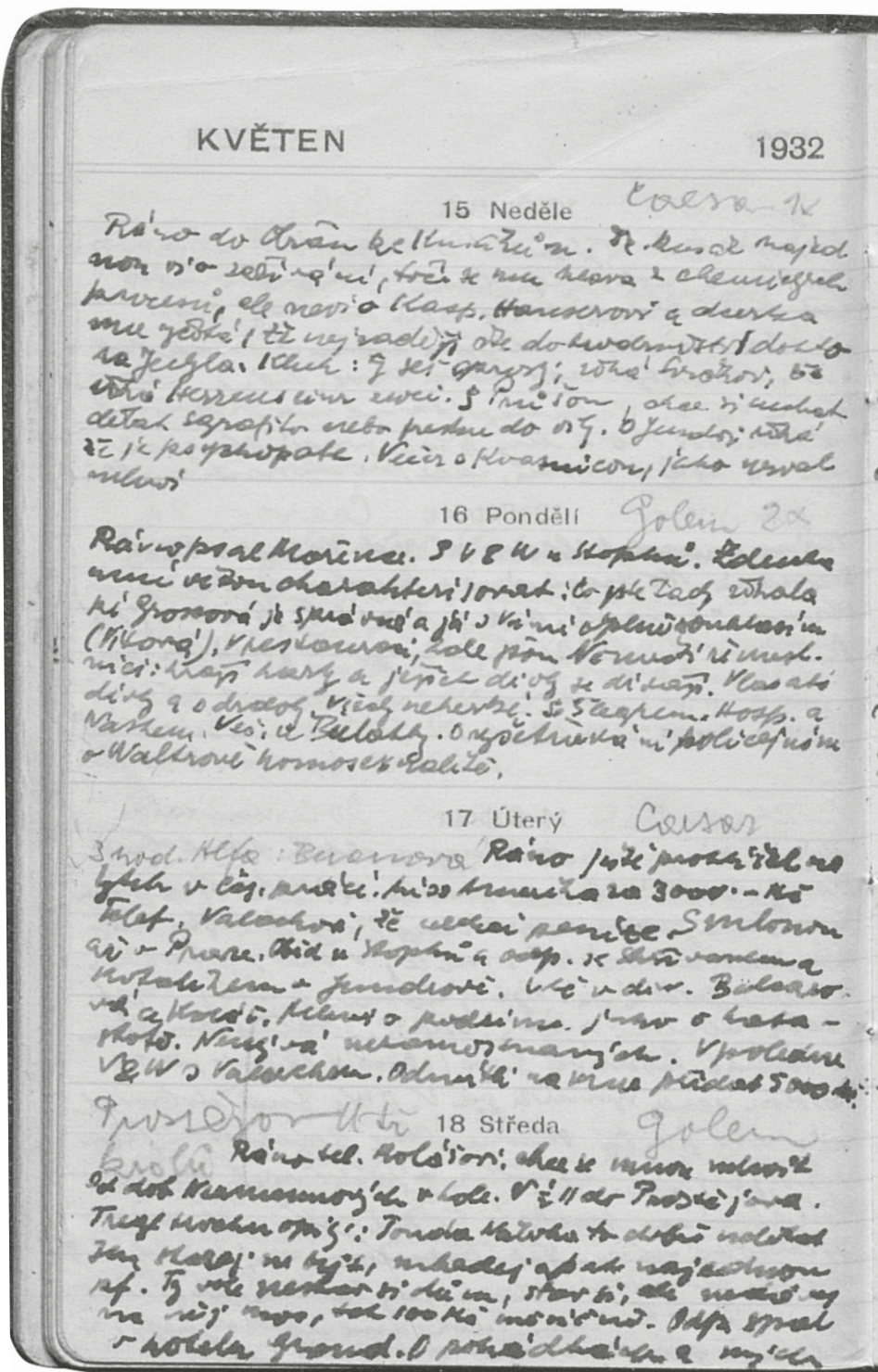


Scéma na poušti, pouštině ale
 lépe krajina. Každá bílá na
 ní svítí světle, některé do
 ní se pánějí, a některé se do
 ní se jasní. Z přední krajiny
 fialové světlo. U podlahy
 kam se bor světla na paprsky
 pouze strany, s obrovským
 jasným v patě narůstající
 krajiny, jen několik jasné
 úroveň, reflexem slunce.
 Sthonyky postar jvi se tma
 ri. Hrátko bílé, nebo světlé
 barev.

Rečba krajina. Paprsky všim
 krajiny na podlahě zářící
 uplně světlé světlo. Všechny
 slonky obrovské poměr tma
 rých a, Rosadi krajiny, hory
 níže se mořem a krajiny
 a fialovým odstínem, doli
 přechází do smaragdové.
 celně k níže.

[archive]

Fig. 2: A page from Honzl's diary (1932, no pag.). Jindřich Honzl's Archive.



KVĚTEN

1932

15 Neděle

Česko - 16

Ráno do Brna k Hlaváčkově. Debesně najednou
naše sebrání, brzo se nám hlava z chemického
průmyslu, ale nově o klas. Hlaváčkově a dříve
mne ještě i tě vyradili o de. do hodiny do
na jezera. Klub: 7 set gary; vha' hroš; 62
vha' hroš; 100 rve. S. P. 1000. Šel i ušet
dět. sepr. v. nebo p. do 07. 6. J. 100; vha'
22. 12. p. p. p. p. V. 100. H. 100. 100. 100.
mluší

16 Pondělí

Golem 20

Ráno psal Mařine. S. V. 8. 10. u. H. 100. 100. 100.
mne ve sm. charakter. J. 100. 100. 100. 100.
H. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
(H. 100). 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
mne: 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
dív. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
N. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.

17 Úterý

Česko

3. hod. H. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.

18 Středa

Golem

Ráno tel. H. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.
100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100. 100.

predstavení v Klubovně, Husi zto ud
jia udítat, cyphon na tya predstavení
akrodeta viali

1932

KVĚTEN

Prose

19 Čtvrtek

Coera

Na sv. Kupce je s Mridaem. v Scholoni
Odp. mluví a smelou a muzik predsta
venich. Wbndre se dela s chadk. Pošta se
se. P. os predpsem a 4 mi predstavenim. No.
vich nunc otvur uposornu je, ze mi ranneti ke
2:30 foloni, sere bndon de tot. D praci s Bnu
Veo. se s V & W potva dal, se W. vs pred knozalem
jho parni a kund. rde, a jak dat ta, co vedet de tot

20 Pátek

Golden Sky

de hvi. Oshon National Pa'no s gen kampan mluví a
volic ych vdeh. Je to pír no zecotvaloti mato
vraty olov a vlemi mato sech. Fite ze slu
ne voding. Tjoud o prof. Gregarui. Zahraena
povora. Jel do Otraz q tam dal V & W pro
loperis. Jate nev n palki no citli. Vich na
predstaveni se Sidon. D Bndueron: Historie
nemá y suam Kio davat Odeu y mudri.

21 Sobota

Golden Coera

Pa'no od 11 na sceně. Coje 2070 ke (na 17 dni
di. O. odp. v divadle. Foto divadla a vich.
Pracovníci a 1 hod. na sceně. Kio venci
toli. P. H. W. W. W. x Kobi na Vork, ze si scia
Tirani. Ke mne a dora' stejne volzale ve.
Vie se Stepi rhem. Mlvi o bide ab tot adstej
min ypu roben, ze neni bida? Ze soci vider.
Mlvi o bve cerke nollam to Tiranie a vret.
A o rchivich v Nemecha. Jlu o bndabem
jipchovom. Nic o obahe. Predstavuje
mi fotografa, se Sky in bi py rosam. To.
Logrofovi man' ari vinde aparku' y. D
spolavort: Mridine si' daz' ut. A vy fu hoi

[archiv]

29. III. Friday

[...]

In the evening, Breton's lecture in Mánes. Charmer – orator – head with Shadow – clear and precise formulations. Poetry is the highest on the ladder of values. Hegel quoted. The crisis of humour after Sercy/?/.

Then dining in the hall of Mánes. Eluard: Why do people paint pictures? It's better to paint nature. He was dying three times. A doctor in Davos after a large bleeding from the ear: You are still alive? It was a tuberculous hemorrhage. Half of his lungs are missing. And his stomach is not healthy. He is talking about Ernst, who was with the German artillery and who was shelling the place where Eluard, a French infantryman, was. He recalls it in the lecture. Handshakes.

Br[eton] and El[uard] were at Štyrský's place – they are enthusiastic – authentic is their most significant word – on the perimeter of Surrealism.

Hoffmeister¹⁸ has dragged Eluard away from us – toward Majerová¹⁹, who is smoking a pipe. Nasty temperature.

The war diaries, dating from 1939–1945, are very brief. One can assume that this was because Honzl withdrew from public life and did not want to compromise his own or anyone else's privacy during the war times. Honzl's more extended entries only reappeared after the end of the war in 1945, and reflect several social, political, cultural, and artistic events of that time. In the last diaries, those from the turn of the 1950s, Honzl was again brief; his deteriorating health and doctor's appointments became the central theme of his last notebooks.

To summarise this brief overview and 'degustation', the diaries of Jindřich Honzl offer a unique (yet very personal) window into important aspects of interwar and post-war Czechoslovakia, including the atmosphere; the relationships between artists; and the cultural, social, and political situation. By offering a previously missing perspective on these decades, they complete in many ways the picture provided by the diaries and memoirs of Honzl's colleagues and friends, such as Vítězslav Nezval, Karel Honzík, Karel Teige, and Jan Werich (which have already been or are about to be published), and contribute to a fuller understanding of these times. I hope that with the support of the Institute of Czech Literature of the Academy of Science, an edition of Honzl's diaries will be published, and this valuable material can become accessible to a wider audience.

18 Adolf Hoffmeister (1902–1973) was a Czech painter, caricaturist, scenographer, writer, and one of the founders of the Butterbur movement.

19 Marie Majerová (1882–1967) was a Czech leftist (communist) writer and journalist.

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