

# REPETITION AND UNIQUENESS IN ART

In order to surpass ourselves, we repeat. Sometimes, however, the wheels start spinning idly and we may not notice it. Then we repeat incorrectly. German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel noted this treacherous dialectic – and how easily repetition gives rise to fetishism – yet he recommended: repeat, repeat! This incentive of his has to do with wisdom, as proclaimed by a well-known Latin proverb, whose Central-European popularity can apparently be traced back to the Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer, who saw repetition as the key to understanding the world and events in general. In short, *einmal ist keinmal*, as the thinkers of a nation that has many times burned itself in the sun of its most daring ideas say. Repetition transforms the possible into the necessary: what at first appeared to be mere coincidence cools and hardens into a lawful form. Through repetition, actions gain seriousness, Hegel would summarize. To repeat means to acknowledge or verify the value of something. The first glance attracts attention, the second actually *sees* – and *testifies*. It is only at second glance that we discover importance, but also mediocrity or kitsch. And uniqueness, even if it is always already lost, has likewise its origin in repetition.

According to Walter Benjamin – another philosopher of repetition and uniqueness, art theorist and, among other things, admirer of Bertolt Brecht – repetition is a method of preserving historical phenomena. To Benjamin, the highest human power is not generosity and empathy, but memory as the ability

to bring to mind what has hitherto been (supposedly) out of reach, unknown, and yet powerful. In psychoanalysis, this is how people salvage themselves; in revolution, this is how they rescue society. Contemporary philosophical revolutionary Slavoj Žižek believes that only a repeated revolution is a legitimate revolution. After all, punk is only truly punk with the slogan “Punk’s not dead”. Ultimately, writing has a Benjaminian aura of salvation and revolution as well. If it does justice to its material, writing not only saves the past from oblivion and sometimes even from distortion, but it also provides the material with meaning. The texts offered in this year’s second issue of *Divadelní revue* attempt to do just that in many explorations of various historical periods.

Pavel Drábek opens the standard studies section with a theoretical reflection on adaptation as a variable that, in its essential paradoxicality, always turns to the inimitable. He asks how such a turn is possible and what a theory that attempts to interpret an unrepeatable theatrical experience can objectively offer. In fact, he boldly puts theory back on its feet in a Hegelian manner, as he searches for the possibilities of a common theoretical starting point, which must functionally *repeat* itself if it is to capture the *uniqueness* of a theatrical performance. The second study on the dialectic of repetition and uniqueness approaches the issue from the opposite end: Otto Drexler reconstructs the life story and work of the versatile Emanuel Famíra. The legacy of this avant-garde artist and politically significant personality, unclassifiable in his multifariousness and internal ideological tension, seems unsuited to the simplistic narratives of history, and so Famíra has remained forgotten and misunderstood. Drexler’s study carefully explores the edges of this cultural void and, through the apparatus of memory studies and representation theory, points to the fascinating contradictions in Famíra’s memory traces

that have prevented their integration into historical and aesthetic consciousness.

The articles by Klára Černá and Markéta Polochová also explore the theme of repetition against the backdrop of specific artistic cases. Klára Černá's study compares *Cutting Timber: An Irritation* with the Czech staging of the famous novel at the Theatre Na zábradlí. The analysis of the Prague production demonstrates one current trend in adaptation – namely, that we associate rather than narrate – and provides a detailed analysis of individual staging and literary motifs in Bernhard's works from *Cutting Timber. An Irritation* through the dramas *The Ignoramus and the Madman* and *Immanuel Kant to Ritter, Dene, Voss*. Markéta Polochová opens up the topic of the return of Henrik Ibsen's plays in the work of Czech director Jan Nebeský. She notices that Ibsen's poetics, to which Nebeský turned from his early theatrical shows to his late works, allows to interpret the director's productions as a coherent and unique whole. Sometimes repetition is kitsch or obsession, and sometimes it is a code that unlocks the universe.

Among the reviewed articles in the Materialia section, we have included a text by Martin Hanoušek on the amateur theatre of the Prague nobility, which was run by the Clam-Gallas family in their Old-Town residence at the beginning of the 19th century. The author examines their philanthropic activities from the perspective of historical circumstances and the artistic and operational nature of this theatrical undertaking, which was extraordinary both in terms of its form and circumstances. Jana Luková presents an exceptional discovery in the municipal theatre in Bratislava, formerly known as Pressburg, which at the end of the 19th century was one of the most important institutions of its kind in Austria-Hungary. She reconstructs the historical background of the recently discovered and described original large-format paintings

from the local auditorium. With Michal Topor, we then move from the 19th to the 20th century. The author delves into the poetics and metaphysics of Otokar Fischer in a text layered with Fischer's thorough reading of Arthur Schnitzler's work, with particular attention to the motifs of puppets, illusion, déjà vu, and fate.

Petra Ježková and Pavel Drábek write about another archival discovery. The finding of a typescript of Kvapil's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for radio prompted a contextualized analysis, in which the authors provide insight into Kvapil's aesthetic and dramaturgical thinking and present his fascination with Shakespeare's dramatic work as an example of creative and artistically innovative repetition. Věra Velemanová commemorates the work of artist Libor Fára, who would have celebrated his 100th birthday this year. She focuses on Fára's typographic work for Prague theatres – posters and programs – and on his scenographic style, which is characterized by its visual repetitiveness and rhythm. The section concludes with a non-historical, quantitative-qualitative research analysis of a questionnaire survey on the professional conditions of theatre critics and journalists in Czechia by Daniela Machová.

In addition to reviewed formats, we also include other texts. Otto Drexler conducted an interview with philosopher Vojtěch Kolman, professor based at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, addressing primarily Kolman's monograph *Co je dialektika?* (What is Dialectics?), published two years ago. The renown Czech philosopher of language and art, logic and dialectics reflects on the social roots and limits of knowledge and its constitution between internal states and formalized rules. He has long been researching the epistemological potential of humour and the necessity of error and doubt for the possibility of arriving at the truth. And it is precisely repeated error and humour – specifically for their

incongruity in relation to circumstances – that expose the conditions of understanding and reason in general, not only in artistic creation.

Anyone who has ever visited the Czech city of Liberec will undoubtedly recall its unique architectural genius. Michael Sodomka contributed to the Focus section of this issue with an essay on the theatrical adaptation of this cultural phenomenon. Against the backdrop of an analysis of *SIALská trojčata* (The SIAL Triplets), a production by the Small Stage of F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec, the author also answers a more general question: what place do regional themes have in current Czech theatrical scenes? In the second essay, Vojtěch Voska takes us back to the Theatre Na zábradlí, whose long-term strategies for working with audiences, have helped to create a unique institutional “love-brand”. The third article in the section, by Otto Kauppinen, focuses on current trends not only in

theatres but also in theatre theory, targeting the course and debate topics of this year’s Perspectives of Theatre Studies conference. In the Desiderata section, Michal Denci’s artistic essay returns readers to the very structure and meaning of repetition. In several philosophical reflections – from Goldoni’s *commedia dell’arte* through Antonin Artaud, Claudia Castellucci, Federico García Lorca, and prominent proponents of flamenco back to Harlequin – Denci plays with the idea that theatre is repetition in which we overcome death: a life *post mortem*.

Thinking ultimately means nothing more than attempting to creatively repeat the thoughts of others and failing to do so in a reflective manner, as suggested, for example, in Michal Denci’s essay. We have made one such attempt with this issue. Its assessment from now on belongs exclusively to the reader’s opinion – the second gaze.

