

# THE LIVING POWER OF SCENOGRAPHY: SPACE, BODY, PERCEPTION

The current issue of *Theatre Revue* is mainly devoted to scenographic themes, and therefore it returns partly to the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) and recalls the symposium of the Scenography Working Group IFTR/FIRT, which is always held during the PQ in cooperation with the Cabinet for the Study of Czech Theatre (KČD) of the IDU and the Department of Theatre Studies at Charles University. This tradition was founded by Eva Šormová, long-time head of the KČD, together with Mirka Potůčková and colleagues from abroad. Šormová's contribution to the integration of the former Theatre Institute into the structure of IFTR/FIRT, one of the world's largest organisations of theatre scholars, active theatre practitioners and students of theatre, is essential.

Eva Šormová (1944-2017) would have celebrated her 80th birthday this year. We wanted to commemorate her solemn jubilee in the form of a scenographic theme: let the current issue be a tribute to an unforgettable colleague and teacher.

In the second volume of this year's *Theatre Revue*, we try to show the possibilities and faces of scenography, the embodiment of the world through it, from different angles and in different historical periods - from the Jesuit theatre to contemporary tendencies of scenographic creation and its reflection. Some of the articles are published in Czech, some in English.

The Studies section opens with a text by Věra Velemanová focusing on Czech scenography in the second half

of the 1980s. The article entitled "The last collaborative opus of Ewald Schorm and Jan Dušek. Action scenography at the crossroads" follows some of the author's articles published in previous issues and editions of *Theatre Revue*, dealing with the work of the scenographer Jan Dušek. This time Velemanová analyses the set design for the production of Roland Harwood's play *The Dresser* (Garderobiér), which became the designer's last collaboration with director Ewald Schorm at the Na zábradlí Theatre (1987).

The study "Vratislav Effenberger's theatrical studies from seventies and the question of contracting authority" by Tomáš Kubart, which is a revealing treatise on the theatrical texts of the literary theorist and art historian Vratislav Effenberger, the leading figure of the Surrealist Group and editor of the surrealist review *Analogon*. The author considers the works the scholarly community neglected to be essential contributions to Czech theatre structuralism.

Kristýna Kovyršina is a young theatre scholar who began to focus on twentieth-century Czech scenography during her studies. Her study "Continual site specific" is related to her expertise and the fact that she is very familiar with this work, even as a native of South Bohemia. At the same time, she brings to our spectrum a view of the present and future of scenography, which goes beyond its own former borders (and the borders of classical theatre spaces) and uses means and tendencies applied, for example, in contemporary visual art.

Šárka Havlíčková Kyssová's article "Endangered Heart: Image Schemas as the Organising Principle of Direction-scenographic Concept for the Brno Production of Händel's *Alcina*" deals with the role of scenography in creating meaning in opera productions, specifically on the example of the Brno production of Händel's *Alcina* from 2022, directed by Jiří Heřman. The author uses cognitive

science methodologies such as the theory of conceptual metaphor and image schemas to analyse the interaction of scenography with music and text in the creation of the theatrical experience. In particular, the paper demonstrates, through the scenic conception of the lament aria “Ah! mio cor”, the cognitive structures by which the spatial elements of scenography enhance the emotional intensity and thematic depth of the opera.

In the section *Materialia* we publish three studies, one in Czech and two in English, presenting and interpreting unique archival material from different historical periods. The older period is represented by Martin Bažil and Kateřina Bobková-Valentová’s study “Forest, palace, and sky on the Jesuit school stage. Scenic devices and stage actions in the play about St. Stanislaus and St. Wenceslaus by Georg Auschitzer (Świdnica 1703)” The text was written and further developed from an earlier study published in German, and provides an interesting insight into Baroque scenographic practice in the specific environment of Jesuit schools. The practices of stage design in the Jesuit school system have been relatively little described; the article, together with the Schematic Scenario of the piece in question, brings welcome new insights to the subject of stage design.

Dorota Jarzabek-Wasył in her text “Actors’ Scripts. From Handwritten Marginalia to Acting Practices of the Nineteenth Century” deals with the handwritten notes in actors’ scripts and their role in relation to the text and its further transmission between acting generations. Using the example of manuscripts comprising 95 roles by Warsaw actor Alojzy Żółkowski Jr. (1814-1889), the author shows that physical interaction with the script, consisting of repeated handling and memorization, left a tactile imprint that connected actors across generations. Through this sensory engagement, the script became a living, evolving

document that captured both the work of the actor and the ephemeral nature of the performance.

Natalie Cierniak’s article “Exploring the Influence of Stage Managers’ Reports on Theatre Research: A Case Study of Archival Documents” focuses on the importance of stage managers’ records, which were originally used to track operational issues. The author analyses the records from 1972-1982, compares them with the current ones (from 2021-2024) and shows that these documents provide valuable information about the institutions and socio-political conditions of the time. The research contributes to expanding the use of stage managers’ reports as source material for theatrical research.

In the *Focus* section, the Brno-based theatre scholar Iva Mikulová reflects on the current relationship of theatre producers to the so-called “classics”, especially on the stages of our national theatres, and also discusses classics as a contemporary concept. Taking into account the findings of translational studies, the essay revises the questions of the director’s relationship to the dramatic text and calls for an abandonment of evaluating theatrical productions according to “fidelity to the original author”.

The *Desiderata* section is dedicated to the special personality of the nobleman Leopold Lažanský, whose life and theatrical activities were elaborated by Berenika Zemanová in her dissertation and in her recently published book *The Count Plays Theatre*. In the text “Nine Years with the Count Who Plays Theatre”, the author describes the journeys she took during her research, which were followed by the diverse experiences of meeting the people who helped her throughout the process. The article is also, on a general level, a remarkable probe into the work of (not only) a theatre historian.

In order to live up to the breadth and in terms of the time zones that we

are trying to cover in our issue, we are this time placing two interviews in the structure of the magazine: the first, conducted by Věra Velemanová, concerns this year's double anniversary of the stage designer and architect Vlastislav Hofman (1884-1964). We want to show this important figure of Czech theatre from a more personal perspective, so the interview was conducted with the artist's two descendants – his granddaughter Adriana Skálová and her brother Leonard Ragusa. It is accompanied by family photographs and excerpts from Hofman's hand-drawn catalogue of his own scenographic works.

The second interview was conducted by Amálie Bulandrová with the costume designer Simona Rybáková, whose opinions on the tendencies of contemporary scenography, the direction the Prague Quadrennial is taking, the position of the costume designer within the production,

etc. are inspiring in their breadth of outlook and their efforts to understand costume design in a historical context, in a kind of constant “mode of timelessness.”

The structure of our issue is again complemented by the News section, in which this time we include a “report” on the Scenography Working Group symposium, which took place in June 2023 in cooperation with the Cabinet for the Study of Czech Theatre and the Department of Theatre Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, on the fourth floor of the Faculty's building on Palach Square.

In this issue, we present scenography not only as a metaphorical representation of the world, but also as an active part of a theatrical performance that is in constant interaction with the actor's body. We reflect on the diverse approaches to scenography that animate theatre making and bridge contemporary and historical practice.

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