

**Performance Beyond Borders in Twenty-first Century Prague: Topography of a New
Theatre-Making Context**

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

Within the framework of the sociology of theatre, this thesis explores the current performance-making landscape of Prague, mapping the emergence of the *nové divadlo* (new theatre) movement since 2000. An examination of the historical development of Czech theatre foregrounds the discussion of contemporary practice, charting its changing social-political role in domestic and international contexts. Theatre's significance in forging an ethnolinguistically defined national consciousness is considered as a legacy that continues to impact the field. Theatrical values originating in the nineteenth-century national revival are traced through the interwar avant-garde, dissident small theatre movement of the 1960s and auteur's theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. The Velvet Revolution of 1989 and theatre artists' contributions to the defeat of communism are considered as catalysing a period of self-reflexivity, as theatres grappled with new logistical infrastructures and faced a crisis of purpose both dramaturgical and social in scope. These changes are framed by discussion of the divergent visions of the country's future posited by Václav Havel and Václav Klaus throughout the 1990s, as well as tensions surrounding European Union ascension and other globalizing processes.

A close examination of the *nové divadlo* infrastructure that has arisen in the past twenty years identifies the strategies by which this faction of the field has forged a third theatre-making space, distinct from either the repertory system or the pre-revolution avant-garde. Central to this discussion is a consideration of the *nové divadlo*'s companies, venues and festivals as both reactive and active: responding to an increasingly international city and, simultaneously, actively positioning Czech theatre on world stages. The work and critical reception of *Farma v jeskyni* (Farm in the Cave) and *Krepsko*, both self-defining as "international" by virtue of their composition and international touring presence, are

considered with regard to the companies' dramaturgy, methodology and social function. Finally, the thesis considers how the work of the new theatre movement and, specifically, *Farma v jeskyni*, constitutes a "practical politics" rooted in the political philosophy of Havel and Jan Patočka.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the emergence of Prague's *nové divadlo* (new theatre) movement and the work of Prague-based companies *Farma v jeskyni* (Farm in the Cave) and *Krepesko* within the framework of the sociology of theatre. Each company has been founded since 2001, over a decade removed from 1989's Velvet Revolution and the fall of communism in the Czech lands. Each company's work is international in a way that would have been impossible prior to 1989, either through the multiple nationalities of its founders, the composition of its company and/or its international touring presence, and each produces a variant of non-verbal, bi- or multilingual performances accessible to international and increasingly diverse domestic audiences.¹ While productions affiliated with the *nové divadlo* are by no means artistically uniform, it is possible to identify reoccurring trends. These include an emphasis on the physical expressiveness of the body and a theatrical language in which the role of text is de-emphasized in the construction of narrative, which, if present, is most often subject to multiple interpretations. As such, the work bears much in common with practices Hans-Thies Lehmann describes as postdramatic, referring to "a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre" (2006: 27). While this thesis examines the work in a predominantly Czech context, it must also be noted that the *nové divadlo*'s companies and practitioners do not emerge *sui generis*, but reflect the influence of evolving international theatre practice throughout the twentieth century. Their work is often described as "physical theatre", a term, which, as Ana Sánchez-Colberg notes, "denotes a hybrid

¹ Increasingly, given trends in re-diversification in the Czech Republic since 1989, an international and/or multi-lingual audience is to be found domestically, particularly within the capital city of Prague, which recorded a resident-foreigner population of 148,578 in 2010 (Czech Statistical Office, "Foreigners by region, district and type of residence permit – 28 February 2010").

character and is testimony to its double legacy in both avant-garde theatre and dance” (2007: 21).

The methodological perspective that underpins this thesis positions this research within the field of the sociology of theatre, which, broadly speaking, views the study of theatre as inseparable from the study of the cultures of which it is a part. As defined by Maria Shevtsova, the field is characterised by its interdisciplinary approach: “[b]y traversing the lines between the social sciences and the humanities and knitting them together, we may achieve a truly interdisciplinary perspective” (2009: 32). Shevtsova’s work builds upon a project initiated by Georges Gurvitch and Jean Duvignaud and draws upon the work of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu, Émile Durkheim and Antonio Gramsci and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin.² The interdisciplinarity inherent in the field promotes a programme of study that “moves back and forth across ‘spheres’ [or different disciplines] so that what is ‘sociological’ is ‘political’ is whatever else collective human action makes it” (Ibid.). While numerous studies, by virtue of their content or sociological orientation, might be classified as sociologies of theatre, the present work is constituted *within* the field precisely because of its interdisciplinary approach, encompassing socio-political and historical perspectives. Additionally, this thesis engages fully with the interconnected areas of study charted by Shevtsova as appropriate to the field.³

The topographical orientation of this research draws on key concepts from Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production*. Of particular relevance is Bourdieu’s understanding of the field of play in any medium as constituted by a set of “structural

² For a full discussion of the theoretical foundations and methodology of the sociology of theatre, see essays I-IV in Shevtsova’s *Sociology of Theatre and Performance* (Verona: QuiEdit, 2009).

³ These include: Actors-Actresses; Directors; Stage Designers, Costumes Designers, Composers, Musicians, Technicians; Playwrights; Administration, Finance and Economy; Theatre Policies, Policies for Theatre; Social Types of Theatre; Performance; Audiences; Dissemination and Distribution; Dramatic Texts; Dramatic Genres; and Merging Theatrical Genres and Hybrids (see Shevtsova, 2009: 32-37).

relations – invisible, or visible only through their effects – between social positions that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be isolated individuals, groups or institutions” (1993: 29). Social agents must be understood in this context as artists, and Bourdieu notes that attempts to study the field of cultural production in this way must confront “the glorification of ‘great individuals’, unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning”, in order to view the field – even its most illustrious and iconoclastic exponents – as constituted by “a network of objective relations between positions” (Ibid.: 29; 30). Instead, works of art must be understood “as a *manifestation* of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated” (Ibid.: 37). In other words, the works themselves (whether more, or less, consecrated, and by whom) and the conditions of their production (where, by whom and for what spectator) both indicate and reflect the society of which they are a part. Accordingly, the parameters of this study must acknowledge the breadth of contemporary Czech theatre practice; the resulting topography is not so much an overview, as a view over the top, or birds’ eye perspective of the field, with companies, venues and genres viewed in relation to one another. The paradoxical position of the nové divadlo companies epitomised by *Farma v jeskyni* is elucidated through an understanding of the coordinates occupied by the company, which themselves emerge in relation to the contemporary and historically inflected positions occupied by other players in the field.

Of necessity, and as noted above, such a study is likely to be predominantly concerned with a national conversation; indeed, Bourdieu locates his reference points and object of study in twentieth-century French culture. As a national theatre culture, Czech theatre is particularly suited to a sociological approach. Czech theatre has a long history of serving as a vector for socio-political action and, as described by Jan Čiřař and Jarka

Burian, as a forum for imagining, negotiating and enacting collective identities. As discussed by Stanley Buchholz Kimball and Hugh LeCaine Agnew, Czech-language theatre galvanized the national revival and led to the emergence of a Czech national consciousness. This, in turn, established theatre as a constituent part of the national cultural life. The culmination of the national revival's trajectory, from scholarly endeavour to a political movement capable of engaging all strata of the population, as theorized by Miroslav Hroch, culminated in the failed Revolution of 1848, but was also instrumental in achieving a greater measure of Czech self-governance and increased cultural parity later in the nineteenth century. Following Stanley Buchholz Kimball's hypothesis, theatre activity has intensified with decreased possibility for direct political action across all periods of Czech history from the eighteenth century onward; this has been seen most recently during the late normalization period of Czech communism in the 1970s and 1980s, as described by Dennis C. Beck, Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, and Štěpán Šimek.

Accordingly, Czech theatre gained a reputation for political potency, much envied by practitioners in Western Europe and North America. Václav Havel, dissident playwright and the first president of the Czech Republic, whose domestically censored works were widely performed in Europe and North America from the 1960s onward, refers to this reputation as "a double-edged thing," which "can bind one, tie one down" (1990: 72). Despite these reservations, the lifting of censorship in 1989 removed the theatre's fundamental imperative and ignited a domestic debate on the future role of theatre in the Czech Republic. Since the Velvet Revolution, Czech theatres, suddenly relieved of this responsibility, have searched for new roles within an increasingly differentiated market of cultural/entertainment products, as documented by Jana Machalická and Beck, among others.

Placed in this context, the work of *Farma v jeskyni* and *Krepsko* and, more broadly, the *nové divadlo* movement as a whole, represents a significant divergence from both the historically dominant Czech repertory theatre and the dissident avant-garde. While clear stylistic links to earlier Czech theatre practice are visible in the work (such as a hybrid performance vocabulary combining text, movement and song), these companies, by prioritizing an internationally-accessible, movement-driven vocabulary over traditional text-based work, are redefining Czech theatre for a twenty-first century audience. The term ‘new’ should not indicate a complete break, or rupture, with the historical development of Czech theatre. Instead, it is most useful and relevant if taken as an assertion of the new conditions of theatre-making now present in Prague. It is the theatre of a new generation of artists, a post-1989 sensibility that reflects a different set of possibilities, theatre-making practices and demographic conditions in Prague. Most significant among these is the *nové divadlo*’s international orientation, which, along with an understanding of borders—whether between nations or genres of performance—as flexible, emerges as a key characteristic of the field.

While existing scholarship documents the interaction between Czech theatre and society through the Velvet Revolution of 1989, such contextualization is notably absent from discussions of twenty-first century theatre practice, of which no significant comprehensive study exists. The starting point of such a project must be the domestic conversation, as the small, close-knit nature of the field means that the lines between scholar, critic and practitioner are frequently blurred. In such a climate, even the most theoretical of discussions on the form and function of Czech theatre have the potential to confer and deny status, with practical implications. Further, the work must identify and seek to unpack the layers of politically and ideologically motivated discourse that have

inflected the field of Czech theatre from the eighteenth century to the present. This research, then, aims to provide a historically and sociologically contextualized account of companies working at the vanguard of twenty-first century theatre practice. This project fulfils a secondary aim of contributing to literature on an under-researched national theatre culture; despite its international significance Czech theatre remains under-represented within the study of theatre and performance. Finally, the significant translation work involved in this project (particularly in the last two chapters) constitutes a significant contribution to work on Czech theatre in English.

Bourdieu notes that any scholar attempting a social history of any field of cultural production faces a difficult task. S/he must, “reconstruct [the] spaces of original possible which, because they were part of the self-evident givens of the situation, remained unremarked” (1993: 31). This thesis, then, proceeds from the premise that contemporary trends in performance can only be effectively mapped if the terrain on which they are built is first excavated and analysed. Accordingly, the work begins by analysing the chronological development of Czech theatre in its political, cultural and linguistic context. The central aim of this approach is to understand how the parameters of the present field of theatre production have been constituted over time and in dialogue with social and political change in the Czech lands.

Significantly, then, this thesis is intentionally *not* primarily a history of the aesthetic development of Czech theatre practice. Rather, the initial three chapters explore the ways in which the hierarchy of aesthetic values that determines the present field of play has been constituted historically in an attempt to make visible, for the non-Czech reader, the historically-constituted “self-evident givens of the situation” in which contemporary Czech theatre practitioners find themselves (Ibid.). This is not to suggest that Czech theatre

practice has evolved in isolation, uninfluenced by concurrent regional and international developments. However, the limitations of space imposed upon this project have necessitated a narrowing of focus and clear methodology regarding the scope of international practice discussed. Vladimír Just's encyclopedic *Divadlo v totalitním systému* was of tremendous benefit in exhaustively documenting inward and outward travel of Czech and international companies from 1948 to 1989. The chart of movement I extrapolated from his catalogue guided my process of curation, as did a desire to focus on international practitioners present and discussed in domestic Czech theatrical discourse, itself a primary object of study in this thesis. A similar methodology guided my discussion of external influences on the contemporary companies discussed in Chapters Four and Five. I follow threads that emerged in conversations with practitioners or in writing about or by them, but strive to avoid discussing the work through analogies to companies and/or practitioners better known to an Anglophone readership. Any lacunae may thus be attributed to the intentionally domestic orientation of this work and a desire (in keeping with this study's location within the sociology of theatre) to analyse the domestic discourse surrounding the field as it emerged organically from the individuals who constitute it.

During the course of this research, the field of laboratory theatre and its position within the Czech theatre-making landscape emerged as a substantial area for further enquiry. Chapters Two and Five address laboratory theatre in the Czech lands beginning with discussions of Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre in Czech theatre periodicals from 1959 onwards and as a significant influence on both *Farma v jeskyni*'s practice and the company's reception by domestic critics. As Mirella Schino observes, "the term laboratory theatre does not designate an external point of reference or a model to be followed", but is better understood as a series of defining interests and practices (2009: 7). These include,

following Schino, an emphasis on training, particularly the body of the performer; an interest in dissemination of training and performance-making practices through pedagogical activities; on-going research, particularly into forms of cultural expression; and what might be termed a spiritual, or ethical dimension to the work (Ibid.: 9-10). The means by which Farma's work may be located within the parameters Schino posits will be explored more fully in Chapter Five; at the outset, it is sufficient to acknowledge that, within the framework of this thesis, the term laboratory theatre is thus taken to understand a process-based methodology encompassing pedagogical and research activities and emphasizing the on-going psycho-physical training of a more or less stable ensemble of performers independent from preparation for or rehearsal of a specific production. Additionally, the term signals a genealogical link to the work of practitioners including Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Włodimierz Staniewski, as well as contemporary theatres such as Polish companies Teatr ZAR and Song of the Goat, who, like Farma have received support from the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, Poland.

When used in reference to Farma, the designation "laboratory theatre" is intended to position the company within what artistic director Viliam Dočolomanský terms this "family" of theatre artists whose work is, broadly speaking, connected to that of Grotowski and his followers (Dočolomanský, 2011: 8). Still, it is important to note that the present work does not aspire to be a comparative analysis of Czech laboratory theatre practice in dialogue with historical and contemporary regional or international practice. Such a study would proceed from a different research question than this thesis, with its intention to map and analyse the current topography, or field of play, of contemporary Czech theatre practice. Thus the designation of Farma as a laboratory theatre must be understood not only as an aesthetic classification that speaks to the company's practice, but also as externally-

imposed label, which, when applied in the Czech context, serves to locate both the company and its work at a specific position within Czech theatre discourse.

Chapter One traces the emergence of vernacular Czech theatre within the framework of the Enlightenment and national revival. The chapter culminates in a discussion of the vibrant theatre culture of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1938). Chapter Two encompasses four decades of communism in the Czech lands, taking in the small theatre movement of the 1960s, the work of dissident playwrights including Václav Havel, Milan Uhde and Josef Topol and the *autorské divadlo* (auteur's theatre) of the 1970s and 1980s. As in the previous chapter, equal attention is paid to the social role and political function of the theatre both domestically and internationally, with the international visibility of Havel's plays and the networks established by the *autorská divadla* considered as contributing factors to the success of the Velvet Revolution. Developments in the field of theatre are interwoven with the social and political history of the period, including the reform communism movement, the Prague Spring and the emergence of Václav Havel's dissident philosophy as expressed in Charter 77 and his political essays. The rapid pace of change during this period, associated with different iterations of communism, contributed to the decision to alternate socio-political content with sections on the evolution of theatre practice, aesthetic movements and cultural infrastructures, in order to best highlight the reciprocity and causal relationships between them.

The thesis reaches its midpoint with the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Despite the significant role theatre artists played in its success, the Velvet Revolution precipitated a crisis of purpose both dramaturgical and existential in nature. Chapter Three considers the post-communist transformation as it unfolds between 1989 and 2000, including debates

surrounding economic and cultural policy, including the competing visions for the nation's future espoused by President Václav Havel and Prime Minister Václav Klaus. The impact of these changes on the field of theatre is considered from the point of view of mainstream and alternative theatres active prior to 1989 and now seeking to find their feet in a rapidly changing terrain in which communist ideology has been supplanted by diverging narratives. The realignment strategies, comprising both artistic and logistical responses, employed by the factions of the theatre sector pre-dating the Velvet Revolution are essential to the emergence of a topography of contemporary theatre practice, as the events of 1989 catalysed a complete restructuring of the field of cultural production. The issues at stake include critical concerns regarding lack of emerging playwrights, changes to theatrical funding, the rise of a commercial theatre sector, generational changes of leadership in significant theatres and the successes and casualties of transformation. Foreign investment, tourism and diversifying demographics in the city of Prague are explored as factors contributing to the challenges facing the theatrical mainstream, with its reliance on texts inaccessible to non-Czech-speaking audiences.

Chapters Four and Five constitute an analysis of contemporary theatre practice falling under the heading of *nové divadlo*, a substantial post-Revolution addition to Prague's theatrical topography. Key attributes of the *nové divadlo* include an international orientation and disregard for generic boundaries, as well as an absence of the growing pains experienced by older artists and organizations, since the initiators of the movement began their careers after 1989. Chapter Four foregrounds the discussion by examining artistic and socio-cultural factors contributing to its emergence, including: Ctibor Turba's internationally regarded physical theatre school, the influence of the Czech contemporary dance scene and the significance of *Divadlo Archa*, the first theatre in Prague with an

artistic policy geared specifically to the programming of international theatre companies. The role of the *nové divadlo*'s networks of companies, festivals and venues in creating a sphere of theatrical production distinct from both the mainstream repertory system and pre-revolution avant-garde is discussed with reference to Eugenio Barba's idea of the third theatre. The work of international physical theatre Krepsko is explored with reference to its interactions with the *nové divadlo* network, prompting an analysis of the network's success in supporting young, internationally-orientated companies.

Chapter Five is devoted to a discussion of *Farma v jeskyni* (Farm in the Cave). The recipient of numerous honours including a Radok Award for Production of the Year (2005), Edinburgh Fringe First, Total Theatre and Herald Angel Awards (2006) and the European Prize for New Theatrical Realities (2011), *Farma v jeskyni* is the most successful theatre company to emerge from the Czech *nové divadlo* scene.⁴ Despite, or perhaps because of its success, *Farma*'s reception domestically is fraught with ambiguity and a suspicion of the company's laboratory-based methodology. A consideration of *Farma*'s work and its critical reception, with emphasis on the domestic discourse, demonstrates the extent to which this reception is shaped by the artistic values and priorities established throughout the historical evolution of Czech theatre. The political dimension of the work is seen to emerge from its activation of the individual spectator, an emphasis on personal responsibility and dedication to "living in truth", which resonates strongly with both Havel's socio-political thought and his writing for the theatre. While *Farma*'s working methods and productions are discussed in detail made possible by unprecedented access to closed workshops and my regular viewing of performances from 2006 onward, the focus of this chapter remains firmly on the position occupied by *Farma* within the field of Czech theatrical production.

⁴ The Alfréd Radok awards are the Czech equivalent of the Olivier Awards.

The origins of this research date to the 2005/2006 academic year, which I spent living in Prague. During this time I came into contact with the *nové divadlo* scene as an audience member and practitioner and began to follow the work of the companies, venues, festivals and organizations discussed in Chapters Four and Five. The decision to focus on *Farma v jeskyni* and *Krepsko* stems from my personal appreciation of these companies' work, as well as their embodiment of the characteristics I perceive as defining the new theatre movement. These are an international orientation, encompassing company composition, touring profile and critical success abroad and a lack of concern with borders between different genres of performance. The lack of on-going, high-quality press coverage and reviews of *Krepsko*'s work, a common problem for new Czech theatre, informed the structuring of Chapter Four, where the company's work is viewed as a case study in relation to the venues and infrastructures of the new theatre scene.

Research into the historical development of Czech theatre draws on both Anglophone and Czech sources, including Jarka M. Burian's seminal *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (2000), Jan Císar's *The History of Czech Theatre – a survey* (2010, trans. Andrew Philip Fisher and Julius Neumann) and Vladimír Just's *Divadlo v totalitném systému* (2010). My discussion of contemporary practice encompasses archival research, interviews and performance analysis. Archival research was carried out primarily at the Institut umění – Divadelní ústav (Arts and Theatre Institute, or IDU) in Prague. Motus, the production company which manages influential *nové divadlo* venue Alfred ve dvoře, allowed me to use their archive, which proved particularly helpful in my research of *Malá inventura* and *Krepsko*, whose early work regularly played there. Archival research followed two main paths: reviews of individual performances and more general articles addressing the work of the new theatre scene generally, including

interviews with key practitioners. Some archival holdings did not have full citation information; where this has occurred, I have noted the archival location in a footnote and provide additional information in the Bibliography. I also make significant use of untranslated Czech texts, including works by *Farma v jeskyni* actresses Eliška Vavříková and Maja Jawor and dramaturg Jana Pilátová. Where possible, I have conducted interviews with company members, including Pilátová, Ewan McLaren of *Alfred ve dvoře* and Jiří Zeman of *Krepsko*. Performance analysis is based on my repeat viewings of *Farma v jeskyni*'s and *Krepsko*'s work from 2005 to the present. Though *Krepsko* has performed infrequently in Prague since 2008, performance footage from the IDU's video archive facilitated close analysis of the company's most important productions.

For logistical purposes, I have limited the critical literature cited in this thesis to works available in Czech or English. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Czech are my own. In the interest of precision and consistency, where the names of theatres, works and specific movements are concerned, Czech names are used, with parenthetical English translations included at the first instance. Capitalisation of venues and titles follows Czech conventions, as a result of which the world *divadlo* (theatre) is rarely capitalised. *Národní divadlo* refers to the Czech National Theatre building in Prague; the English terminology is used for all other contexts. Where multiple meanings are possible, or the choice of word is significant, a parenthetical notation of the Czech word follows the English translation.

Chapter One:
Society, Politics and Performance: The Role of Theatre in the Emergence of Czech National Consciousness, 1620-1945

This Chapter, like the one that follows it, addresses the historical evolution of Czech theatre practice in dialogue with social and political change. The historical perspective of these chapters does not seek merely to set the stage for the contemporary work discussed in Chapters Three to Five. Following Pierre Bourdieu,

No stylistic characterisation of a work of art is possible without presupposing at least implicit reference to the compossible alternatives, whether simultaneous – to distinguish it from its contemporaries – or successive – to contrast it with earlier or later works by the same or a different artist. (2010: 42)

Accordingly, a topographical examination of the contemporary field demands not only synchronic, but also diachronic analysis of historical works and movements. Despite their historical nature, these must not be understood as passive, but, rather, *active* participants in the shaping of the contemporary field. Of particular interest in Chapter One, is the means by which theatre became an active force in an emerging ethnolinguistically defined Czech national consciousness. The socio-political conditions under which vernacular Czech theatre emerged in the early modern period continue to impact the field; the form, particularly its plays, is laden with symbolic capital as a result of its pivotal role in nation-building.

1.1. Framing the National Revival

In his study of the Czech national character, Czech-born anthropologist Ladislav Holy emphasizes the importance of the fifteenth-century Hussite Rebellion as a powerful symbol of the Czech nation:

The Hussite victories over the armies of German crusaders and Roman emperors became appropriate symbols of the greatness and spiritual and moral superiority of the Czech nation which was forming itself in opposition to the German elements in Bohemia and in the Habsburg Monarchy at large”. (1996: 38)

The Hussite rebellion offered a critique of the practices of the Catholic Church, which prefigured the Reformation, and, here, Holy positions it as a significant underlying myth of the nineteenth-century Czech national revival, the period of history which restored Czech as a literary language, gave rise to the development of Czech theatre and invested it with the political significance it retains to this day. This chapter will primarily focus on the period of the National Revival, but some initial comments on earlier Czech history will assist in establishing the conditions of the Czech lands, and the Czech language prior to the Revival and, accordingly, seek to contextualize its most significant images and symbols.

While Holy rightly points to the symbolic implications of the rebellion, it also had significant practical influence on the development of Czech history and culture, particularly of literature. Vernacular preaching and the translation of religious texts into Czech were among the reforms called for and practised by the followers of Jan Hus (c. 1369 – 1415). Accordingly, the period saw a significant increase in the number of Czech texts, both original and translated, many of which were subsequently repressed as heretical and burnt in large numbers when the movement was defeated. This negatively impacted the further development of Czech as a literary language, as the destruction of these grammatically and syntactically advanced texts robbed future Czech writers of their literary heritage, which in turn facilitated the rise of German as the dominant literary language of the Czech lands. Early Czech plays were likely included in the book-burning. Although anthropologist Stanley Buchholz Kimball states that “Czech drama was probably the earliest in Central Europe,” citing evidence of liturgical dramas in Latin and Czech, he notes that only nine Czech plays dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are extant (1964: 12-13). Barbara Day acknowledges a “long-standing and healthy tradition of vernacular Czech drama [...] includ[ing] the liturgical dramas of the Middle Ages” and argues for a degree of

continuity, since “although interrupted by the Hussite wars, [these] served as one of the diverse sources of material for the [subsequent] popular or folk theatre” (1991: 231). Still, the repression of vernacular literature that followed the rebellion must be understood as clearly impeding the continuation and development of vernacular drama.

Despite the defeat of the Hussites, Protestant activity continued in Bohemia until the Battle of Bilá Hora (White Mountain), north of Prague, in 1620, at the end of the Thirty Years War, when the international Union, or Protestant army, comprised of Czechs, Moravians, Austrians, Germans and Hungarians was defeated by the Catholic League, “an equally international group of Bavarians, Spanish, Walloons, Germans and French” (Demetz, 1997: 227). In the aftermath of the battle, twenty-seven members of the Bohemian nobility (both Czech and German) were executed. Additionally “the imperial commission condemned 680 persons and fifty towns all over Bohemia to loss of property and possessions”, as part of a restructuring that completely changed the face of Bohemian society (Ibid.: 229). Seized property was granted to Austrian and Spanish supporters of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as to the clergy tasked with re-Catholicizing Bohemia. Hugh LeCaine Agnew suggests that this redistribution of property and power had three direct results: a widening of the social base; a complete separation between the people and their monarch; and a permanent fracture in Czech/German relations, as the majority of anti-Hussites came from German-speaking Europe, which “only added to the strength of the national elements, giving to Hussite national consciousness its precociously modern appearance” (LeCaine Agnew, 1993: 12).

The experience of Bilá Hora produced two lines of thinking that have evolved into what Holy terms “culturally constructed ideal[s]” (1996: 38). These remain active forces in contemporary Czech cultural and socio-political discourse. The first, stemming from the

decimation of the Bohemian nobility, attributes to the nation a natural egalitarian spirit. Secondly, and of greater significance to this study, the Czech lands' absorption into the Austro-Hungarian Empire constitutes a schism between the state and the nation. Holy writes:

Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Czech nation had its own state, the Bohemian kingdom. The Battle of White Mountain [...] ended the uprising of the Czech nobility against the centralising and absolutist tendency of the Habsburg monarchy and effectively put an end to the sovereignty of the Czech state: the centre of political power moved to Vienna. (1996: 38-39)

Bilá Hora, then, is significant as a point of divergence between the nation (here referring to the Czech-born, Czech-speaking population) and the state, seen in this formulation as a system of governance externally imposed by a foreign power, which cannot be trusted to act in the best interests of the nation. The impact of this separation on the field of the cultural production both invests overtly national works with political significance and serves to insert a foreign audience into the domestic sphere; as shall presently be discussed, the plays and other writings of the national revival were intended not merely to demonstrate Czech cultural competencies to the Viennese government, but to challenge German dominance of Prague stages. Unsurprisingly, both the Hussite rebellion and Bilá Hora provided ample source material for revivalist cultural products, as “the symbolism of Jan Hus and the Hussite movement was effectively fostered by literature, journalism, drama, visual arts and music” (Holy, 1996: 38). The emergence of such works sought to address the damage suffered by Czech culture in the early years of Austro-Hungarian rule.

The hundred and fifty years following Bilá Hora are “known in Czech popular parlance as “darkness” (*temno*)” and associated with free-falling cultural and linguistic

decline (Pech, 1969: 23).⁵ This view is consistent with a nationalist narrative that perceives Czech history as “discontinuous, full of breaks, interruptions and schisms [...] According to this image of the past, Czech history is the history of a nation which often made European history through its actions but was frequently blocked by its powerful neighbours because its ideas were ahead of its time” (Holy, 1996: 119). This view is contested by a non-nationalistic narrative, which views the Czech lands “as an object of historical processes beyond its control” (Ibid.: 124). This narrative understands “the darkness” instead as a period of cultural flowering, “during which the cultural development of Bohemia was once more in tune with cultural developments in Europe after the disruption of the Reformation” (Ibid. 125). Quoting Czech historian Josef Pekař (1870-1937), Robert F. Pynsent cites the strong influence of the Baroque in shaping Bohemia’s culture, as well as the architecture of its towns and cities, as proof that the period is one of light, rather than darkness: “the whole nation [...] was filled with the vital joy of Baroque culture, that was penetrating, creating, building a new society, a new nation, that very nation from which our National Revival sprung” (1994: 184). Theatre historian Jan Císař agrees, arguing that Czech “stagnated neither orally nor as a literary or professional language” in the aftermath of Bilá Hora (2010: 24). Pekař’s and Císař’s views instead interpret “the darkness” as something of an apprenticeship, in which exposure to developments in broader European culture prepared Czechs to embark on their own national revival, an argument that is strengthened when the Czech case viewed in light of ethno-linguistically defined nation-building occurring elsewhere in Europe at the same time.

⁵ See also Hugh LeCaine Agnew (2004: 75); Ladislav Holy (1996: 125) ; Robert Pynsent (1994: 184); and Stanley Buchholz Kimball (1964: 12).

Despite the validity of calls for a critical reappraisal of Baroque Czech literary and cultural development, the reality of the Czech language's decline during this period is evidenced by the tremendous amount of work undertaken by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians and lexicographers to rehabilitate it into a modern literary language. By the late eighteenth century, writes Benedict Anderson, overwhelmingly, "the nobility and the rising middle class spoke German" (2006: 73). The Czech language, by comparison, was regarded by its detractors as "a debased peasants' jargon" that was firmly "on its way to oblivion" (LeCaine Agnew, 1993: 51). Assimilation to the dominant German culture, even among the ethnically Czech gentry who had survived Bilá Hora, was widespread. Józef Chlebowczyk writes:

In Czech territories, the assimilation of the gentry, the urban patriciate and the enlightened sections of the population had reached such proportions in the 18th century that from the point of view of social structure the local minority group became a plebeian, non-historical community. In view of these transformations, the fate of this community seemed to be doomed; there seemed to be no chance of the Czechs preserving their language and ethnic individuality as constitutive factors of further social development. (1980: 69)

With exception of Jesuit school dramas often performed in Latin, domestic theatre practice dwindled to nothing. Both Day and Kimball note that "until the early eighteenth century the only professional theatre companies were foreign touring groups" from France, Germany and England (Day, 1991: 231; see also Kimball 1964:13). External domination was not restricted to the field of theatre. Stanley Z. Pech writes that while Czechs constituted the largest population group, "[i]n practically all realms of human endeavour, their destiny was in the hands of the Germans. The Czechs of all classes were controlled by the Germanizing centralism of Vienna and its instrument, the German officialdom in Bohemia and Moravia" (1969: 21). Pech describes a linguistically stratified economy, in which the management of production, as well as political and religious life, was handled by the Germans, with the

Czechs in subordinate positions as workers or followers. This was the state of affairs faced by the earliest instigators of the National Revival.

1.2. Origins of the National Revival

The beginnings of the Czech national revival may be traced to the late-eighteenth century, in accordance with E. J. Hobsbawm's observation that "the modern sense of the word [nation] is no older than the eighteenth century, give or take the odd predecessor" (1990: 3). Benedict Anderson concurs, noting that "the creation of these artefacts [nationality, nation-ness, nationalism] towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces" (2006: 4). Following Czech political theorist Miroslav Hroch, Hobsbawm posits a three-stage model for the analysis of nationalism and nation building, with the first stage defined by its lack of political implications. Hobsbawm defines it as "purely cultural, literary and folkloric", and, as shall be shown, the early national revival in the Czech lands broadly follows this schema (Ibid.: 12).⁶ At the same time, the movement was catalysed by Enlightenment thinking, which stressed the responsibility of the elite – whether cultural or political – to act, rationally and without prejudice, in the best interests of the majority. While, for the grammarians and writers at the vanguard of the Czech national revival, Enlightenment values manifested in attempts to revive Czech as a literary language, they also inspired a series of reforms undertaken by Austro-Hungarian Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) which would, in turn, provide the national revival with an additional impetus. Chief among Joseph II's reforms was a linguistic policy designed to streamline communications throughout the

⁶ Following Holy, this thesis terms the movement "national revival", however other scholars favour different terminology. Agnew uses the term "National Renaissance", and, further, notes that "19th century patriots described their movement using metaphors of rebirth, awakening, or resurrection (zhovuzvození, probuzení, vzkříšení)...towards the threshold of the twentieth century, the less emotionally charged term 'renaissance' (obrození) began to replace the earlier, less accurate terms" (1993: 9).

Empire by replacing Latin with German as “a uniform state language of communication” (Chlebowczyk, 1980: 61). As Chlebowczyk notes, Joseph II, guided by his cultural advisor Josef von Sonnefeld, did not implement this policy to undermine the Empire’s other languages. Reflecting the dominant eighteenth-century view, Joseph II believed in territorial patriotism and “identified the concept of ‘nation’ with all the inhabitants of a given country, irrespective of the language they used” (Ibid.). However, arguments for the neutrality of the policy quickly became untenable as territorially-specific, ethno-linguistically homogenous populations were increasingly understood as the bases for nation-building. Joseph II’s language policy concerned even the German-speaking nobility, whose lands and political rights fell within minority-language territories, including the Czech lands. Fearing a loss of influence as the empire consolidated its power in Vienna, the Czech gentry became interested in the Czech language “at least as a symbol of the traditional, historic individuality of the Kingdom of Bohemia” (LeCaine Agnew, 1993: 68). Still, since few of them spoke it, there was no real chance that Czech would become the language of their daily lives and their interest in the language does not represent a move on their part from a political/territorial concept of nation to an ethno-linguistic one.

Both Chlebowczyk and LeCaine Agnew affirm the prevalence, until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, of a definition of nation based on territorial or political concepts. LeCaine Agnew writes, “the *natio* consisted of those with political rights, usually only the nobility. Their patriotism consisted of loyalty to their sovereign, their king, and to the territorial entity of which they were citizens” (1993: 67). Individuals residing in the Czech lands might refer to themselves as Bohemians, but this did not imply an ethno-linguistic identification: “The concept of *böhmische* [Bohemian] *Nation* was fully in accord with the category of political nation; it was determined by the feeling of belonging to the territory

where a given individual was born or domiciled” (Chlebowczyk, 1980: 70). The function of ethno-linguistic identification as a basis for nation-building emerged during various national movements in central and eastern Europe, among what Hroch describes as “non-dominant ethnic groups,” including the Czechs: “for such groups, the path to becoming a modern nation forms a sort of culminating point in the evolution of the ethnic group, its modernization” (2000: 6). In the Czech case, allowing for the argument that the Hussite rebellion cultivated a proto-national consciousness, the events of the late eighteenth century may be viewed as an attempt to reintegrate the concept of nation and state along ethnolinguistically-defined lines.

Still, the prevalence of territorial patriotism helps to explain why the first phase of the national revival (spanning the late-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth centuries) is described by LeCaine Agnew and Císař as largely apolitical. To the extent that linguistic identity was not at that time understood as a political category, this is true. Most of the early participants in the national revival were scholars, intellectuals and grammarians, who undertook the restoration of the Czech language out of a combination of professional curiosity, territorial patriotism and an Enlightenment drive to educate the Czech-speaking masses, including the peasants whose freedom of movement had been restored by imperial edict on 1 November 1781 (Pech, 1969: 13). In practical terms, this meant the end of serfdom and led to demographic changes that saw increasing numbers of Czech-speakers take up residence in urban centres. While noting that “the effect of this alteration was not to be felt for some time, since for some decades opportunities in the cities were few and the flow of the rural population into them was very limited,” Pech cites the importance of emancipation in the “growth of a Czech intelligentsia and a Czech national movement”

(Ibid.: 14). Chlebowczyk notes that the gradual politicisation of the national revival was not confined solely to the cities, but took root first in the countryside, where emancipation

awakened material, vocational and social aspirations among peasants. These aspirations, which were fully realistic, meant that at least a part of the previously passive, amorphous mass of the peasantry, so far living in appalling conditions, would become an active social force conscious of new development prospects, that they would become real stewards and citizens of their state. (Chlebowczyk, 1980: 63)

Vernacular cultural activities became a strong component of rural life, as teachers and clergy wrote texts in Czech for their students and congregations (Ibid.).

As the national revival expanded to engage with ever-broadening factions of society, the medium of theatre, by virtue of its social nature, proved an ideal vehicle for fulfilling its dual aims: the education of the Czech-speaking population and the strengthening of the Czech language. As Pech observes, a third goal, explicitly political in nature, also drove the revivalists to embrace the theatre:

The most important instrument by which Czech patriots could influence the Czech-speaking, but not yet nationally conscious masses of the population was the theatre. [...] In its early stages its quality lagged considerably behind its value as a medium for awakening Czech national feeling, but in the latter role it was of supreme importance. (1969: 26-27)

However, before Czech theatre could be harnessed in service of the revival, it would have to compete for a place on Prague stages. As noted above, Czech theatre practice declined after Bilá Hora period, but, by 1701, “the first permanent private theatre in Prague opened in Count Sporck’s palace, followed, in 1739, by the first public theatre, the Kotzen Theatre” (Day, 1991: 231). While Císař notes the presence of a network of amateur “neighbourhood” theatres operating in both Czech- and German-speaking communities across Bohemia, until the late eighteenth-century, the Prague scene was dominated by Italian opera and German-

language theatre, with a preference for the popular forms of comedy, burlesque and pantomime (Císař, 2010: 32-34/Day, 1991: 231).

In the later decades of the eighteenth century, the Prague theatre scene began to reflect the influence of theatrical reforms in Germany and Austria. Chief among these were the establishment of Johan Friedrich Löwen's Hamburg National Theatre in 1767. To address the "low repute" of the German theatre, Löwen argued for the necessity of state subsidies to protect a repertoire focused on "drama of higher quality than had previously been seen", effectively creating the institution of the modern national theatre (Brockett 1999: 302). Two years later, in 1769, Joseph von Burnian, director of the Kotzen Theatre, appended *Nationaltheater* to the venue's name and, like Löwen and his dramaturg, G. D. Lessing, "began to stage a repertoire of serious drama, which included translations of French dramatists" (Day, 1991: 231-2). Joseph II followed suit in 1776, with the opening of the Imperial and National Theatre (or Burgtheater) in Vienna, which, "[b]y 1825 [...] was considered the best of all the German-language troupes" (Brockett, 1999: 306).

Central to the reform of German-language theatre was an emphasis on playwriting, and "a responsible programme of serious drama" (Day, 1991: 231). As Brockett notes, Löwen's project coincided with the career of Lessing, "by this time considered Germany's finest playwright" (1999: 302). In Hamburg, Lessing acted as in-house critic, creating the role of the modern dramaturg, and the theatre sought to cultivate German playwriting by offering prizes to the best works (Ibid.: 302). The institution of the national theatre, then, must be understood as deeply invested in the cultivation of dramatic literature, whose seriousness differentiated it from more populist, cross-genre fare (such as pantomime, or operetta) shown in the commercial theatre. The centrality of playtexts to the national theatre project helps to explain the significance attached to Czech plays, particularly in the post-

communist context. More immediately, the national revival's multiple aims required a repertoire of suitably serious Czech plays, then notably absent from Czech stages.

Day cites a 1771 production of a Czech translation of *Herzog Michel*, a German farce, at von Brunian's Nationaltheater, while Císař names a 1785 production of *Odběhlec z lásky synovské*, a translation of a German play by Gottlieb Stephanie, as the first professional Czech production (Day, 1991: 231/Císař, 2010: 40). The latter was performed at the Nosticovo divadlo (Nostitz Theatre), founded in 1783 by the Bohemian Count Franz Anton Nostitz-Rieneck (1725-1794) as a challenge to the cultural hegemony of theatres in Vienna and Hamburg (Kimball, 1964: 14). Nostitz's theatre replaced the Kotzen Nationaltheater, but displayed a similar ethos. Count Nostitz ordered the motto "patriae et musis" to be inscribed above the entrance of his new theatre, which he hoped would enrich the charm of Prague and the minds of its citizens. It is significant that Nostitz's patriotism was still constituted upon territorial lines; the theatre's programming was primarily in German. Czech plays were performed mostly to attract new and larger audiences.⁷ The theatre's political significance lay in its desire to further the cause of the territory of Bohemia by demonstrating its capacity to produce high-quality cultural products accessible to wide sections of the public.

After the 1785 production, Czech-language theatre appeared with some frequency at Nosticovo Divadlo. The Nostitz's resident company, managed by František Jindřich Bulla, included "bilingual Czech actors, who were limited to one or two performances (usually

⁷ Day quotes a contemporary account of the 1785 production, originally published in German in *Das Pragerblättchen (Prague Leaflet)*: "The house was full each time and, amidst the general acclaim, the wish was often expressed for more Czech pieces to be seen. The actors themselves had clearly enjoyed being in this production more than any other [...] When [actor-manger] Mr. Höpfler was thanking the audience after the play in German, as usual, there were calls from many sides: In Czech! which he immediately acknowledged and obliged accordingly, but for the long applause was hardly able to finish the speech" (Day, 1991: 234).

matinees) in Czech in German theatres that gave them permission, or, at best, in other bilingual theatres that the Czechs themselves started” (Burian, 2000: 10). The practice of producing Czech plays at four o’clock in the afternoon on weekends and holidays must be read as a comment on the perceived, and actual, social class of the audiences, “which were recruited from the lower classes and did not have time to attend the theatre on weekdays” (Císař, 2010: 40). This practice perpetuated in some theatres until the 1830s and several Czech-language theatres, including the Růzová Street Theatre, which opened in 1842 as a platform for Czech performances, collapsed financially because they overestimated their audience’s ability to support them (Císař, 2010: 110). It should also be noted, however, that financial problems frequently plagued eighteenth-century companies aspiring to national theatre status. Brockett notes, for instance, that the Hamburg Nationaltheater was forced to include variety shows to boost audience numbers, while the Vienna Burgtheater also suffered difficulties in its early years (1999: 302; 306).

Denied equal billing with the existing German repertoire at the Nostitz, Czech theatre artists sought other venues for performances and two short-lived vernacular theatres were established: the Czech-language Bouda (Hut) (1786-1789), and the bilingual Vlastenecké divadlo (Patriotic Theatre) (1789-1805). The Bouda, in Václavské náměstí, was started by a group of Nostitz actors who managed to produce seventy-three Czech plays in the first two years of the venue’s existence (Císař, 2010: 40). Of the programme, Stanley Buchholz Kimball writes that “[m]any of the productions were propaganda pieces dealing with Czech history for the purpose of educating the people about their own past, rekindling interest in and love of the Czech tongue, and stimulating national pride” (1964: 16). Vlastenecké divadlo opened when the temporary structure of the Bouda was dismantled by city authorities, and was led by the Brothers Thám, actor-playwright Václav

(1765-1816) and writer-translator Karel (1763-1816), who was also involved in the revitalization and codification of the Czech language. Vlastenecké divadlo offered productions in both German and Czech, including Václav's original works and Karel's translations of Shakespeare and Schiller. Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek (1783-1844), head of the newly created Czech wing at the Stavovské divadlo (Estates Theatre, formerly the Nosticovo) also contributed plays.⁸ In addition to dramatic theatre, Vlastenecké divadlo also produced, in Czech, an early form of musical theatre that combined operatic structure with spoken dialogue. Adapted from similar Austrian productions, such performances were highly popular with the public, but fell short of the serious aims of the national theatre movement and were dismissed as inferior and impure by the cultural elite (Císař, 2010: 41). The treatment of such productions serves to reinforce the bias for literary, dramatic texts associated with national theatre movements and also affirms the theatre's desire to "contribute something to the improvement and spread of the Czech language" (Burian, 2000: 10). Despite the implications of Vlastenecké divadlo's name, linguistic identity had not yet become a force of political mobilization and the early Czech theatres did not publicly link their work to an explicitly political agenda.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise moment that the national revival and its theatre became explicitly political. In the sense in which vernacular theatre made cultural products accessible to previously excluded members of the population, it was always political, though to read into it, from the beginning, an overtly separatist political agenda, with the theatre functioning as training ground for nationalist proponents of self-governance and as a platform for stirring up public discontent is erroneous. It is important to remember that before it could begin to make a significant cultural or political impact, the Czech theatre,

⁸ The Bohemian Estates, or nobility, purchased the theatre from Count Nostitz in 1798.

like the language itself, needed time to recover from over a century during which very little literary writing was done in Czech.

Thus, even if the early Revivalists, coming from the elite of the bilingual Czech intelligentsia, had had a clear political agenda from the beginning, it would have taken a full generation at the absolute minimum to lay the groundwork, both socially and culturally, for a broad-based political movement. Císař rightly stresses the early Revivalists' need to establish not only a literary aesthetic, but an audience base able to support mature works of literature and dramatic theatre. He quotes an article written in 1794 by František Němeček, which offers insight into the audience of Vlastenecké divadlo:

[It] is made up of all the respectable members of the guild of millers, butchers and bakers from the capital city of Prague, mainly from the New Town. [...] This public very much prefers songs and so most of the performances at the National Theatre are operas. [...] Czech comedies and operettas are excellent for this society. [...] Even if there are many tasteless and overly popular pieces, every real Czech must be happy that their genuine Czech countrymen have entertainment more noble than fighting and visiting the pub and, they can, in this way, cultivate their senses. (2010: 44).

Němeček goes on to contrast this segment of the audience with “a part of the nobility, a larger part of the educated bourgeoisie, state officials, and especially young people educated under Joseph II” who have “genuine and correct taste” (Císař, 2010: 44).

Following Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that “[a]ny art perception involves a conscious or unconscious deciphering process”, it is clear from Němeček's remarks, however pejorative, that the majority of the audience for Czech-language theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century – and even well into its first decades – did not, as a result of its historically determined position, possess the necessary cultural capital to decipher the high art called for by the more literary revivalists and thus, could not yet be moved to responsible political action (1993: 215).

The juxtaposition of “high” and popular cultural products alluded to by Němeček reappears time and again throughout the history of Czech theatre, exacerbated by the national theatre movement’s preference for serious dramatic texts.⁹ Even Václav Kliment Klicpera (1792-1859), the first Czech playwright to possess a mature, critically esteemed literary aesthetic, suffered from the dichotomy it imposed. Possessing “a distinctive voice and undeniable talent,” Klicpera wrote “lively, often satiric comedy [that] captured something essential in Czech speech and grammar” (Burian, 2000: 11). Císař credits him with exploiting a theatricality that would “wrench Czech drama from an exclusively non-theatrical (revivalist) [...] context” (2010: 62). A generation younger than Štěpánek and the brothers Thám, Klicpera came to prominence in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. While Klicpera’s work transcended the earliest didactic function of Czech-language theatre, it was, nevertheless, inspired by – indeed a direct answer to – revivalist and lexicographer Josef Jungmann’s call for a literary dramatic theatre, serious enough to represent the national interests.

Jungmann (1773-1847) was the author of the first Czech-German/German-Czech dictionary, a feat of lexicography recognized by Anderson as a “pioneering” contribution to the emergence of a Czech national consciousness because it placed Czech and German on an equal footing within its pages, thus creating in print a parity not yet achieved in the fields of culture and politics (2006: 73). In addition to his work on the dictionary, Jungmann worked to “establish great literary dramas in Czech modelled after the most illustrious dramatic works of other nations’ dramatic literature (Císař, 2010: 51). Klicpera

⁹ For a recent example, one need only consider the case of *Kudykam*, an extremely popular piece of fantastical musical theatre, fusing opera and jazz, which has been part of the repertory in Prague’s Státní Opera. In September 2010, Věra Drápelová reported that Státní Opera’s new director had announced the production would be removed from the repertoire on the grounds it does not suit the venue’s classical repertoire (2010: D6).

endeavoured to meet this challenge, with a pair of serious plays written for Jungmann's journal (Císař, 2010: 58). In his work for the stage, Klicpera endeavoured to raise the bar aesthetically without alienating the working-class base that constituted the majority of the audience for Czech theatre. In the end, he succeeded in pleasing neither camp. Although his achievements are recognized today, contemporary appraisals of his plays cited by Císař suggest that his contemporaries believed "they are meant for the future and require a more educated audience" (2010: 61).

1.3. Evolution of the National Revival

The revivalist activity discussed so far, with its emphasis on lexicography and translation, conforms to Hroch's definition of the first phase of his three-part model of the progression of nationalist movements as "a period of scholarly interest in the ethnic group", bereft of political agenda (1999: 9). Further, its educative focus reflects Enlightenment values and acknowledges a predominantly territorial patriotism. In line with the development of nationalist movements across Europe, the Czech national revival entered, in the mid-nineteenth century, a second phase. As defined by Hroch, this constitutes

a national movement: a period that began with the decision of a certain part of an ethnic group to adopt the idea of nationality for all members of that group – and also to gain the highest level of cultural and political equality from the ruling class, as required by the principles of civil society. (Hroch, 1999: 9)

The third, and final, phase occurs when "large masses of the population accept the idea of identification with the nation as an autonomous value, and the national movement becomes irreversible" (Císař, 2010: 38). The progression from phase one to two and three was made possible by the raising of national consciousness within the Czech-speaking population of all classes, a project in which theatre, as indicated above, played a prominent role. Thus far, the education process had confined itself primarily to the linguistic and scholarly concerns

associated with Hroch's first phase. However, from the 1830s onwards, the national revival movement, and the theatre, asserted an overtly political agenda, though, initially, it remained a concern of the liberal intelligentsia, rather than a matter of popular concern.

As in the first phase of the national revival, developments in Vienna catalysed events in Bohemia. Joseph II's brother, Leopold II (1790-1792), reigned for only two years before his son, Francis, ascended the throne in 1792. Francis's reign lasted until 1835 and is characterized by its "reactionary mood", which, LeCaine Agnew argues, stems from Francis's interpretation of the French Revolution not "as an expression of social and political pressures that could have been treated by astute reforms [...but] as mere anarchy and terror unleashed by conspiratorial elements" (2004: 93). Accordingly, Francis's policies, including the 1815 Metternich system of governance, constituted a retreat from the enlightened absolutism of his predecessors. Named after its founder, Clemens Václav N. L. Metternich, the "essence of this system was the conviction that any reform was the precursor to revolution; therefore, it was important to maintain the stability of peaceful permanency at all costs" (Císař, 2010: 50). The Metternich system seriously damaged the viability of territorial patriotism and the idea of an "Austrian" nationality capable of transcending ethno-linguistic differences, as had been championed by Josef II, whose Enlightenment-inspired reforms formed the political and cultural backdrop to the first phase of the National Revival. Under the Metternich system "there was a distinctly antagonistic attitude towards Estates [Bohemian] patriotism as well as any expression of German national identity" (Císař, 2010: 50). The regime was "distrustful of new ideas and of all forms of dissent, and, in checking the manifestations of dissent it relied heavily on the police and censorship" (Pech, 1969:8). Reflecting on the combination of these circumstances, Císař concludes that "[u]nder these circumstances there was only one

possibility for a Czech nationalist: to search for identity within the homogenous language community and/or its culture” (2010: 50). Accordingly the Czech response to the Metternich system must be read as a turning point in the shift from a territorial to an ethno-linguistic patriotism, which also pointed towards the events of the revolutionary year of 1848.

The maturing Czech-language theatre was well-positioned to respond to a more political climate, ironically due in part to the lessons it had learned through continuous engagement with the older, more professionalized German-language theatres in Prague. Císař notes the frequency with which Czech and German companies shared theatre spaces, and often actors, thus allowing the Czech practitioners to absorb the professionalism, rehearsal practices and production values of the older and more established German theatre. Císař cites the example of Brno’s Estates Theatre, in which the performance of Czech plays within the framework of a German company “made the operational and creative practices of German theatre a natural part of the everyday life and even of the Czech theatre organism” (2010: 68). As a result of this relationship, in many respects analogous to a period of apprenticeship, the means of production in Czech-language theatre had caught up with those found in the dominant cultural sphere.

Simultaneous changes in political climate and advances in theatre practice paved the way for Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808-1856), playwright, publisher, public intellectual and leading Czech theatre personality of the 1830s and 1840s. Tyl reflected the increased political implications of his contemporaries’ cultural activism and belonged to a generation of intellectuals that “did not want to wait passively; rather it sought, through public activity, to remove everything preventing the nation’s development” (Císař, 2010: 65). This included the bureaucracy of Prague’s Estates Theatre, where Czech-language performances

remained limited. Accordingly, in 1834, following a stint as an actor with a touring theatre company, Tyl established the Kajetán Theatre in Prague's Malá Strana district as an independent Czech-language national theatre. In 1840 Tyl issued his famous call for a permanent Czech national theatre that, unlike the Estates Theatre, which had been intended to serve as a multi-lingual (as much as the confines of Austrian cultural hegemony would allow) national theatre for the territory of Bohemia, would perform exclusively in Czech, for an ethnolinguistically Czech audience. He imagined a national theatre as a forum which could be used to educate the Czech population towards autonomy and self-governance. "Elsewhere, people may wish theatre to show them as they already are," he explained, "but we must want a theatre to show us as we ought to be" (Burian, 2000: 12). Along with the Enlightenment notion of theatre as a means of educating the population, Tyl's language indicates an evolution in thinking about nations and nationalism that is closely linked to political changes taking place across Europe. Hobsbawm argues that "the liberal bourgeoisies and their intellectuals" at the forefront of various national movements, would perforce have had to consider their own emerging nations' positions at a time when

the European balance of power was transformed by the emergence of two great powers based on the national principle (Germany and Italy) [...] not to mention the recognition of a number of lesser political entities as independent states claiming the new status as nationally based peoples, from Belgium in the west to the Ottoman successor states in southeast Europe (Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria), and two national revolts of the Poles demanding their reconstitution as what they thought of as a nation-state. (1990: 23)

The case of Poland, a fellow Slavic nation, and, later, the separation, via the Compromise of 1867, of the Habsburg Empire into linguistically-defined Austro-Hungary, provided examples of nation-building at close cultural and geographic proximity and cannot be discounted as contributing factors in the evolution of the Czech national revival towards the second phase of Hroch's schema.

In this climate, Tyl, like Klicpera, endeavoured to transcend the opposition of serious and popular performance forms. Supporters of his work included the highly respected historian František Palacký. Among his many plays, Tyl's most famous contribution to Czech drama is *Fidlovačka*, an episodic exploration of Prague life in the working-class Nusle neighbourhood. Overtly nationalistic, *Fidlovačka* features Czech, Jewish and German characters that broadly conform to stereotypes: the central plot concerns a love affair between Liduška (whose aunt and guardian Mastílková moves in German circles) and the miller Jelik, son of a patriotic Czech shoemaker. Significantly, Tyl's play contains songs by František Škroup, one of which, "Kde domov můj", became the Czech national anthem. Císař emphasizes the production's genuine engagement with the issues surrounding the political and social realities of language in Prague. *Fidlovačka* transcended the by then "national conviction that Czechs should speak Czech" in order to facilitate a discussion "about language, discourse, and speech as a practical, socio-historical and, ultimately, an existential problem" (Císař, 2010: 75).¹⁰ Despite its finely-tuned social observations and literary merit, *Fidlovačka* flopped; like Klicpera's work, it seemed designed for an audience that did not yet exist. As a result, Tyl abandoned the theatre for a time and shifted his focus to fiction, earning an award from the literary institute Česká Matice (The Czech Foundation) for his nationalistic short story "Poslední Čech" ("The Last Czech") (Císař, 2010: 76).

¹⁰ *Fidlovačka* remains a living reference for discussions of national identity and language. In the 2010/2011 season, Divadlo na Vinohradech staged *Fidlovačka, aneb Kde domov můj?* (*Fidlovačka, or Where is my home?*). Directed by Jiří Havelka, a director associated with the *nové divadlo* movement, the production intercut traditionally staged excerpts from Tyl's play, complete with Bohemian folk costumes, songs and dance, with scenes in the European Parliament and based on transcripts from the debate surrounding the adoption of an E.U. flag and anthem. By the second act, the boundaries between Tyl's text and the transcripts are increasingly blurred, the euro-sceptic Czech MEP replaced at the lecturn by Tyl's patriotic Prague shoemaker.

In the run-up to the revolutionary year of 1848, public opposition to the cultural and political hegemony of the Austro-Hungarian Empire grew, fuelled in part by the discrepancy between Bohemia's economic and political capital. By the 1840s, one-third of all goods manufactured in the Austro-Hungarian Empire were produced there, yet Bohemia's inability to significantly influence Imperial policy remained a source of grievance (Císař, 2010: 76). Tensions grew between Czechs and Germans, in part due to an increase in German nationalism inspired by efforts to unify Germany, a process which some Germans believed should involve Bohemia. Frustration with the Metternich system grew. Císař writes that by the early 1840s, a "significantly diversified opposition developed" in reaction to its bureaucratic incompetence and refusal to acknowledge the growing power and influence of Czech cultural life (2010: 78). This was demonstrated by Vienna's refusal to grant the theatre license belonging to the then-defunct Vlastenecké divadlo to a group of one hundred and fifty signatories, including Tyl, to a petition submitted in the name of the Czech Theatre Association. Despite the heightened political context in which they unfolded, the cultural character of these conflicts is significant, since, as Hobsbawm notes: "where linguistic movements already had a significant political base, as in the Czech lands, national self-determination (as opposed to cultural recognition) was not yet an issue, and the establishment of a separate state was not seriously thought of" (1990: 101). For the time being, the revivalists continued to apply themselves to combating cultural hegemony.

By 1846, Tyl had taken up the position of dramaturg at the Stavovské divadlo, overseeing Czech-language productions. He used this platform to present work inspired by German Biedermeier, a Central European variant of romanticism that "sought refuge in a small-scale, comfortable, useful, middle-class world of intimate family life, of resignation

to the established order, of enjoyment of nature in the idyllic, pastoral context of the well-cultivated countryside, and of love of the homeland” (LeCaine Agnew, 2005: 102-103).¹¹ In addition to promoting the importance of the individual, Biedermeier “made room for the development of visions of equality, freedom and fraternity at a cultural level,” an objective that complimented Tyl’s belief that the future of the National Revival lay with the lower classes (Císař, 2010: 79). In order to capture and hold this audience’s attention, Tyl made use of two popular forms of Viennese theatre: Bessenrungsstück and Magical Plays. The former related to content and favoured stories of strong individuals who transcended their circumstances to achieve a better life, while the second was a style of production that emphasized exotic locales and special effects. Both had been subject to criticism of their sentimentality in Vienna, but this was much less the case in Prague, where they were enormously popular with the public. Popularity with audiences was an important determiner of programming, as “acquiring an audience for Czech performances, and consequently achieving financial success...formed the incentives for interconnecting commercial aspects with education and national campaign objects” (Císař, 2010: 83). By 1848, the combination of the Beidermeier emphasis on the individual, with increasingly political frustration, resulted in a rash of plays based on the lives of Czech national heroes dating from the medieval and Hussite eras, including Josef Václav Frič’s *Václav IV. král český* (*Wenceslas IV, King of Bohemia*), Josef Jiří Kolár’s *Žižkova smrt* (*The Death of Žižka*) and Tyl’s own *Kravavé křtiny aneb Drahomíra a její synové* (*The Bloody Baptism, or Drahomira and her Sons*) and *Jan Hus*.

¹¹ When viewed from a twenty-first century perspective, Biedermeier’s emphasis on a retreat into the personal sphere in the face of limited opportunities for civic and political engagement amid heavy state censorship is eerily analogous to the cultural and social climate of the normalization era of Czech communism, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

As its cultural agenda diversified, becoming more populist and nationalistic in content, the National Revival began to fragment politically. The majority of the Revivalists were nineteenth-century liberals, who sought the recognition of Czech culture as equal to German culture, but felt their needs were best served by staying within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Known as the Old Czechs, this group, led by the esteemed historian Palacký, “envisaged the Czechs within a larger Danubian confederacy under the leadership of Austria” while the Young Czechs “were somewhat more radical in their pursuit of national autonomy” (Thomas, 2007: 15). It was the Young Czechs who would, with the help of Prague students and workers, build and defend the barricades in the June uprising of 1848. It is important to note that, even in 1848, the majority of politically conscious Czechs in Prague, with the exception of the most radical nationalists, favoured remaining within the Austro-Hungarian Empire; their political goals consisted of securing a degree of political autonomy, such as a Czech parliament in Prague, as well as linguistic equality. This division is reflected in the two groups’ attitudes towards the various articulations of pan Slavism circulating in throughout the 1840s.

Hobsbawm notes the role of language, by the mid-nineteenth century, as “a factor in international diplomacy” (1990: 98). Viewed in this light, pan-Slavism, with its doctrine of mutual support and cooperation between Slavic nations, takes on the character of an attempt at solidarity amongst emerging, linguistically linked nations governed by larger (and sometimes different) states. The movement’s tenets are expressed in “Slávy dceru” (“Daughter of Sláva”), an 1824 poem by Slovak Jan Kollár, “which glorified the Slavic past and predicted for the Slavs a rosy future [and] fired the Slavic intellectuals with almost mystic faith in the virtues and messianic destiny of Slavdom” (Pech, 1969: 37). Ideas emanating from pan-Slavism included mutual protection from an implied German threat,

literary reciprocity, emphasizing the circulation and translation of texts among Slavic nations and, of utmost importance to the Czech case, Austro-Slavism. Unlike literary reciprocity, which Kollár denied possessed any political motivations, Austro-Slavists believed that cooperation between Slavic peoples within the Austro-Hungarian Empire would result in greater influence in Vienna. As Pech notes, unlike pan-Slavism, Austro-Slavism maintains separation between smaller Slavic states and Russia (1969: 37-38). It was also economically motivated, reflecting “Czech fears of the stifling influence of a more highly developed German industry [...as well as] hopes of an expanding Czech influence in the less developed economies of the Balkan Slavs” (Pech, 1969: 83). By 1848, Pech writes, “Austro-Slavism dominated the minds of Czech liberals and exerted great influence upon other Slavs of the monarchy” and, accordingly, contributed to the events of 1848.

Against the backdrop of debates on German unification, Hungarian autonomy and a growing constitutional crisis in Vienna, the radical Czech organization Repeal, adopting its name from a republican Irish group, produced a petition in March of 1848. The document demanded financial emancipation of the peasantry, greater self-governance and representation in a Bohemian diet as well as broad religious and political freedoms and the “equality of Czech with German in schools and offices” (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 117). When the delegation tasked with presenting the petition to Ferdinand I encountered the disarray of the Viennese government, the initial demands seemed too modest, and a subsequent draft demanded even greater autonomy for the unified Czech lands. The imperial government accepted the majority of Czech demands, but delayed a decision on the unification to the next Reichstag. Despite the significance of ethno-linguistically defined national identity to the Czech cause, remnants of territorial Bohemian patriotism were still evident in March of 1848. The second draft of the petition, notes LeCaine Agnew,

was followed by “a declaration supporting national equality”, signed by “over fifty Czech and German intellectuals” (2004: 118). While dissenting voices soon emerged, Czechs and Germans manned the barricades together when fighting with the imperial army broke out on 12 June 1848 and German collaborators smuggled anti-Imperial articles and pamphlets out of Bohemia and into Germany, where they were printed, before being smuggled back into Prague (Pech, 1969: 43).

Unfortunately, after 1848 the almost complete acceptance of ethno-linguistic patriotism, coupled with the increasingly dynamic movement towards German unification drew a wedge between Czechs and Germans. The popularity of Austro-Slavism, cemented at the Slavic Congress held in Prague in June of 1848 that coincided with the fighting, must also have been experienced as divisive. Stanley Z. Pech argues that divergence between Czechs and Germans was inevitable, explaining that:

If any kind of brotherhood and equality was to be instituted between the two ethnic groups, a political and social surgery of major proportions would be required. In the process, the Germans would, almost overnight, be vastly reduced as a group in importance and power, and it was unlikely that such a situation would be acceptable to them either as individuals or as a group. (1969: 79)

Czech and German causes were driven further apart when Czech intellectuals, including Palacký, rejected an invitation to participate in the 1848 Frankfurt Conference on German unification. Reflecting the ascendant Austro-Slavist position, in his reply to the invitation, Palacký made the now-famous statement that, as a “Czech of Slavic descent”, he was unqualified to debate the future of Germany (Pech, 1969: 81).

1.4. Diverging Cultural Trends in the Aftermath of 1848

The constitutional reforms promised in the spring and summer of 1848 were never put into effect. Ferdinand abdicated in favour of Franz Joseph (1848-1916), who presided

over the military defeat of Hungary and, by 1851, had revoked all revolutionary reforms, ushering in a neo-absolutist regime. Under the Bach System, “[t]he essence of neoabsolutism was the state bureaucracy: supranational, centralized, in theory in corruptible, and controlled from Vienna” (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 126). LeCaine Agnew notes that the new system of governance “refused to grant recognition to any national feelings” and German was named the official language of state in 1852 (Ibid.).¹² Centralization limited local participation in government; while, like other imperial territories, the Czech lands had previously had their own diet, after 1848, it was never summoned (Ibid.). Despite its repressive tendencies, which included, from 1850, a new law that subjected all theatre performances to government approval and reserved the right to forbid, ban, or even interrupt performances at will, LeCaine Agnew stresses that that Bach system represented a move towards efficiency and transparency. He cites better rates of pay and working conditions for imperial employees, and the development of a modern railway network, telegraph system and postal service (Ibid.: 127). Still, the Bach system, supported by “the army (larger than before 1848), the police (uniformed and secret), and newly organized rural gendarmerie” served to reinforce the distance between the Czech nation and imperial state (Ibid.).

The experience of 1848 deflated the national revival and catalysed fragmentation in the cultural sector. Exhausted by events of the first half of the century and seeking a broader scope for their artistic work, “[m]any Czech writers had ceased to identify with a monolithic model of nationalism by the second half of the nineteenth century” (Thomas,

¹² An outcome of this policy, Agnew notes, was the reintroduction of German “into the other middle-level schools in the Bohemian crownlands. At the primary level the vernacular was still the initial language of instruction, but the proportion of “mixed” schools increased” (2004: 127).

2007: 8). As a result, certain assumptions of the national revival, including the national theatre movement as headed by Tyl, were criticised in the press. In an 1849 article, Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821-1856), founder of *Národní noviny* (*National News*) and widely acknowledged as the father of Czech journalism, laments the absence of quality foreign drama on Czech stages. The nationalist agenda of practitioners such as Tyl, he argues, “overestimates original Czech plays [and] bad Czech plays are given precedence over good foreign plays” (quoted in Day, 1991: 257). Havlíček Borovský’s justification of his critique is of particular interest to a study of Czech theatre in an international context, as he objects on the grounds that Prague theatres are “often frequented by people wishing to discover the latest progress of our Slavonic cause and by foreigners who, although they may not understand the Czech language, easily perceive the simple-minded and antediluvian air of such an ‘original’ piece” (Ibid.: 258). Havlíček Borovský’s argument makes explicit the role of theatre in advocating a national cause and demonstrates the interest (perceived or real) of non-Czech spectators in the Czech theatre. He speaks to a context in which the theatre functions (or is at least understood to function) as a barometer of national achievement, or as an unofficial foreign policy of sorts, delivering a message from the nation to the state, as well as to foreign observers from outside the Empire.

Although critical of its parochial tendencies, Havlíček Borovský was a staunch supporter of professional Czech theatre. When, in 1851, the Viennese government permitted the collection of funds for a Czech national theatre, he expresses outrage at a two-tiered funding system predicated on language:

The government has at last given us permission to collect our own money and build ourselves a theatre in Prague. Who would say that we should not be delighted with such a favour? We Czechs have another similar job, that of paying taxes to support the German theatre. This is equality?! Because the Czech dramatic productions in Prague are bad, the audiences are small, thus the performances are poor, for there is

no money to pay good actors, therefore the plays are bad, hence the audience is small, therefore – so goes the round. [...] What then is the answer to our problem? All we lack is money. Give me about 400,000 fl. and in three years I will establish in Prague a Czech theatre, the equal of any in any other country, and one which even the Germans would rather attend than their own theatre. Pay our Czech artists what they can command elsewhere and see what we can create here at home. (Day, 1991: 40; originally published in *Slovan (The Slav)*, 2 April 1851).

Significantly, Havlíček Borovský's outrage stems not from an overtly nationalistic agenda, but rather a desire for equality. Czech theatre is being denied access to the conditions of production necessary to develop and sustain quality professional theatre and, as a result, is unable to demonstrate its artistry. Theatre should be funded not merely as an instrumental activity within the framework of the revival, but as a vital art form in its own right.

The increasingly international cultural orientation that underlies Havlíček Borovský's critique is reflected in cultural activities outside the theatre. Of particular importance in the field of literature is the Czech Decadent movement, which "made Czech culture more cosmopolitan than it had been since the late fourteenth century" (Thomas, 2007: 8). Writers of this group, led by writer and journalist Jan Neruda, published the *Máj Almanach*, named after Karel Hynek Macha's romantic lyric poem of 1836, and aspired to a view that was "worldly, international and cosmopolitan. In their opinion, the focus of art and literature should be a human being, not a Slav or a Czech. They envisioned mankind in the spirit of contemporary liberalism and democracy as social emancipation" (Císař, 2010: 114). In the theatre, the ascendancy of this view, together with the pressures of censorship and state scrutiny of playtexts resulted in the elevation of the actor as the most important element of a performance. Císař credits the Romantic actor Josef Jiří Kolár with making acting "a full and legitimate position...contributing to [theatre's] semantic and aesthetic quality" (2010: 101). Concurrent with the development of Czech acting was a spate of translations and subsequent performances of Shakespeare, the demands of which, contemporary critics,

such as Vítězslav Hálek, argue, further raised the level of acting. The increased artistry of the performers, in turn, contributed to the development of the audience, as modern theatre conventions, such as applauding only at the interval and end of the performance, became the norm (Císař, 2010: 106).

The Bach System of governance ended in 1860 with the introduction of constitutional government. Censorship relaxed, civil rights were broadly extended and possibilities for expression and civil society grew, with the establishment of numerous societies and organizations dedicated to education, culture or entertainment (Císař, 2010:120). Further industrialization led to an even stronger Czech middle class, which effectively dominated society from the 1860s onwards; in his survey of Czech theatre history, Císař refers to this period as the age of middle-class theatre. Its tastes were not radical, or even particularly liberal, and leading writers and intellectuals, including Neruda, complained that the time was ‘unripe’ for broad social and political change (Urban, 1991: 162). Nevertheless, change was forthcoming. In 1861, Czechs gained control of the Prague municipal government and renewed Tyl’s call for a national theatre. Císař writes that, “from the beginning of the 1860s, Prague, led by the municipal authorities, became the true centre of national life” (2010: 122). The ethno-linguistic Czech community consolidated its power and influence in Prague, but despite all its progress, it still remained economically dominated by the German community. From the 1820s on, “the traditional manufacturing industries concentrated in the German-inhabited border regions, [while] the agricultural industries developed in the Czech-speaking heartland” (LeCaine Agnew, 2005: 107). Economic capital translated into greater power for German-speaking communities, as Austria struggled to recover from the economic effects of the Napoleonic Wars: “the German-speaking areas were more industrial and as a consequence they had greater economic influence” (Císař, 2010: 112).

In the context of extremely limited opportunities for political action, the maturation of Czech culture, expressed through the national theatre campaign, and, eventually, the building itself, came to symbolize the strength of the Czech nation. This function is in keeping with Kimball's argument that, throughout Czech history, cultural activity demonstrably increases as possibilities for political action decrease (1964: 24). While Kimball notes that other countries, including minority nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also used theatre to advance national politics, the Czech case is unique: "To the Czechs, perhaps more than to any other people, theatre had a definite political meaning. It did not grow from the need of artists, but from national political needs. [...] Indeed, the project was launched long before there were sufficient native plays to justify its existence" (1964: ix). The political nature of the national theatre movement must be understood as heightened by the Empire's emphasis on the most highly consecrated cultural products, including dramatic theatre, opera, and classical music. Czech critics' concerns, as previously discussed, that national cultural products be "serious" and "dignified", reflects their understanding of the social and political leverage that a strong, vibrant cultural life could provide. Scott Spector attributes the ultimate success of the Czech bid for self-governance to the national revivalist's efforts towards successfully "establishing a modern and autonomous national literary and musical tradition", which was emerging by the 1860s (2000: 42).

In an atmosphere in which cultural activity substituted for politics, the building of Národní divadlo would symbolize the success of the national revival and the maturation of Czech culture. The location of the theatre, on the eastern bank of the Vltava River, diagonally opposite Prague Castle and just north of Vyšehrad, Prague's other, earlier, castle, was significant for both Czech- and German-speaking citizens of Prague. As Spector

notes, the building was part of a larger process by which the architecture and geography of the city changed to reflect its increasingly Czech character:

Both Wenceslas Square and, below it stretching to the bank of the Moldau/Vltava, the avenue named Ferdinand (a name that would give way to the present Národní or National, boulevard) seemed monuments to a rising Czech Prague...[as did the] spectacular modernist Czech National Theatre, deliberately dwarfing the two German theatres at the opposite end of Wenceslas Square [...]. (Spector, 2000: 7)

Such a building demanded artistic excellence and, in 1862, with the funding campaign underway, the Prozatímní divadlo (Provisional, or Interim Theatre) opened adjacent to the planned site of Národní divadlo as a training ground for the company that would move into the completed building. While its small size created problems, it provided a consistent, independent Czech stage that catered to middle class audiences. Instrumental in the development of Czech opera, the venue hosted the 1868 premiere of Bedřich Smetana's comic opera *Prodaná Nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) (Císař, 2010: 128). Smetana's work, like that of Klicpera and Tyl, endeavoured to bridge the gap between high and low art forms, incorporating influences from classical opera, Czech folk culture and popular operetta to develop a truly national product. Still, like both playwrights, he found his work subject to accusations of frivolity; *Prodaná Nevěsta*, despite its popularity with audiences, was dismissed as operetta and instead Smetana's *Libuše*, a dramatic opera about the founding of Prague, was chosen to open the theatre in 1881.

Audiences entering the new Národní divadlo encountered further symbolism. A national fund-raising campaign had financed the building of the theatre and, in addition to cash, towns from across Bohemia and Moravia had sent "many symbolic stones...from ancient and historic sites...to be incorporated ceremoniously into the foundations of theatre...[which] has the atmosphere of a crypt or a shrine for the remains of departed heroes or saints" (Kimball, 1964: 2). The involvement of towns and villages throughout the

Czech lands is a testament to a broad-based appreciation of the role of theatre in national life. The Národní divadlo not only solidified the position Czech theatre in Prague, but also consecrated the activity of the regional professional theatres, the strolling players that regularly travelled throughout the Czech countryside and innumerable amateur theatre groups and dramatic societies.¹³ In addition to Národní divadlo, numerous Czech theatres were established in regional cities and towns during the late nineteenth century. The same was true of German theatres, which sprang up in areas with concentrated German populations, effectively resulting in something of a theatrical arms race; in cities such as Brno, Czech theatre did not gain a foothold until as late as 1884 (Císař, 2010: 134).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cultural, social and political tension between Czechs and Germans in the Czech lands continued to rise, with language remaining a dominant issue. As Hobsbawm points out “linguistic nationalism was and is essentially about the language of public education and official use. It is about ‘office and school’ as Poles, Czechs and Slovenes never tired of repeating” (1990: 96). The Czech language gained greater recognition in 1880, when the Stremayr Language Ordinances for Bohemia and Moravia “gave co-official status to Czech in the Czech lands, along with German” (Spector, 2000: 71). 1880 also marked the introduction of a language question in the Imperial census, with respondents asked to provide “the ‘family tongue’, i.e. the language usually spoken in the home, which might be different [from the mother tongue]”

¹³ Císař reports that the number of amateur theatre organizations operating in the Czech lands by the 1840s “ranges between one hundred twenty and one hundred fifty [...] for Bohemia, ten for Moravia and two for Silesia” (2010: 67). The motivations for such groups were not always political. Císař notes their defining characteristic as their responsiveness to the particular circumstances of the communities in which they performed, the ethno-linguistic demographics of which determined the language and repertoire of performance. By 1939, 7,000 such groups existed, even under pressure from the occupational Nazi government (Ibid.). The importance of drama as a community activity is further demonstrated by the phenomenon of Czech language productions by immigrant communities in the North America throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a practice which continued well after these communities abandoned Czech as their language of daily communication. See *Czech and Slovak Theatre Abroad*, Vera Bořkovec, ed., Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006.

(Hobsbawm, 1990: 99-100). German speakers perceived the Ordinances as discriminatory on the grounds that “educated Czechs would know German while the reverse would not necessarily be the case” (Spector, 2000: 71). The Ordinances also led to the division, in 1881, of Prague University into separate Czech- and German-speaking faculties. Like earlier edicts establishing the use of German, the advance of Czech, Spector argues, “was not meant to aggravate or even damage the German-speaking community, as the German-liberal press claimed. Rather, [it was] designed to shatter the German-liberal image of a Prague and a Bohemia that were culturally and historically integrated into German territory” (2000: 75).

Czech culture increasingly dominated Prague; Hobsbawm notes that, by the 1890s, 93% of the city’s population spoke Czech (1990: 112). Tensions between the conservative, nationalist faction, and those artists with a more international orientation continued. While some Czech artists drew inspiration from international movements including Symbolism and Expressionism, others maintained a preference for “national” cultural products, whose value was conferred less by their artistry than by their possession of a specifically Czech character that required no foreign inspiration (Scheffel and Kandert, 1994: 18).¹⁴ Such thinking produces critiques and discussions of Czech culture that view Czech artists’ work in a vacuum, as if immune from broader artistic movements occurring across national borders, a problem that will be reconsidered in relation to post-communist work in subsequent chapters. Prague’s German artists, including writers Franz Kafka and Max Brod, reacted to parochial tendencies by forming their own circle, centred around the Cafe

¹⁴ David Scheffel and Josef Kandert discuss an 1897 *Český lid* art review, which displays a creeping sense of xenophobic parochialism with regard to cultural products: “When Josef Mánes, an outstanding painter of village scenes, was commended for choosing “only motifs truly typical,” and for excluding “accidental, transitional, [and those] introduced by foreign influence” it encapsulated the determination to suppress any suspicion of Czech national culture having anything other than entirely Czech roots” (1994: 18).

Arco, and, despite the presence of certain xenophobic tendencies, Prague maintained an “important position because of its multicultural face, particularly its German-Jewish cultural minority” (Císař, 2010: 220). By 1900 only 10% of Prague’s population of 500,000 defined itself as German-speaking, a remarkable demographic change that is attributable to the efforts of the Revival, linguistic policy reform and increased industrialization, which drew greater numbers of Czech speakers to Prague.

In the field of theatre, the practitioners that would constitute the interwar avant-garde viewed their work in an international context, drawing inspiration from the Théâtre d’Art in Paris, and embracing the plays of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Frank Wedekind. As the radical theatre artists of the 1960s would do decades later, they created their own spaces, such as the Intimní divadlo (Intimate Theatre), designed to facilitate close proximity between stage and spectators. Czech theatre in this period began a process of differentiation, as the early twentieth century also saw the establishment of Divadlo na Vinohradech, a large theatre catering to middle-class tastes, in 1907. While early programming at the Vinohradech exhibited nationalist traces, the arrival of director K. H. Hilar in 1914 eliminated these in favour of a program that was “purely theatrical [...] refusing to take into account any National Revival considerations or extra-theatrical concepts, such as serving the cause” (Císař, 2010: 224). Concurrently, and reflecting differing views on the heritage of the revival, the National met with criticism for a perceived inflexibility in responding to socio-political currents outside the theatre. Císař notes that National’s symbolic status hampered its artistic growth, including the development of modern directing as pursued by Hilar at Divadlo na Vinohradech. Despite the significant skills and experiences of Jaroslav Kvapil, who led the National prior to World War I, “pressure from varied interests, needs and influences prevented him from

achieving a modern [...] director-led theory of staging,” such as was pursued at the smaller theatres (2010: 207).

1.5. Theatrical, Political and Cultural Developments of the First Republic, 1918-1938

The establishment of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918 represents, at least in the first analysis, the attainment of Czech independence and, accordingly, a closing of the schism that had existed between nation and state since 1620. While this is not the place for an exhaustive discussion of the factors that combined to bring it in to being, its international orientation and theatrical aspects suggest strategies that would re-emerge later in the century and are worth noting in the context of the present study. Chief among them is the leading role played by the Czech leadership in exile, including future president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), in cultivating international support for the Czech (and, eventually, Czechoslovak) cause. As a professor of history and philosophy at Prague University, a position he held from 1897, Masaryk established and maintained contacts with the institution's foreign students and alumnae, including those from Slovakia and the southern Slavic territories. The resulting academic activities, including reciprocal publication and circulation of the nations' literature, notes LeCaine Agnew, “provided some foundation on which cooperation during World War I could build” (2004: 162-3). Masaryk also had strong links beyond the Slavic world, particularly in France and Britain; as William V. Wallace notes, his correspondents included “politically influential historians Ernest Denis and R. W. Seton-Watson” (1989: 75). In addition to his strong academic rigour, and international orientation, Masaryk is notable for his rejection of easy answers and ahistorical narratives, a characteristic, which he shares with Václav Havel and philosopher Jan Patočka, as shall be discussed. Critical of both the Young and Old Czechs, Masaryk's political philosophy is expressed in the name of his party: The Realists.

Masaryk went into exile in the winter of 1914-1915, intent on cultivating allied support for Czech autonomy, spending time in France, Russia and Great Britain. As an advocate for the Czech cause, particularly in comparison to his close collaborator, the young Edvard Beneš, Masaryk “had much more sense of theatre” (Wallace, 1989: 80). Theatrical flourishes in his wartime international activity included a speech in Geneva on 6 July, 1915, the anniversary of Jan Hus’s martyrdom, in which “he called for the destruction of Austria-Hungary and the creation of an independent Czech state” (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 165-166). By December of 1916, the “liberation of Czechoslovakia” had been incorporated as a condition of peace by the Entente (Ibid.: 167). Still, even as Masaryk was presenting the argument for an independent Czech state to foreign leaders, the majority of politicians who had remained at home favoured, as they had since the 1840s, increased autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which they felt sure would emerge victorious from the war (Wallace, in Hanak 1989: 71/Císař, 2010: 223). However by 1918, with victory in doubt and food shortages affecting more of the population, the public protested both the empire and the war. On 28 October 1918 the Republic of Czechoslovakia was declared.

Often known as the First Republic, the new nation is notable for its democratic governance, economic success and cultural achievements, characteristics which would later be invoked in debates concerning the nation’s post-communist transformation. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, such rhetoric tends to obscure the First Republic’s shortcomings, though, as Bradley F. Abrams asserts:

[B]y almost any standard of judgement, the interwar Czechoslovak Republic was an at least moderately successful state [...] an island of relative democracy and stability in the region until the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism sowed the seed of its destruction by inflaming ethnic and national discord. (2007: 118).

An alliance with Slovakia was not planned far in advance, nor, as indicated above, was the establishment of the First Republic itself a foregone conclusion either domestically or internationally. While the work of the Czech government in exile did much to sway foreign opinion, the success of the First Republic also depended on the union of two discrete nationalities, a process not remotely completed, or even truly begun, by 1918.

Until now, this chapter has focused exclusively on the Czech lands, which constituted only one nation within federal Czechoslovakia. Accordingly, a brief consideration of Slovakia is now necessary. The union between Czechs and Slovaks was largely one of convenience; Fawn notes it was necessary to combine Czech and Slovak populations in order to guarantee a Slavic majority in the new nation (Fawn, 2000: 2). However, the union was not without problems rooted in the differences between the nations. Slovakia was far less industrialized and economically weaker than the Czech lands, where per capita income “between 1911 and 1913 exceeded that of Austria by 21 percent” (Fawn, 2000: 3). In his analysis of European nationalisms, Hroch identifies both the Czechs and Slovaks as non-dominant ethnic groups, but they occupy different positions within that classification. While the Czechs belong to a category of ethnic groups, including the Irish and Germans, who had previously possessed political power and a national literature, the Slovaks are grouped with nations who had no prior experience of statehood, or a national literary tradition (2000: 12). The two groups had also experienced Austro-Hungarian rule differently; while Bohemia was ruled from Vienna, Slovakia was ruled from Budapest and Slovakian patriots struggled against Magyarisation. Unlike Bohemia, with its strong Protestant tradition, Slovakia was Catholic.

In the nineteenth century, Slovakia had experienced its own national revival, led by grammarian, intellectual and priest Ľodovít Štúr (1815-1856), who stimulated the revival

and modernization of the Slovak language. The previously discussed doctrines of pan-Slavism and Slavic reciprocity emanated from Slovakia. Pavel Jozef Šafárik (1795-1861) and Ján Kollár (1793-1852) together “created a complex new myth of Slav nationalist deliverance...[which] looked to the future as well as the past...like any nationalist myth it had a utopia as its goal“ (Pynsent, 1994: 45). Their approaches to this goal differed. Šafárik was an ethnographer and lecturer, who taught at the university in Prague. His pan-Slavism was more academic and measured than that of Kollár, a poet by trade, who appealed emotionally to his readers in an attempt to catalyse a linguistically-determined national consciousness: “If he [Kollár] states that this love of language exists, his audience may believe it. If they do not harbour it themselves, they may feel guilt at their lack and so cultivate such a love” (Pynsent, 1994: 79).

Pynsent explains that both Kollár and Šafárik are examples of what John Plamenatz, along with Hroch, terms “Eastern nationalism.” All nationalist movements are motivated by “a desire to preserve or enhance a people’s cultural identity when that identity is threatened...or even create it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking” (Pynsent, 1994: 45). According to Pynsent and Plamenatz, Eastern nationalism further differs from Western (for example, German and Irish) nationalism because while Western nationalists admire their role models (specifically, France and England), they feel themselves capable of successfully imitating them in the nation-building process. Eastern nationalists, by contrast, feel a sense of inferiority as “a people that has recognized its own backwardness...[and] feels the need to re-equip itself in order to culturally raise itself” (Ibid.). Eastern nationalist movements look to the same role models as Western ones, but, in so doing, regard them

with hostility.¹⁵ Slovakia's comparative economic weakness and a less clear identification with Western or Central European culture meant that Eastern nationalist ideas – and the illiberalism that accompanied them – gained a greater foothold. When Slovakia joined the Czechoslovak Republic, it had to “cede an identity that, while not fully enshrined as a popular ethos, was still strong enough to present an obstacle to the instalment of a successor” (Fawn, 2000: 2-3). In other words, for some Slovaks, the Hungarian rulers had merely been replaced by Czechs while they themselves remained a dominated population for whom a schism between nation and state still existed. The problems caused by the lack of an organic “Czechoslovak” national consciousness were not ultimately resolved until the Velvet Divorce of 1991 separated the two countries.

Despite the continuing social and political unrest, it is worth dwelling on some of the First Republic's successes. Abrams praises its “progressive social policy... anchored by legislation mandating, among others, the eight-hour work day, unemployment insurance, protection of women and children, family allowances, holidays with pay and housing and agrarian reform” (2007: 118). Fawn cites as remarkable the diverse demographic character of interwar Czechoslovakia. According to a 1921 census, 66% of the total population was Czech and Slovak, 23.4% was German, and 5.6% was Hungarian, with the remaining population comprising East Slavs, Russians, Ukrainians and Ruthenians (2000: 4). The Czechoslovak education system recognized this diversity and provided education in minority languages. By 1930, “almost 96 percent of those over ten years of age were literate” (Abrams, 2007: 118). Fawn emphasizes that the Constitution of 1920 “entrenched

¹⁵ It may be rightly pointed out that the Czech national revival also displayed behaviours characteristic of Eastern nationalism, mythologizing national history and forging ancient manuscripts to demonstrate a long-standing literary tradition. However, such behaviour was always tempered by criticism from the liberal, internationally-orientated intelligentsia, as demonstrated by Havlíček Borovský's critique of revivalist theatre.

equality among the country's diverse ethnic groups and offered minority rights, including the use of minority languages in conducting government business in areas where they comprised at least a fifth of the population" (2000: 4). These linguistic accommodations, however, occurred mostly outside of the capital city; Cynthia Paces reports that during this period "many Prague Germans assimilated into the now dominant Czech linguistic community" (2009: 7).

Prefiguring the theatre's instrumental role in the Velvet Revolution, theatre artists contributed to the establishment of the First Republic. Císař describes a protest rally, held on 13 April 1918 in front of Prague's Municipal House, as "brilliantly directed by Jaroslav Kvapil" of Národní divadlo (2010: 224). In addition to organizing protestors in space, the theatre provided the new country with a symbolic language. Císař cites the spontaneous adoption, a year earlier, of the song "Kde domov můj?" ("Where is My Home?") from Tyl's *Fidlovačka* as the Czech national anthem, after audiences began to sing along with actors from Divadlo na Vinohradech. After the official establishment of the First Republic, a dispute erupted over control of Stavovské divadlo, which had been under German administration. A group of Czech theatre people ultimately occupied the theatre and staged a production of *The Bartered Bride* there the same evening (Císař, 20110: 228). Outside designated theatre spaces, mass spectacles involving larger numbers of participants presented crowds "as both a factor in history and a carrier of important social ideas" (Ibid.: 229). Such events included competing demonstrations staged by the Sokol gymnastics association (directed, like the 1918 protest, by Kvapil) and the Communist Party's Federation DTJ. Císař argues that these events carried more ideological than artistic weight, communicating the then popular belief that "the crowd was a saviour on whom the future

could be built,” an idea that led a segment of the population, particularly artists and intellectuals, to “embrace socialism or communism” (Ibid.).

The establishment of the First Republic created conditions for a period of theatrical activity noteworthy, Burian observes, for its “vitality and variety” (2000: 31). Attributing the former to “the enormous release of spirit accompanying the creation of an independent republic after several centuries of alien citizenship within the Hapsburg Empire,” Burian locates the variety in the openness to external influence facilitated both by Czechoslovakia’s geographic location between east and west and “a desire to become worthy of world citizenship by keeping abreast of significant culture abroad” (Ibid.). Burian cites foreign practitioners including “Jacques Copeau, Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov, and Eugene Vakhtangov” as particularly significant, but also notes the importance of “American jazz and film (Buster Keaton, Lillian Gish, Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks)” (Ibid.). Císař notes the influence of theatrical revues on the development of Czech theatre throughout the 1920s, and finds elements of their aesthetics in practitioners as diverse as playwrights Karel and Josef Čapek and cabaret artists Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich (2010: 250).

Of the Czech theatre artists who came to prominence in the 1920s, Karel Čapek achieved the most international notoriety and is also recognized by Císař as representative of the period (Ibid.). Widely translated almost immediately upon its Czech publication in 1921, *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*, “took the world by storm”, with productions in New York, London, Los Angeles and Chicago throughout the 1920s (Wellek, 1936: 195). Despite the international success of the play, which introduced the word “robot” into the English language, Burian cautions against the characterisation of the theatre of the First Republic as dominated by playwriting: “the theatre [...] was dominated by its directors,

first, and its scenographers and actors, second” (2000: 32). Discussing *R.U.R.*, Císař suggests that the play’s success is primarily due to its topical subject matter relating to the ethics of scientific advancement; Čapek’s most significant artistic contribution, Císař argues, comes from his exploration of the revue form in *Ze života hmyzu* (*The Insect Play*), jointly authored with his brother Karel in 1921, and also produced internationally (2010: 250). Revue aesthetics, which also influenced the duo of Voskovec and Werich, capitalised on Czech audiences’ love for hybrid entertainments that combined music, text and movement.

Concurrently and in response to its absorption of external influences, First Republic artists defined and articulated their values through several domestic and international schools of thought. Significant among these was Devětsil (founded in 1920 and led by Vítězslav Nezval), an interdisciplinary association of artists calling for the union “of all left-wing artists in order to create a real avant-garde movement” (2010: 253). Ideologically, Devětsil was sympathetic to the Communist Party; many of its artists were party members and its manifesto “proclaimed the will to stand in the ‘first ranks together with those wearing blue collars who march to fight for a new life’” (Ibid.: 253-254). Burian writes that, while Devětsil members embraced “the ideal they felt was present in the youthful freshness of communism,” their outlook was in no sense ideologically limited: “It was an era of fertile cross-breeding, when communism and surrealism (or futurism, or poetism) were regarded as complimentary rather than irreconcilable” (1976: 96). Artistically, Devětsil embraced Czech poetism, which Císař defines as an aesthetic that functioned as “a revolution of merriment, a revolution that shows the struggle against a lifestyle that deforms human nature, and against the world of money where there is no space for love or happiness” (2010: 257). Císař cites the influence of the stylistically diverse poetry of

Guillaume Apollinaire, identifying in poetist or Devětsil theatre a preference for collage or montage as “a method of creating a whole from diverse individual parts”, a technique also found in influential filmmakers of the period, such as Sergei Eisenstein.

An alternative to Devětsil was offered by The Literary Group, established in Brno in 1921 when its founders split from Prague-based Devětsil. The Literary Group was primarily interested in Expressionism and took a greater interest than Devětsil in dramatic literature, largely due to the influence of its founder, dramaturg František Götz. As dramaturg at Národní divadlo, Götz “elevated the status of dramaturgy to that of responsible work that demanded an extensive knowledge of world dramatic literature [and stressed] new original work from Czechoslovak playwrights and from abroad” (Císař 2010: 243). Still, Devětsil emerged as the strongest articulation of the avant-garde, with the greatest influence on subsequent practice.

In 1926, the Osvobozené divadlo (Liberated Theatre) was established as an off-shoot of Devětsil, under the direction of Jiří Frejka and Jindřich Honzl. Initially a semi-professional company heavily indebted to contemporary French drama and Soviet innovations in staging, Osvobozené divadlo became the well-spring of the inter-war theatrical avant-garde.¹⁶ In addition to Frejka and Honzl, the theatre's collaborators included E. F. Burian, a classically trained composer-turned-director, who developed techniques in aural and visual montage, and Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, whose enormously popular revues dominated the theatre by the end of the 1920s.¹⁷ V+W, as they came to be known, were law students with no theatrical training when they joined Osvobozené divadlo in 1927. Originally intended as a one-off performance, their *Vest*

¹⁶ Jarka Burian notes, “The Soviet influence was mainly in staging, the French in texts: Apollinaire, Cocteau and Ribémond-Dessaignes were particular favorites” (1976: 96).

¹⁷ E. F. Burian’s father was a baritone in Národní divadlo’s opera company and his mother was a singing instructor. Jarka Burian characterises this early exposure to music as profoundly influential: “the roots of Burian’s general creativity may be found in music” (1976: 95). As discussed in Chapter Five, this statement might equally be applied to Farma v jeskyni’s artistic director, Viliam Dočolomanský.

Pocket Revue combined “music, commedia-like farce, and socio-political relevance” (Burian, 1976: 96). Influenced by Czech poetism and Devětsil, of which Voskovec was a member, as well as Swiss dada and the French avant-garde, they drew their greatest influence from the films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. On a 1936 visit to Prague, Vsevelod Meyerhold attended a V+W performance, writing in the guest book that “I saw the ‘zanni’ again in the persons of the unforgettable duo of Voskovec and Werich, and was once more bewitched by performers rooted in the Italian commedia ex improvviso” (Burian, 1977: 154).¹⁸ In addition to their mastery of physical clownery, emphasized by their white make-up, V+W were famous for their witty, mid-show dialogues, full of “slang, multi-lingual punning (they were facile in German, French, Russian, and more limitedly English) and illusions drawn from classical mythology” (Burian, 1977: 157).

Immediately prior to V+W’s arrival at Osvobozené divadlo, Frejka and Burian had departed, following an artistic dispute with Honzl, who remained at the theatre and went on to direct many of V+W’s productions. Frejka and Burian, together and separately, followed a different artistic path, cultivating montage (inspired, as noted above, by both film and theatrical revue) as a means of approaching text. Their work is particularly significant from the point of view of modern devised and physical theatre. Frejka’s productions featured

¹⁸ Burian’s account suggests that Meyerhold attended the performance by chance, while in Prague “on a trip home from Paris in the fall of 1936” (1977: 154). Burian continues, “.After seeing two of Voskovec and Werich’s productions and spending the better part of several days and nights in their company, he inscribed the following in their theatre’s guest book: In 1913, my friend, the late poet Apollinaire, took me to the Cirque Medrano. After what we’d seen that night, Apollinaire exclaimed: ‘These performers- using the means of the commedia dell’arte- are saving theatre for artists, actors, and directors.’ Since then, from time to time, I would return to the Medrano, hoping to intoxicate myself again with the hashish of improvised comedy. But Apollinaire was gone. Without him I could no longer find the artists he had shown me. I looked for them with a longing heart but the Italian “lazzi” were no more. Only tonight October 30, 1936, I saw the “zanni” again in the persons of the unforgettable duo of Voskovec and Werich, and was once more bewitched by performers rooted in the Italian commedia ex improvviso. Long live commedia dell’arte! Long live Voskovec and Werich!” (Ibid.). Meyerhold’s observation is apt, as Burian notes elsewhere that Voskevec studied in Paris for three years, during which time he was strongly influenced by Apollinaire, as well as performers at the Cirque Medrano, particularly the Fratelli Brothers (Ibid. 155).

“dance-like movements that produced surprising associations and lyrical shortcuts” (Císař, 2010: 261). Burian developed a technique known as voiceband, “a choral rendition of poetry based on the harmonic and rhythmic syncopations of jazz, a wedding of poetic text and musical expression...[with] a variety of vocal expression, including hissing, whistling and other non-traditional vocalization with percussion accompaniment” (Burian, 1976: 96). Initially Burian created physically static performances of pure voiceband, but later incorporated the technique into traditionally staged performances. Immediately following their split from Honzl, Frejka and Burian founded Moderní studio (Modern Studio), which lasted only two years. After a period of directing in Brno, Burian returned to Prague and, in 1933, established D34, where he applied montage technique to literary and non-fiction texts, creating “a synthesis from literary inspiration while using the other sensory qualities of the stage to achieve theatre communication” (Císař, 2010: 311).

A member of the Communist Party from his student days, Burian intended D34 to be a political theatre. This was reflected in the theatre's name; the “D”, he explained in an announcement of its establishment, “can equally stand for today (dnes), as well as for labourer (dělník), theatre (divadlo), as well as the masses (dav), drama, as well as history (dějiny)”, while the number would change annually to “indicate the incessant change of actualities that the theatre will serve” (Burian, 1976: 98). While his project was inspired by ideals that differed greatly from those espoused by the revivalists almost a century earlier, like them, Burian hoped that D34's platform would generate playtexts and stimulate a new generation of Czech playwrights. When this did not happen, he increasingly explored the adaptation and staging of poetry while simultaneously endeavouring to turn the theatre into a cultural centre for multiple art forms. Burian had been interested in lighting since his Voiceband experiments at the Liberated Theatre, and at D34 he experimented with the

interplay of live action and projected still and moving images, often placing his actors behind a scrim, so that the live and projected movement blurred. The D34 company shared Burian's political ethos and worked as a collective. Their work included elements reminiscent of laboratory theatre practice; for example, rehearsals began with at least an hour of training in song and dance, with actors attending even if they were not cast in the current production (Burian, 1976: 98-99).

As the threat of another war grew closer, politics intruded more and more on First Republic stages. Some theatres reacted with escapist offerings or unusual collaborations, including a brief rapprochement between Czech- and German-speaking theatre artists, who co-organized bi-lingual performances on anti-Nazi themes in Prague, Ostrava and Brno (Císař, 2010: 292). The political engagement of the avant-garde theatres increased. V+W in particular took an active stance against the threat of fascism, despite their reticence, similar to that of the fin-de-siècle Decadents, to adopt an overtly political or nationalist agenda. In a statement published in D34's in-house periodical, they explained their position:

Our mission is simple: to entertain [...] As soon as propaganda of a certain kind intrudes into theatre, as soon as a certain ideological tendency begins to influence theatre work, it stops being theatre and loses its most distinctive mission, an artistic mission. We regard every such dutiful subservience, whether to social needs or political agitation, as artistically unclean. (Burian, 1977: 168)

V+W's regretful acknowledgement of the artist's "dutiful subservience" in times of political turmoil demonstrates the degree to which the act of theatre production in the Czech lands was, and would remain, inextricably linked to the socio-political life of the nation. V+W's audience, as described by Císař, was not dissimilar to the audiences that would frequent the alternative venues Divadlo Na zábradlí and Semafor during the 1960s; just as those theatres drew an audience opposed to the communist regime, "the stage/auditorium relationship at [Osvobozené Divadlo] morphed into an anti-Nazi, anti-

nationalist and pro-democratic attitude that created a kind of joint political platform for theatre and the audience” (Císař, 2010: 289). In a further parallel with the small theatres of the Prague Spring, V+W were persecuted by a totalitarian regime, in this case the occupying Nazi forces, who closed their theatre in 1941.

Czechoslovakia ceased to exist in 1938 when delegates to the Munich Conference “attended by Britain, France, Germany and Italy, but not the country in question...agreed to cede the Sudetenland to Germany” (Fawn, 2000: 7). Hugh Seton-Watson considers Czechoslovakia’s collapse “not only a strategical but a moral loss to all of Europe” (1946: 185). Císař describes the events as a “shattering tragedy” which demanded that artists “become spineless” in the interests of the nation (2010: 323). In histories of the period, this event is widely regarded a betrayal by the same Western Europe in which the Czechoslovak Republic had placed its hopes and with which it culturally identified. The dismantling of Czechoslovakia is read as paving the way for communism to take root in a disenchanted population and debased political system in the aftermath of World War II (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 201). Almost immediately after the First Republic’s dissolution, its social and political legacy became subject to criticism from those on the Left who asserted that its “bourgeois culture” and capitalist orientation had directly led to its fate, which, according to Jiří Hendrych, amounted to “bankers, large-scale capitalists and agrarian magnates selling our entire country” (Abrams, 2007: 121).

The occupation had dire consequences for the theatre, which during the First Republic had achieved, due in large part to an open dialogue with foreign practitioners, a quality “not only equal to that in other contemporary national cultures; in some way it represented a peak in modernist theatre achievement in Europe” (Císař, 2010: 323). Under the Nazis, cultural activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was carefully

controlled. Osvobozené divadlo was closed on the grounds that improvised performances could not be appropriately scrutinized by the censor (Ibid.: 326). Numerous playwrights including Čapek, anti-Nazi Austrian and German playwrights in translation and writers of Jewish origin, were banned. Even in these circumstances, Frejka and Burian managed to stage performances of classic Czech and world texts which, through allegorical staging, were able to comment on the political situation. Such performances, including Burian's November 1938 production of *Věra Lukášová* and Frejka's 1942 staging of Plautus's *Pseudolus the Fox* "were intentionally offered to the audience presuming complicity" (Císař, 2010: 328). After an initial decline in audience numbers, the war years saw a sharp rise in attendance at theatres offering both uncontroversial, censor-friendly popular entertainment and more overtly political fare. In all these performances, a specifically Czech character was emphasized, frequently through use of folkloric references. Czech elements were, by definition, anti-Nazi, and came to be associated with a "democratic, humanist perspective... which frequently led to patriotic sentimentality" (Císař, 2010: 330). This view existed alongside and in opposition to the previously mentioned critical view of the First Republic, which, despite its sceptical stance, remained firmly anti-Nazi.

As the war continued, production conditions became increasingly difficult. In 1941, the palatial Divadlo na Vinohradech (Vinohrady Theatre) was commandeered as a space for German-language cabaret. Bořivoj Srba writes that the occupational government "in six cases out of nine [...] deprived Czech theatres of the possibility of playing in prestige city-owned theatre buildings... [and] cut the subsidies harshly – sometimes by as much as half" (1988: 92). Also in 1941, Burian's D34 was closed and he was sent to a concentration camp, along with his choreographer and agent. Of the interwar avant-garde, only Frejka, at Národní divadlo, continued to mount productions. The end of the war and the 1948

establishment of the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia liquidated private theatres and introduced the doctrine of Socialist Realism as the guiding artistic principle for theatrical endeavours. In addition to artistic uniformity, theatres in communist Czechoslovakia for the first time encountered an almost completely homogenous audience, as the expulsion of three million Germans from the Sudetenland and a policy of assimilation or relocation for Magyars in Slovakia all but eliminated the country's historic ethnolinguistic diversity. The post-war context will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

1.6. Conclusions and Common Themes

The purpose of the discussion up to this point has been to trace the development of an ethno-linguistically defined Czech national consciousness and to examine the role that theatre played in this process, while also following the aesthetic development of Czech theatre practice, with the aim of excavating the underlying, historically-constituted values that influence the practice of theatre in twenty-first-century Prague. The foregoing discussion suggests five significant threads which shall be traced through the following chapters.

The first of these concerns the leveraging of Czech cultural products, particularly theatrical productions, internationally. Although Czech work did not encounter widespread international success until the First Republic, it must be recalled that the schism between nation and state, together with long-lasting German cultural hegemony in Prague, meant that a non-Czech domestic audience witnessed each step of the Czech theatre's development and maturation. More broadly, as noted by Spector, artists dedicated to the cultivation of vernacular Czech culture pitched their activities to impress the cultural and

political elite in Vienna, while Havlíček Borovský's critique of revivalist plays suggests that Czech theatrical activity was of interest not only to Czech-speaking Praguers, but to foreign observers. Despite its roots in an explicitly *nationalist* revival, the national theatre movement and, eventually, the differentiated, professional Czech theatre culture, always presupposed an international audience, whether composed of local Germans, Viennese visitors or foreign observers.

Secondly, and significantly for a discussion of contemporary Czech physical theatre, the artistic development of Czech theatre from the late eighteenth century onwards features a recurring debate between genres of theatre. Whether conceived as a struggle between high versus popular culture, or pure versus hybrid forms, this discourse affirms two key points. The first is Czech audiences' persistent affection for hybrid performance forms combining music, dance and movement, from Tyl's *Fidlovačka* to Smetana's *Prodaná Nevěsta* to V+W's cabarets. The montage technique employed by Frejka and Burian is particularly important due to its influence on future generations of practitioners, and the extent to which it prefigures postdramatic theatre. Burian's work, particularly his appropriation of non-dramatic texts will be seen in the "living newspapers" of the communist era, as well as in Farm in the Cave's *SCLAVI/Emigrantova píseň (The Song of the Emigrant)*. If it is possible, at this stage, to speak of a Czech aesthetic, then surely this is it: a socially-conscious theatre emphasizing fluidity of form, straddling high and popular culture, and making full use of the body, voice and psychology of the actor. Still, the historical development of Czech theatre is dogged by a persistent anxiety regarding the production of original, singly-authored plays, which are posited as the appropriate manifestations of a serious, national theatre culture.

Thirdly, the socio-political history of Czech theatre in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates the theatre repeatedly mediating between an alienated nation and state. Increased and explicitly political theatrical activity under the Metternich and Bach systems of governance, as well as in the years preceding the Munich disaster, affirm Kimball's assertion that theatrical activity increases as opportunities for political engagement decrease. A fourth, and closely related, point, concerns the relationship between Czech theatre artists and their audiences, particularly in those moments when the schism between nation and state yawns widest. In such circumstances, the theatre space allows audiences and artists to gather as a nation, even if the theatre building itself sits within a hostile state. This transformative potential endows theatre buildings with great symbolic and political significance and facilitates complicity between stage and auditorium. This function of theatre, established from the eighteenth century onwards (recalling the enthusiastic response to the first Czech-language performances), helps to explain the role of theatre buildings and theatre artists in the Velvet Revolution.

Finally, and of great interest to a discussion of contemporary Czech theatre artists who describe their work as international, this chapter has shown the evolution of Czech theatre to be shaped by opposing cosmopolitan and nationalist lines of thinking. Havlíček Borovský's critique of the naivety and myopia of the nationalist theatre movement points towards the cosmopolitanism of the Czech Decadence and Czech artists' subsequent engagement with transnational cultural movements such as symbolism, futurism and expressionism. This aspect of Czech theatre practice culminates in the early, optimistic years of the First Republic, when theatre did not need to substitute for politics, and practitioners could experiment freely, drawing inspiration from both foreign and domestic sources, at a time when Prague was also home to vibrant German and Jewish cultural

activities. Opposed to this outward orientation is a nationalist discourse, which tends to view Czech cultural products as wholly indigenous. In such conversations, works are deprived of their full context and evaluated primarily for the extent to which they confirm or deny the values of the field's most conservative faction, which tends to uphold a preference for serious dramatic works reflecting the dominant national ideology of the time. Discourse emanating from this position frequently approaches perceived foreign influences with scepticism, as shall shortly be discussed with reference to laboratory theatre practice and the work of Farm in the Cave.

Chapter Two: **A Socio-cultural History of Czech Theatre under Communism, 1945-1989**

It is beyond the remit of this thesis to give an exhaustive account of communism in the Czech lands, but a consideration of the conditions of its establishment provides essential insight into the development of the theatre from the post-war period through 1989. The shattering effect of the Munich Conference and the subsequent division of Czechoslovakia into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and independent Slovakia has already been discussed. This event, and the war-time experience of Czechoslovakia's two nations, powerfully influenced the post-war climate that emerged following the liberation of Prague by the Red Army in May 1945 (Brown, 2010: 154). The three years of the Second Republic of Czechoslovakia, established after the liberation and lasting until the Communist takeover in 1948, were marked by a complete "rethinking of the meaning of the nation, its organization and orientation" (Abrams, 2004: 280). The mood of the country swung increasingly towards socialism. A national communist party had been present in Czechoslovakia since 1921, polling 18.8% in the 1923 elections and defeating the Social Democrats by a margin of 9% (Fawn, 2000: 5). This reality tends to be obscured by late- and post-communist narratives emphasizing the continuity between Czechoslovakia's interwar democracy and the present day (Demetz, 1998: 341). Citing a 1993 study in which the majority of Czechs deplored the decline of "basic moral principles" as the chief failing, and predominant legacy, of communism, Ladislav Holy notes "a distinct irony in the Czech summary condemnation of socialism on moral grounds," given that socialism "was not imposed by the bayonets of the Soviet Army at the end of World War II, but grew out of the wishes of a majority of the population, to whom the justice and equalities it promised

seemed morally superior to the injustices and inequalities of capitalism” (Holy, 1996: 17). This belief was compounded by a post-war population who, since 1918, had survived “right-wing national dictatorships, economic collapse, and then a war almost incomprehensible in its brutality. Those that survived, particularly the youth among them, were ripe for revolution” (Abrams, 2004: 285).

Post-war Czechoslovak society exhibited a strong anti-German sentiment, tied to a widespread belief among the population that “the war against the Nazi regime had represented a struggle for their nation’s very survival” (Abrams, 2004: 158). An alliance with the Soviet Union was viewed as the best chance of ensuring the nation’s future, especially in the much-feared event of a revitalized Germany. Such cooperation was placed within a pan-Slavic context, renewing the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century arguments that the future of the Slavic nations lay in their close association under Soviet leadership. The post-World War II incarnation of pan-Slavism attributed the Red Army’s triumph over the Nazis to “the strength of the socialist system and the heroism this inspired in its citizens” (Abrams, 2004: 158). Writing three months after Czechoslovakia’s liberation, Ladislav Stoll published “East and West”, an essay in which he argued that the eastern, Slavic countries, epitomized by the Soviet Union, were the true inheritors of Western thought and represented the vanguard of developing civilization. The text displays the messianic zeal also palpable in its nineteenth-century variant:

The “Russian nation and the culturally and spiritually related Slavic nations” will bring the new epoch to the world...the Slavic nations will accordingly hold “a respected place in European civilization, where the culture of the Slavic nations had often been looked down upon.” (Stoll, quoted in Abrams, 2004: 160-161)

In the post-Munich climate, arguments of Slavic exceptionalism were particularly

attractive, as they allowed Czechs and Slovaks to share jointly in the victory of the Soviet Union over Germany, forging “the first link in [...] a conceptual chain binding the Czechs to the East” (Abrams, 2004: 159). Pro-Soviet rhetoric was especially effective in the Czech context because, as Brown notes, the country lacked the history of negative interactions with Russia and the Soviet Union found in neighbouring countries, most notably in Poland (2010: 154).

Ties to the Soviet Union were further fostered by President Eduard Beneš, who had spent the war years in London with the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and resumed his office in Prague in 1945 (Brown, 2010: 154). Beneš fuelled both pan-Slavic and anti-German sentiments with his certainty that the expulsion of some three million Germans from the Sudetenland was necessary to ensure Czechoslovakia’s peaceful future, a project which depended upon the support of Moscow. The expulsion, which remains an open wound in Czech history, was carried out immediately after the war, frequently facilitated by members of the Communist Party. Czechs and Slovaks resettled on ex-German property were ready converts to the party and its membership grew from 40,000 in May 1945 to 826,527 by the end of the year (Brown, 2010: 154). The deportation of the Germans, as well as similar policies towards Roma and Magyar populations in Slovakia, made the Second Republic far more ethnically homogeneous than the First Republic. The departures of the minority groups also increased the Slovak population from “under one-fifth to over one-quarter of the total Czechoslovak population” (Fawn, 2000: 11). In the wake of the resettlements and deportations, the Communist Party’s membership, comprising pre-war communists, members of the interwar intelligentsia and cultural avant-garde, and the most recent converts, handed the Communist Party 38% of the national vote in the 1946

elections, while a further 32% voted for some form of socialism. In the resulting National Front, the governing coalition was led by the Communist Party, and its leader, Klement Gottwald, was named Prime Minister. Despite the dominance of the communists, the government remained, at least initially, nominally pluralistic and democratic (Brown, 2010: 154).

The election results illustrate the on-going debate on the form and precise nature that Czechoslovak socialism would take. While the Communist Party emphasized the socialist and Slavic elements of national history and “strove to recreate the Czech nation and to align it with their vision of the proper socialist society” modelled on the Soviet Union, the position of the Democratic Socialists, the main opposition party, was less clear (Abrams, 2004: 280). As Abrams explains, “democratic socialist intellectuals either adopted compromise positions...or argued in favour of a synthesis that would purportedly lead to a higher form of “Czechness” and potentially avert the onrushing Cold War” (2004: 280). The foggy nature of the democratic socialist position allowed the communists to benefit from a much clearer and more consistent rhetoric, as well as their war-time pedigree of opposition to the Nazi occupation. Within on-going debates on the meaning and legacy of the First Republic, “Marxism offered a coherent and comprehensive cultural and political philosophy that provided consistent answers raised by the war” (Abrams, 2004: 281). In contrast, the Democratic Socialists “found themselves internally disunited, theoretically bereft and, after the elections of 1946, increasingly defensive” (Abrams, 2004: 284).

It is important to note the domestically-generated nature of these debates. While the Czechoslovak Communist Party undoubtedly enjoyed support from Moscow, it must be emphasized that the post-war debate concerning the appropriate course of socialism in

Czechoslovakia was understood as a national concern and, to that extent, a continuation of the First Republic's autonomy and self-understanding as a nation open to both eastern and western European influences. The Second Republic's coalition government enacted a Two-Year Plan for the Renewal and Reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Economy, which, while based on the Soviet model, was conceived within the framework of the existing democratic market economy (Fawn, 2000: 12). Other measures were designed "to equalize wealth, including high progressive taxes, the confiscation of large personal savings, and caps on higher salaries," policies that reflected the mood and political will of the majority of the nation (Fawn, 2000: 12). Despite the atrocities that would come later, after the communists had seized power, the understanding of communism as a national *choice*, rather than a foreign imposition, is central to the reform process of the 1960s.

2.1. Kulturnost in Action: Post-war Theatrical Continuity and Evolution

Those in the artistic community, particularly the writers and avant-garde theatre artists associated with the Devětsil cultural movement of the 1920s, were particularly instrumental in swaying post-war public opinion. The socio-political power they wielded was a direct result of the role of nineteenth-century artists in the emergence of the Czech national conscious and, eventually, nation state. The close relations between politics and the field of cultural production had, over time, and as a direct result of the National Revival (including the dialogical contributions of those critical of xenophobic tendencies in the movement), evolved into what Holy terms the national tradition, or myth, of *kulturnost*. The term refers to the sense in which Czechs conceive of themselves "as an exceptionally cultured and well-educated nation by a specific reading of their history in which they construct a close relationship between culture and politics" (1996: 83). Kulturnost

guaranteed that the political actions of artists would be noted and influential. Milan Simečka describes the embrace of socialism in the immediate post-war period as guided by cultural leaders: “almost everyone in that admirable generation of interwar artists and creators had been in the party...all the writers we admired, all the poets we loved – cultured people with national standing – were either party members or at least fellow travellers” (1984: 53; quoted in Falk, 2003: 60). The support of the artists bolstered the belief that socialism was a natural and autonomous correction, or evolution, of the First Republic, while their on-going artistic practice demonstrated, despite some artists’ renunciations of their interwar work, a continuity of sorts between the First and Second Republics.

Led by the pluralistic coalition of the National Front, the short-lived government of the Second Republic instituted a series of cultural and social policies that reflected the results of the 1946 elections. In the theatre, this included the nationalization of commercial theatres, which joined subsidized theatres under state administration (Burian, 2000: 67). Leadership positions in the theatres were awarded by a committee headed by E. F. Burian's former assistant, Miroslav Kouřil. Mirroring the dominant attitude amongst the population, the theatre community greeted the advent of socialism with optimism, investing in the reorganization of the nation’s theatre network on the grounds that it would now “fulfil a vision [...] for a theatre that would have a secure, institutionalized economic basis so as to fully concentrate on the generally useful functions required of it” (Císař, 2010: 348). A secure economic base, it was thought, would undermine the dominance of the escapist fare that had dominated war-time programming and prevent the reestablishment of artistically conservative middle class theatre on the majority of Prague stages. Instead, performances of significant artistic value would be accessible to all, regardless of income. Prefiguring the

small theatre movement of the 1960s, the Second Republic artists envisioned theatre as a laboratory for society, with artists and audiences engaged in reciprocal communication. Strikingly, the theatrical activity of this period challenges Kimball's correlation of theatrical activity with political disempowerment. The experience of the Second Republic theatre, however brief, nevertheless provides a model for a Czech theatre that maintains its social engagement and desire for audience complicity at a moment when nation and state were reunified after their separation by Nazi occupation.

Venues sustained personnel changes as the interwar avant-garde left their small theatres for roles at the most consecrated venues. Osvobozené Divadlo founders Jindřich Honzl and Jiří Frejka headed Národní divadlo and Divadlo na Vinohradech respectively, while E. F. Burian remained at his D34 quarters. They were joined by a new generation of theatre practitioners, including director Alfréd Radok and designer Josef Svoboda. A third significant post-war figure, Otomar Krejča, began his career as an actor, but would go on to become the most celebrated Czech director of the 1950s and 1960s through his work first at the Národní divadlo and, later, at his own Divadlo za branou (Theatre Behind the Gate). These artists helped to fill the void left by the deaths of interwar practitioners, several of whom, including designer Josef Čapek, and directors Viktor Šuc, Josef Skřivan and Oldřich Stibor, had died in concentration camps (Burian, 2000: 61). Significant new companies included the Divadlo satiry (Theatre of Satire), which worked in the vein of V+W, and Divadlo 5. května (Theatre of the 5th of May). Established by a group of young practitioners, Divadlo 5. května drew its name from the date of the Czech uprising against the Nazi occupational force and was housed in a former German theatre. The largest of the new post-war theatres, it maintained an opera company, as well as a drama ensemble which “was to be a frankly political theatre supporting the socialist cause, with an emphasis on

Slavic plays, but these aims were modified by the inclusion of Western plays in the second season to bolster attendance,” a move which clearly demonstrates the existence of an open, nationally-determined socialism in this period (Burian, 2000: 72). Radok and Svoboda, who would dominate Czech theatre in the 1950s, collaborated with both companies.

In addition to the emergence of new theatres, this period also saw the establishment of university-level conservatory training with the founding of Akademie múzických umění (Academy of Performing Arts, or AMU), and its dramatic wing, Divadelní akademie múzických umění (Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts, or DAMU), in Prague and Janačkova akademie múzických umění (Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, or JAMU) in Brno.¹⁹ As a significant number of influential theatre practitioners including E. F. Burian, Voskovec and Werich, and Svoboda had achieved their success without formal training in the theatre arts, the establishment of AMU marked a significant turn towards professionalism in theatre. Later, following the communist putsch, it would serve as a means of control: those deemed politically unsuitable were denied access to formal training, and by extension, the most consecrated venues and positions of the profession. Students who were accepted were required to attend “political education” courses in Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

2.2. Únor/February: The Communist Coup D'état of 1948

As the field of theatrical production evolved, the nation's political system struggled with competing forms of socialism. From 1946 onward, several events posed threats to both the functioning of the parliamentary system and to Czechoslovakia's political autonomy. In

¹⁹ As Burian notes, the new training programmes complemented the network of state-subsidized theatres: the number of students accepted annually corresponded to the needs of the network (2000: 69). While the academies further the professionalization of theatre, the resulting job security contributed to artistic complacency, particularly in the late years of the communist period.

1947, after a July cabinet vote, Prime Minister Klement Gottwald became the only European Communist Party leader to accept the United States' invitation to participate in the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, a move which angered Stalin. After being summoned to Moscow for a rebuking, Gottwald's future policies were "ultra-responsive to Soviet wishes" (Brown, 2010: 157). Jan Masaryk, an avowed anti-communist, the son of T. G. Masaryk and Gottwald's foreign minister at the time, accompanied Gottwald to Moscow. Upon returning "he proclaimed that he went to Moscow as the foreign minister of a sovereign state but returned as a stooge of Stalin" (Fawn, 2000: 13).²⁰ In addition to compromising the nation's political autonomy, the episode broke ties with the West and further cemented Czechoslovakia's eastward orientation. American president Harry S. Truman made no secret that future interventions from the West would be unlikely after Czechoslovakia had chosen this path.

To consolidate and cement its power, the party set about manufacturing a government crisis: it proposed popular but impractical legislation in an attempt to discredit the National Front, formed an alliance with the army through General Ludvík Svoboda, and infiltrated rival parties in an attempt to sabotage them. Gottwald proposed cancelling the 1948 elections in favour of appointing a list of candidates pre-approved by the party. Anti-communist parties grew increasingly critical of such activities, calling for an investigation into abuses of power by the communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior. The conflict came to a head in February 1948, when a group of non-party ministers resigned in protest of such coercive practices, counting on the fact that Beneš would refuse to accept them and bring forward the elections. In failing health and aware of the support the party enjoyed

²⁰Jan Masaryk was found dead on the ground below his apartment window on 10 March 1948, less than a month after the communists seized power. The question as to whether he committed suicide, the view supported by the communists, or was murdered remains open (Fawn, 2000: 14).

from the Czechoslovak military as well as from Moscow, Beneš accept the resignations and the ministers were replaced by party candidates.

Abrams emphasizes the widespread confusion amongst the population with regard to the alternatives being presented to them. Particularly at fault, he notes, was the Democratic Socialist Party, which, despite being best placed to do so, failed to present a clear alternative programme for consideration. Compounding matters was the faith that the democratic socialists and their anti-communist allies placed in the Second Republic's parliamentary system, which, as Renner notes, had been compromised by both the communist leadership of the National Front and the difficulty of forming an opposing coalition within it (Renner, 1989: 6-7). The democratic socialists not only believed that Beneš would refuse their resignations; they also believed that their concerns would be addressed within the parliamentary system and, accordingly, were completely unprepared to mount an opposing demonstration to the massive and public mobilisation of support galvanized by the Communist Party. The disorganized rhetoric and misplaced faith that characterized the anti-communist position resulted, Abrams argues, in a choice which, by February 1948, greatly lacked clarity:

Were true democrats to stand up for liberal democracy, socialist democracy, the people's democracy, or socializing democracy? Were they to counter the communists on the streets and in the action committees for liberal freedom, socialist freedom or a higher freedom to be achieved by synergetic synthesis? Was opposition to the Communist Party an act inimical to the ideals of the "new Slavic politics?" Were Czechs to risk bloodshed, or at least the loss of their careers, to support the democratic socialists' "struggle for the new man" instead of the communists' same struggle? (2004: 283)

Such rhetorical confusion, Abrams asserts, particularly in combination with the previously discussed socio-political realities of the post-war environment, greatly weakened the

communist opposition movement and paved the way for a bloodless seizure of power.

2.3. Transforming Theatre and Society: Social and Cultural Restructuring, 1948-1956

The free development of theatre was compromised by the communist takeover, which, ultimately, frustrated continuity with the sophisticated theatre practice of the First Republic. The new regime implemented Stalinist cultural and aesthetic policy, the centre-piece of which was the doctrine of socialist realism. Developed by A. A. Zhdanov, and mandated in the USSR following the Soviet Writers' Union Conference of 1934, socialist realism required an "art based on nineteenth-century realism in form and Marxism-Leninism in content" (Burian, 2000: 73-74). Describing the initial imposition of socialist realism in the Soviet context, Boris Groys writes that the policy had come about as a response to demands by writers and artists that Stalin take direct control of the field of cultural production. The resulting policy emphasized the role of the arts to educate. A 1948 address by Zdeněk Nejedlý, the first communist Minister of Culture and Education, demonstrates the party's understanding of the power of theatre:

No art is stronger and more influential than the theatre. Theatre works not only on the individual, but on the large collective, the whole public, the entire nation. [...] Citizens in the theatre – *they* are the nation, the collective unified by what it sees and hears. We must create [from the theatre] a school of culture, a national education. (Just, 2010: 55)

Nejedlý's rhetoric, particularly his use of the word nation, serves to bolster his argument by invoking the Czech theatre's revivalist heritage. Accordingly, his vision does not read as anathema to the Czech avant-garde theatre community's self-defined purpose, nor, indeed, to the role for theatre envisaged in the nineteenth century by Josef Kajetán Tyl. The party sought to actively encourage such associations, with actions such as the renaming of the Stavovské divadlo in honour of Tyl, a practice Jarka Burian describes as "perverse":

“Originally tied to the ideals of national identity and autonomy for the Czechs, [revivalist rhetoric] was now co-opted by an ideology designed to frustrate both ideals in the name of universal social engineering designed and controlled by Moscow” (2000: 76). What differed, but remained temporarily obscured, was the ideological emphasis of the new cultural policy. This quickly became evident, as did party intolerance for any cultural product that deviated from the official doctrine. As Groys states, the party's leadership was “prepared to welcome anyone from any camp who unconditionally supported [socialist realism]. Those who insisted on their own exclusiveness or emphasized past services...were regarded as ‘attempting to be wiser than the party’, that is the Leader, and were ruthlessly punished” (Groys, 1992: 35).

As in the Soviet Union, the assault on Czech culture began in the field of literature, though “it was subsequently superimposed on [all] the arts with no alterations whatsoever” (Groys, 1992: 36). Private Czech libraries were confiscated and their contents evaluated for doctrinal compliance, with dire consequences: “half of all the titles, some 7 million ended up in the paper mill. A mere 3 million books were thought to be ideologically harmless and taken to public libraries” (Renner, 1989: 22). The literary journals, including theatrical publications, that had played a central role in Czech cultural life since the nineteenth century were suppressed and ultimately ceased publication. A direct move to control theatrical activity came on 30 March 1948 with the passage of the Theatre Act, which “defined, in the communist spirit, the position and function of theatre in society and guaranteed the state critical influence in all theatrical matters” (Just, 2010: 55). Just notes that, with a few inconsequential amendments, this law remained on Czechoslovakia's books until 1989 (Ibid.).

The Theatre Act liquidated private theatres and brought all activity under the control

of regional party committees or the Ministry of Culture. Having secured administrative control, the party sought control of aesthetics, insisting on socialist realism as the guiding artistic principle. In practice, this “led to a distorted oversimplification and uncritical application of what was thought to be Stanislavsky’s system” (Burian, 2000: 73). The Czech theatre community had first encountered socialist realism in the mid-1930s: its first target was director E. F. Burian, who had joined the Communist Party as a student in 1923 and established his D34 as a “political theatre tribunal” (Burian, 1976: 98). Deeply influenced by Vsevolod Meyerhold and the Soviet avant-garde, E. F. Burian’s work in the mid-1930s moved away from its earlier, agitprop style in the direction of subjective lyricism. At least one-third of Burian's productions were montages created from non-dramatic texts; initially, these had included statistics and historical facts meant to instruct the audience along Marxist lines, but they were later replaced by poetry, accompanied by projections that highlighted the psycho-emotional experience of a single protagonist struggling against society. Communist Czech critics lamented the evolution of E. F. Burian's work towards portrayals of subjective experience and, in 1937, photos of D34 productions were removed from a Czech cultural exhibition in Moscow, on charges of formalism (Burian, 1976: 112).

E. F. Burian reacted angrily; Jarka Burian notes that he “chafed at the imposed criteria of ready intelligibility and hewing a dramatic line, both of which seemed designed to frustrate what he considered the intrinsic demand of art” (1976: 111). Significant for the future of Czech theatre practice, this critique emphasizes a production’s ‘readability’ and privileges dramaturgically closed productions, which present a clearly discernible, single narrative, over work that prompts the spectator to create his/her own meaning in response

to a scenic montage that may appear self-contradictory, or lacking in continuity. Theatre works organized along the latter principles – montage, audience engagement – were associated with small theatre forms (revue, cabaret) and the work of the interwar avant-garde; communist resistance to such forms threatened the legacy and influence of the interwar period, despite its acknowledged achievements and sophistication. In what initially seems an ironic reversal of the avant-garde's cosmopolitan interwar position, E. F. Burian further objected to the international orientation of communist cultural policy, arguing for the right to determine aesthetic questions on a national level. E. F. Burian's critique is nuanced, acknowledging Czech theatre artists' genuine interest in socialist realism in the early years of the First Republic, as well as its role in the achievements of the interwar avant-garde. Instead, it was the monolithic nature of the policy and its resistance to dialogue with specific (national) field of production that drew his ire.²¹ For E. F. Burian, the free-flowing exchange of ideas and influences in Devětsil represented a preferred mode of cultural interaction. Although strongly socialist in orientations, Devětsil combined foreign elements, primarily from France and Russia, with domestic forms and tastes. The blanket imposition of socialist realism derailed the continuity of this legacy, by insisting on uniform application of its principles, without regard for existing Czech tastes and modes of presentation, including the small forms that had proliferated during the First Republic. Internationalism in this context did not create conditions for cross-pollination and exchange, but instead served to close debate with a universal policy.

By the late 1940s, the universal and inflexible application of socialist realism began to exact a toll on the Czech theatre scene, particularly those factions closest to the interwar

²¹ E. F. Burian exhibited solidarity with theatre makers running afoul of the regime elsewhere in the communist bloc. In Prague, for example, he circulated petitions on behalf of Vsevolod Meyerhold, who faced increasing persecution in the USSR (J. Burian, 1976: 111-112).

avant-garde. Both Divadlo satiry and Divadlo 5. května were closed, the latter absorbed into Národní divadlo. V+W, who had returned to Prague after spending the war years abroad, dissolved their partnership in at the end of the 1947/1948 season, recognizing that their work “no longer resonated with the new socio-political context” (Burian, 2000: 71). Modern dance, ballet and pantomime were dealt with particularly harshly, as their non-verbal content, much like the semi-improvised nature of the performances of V+W, made them difficult to censor and subject to multiple interpretations (Petišková, 2001). Theatre programming was regulated to conform to the dictates of ‘The Bratislava Ladder’ policy; as a result, “[v]irtually all contemporary western plays disappeared from the repertoires at this time, replaced by the approved Soviet plays and dramatic works from other socialist countries” (Burian, 2000: 74). Along with their repertoires, the staffs of theatres were investigated. Following the implementation of the Theatre Act, the official body tasked with administering the nation's theatres commenced

an “eligibility review” of the leading personnel of all theatres [...] to “cleanse” from theatres unreliable, meaning non-party member, staff. Persons who would not guarantee that they would lead the theatre according to the intentions of the KSČ [Czechoslovak Communist Party] started to be systematically removed (among the first were, for example Karel Dostal, head of drama and Václav Talich, head of opera at the National Theatre). Membership in the KSČ became henceforth a necessary precondition for the appointment of all administrative and artistic directors. (Just, 2010: 55)

The purges created an atmosphere of fear, which fuelled artists' complicity. As Ota Ornest, head of the Prague Municipal Theatres from 1950 to 1973, explains, some “kept silent and thereby became accomplices.” Further, Ota explains, “in addition to keeping silent, every now and then they had to comply with some ‘sacrifice to the gods’ if they wanted to keep working, if they wanted to retain some values...if they simply wanted to stay alive (Burian, 2000: 67). This reaction supports Hungarian dissident Miklós Haraszti's argument that the

policing of creativity within the framework of state socialism “paradoxically seeks the elimination of censorship” by fostering a reciprocal relationship between the artist and the state, in which the state repression is replaced by self-censoring (1987: 6).

The early Stalinist purges were worst in Prague, where censorship was harshest. Artists who did not comply were denied access to Prague stages, establishing a precedent for strict monitoring of theatre in the capital. Some practitioners were relegated to provincial towns and cities, which, decades later, would give rise to a vibrant alternative theatre culture. Others, including Jiří Voskovec, were among the first artists to emigrate. Honzl, Frejka and E. F. Burian all remained in Czechoslovakia and continued to work, though the compromises demanded of each exacted a significant toll on their creative and personal lives. Honzl, the most dogmatic communist among them, spent the majority of his post-war career at Národní divadlo, where he staged sixteen productions, including historical Czech dramas and propagandistic pieces. The post-war work of Frejka, who had remained unaffiliated before finally joining the party in 1948, was, Jarka Burian argues, the strongest of the three. In his five post-war seasons at Divadlo na Vinohradech, Frejka's work continued to develop, though his avoidance of socialist realist themes drew criticism. Unlike E. F. Burian and Honzl, Frejka did not renounce his previous work, maintaining continuity within his own practice. Ultimately, a lack of interpersonal skills in his leadership style and his questionable political profile led to his removal from Divadlo na Vinohradech. He was transferred to a music theatre in the Prague suburb of Karlín, where he worked for two seasons before committing suicide in October 1952. His suicide note accused theatre czar Kouřil and two associates of “draining” Czechoslovakian theatre and pleaded for their removal (Burian, 2000: 81).

E. F. Burian's post-war work was comparatively erratic. Despite his early critique of socialist realism, he, like Honzl, renounced his 1930s work, and his admiration of Meyerhold. However, he continued to revive his interwar productions, positioning them as historical curiosities. His first production after returning to Prague from internment in Dachau, *Romeo and Juliet: The Dream of a Prison*, was hailed by some critics as the best of his career, but only a few years later he staged a sensationalist and exploitive documentary inspired by the Stalinist show trials (J. Burian, 2000:82). As Jarka Burian notes, perhaps the most important role played by Frejka, E. F. Burian and Honzl in the post-war environment was their nurturing of the next generation of theatre artists, including playwright Josef Topol, actor/director Krejča, director Radok and designer Svoboda, all of whom collaborated with one or more of them in the decade following 1948. Krejča, Radok and Svoboda represent a middle generation: artists who worked predominately in large, state-subsidized theatres and would enjoy a comparative freedom of expression for the majority of their careers, they seem initially opposed to the interwar avant-garde of the 1930s and the small theatre movement of the 1960s, yet it is their grounding in the former that paved the way for the latter. They would bring traces of this work to bear in their productions at Národní divadlo in the 1950s, which, in turn, proved an inspiration to the instigators of the small theatre movement.

The restructuring of the field of theatre was part of the Gottwald government's plan to dismantle the 'capitalist remains' of democratic Czechoslovakia in order to reconstitute society along Soviet lines — this despite Czechoslovakia's substantial economic success and pre-war industrial development.²² The National Front had already nationalized the

²² Inter-war Czechoslovakia was the tenth most highly industrialized nation in the world and the national infrastructure did not suffer great damages as a result of World War II (Falk, 2003: 62).

banking and insurance industries. Under the communist government, all means of production, ranging from small, privately owned businesses to heavy industry, were nationalized and the economy restructured to favour heavy industry. The number of privately-owned shops and self-employed craftsmen was reduced from approximately 250,000 in 1948 to 6,552 by 1958 (Williams, 1997: 5). Social reorganization targeted individual citizens, who were persecuted, imprisoned or sent to forced labour camps as ‘enemies of the state,’ a designation applied to such diverse groups as the clergy, non-communist politicians, national communists (many of them Slovaks), interwar government officials, members of the war-time National Resistance and class enemies – the pre-war bourgeoisie and economic elite (Renner, 1989: 23).²³ Williams reports that “at least 300,000 people were removed from public life for class reasons, and in their places 250,000 people aged between twenty-five and thirty were hastily trained and promoted to become the basis of the new ruling class,” resulting in large numbers of insufficiently qualified people in positions of power (1997: 5). Children born to politically unsuitable parents were denied access to higher education, a fate that befell future president Václav Havel, as the son of a wealthy Prague family. Even party members were not safe: in 1952, eleven party officials were sentenced to death in the Slánský Trial, the worst of the Stalinist show trials, which reflected a strong anti-Semitic orientation in its choice of defendants: eleven of the fourteen tried were of Jewish origin.²⁴ Characterized by forced confessions and staged proceedings in which the participants, in a gruesome parody of theatre, had memorized their lines in

²³ National communists resisted the uniform application of policies emanating from Moscow and instead argued that each communist nation should be free to determine its own form of socialism. The logic of the position has much in common with E. F. Burian’s 1930s critique of socialist realism on Czech stages.

²⁴ The Slánský trials, the most notorious of the 1950s, were named after their chief defendant, Rudolf Slánský, a Gottwald ally and leading communist, who was arrested in November of 1951. Along with thirteen other defendants, Slánský was tried and convicted on trumped-up charges supported by evidence “given under duress” (Brown, 2010: 214). Eleven of the fourteen defendants, including Slánský, were sentenced to death and executed in November 1952.

advance, the felt need to “cleanse” the party from within emanated from Moscow and clearly demonstrated the loss of Czechoslovak sovereignty in the darkest period of repression.

The atmosphere of the late 1940s and early 1950s was one of fear, pressure and constant surveillance, which did not abate with Stalin’s death in 1953. The Czechoslovak government conservatively interpreted and rigorously implemented Soviet policies. Gottwald’s zealous adherence to Moscow’s policies should, Archie Brown argues, be understood, at least in part, as reflecting broad public support for the communist government, which was justified in feeling it possessed a mandate. While Czechoslovakia “was the last of the European states to become Communist [...] it was the one in which repression was the most severe. This may have been a Stalinist tribute to the very strength of Czech democracy” (Brown, 2010: 213). Though the May 1948 elections that solidified communist power after the coup were not free, the veneer of democratic process justified a strong, domestic Stalinism, again untainted by antipathy resulting from the sense of communism having been imposed from abroad. Barbara J. Falk suggests that comparatively favourable economic progress in the first half of the 1950s further contributed to the legitimacy of Gottwald’s government (2003: 61).

2.4. Political Liberalization and Theatrical Reinvigoration: 1956 -1967

In 1956 a chink of light appeared. At the XXth Party Congress in Moscow, Nikita Khrushchev denounced the Stalinist cult of personality and revealed some of the worst crimes of his predecessor’s regime. Heda Margolius Kovály, whose husband Rudolf Margolius, Deputy Foreign Minister, had been tried and sentenced to death in the Slánský trials, describes Khrushchev’s statement as “only a crack in the wall of terror which Stalin

and his henchmen had built” in Czechoslovakia, yet it was sufficiently significant that “before the Party regained its bearings and tightened the screws again, most people saw the light” (1986: 164-165). While the Czechoslovak government, led by Antonin Novotný, would not significantly alter its conservative policies until the 1960s, the influence of the Soviet Union resulted in the release of political prisoners and the rehabilitation of those executed in the show trials of the 1950s – a rare instance in which adherence to Soviet policies pushed the regime in a more progressive direction. Under the guise of the “Czechoslovak New Course” pursued after Stalin’s death, the apathy and indifference which characterized Czechoslovak society in the fearful atmosphere of Stalinism slowly abated, “encouraged by the events of the XXth Party Congress...and the example of rebelling colleagues in Poland and Hungary” (Renner, 1989: 28).²⁵

The reform process that led up to the Prague Spring comprised practical, political and social elements. On a practical basis, the government was faced with stagnant economic growth: in 1962, national incomes were lower than the year before, there were shortages of consumer goods and economic growth reversed (Fawn, 2000: 18-19). Falk notes that the party attributed the problems to proposed plans for decentralization, but argues that the actual causes were primarily structural in nature, relating to bad stewardship and misappropriation of Czechoslovakia’s existing pre-communist industrial infrastructure.

Under Soviet influence, Czechoslovakia went through a second industrialization, carried

²⁵ Inspired by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization message, reform communism movements emerged in Poland and Hungary. Like the Prague Spring, they were led by critical voices within the party itself. In each instance, the replacement of a popular leader (Imre Nagy in Hungary and Władysław Gomułka in Poland) with a successor hand-picked by Moscow acerbated the situation and mass demonstrations were held throughout October 1956. A major issue concerned the right of each communist country to determine its own course, a question highlighted by the recent reconciliation between Yugoslavia (previously expelled from the party for pursuing a national socialism) and the Soviet Union. The Polish rebellion ended with the restoration of Gomułka to power and avoided violence; in Hungary, events culminated in armed resistance to a Soviet invasion. (See Brown, 2010: 272-289).

out with little forethought and awareness of what decisions would best support on-going growth. In combination, these factors meant that, despite being “the showpiece of socialist expansion in Europe” in the 1950s, Czechoslovakia could not sustain the momentum: “the Stalinist model of heavy industrialization and extensive or “easy” economic expansion was exhausted much earlier in terms of economic growth” than in countries with less existing industrial infrastructure (Falk, 2003: 62-63). To combat these problems, leading party economist Ota Šik suggested an extensive economic reform programme marked by a “shift to an intensive-growth, regulated market system” which would oppose complete centralization and introduce a partially free market, influenced by supply and demand (Ibid.). Šik’s plans called for increased responsibilities for managers and workers who would take greater responsibility in decision-making.

Zdeněk Mlynář, an architect of the Prague Spring, who served as Party Secretary from 1968-1970, believed that Šik’s economic reforms required accompanying political reform. In “Towards a Democratic Political Organization of Society”, he argues that only changes to the role of the individual in the spheres of politics and the economy would enable “people [to] begin to turn their initiative, activity, and talent away from advancing their own private affairs, towards the goal of the social whole, to the search for ways to satisfy their own needs and interests *in harmony with* the whole development of society” (Stokes, 1996: 124). The new Czechoslovak constitution of 1960 paved the way for a renegotiation of the political role of the citizen. Further, it declared that socialism had been achieved and that any remaining social divisions were non-antagonistic; under such circumstances, “there was no further need to foster an atmosphere of vigilance and hatred. The development and interests of each individual were now considered congruent with the

development and interests of society as a whole” (Williams, 1997: 7). Simultaneously, dissatisfied members of the “middle” generation, those who had been in their twenties in 1948 and now held responsible positions within the party, took inspiration from Marx’s earliest writings, which had recently become available. With their emphasis on “man’s projective consciousness,” these texts provided an acceptable ideological basis for imaging a “Marxist humanism turning on the idea of praxis, of creative activity” (Ibid.: 9). As in the case of Šik’s economic reforms, the party interpreted these internal developments, and the policies they inspired, as developing communism rather than deviating from it: “The CPCz [Czechoslovak Communist Party] was able to mount an effective revisionist challenge to the Stalinist model because intellectual opposition remained largely inside the party, at least prior to 1968” (Falk, 2003: 61). The emerging socialism drew freely from the Czech lands’ humanist heritage and the democratic experience of the first Republic, to create an indigenous system of governance.

Economic and political reforms were accompanied by social and cultural flourishing. Signs of increased trust between the people and the state included government-led investigations of the 1950s show trials and the re-emergence of civil society in the form of the numerous citizens’ organizations that came into being throughout the decade. Inspired by the reformist position that championed a pluralistic society, groups that emerged during this period include KAN (The Club of Non-Party Activists), K231 (The Club of Former Political Prisoners), and the Slovak Society for Human Rights. Print culture flourished and numerous literary magazines and journals were established, including the influential *Literární listy*, the journal of the Czechoslovak Union of Writers. The years preceding the 1968 political liberalization and cultural flowering known as the Prague Spring were also characterized by the revitalization of the media, which, taking its cue from the reform

communists, stepped up its critical coverage of the political atrocities of the Stalin-Gottwald Era. The entire period, not only its cultural products, “amounted...to a departure from Soviet norms and a ‘return to Europe,’” with a reform spirit “unique in the cross-generational appeal of its movement” (Fawn, 2000: 19).

Liberalization in the theatre gave rise to an experimental small theatre movement that opposed the status quo. Its origins may be traced to the work of Radok, Krejča and Svoboda, in the larger repertory companies. Though limited by the political climate, their work maintained continuity with the Czech theatre heritage. Jarka Burian writes:

Their work strongly resisted the counter artistic flow of the theatre of their time. It was their vision, artistry, and will that most decisively broke the pattern of the Socialist Realist formula and, along with the later development of new, non-establishment studio theatres, inspired the surge of creativity leading to the peak years of the 1960s. (2000: 86).

Radok, Krejča and Svoboda differed from the generations that preceded and followed them by working almost exclusively in large, repertory companies. All three worked at Národní divadlo in the 1950s, Krejča as head of the drama ensemble and Radok as an associate director. There they reintroduced explicitly theatrical elements of staging – masks, lyrical physicality, minimal sets, expressive lighting – and formed, according to Vladimír Just, “a latent opposition to the schematic socialist-realist model,” in the early days of the post-Stalinist thaw (2010: 91). While they continued to stage dramatic texts, their dramaturgy reflected the Prague Spring’s interest in individual responsibility and presented “a psychologically intensified depiction of life [...which,] accentuated individual human fate, problems and dilemmas” (Just, 2010: 91). Significantly, such work served to rescue theatre from the didactic, declamatory and indoctrinating function imagined for it by socialist realism and promoted it once more as a space for dialogue and exploration of human-scale truths: “Krejča used his leading position [...] to direct the National Theatre's drama

department away from utilitarian service of the interests of power, towards the development of his own, distinctive theatrical language...[to create] a critical picture of the contradictory, complex life of the modern person” (Just, 2010: 77).

Just credits Krejča and dramaturg Karel Kraus with “rehabilitating the importance of on-going dramaturgical work”, and their work at Národní divadlo is especially notable for its rigour (2010:77). Their support of young playwrights, including Josef Topol and František Hrubín, stimulated Czech playwriting; simultaneously, they took tremendous care in the preparation of older works, often commissioning new translations of classic texts.²⁶ Their pursuit of excellence invigorated the programming at the National and stood in opposition to the artistic lethargy that had consumed Czechoslovakia's state theatres in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Further, their collaboration modelled a democratic way of working, team work (týmová práce): “although the director retained the leading position, the dramaturg, sceneographer, and actor became equal partners with him (dramaturgical-directorial concept, actor-director's method of work, directorial-scenic components of a production)” (Just, 2010: 84). This method, pioneered by Krejča and Kraus on a highly visible platform, was replicated in the small theatre movement in the relationships of dramaturg Václav Havel and director Jan Grossman at Divadlo Na zábradlí and playwright/director Ladislav Smoček, playwright Alena Vostrá, playwright/actor Pavel Landovský, director/theorist Ivan Vostrý and director/actor Jan Kačer at Prague's Činoherní Klub (Drama Club) (Goetz-Stankiewicz, 1979: 175).

²⁶ Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz describes Topol, Kraus and Krejča's preparation of *Jejich Den (Their Day)* for Národní divadlo's 1960 season: “the three men kept polishing the play's language and perfecting it to the smallest detail, continuing their work even after the play had begun to run. [...] We are told that [Topol] changed some of the dialogue even after the eighty-fifth performance of the play” (1979: 150-151). Recognized within Czech theatre criticism as the most distinctive playwright of the 1960s, Topol's work is largely unknown abroad, due to the conviction that the playwright's poetic tone renders the work untranslatable.

Alfréd Radok differed from Krejča in his attitude towards texts; where Krejča staged plays, he preferred to adapt, creating textual montages reminiscent of D34. Where Krejča's work was serious in tone, Radok "had a flair for comedy and even farce" and worked "primarily intuitively and improvisationally" (Burian, 2000: 90-91). Originally removed from the Národní divadlo during the Stalinist purges, Radok returned to the National under Krejča, where he directed several successful productions that combined "a penetrating view of the human heart with original, spectacular staging" (Just, 2010: 78). Even more than Krejča, Jarka Burian argues, Radok had inherited from the interwar avant-garde "a non-realistic, poetic, consciously theatrical, metaphoric approach to theatre" (2000: 90). Radok's collaboration with Svoboda on *Laterna Magika*, presented at the 1958 Brussels Expo, made full use of this inheritance and fulfilled Radok's desire, inherited from E. F. Burian, for "total, synthetic theatre, in which all the technical elements (film, photography, visual and musical collage, cabaret) combined in a polyphonic stage testimony of the contemporary world" (Just, 2010: 78).

The project's international success was significant, since its presentation in Brussels marked only the second time a Czech production had toured to Western Europe since 1948. The first had occurred two years earlier, when the Národní divadlo's dramatic ensemble travelled to an international theatre festival in Paris with productions by Čapek and Nezval in May of 1956 (Just, 2010: 274). The content of the *Laterna Magika* production for Brussels was, Jarka Burian notes, essentially Czechoslovakian propaganda. Indeed, the efficacy of *Laterna Magika* for such purposes succeeded in derailing its development for several years. While Radok and Svoboda favoured using the technology to mount a Shakespeare production, Burian notes:

[M]anagerial and administrative elements viewed *Laterna Magika* in terms of economics and politics, as a source of profit and an instrument of propaganda, with the result that its subsequent artistic career was aborted; its several sequels rarely rose above tourist-level entertainment. (Burian, 1970: 138)

While ironic and hypocritical, given the emphasis on liquidating commercial theatres in the 1940s, the management of *Laterna Magika* reflects Czechoslovakia's policy of limiting cultural exports to those least likely to attract controversy. Accordingly, it was the design work of Josef Svoboda which received the most widespread foreign recognition throughout the 1950s and early 1960s and remains influential to this day.²⁷ An "architecturally trained stage designer," Svoboda became one of the most prolific and sought-after European designers, designing almost 350 productions between 1945 and 1970 (Burian, 1970: 123). While Burian notes that "many of his productions recall the emphasis of scenic dynamics and stage-as-mechanism evident in [...] the work of Soviet theatricalists, Meyerhold and Tairov" or, in their combination of scenic and filmic elements, relate to "the earlier work of Piscator", Svoboda's "greater technical sophistication and more suggestive approach provide a richer, more emotive experience" and "carr[y] the work to a much higher, more complex level that amounts to the creation of a new, hybrid medium combining actor and screened image" (Ibid.: 145). Associated with Svoboda's work, notes Jarka Burian, were "a full-scale exploitation for stage purposes of the latest mechanical, electric, and optical devices (many of which he has designed himself)...the so-called kinetic stage, and...a

²⁷ Svoboda was the recipient of international prizes including: "the gold medal award of the Sao Paolo Biennale in international stage design (1961), an honorary doctorate from England's Royal College of Art (1969), and the Sikkens Prize of the Netherlands in architecture (1969), a previous winner of which was LeCorbusier" (Burian, 1970: 124). A partial list of the theatres for which Svoboda designed appeared in obituary published in *Entertainment Design* magazine at the time of his death in 2002 and speaks to the reach of his work; venues listed include: National Theatre and Royal Opera House (London); State Opera (Vienna); Metropolitan and New York City Operas and the Kennedy Centre (New York); Festival Theatre (Bayreuth); State Opera (Berlin); and La Scala (Milan) (2002: 7). In addition to his design work, Svoboda's "master classes and lectures at more than a dozen universities and schools of art exerted a profound influence" (Burian, 2002: 15-16).

wide-ranging use of sophisticated lighting and production techniques” (Burian, 1970: 124). Despite the limitations imposed on *Laterna Magika*, Jarka Burian argues that Svoboda’s touring activity established Czech theatre in the minds of western theatre critics and practitioners and did much to motivate their decision to travel to Prague as conditions became more favourable in the 1960s (1971: 229).

Svoboda’s international success prompts a consideration of Czech practitioners’ engagement with international audiences and trends in theatre-making during the communist era. While the period from 1948 until 1956 offered few opportunities for contact with theatres outside the Soviet bloc, Just documents seventeen foreign tours between May 1956 and June 1968. Of these, ten visited destinations outside the Soviet bloc or its allied governments.²⁸ With the exception of the National’s 1956 trip to Paris, none occurring before 1966 were undertaken by a dramatic ensemble. Travelling companies included the State Theatre of Brno’s ballet ensemble (Paris, 1959); *Laterna Magika* (London and Vienna, 1961); Jiří Srnec’s Black Light Theatre (Australia, 1964) and *Národní divadlo*’s opera company (Edinburgh, 1964). The list affirms the parameters implied by Svoboda’s success, as companies travelling abroad were either particularly notable for their technical achievement (*Laterna Magika*, the Black Light Theatre) or able to promote national culture with a conservative repertoire of nineteenth-century classics (the opera and ballet companies). There was no attempt, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, to promote the vanguard of domestic practice or contemporary Czechoslovak playwriting abroad. When dramatic ensembles did tour, their programming was historical and conservative, as evidenced by *Národní divadlo*’s choice of a Čapek play for a 1966 tour to London and

²⁸ Statistics quoted in this section, and throughout the rest of the chapter, have been calculated based on the catalogue of significant Czech performances between the years 1945 and 1989 published in Vladimír Just’s *Divadlo v totalitním systému* (*Theatre in a Totalitarian System*), Prague: Akademie 2010, pages 149-601.

Munich. As the Prague Spring gained momentum, the younger and smaller factions of the Czech theatre scene made use of festivals to gain international exposure. Examples include readings by playwrights Václav Havel, Bohumil Hrabal, Vera Linhartová, Martin Macourek and Josef Topol at a May 1966 writing festival in Munich, or Krejča's participation, with Divadlo za branou, the theatre he founded after his departure from the National, in a festival of experimental theatre in Frankfurt (Just, 2010: 379-382).²⁹

As Czech companies ventured further afield, the 1960s also brought Western visitors to Prague. The London Old Vic was the first to arrive, performing *Romeo and Juliet* and *St. Joan* in July of 1962, while subsequent visitors included the Royal Shakespeare Company, under the direction of Peter Brook (1964), Merce Cunningham's ballet company (1964), Compagnie Renaud-Barrault (1965), Kenneth Tynan (1967) and Marcel Marceau (1967) (Just, 2010: 237). Foreign playwrights from beyond the Soviet bloc increasingly featured on Czech stages; an examination of repertoires reveals a gradual loosening of the policy towards western European and North American plays from the 1956/57 season onwards. Arthur Miller had been performed sporadically from the 1940s, but became a regular fixture after 1957, a year before Jean-Paul Sartre's work appeared, followed shortly by that of Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Shelagh Delaney, and Eugene Ionesco, all in regular rotation by 1962. Thirty-three productions of plays originating outside the Soviet bloc were performed from 1957 to 1962, in contrast with twenty productions of plays from other communist countries, all but one of which were by Bertolt Brecht. The new plays included, most significantly, those of the Absurdist. 1965 saw productions by fourteen western playwrights, including Edward Albee, Albert Camus, Luigi Pirandello, and Harold Pinter.

²⁹ Just notes that the Frankfurt festival was also attended by the Berliner Ensemble, La Mama and the Living Theatre (Just, 2010: 379-382).

Since theatres firmly under state control, including Národní divadlo, were obliged to respect the dictates of the Bratislava Ladder, the majority of Absurdist plays, along with other international writing, were produced by the more intimate venues that emerged in the 1960s. Despite their association with absurdist playwriting (both foreign and domestic), the earliest articulations of the malé divadlo (small theatre) movement were Jiří Suchý's and Ivan Vyskočil's 1958 text-appeals at Prague's Reduta jazz club. Presented in revue-format, text-appeals emphasized song and literature over playtexts and full production values. Suchý and Vyskočil occupied a position within the malé divadlo movement analogous to that of Frejka and Honzl within the avant-garde, in the sense that their initial collaboration, while short-lived, sparked a chain of developments which gave rise to the establishment of numerous theatres and careers, as their disciples clarified and pursued their own artistic visions. In October 1958, Suchý and Vyskočil moved out of Reduta, establishing Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade) where they continued to produce text-appeals. A year later, Suchý left to form Semafor, which continued to mount revue-style productions emphasizing the role of music. Divadlo Na zábradlí, meanwhile, turned its focus increasingly to the production of plays. In 1962, Vyskočil, who later co-founded Činoherní Klub (Drama Club), a hub of contemporary Czech playwriting, was succeeded by director Jan Grossman, whose effective staging of Absurdist plays and excellent working relationship with the theatre's dramaturg and resident playwright, Václav Havel, catapulted the theatre to world prominence.

While they differed in their interests and methodologies, the small theatres shared common objectives and interests. While Krejča's work had reinvigorated the ND and greatly increased the quality of its work, it remained, like other 'stone' theatres (kamenná

divadla), a bulky, bureaucratic organization with a large, unwieldy staff and state-imposed quotas to meet. Work was affected by a production-line ethos, which evaluated success in terms of the number of premiers and performances staged and tickets sold annually (Burian, 1971: 231). This assessment model greatly compromised the creative process, as rehearsals were hurried in an effort to meet targets. The small theatres, in contrast, rehearsed until they were satisfied with the work and operated with a minimum of artistic and production staff. They chose their material based on interest, which, as noted above, allowed them to devote more time to foreign plays. At the same time, the small theatre movement nurtured a generation of young Czech playwrights, which, in addition to Havel and the playwrights of Činoherní Klub, included Ivan Klíma, Pavel Kohout, and Milan Kundera, all of whom were producing increasingly open-ended texts exploring the personal, ethical and moral dimensions of contemporary life.

The seeking quality of these writers' work reflects their position as members, according to Havel, of "the first non-ideological generation" (1990: 49). Their theatre was not didactic, but rather strove to "express the truth of young people [...] who only wanted to live in their own way, to dance the way they wanted to dance, simply to be in harmony with their own nature" (Havel, 1990: 49). In part, this amounted to a "protest against the ideologization of art," through the attempt to produce "the opposite of political, namely anti-political theatre," so that the stage might "again exist for its own sake and, theatre be made for theatre's sake" (Goetz-Stankiewicz, 1979: 40-41). Goetz-Stankiewicz notes the paradox of such an aim: in its attempt to escape politics, such work "in the last analysis...becomes, in a wider sense, political again" (Ibid.). The work acquired this dimension largely through its capacity to transmit its seeking ethos to an audience of its

same generation:

More important than their [...] dramatic or ideological communication was the mere fact of their generation “co-residing” or “being-together”. “Co-residing” in a mentally and visually unconstructed space, in their own “free space” (mainly unintended for the operation of theatre), “co-residing” together with listeners, interpreters, and their own adopted music, together with visual characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, clothes and other generational codes. The common denominator in all this was disregard for the then-applicable model of behaviour [...] disregard for the dominant musical, literary, artistic, dramatic and theatrical modes of speech. In that disregard for the contemporary norms of being [...] was hidden a latent opposition to the totalitarian system, and thus a latent political character. (Just, 2010: 91-92)

This interest in undefined spaces and uncodified behaviour constitutes a rejection of the easy answers provided by party ideology in favour of a genuine exploration of the complexity and variety of human life. Small spaces were preferred, as these placed audience and performers in close proximity to each other. Dennis C. Beck likens the malé divadlo movement to post-structural semiotics, since it “refuse[d] to close meaning, to privilege a single ideology and to totalize. As such, it stood in ideological and practical opposition to post-Leninist communist perspectives”, which were closed to notions of plurality (1996: 421).

While post-communist narratives emphasize the malé divadlo movement’s association with playwriting, its values are also expressed through small, episodic theatre forms, including cabaret and revue, which were “less subject to the inflated, schematic, and ultimately hollow treatment associated with the more traditional theatres” (Burian, 1971: 232). In Semafor, as in Suchý and Slitr’s early text appeals, music was a central carrier of meaning. Ivo Osolsobě’s discussion of a theatre “speaks, sings and dances”, argues that the combination of music and text in revue-style performance “emphasizes variety in unity” and is particularly adept at engaging and uniting audiences, often in opposition to a polarly

opposed 'other' (1974: 241). Semafor's productions, described by Havel as "a manifestation of uncensored life, life that spits on all ideology," operated in this way; its "performances were not about anything" and consisted of individual songs, each a universe unto itself (1990: 49). The 1960s also witnessed a renewal of Czech pantomime, as, beginning in the 1960s, mimes Ctibor Turba, Boris Hybner and Richard Rýda, "evolved the genre [of pantomime] to another phase, moving away from dance and ballet and towards so-called grotesque pantomime [...] which is directly analogous to the wave of absurd theatre and plays in dramatic theatre" (Just, 2010: 92). Even more strongly than the movement's dramatic theatre, such non-verbal or hybrid-genre work worked to shift the mode of theatrical presentation "from one-way proclamation to dialogue, to a form of mutual participation in the act of theatre, to a sharing of experience" (Burian, 1971: 232). As individuals and a collective, then, audiences engaged in the active reading of a diverse range of productions united by their open dramaturgy.

The relationship between form and content was heightened by the anti-illusionistic acting style associated with the movement, which challenged socialist realism's requirement that the actor be submerged completely within the character. While this technique reached its apotheosis in the autorské divadlo (auteur's theatre) movement of the 1970s, the foundation of the work lay in the 1960s. At Divadlo Na zábradlí, Grossman and Havel evolved Brecht's epic acting, which forgoes the notion of complete submerging of actor into character, into what they termed "appellative theatre."³⁰ As described by

³⁰ It is worth noting that the first director of Havel's *Zahradní Slavnost* (*The Garden Party*), Otomar Krejča, invited by Grossman to guest-direct at Divadlo Na zábradlí, found what he felt to be Havel's and Jan Grossman's overtly political agenda oppressive. In a 1996 letter to Jarka M. Burian, Krejča wrote, "during our work, it became apparent that my poetics of staging did not adequately equip me for understanding or grasping Grossman's and Havel's concept of theatre; a theatre that places the political-appellative function of theatre before and above a philosophic-anthropological approach" (Burian, 2003: 84).

Grossman, this meant:

A theatre that elected a certain approach to reality, to the world in which we live and in which as its contemporaries we act — here and now for something and against something...a theatre that wants above all to pose questions to the spectator, often provocative and extreme ones, and it counts on a spectator who is inclined to reply to those questions. (Burian, 1971: 235)

The malé divadlo movement, then, must be understood as a highly collaborative act, which, in addition to exhibiting the close working relationships of Krejča's *týmová práce*, extended the concept to include the audience. To the extent that spectators were "inclined to reply" to the tough questions being asked on stage, the act of theatre-going took on a political dimension as it allowed individuals to coalesce into a voluntary collective united by a shared determination to engage in active reflection without recourse to ideology. While, in earlier periods of Czech history, the theatre functioned as a lecture hall, or politician's rostrum, the small theatres transformed it into a workshop, collapsing hierarchies and privileging questions over answers.

In addition to their contribution to Czech dramaturgy, the reception of western European Absurdist plays on Prague stages is significant for the extent to which it represented a reengagement with an international community of practitioners and critics after the isolation of the Stalinist era. As Goetz-Stankiewicz observes, the majority of the Absurdist plays had passed the tenth anniversary of their premieres by the time they opened on Prague stages, "not as avant-garde events that smashed traditions, but as literary museum pieces" (1979: 18). Still, the production and reception of the plays in Prague were quickly embroiled in an international debate on the project and implications of Absurdism, most heatedly expressed in an exchange between Kenneth Tynan, theatre critic at the London *Observer* and, from 1963, literary manager at the Royal National Theatre, and

Eugene Ionesco, Absurdist playwright. A brief history of their debate will serve to foreground the significance of the Prague productions.

Writing in the *Observer* in 1958, Tynan took issue with what he perceived as Ionesco's position "that words were meaningless and that all communication between human beings was impossible," arguing that Ionesco was moving away from realism "to that bleak new world from which the humanist heresies of faith and belief in man will forever be banished" (Esslin, 2001: 128). Ionesco replied that "The very fact of writing and presenting plays is surely incompatible with such a view. I simply hold that it is difficult to make oneself understood, not absolutely impossible" (Ibid.: 129). Tynan further asserted that Ionesco's plays did not engage constructively with the ills of society, in the style of Arthur Miller, for example, and instead renounced political activism. Martin Esslin discusses Ionesco's response:

Ionesco stated his conviction that society itself formed one of the barriers between human beings, that the authentic community of man is wider than society. 'No society has been able to abolish human sadness, no political system can deliver us from the pain of living, from our fear of death, from our thirst for the absolute; it is the human condition that directs the social condition, not vice versa.' Hence the need to break down the language of society, which 'is nothing but clichés, empty formulas and slogans.' That is why the ideologies with their fossilized language must be continually re-examined and 'their congealed language...relentlessly split apart in order to find the living sap beneath'. (Ibid.: 129-130)

This passage has been included at length due to the similarity it reveals between Ionesco's project and Havel's and Grossman's desire to expose and destabilize the dehumanizing effect of ideology on language. An analysis of Havel's plays, with their emphasis on the distorting effects of ideological speech, manifested in clichés, bricolage and, in the case of *Vyrozumění* (*The Memorandum*) (1965), an impenetrable, artificially constructed language, unearths many themes held in common with the Absurdist. Esslin recognized this and

championed Havel's work for its artistic merit and stylistic innovation, producing many of his plays and including a section on his work in the second edition of *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Michelle Woods, 2010: 7). Esslin's assessment of Havel's work is particularly significant, given that the style and dramaturgical structure of the plays was later almost entirely overshadowed by their perceived political relevance.

What most compelled the Western observers of foreign Absurdist plays in Prague was the way in which Tynan's concern about their social apathy fell away when they were performed for Czechoslovak audiences. This is not to say that Ionesco's plays – or those of the other Absurdist – became ideological in a Czechoslovak setting; rather, Czechoslovak audiences, like those in other communist countries, identified, in a very concrete way, with the absurdist plots. While some Czech critics complained, along with Tynan, that the Absurdist lacked humour and faith in humanity, audience reactions were overwhelmingly positive: "Despite, or, more likely, *because* of its atmosphere of non-committal mystery, the Theatre of the Absurd became charged with politically electrifying meaning" (Goetz-Stankiewicz, 1979: 35). The plays seemed to speak directly to their audiences' experience of the de-humanizing effects of Communist bureaucracy and the ideological manipulation of language. At the same time, the absence of any specific political argument aligned Absurdist plays with the Czech tradition of apolitical (or non-ideological) theatre, which imagined a theatre freed from political appropriation. Prague audiences received the plays as they received those of Havel: representative of the dramatic form appropriate to the time. Havel himself locates their appeal in their ability "to capture what was 'in the air'", adding "I have the feeling that, if absurd theatre had not existed before me, I would have had to invent it" (1990: 54).

The Prague response to the Absurdist plays was disseminated by theatre critics and scholars, including Czech-American scholar Jarka M. Burian and Tynan. These accounts stress the ways in which the audience reactions provided “an unexpectedly topical aspect for the much-discussed, enigmatic qualities of the Western Theatre of the Absurd,” while also serving “to open up an access route to the mystery of Eastern European contemporary culture” (Goetz-Stankiewicz, 1979: 37). Western observers were thus able to use a familiar cultural product (Absurdist plays) to “decode” a less familiar culture. The shorthand notation for this phenomenon, perhaps unavoidably, encouraged the notion that any and all theatre – and, more broadly, cultural products across disciplines – emanating from Czechoslovakia were inherently “difficult” and political in nature. Tynan’s 1967 statement that “it is nearly impossible for a Czech artist to make a non-political statement” exemplifies this point of view. Tynan's assessment, and others like it, subsequently affected the reception of Czechoslovak Absurdism, most notably in the form of Havel’s plays on western European and North American stages.

Václav Havel’s *Zahradní slavnost* (*The Garden Party*) (1963) shares Ionesco’s project of dismantling and interrogating the clichés by which society governs. The central character, Hugo Pludek, is the underachieving son of a politically questionable family of bourgeois origins. As the play opens, he is playing himself in a game of chess as his father goads him to improve his future prospects with a series of nonsensical maxims. In the second act, Hugo’s parents have sent him to a garden party to network. As the act opens, he knows no one, but, by end of the play two acts later, he has been appointed to a position of responsibility as a result of his uncanny ability to learn and repeat the language of those around him. He returns home to tell his family of his success, but his final speech, a

dizzying and repetitive recitation of his newly acquired vocabulary, reveals the extent to which he has become alienated from himself and society, the personal deformed by the ideological.

Havel's insistence on the play's apoliticality – it is, fundamentally, a play about the inhumanity of any ideological discourse, not just a Stalinist one – is lost on the majority of Western critics who first encounter the play. In a November 1967 article on cultural developments in Prague for *The New York Times*, Richard Eder, speaking with Havel, reports: “He says that he is writing of a problem more general than that of Communism, but the Ionesco-like bite of his work is most relevant to Czechoslovakia” (12 November 1967: 265). This argument occurs repeatedly in early receptions of Havel's work abroad. The playwright asserts that he is speaking to a *human* condition while the Western critic insists on the essential *Czechoslovak* nature of the work. If Havel's intention, as his own writings on his work indicate, is to address the specific through the universal, creating a theatre which speaks to modern, industrial societies in all political systems, many western critics see only the specifics of his given circumstances.

Joseph Papp's 1968 production of Havel's *The Memorandum*, at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Public Theatre, reignited issues raised by Ionesco and Tynan in the pages of *The New York Times*. The play's themes resonated with Papp; Carol Rocamora records Gail Papp's recollection that ‘having lived through the McCarthy era, Joe responded to the play very well [...] He had no problem relating to it, and understanding what it was about’ (2005: 88). Rocamora also cites a letter from Vera Blackwell to Papp, in which Havel's translator strongly emphasized the political impact the production might have, given the playwright's recent interrogation by the Secret Police (StB): “all one can do

for him in the way of publicity abroad may be more than just a natural reaction to the discovery of a young writer of considerable talent. It may prove to be – literally – a life-saving endeavour” (Ibid.). *The Memorandum* concerns the plight of Mr Gross, a bureaucrat who arrives in his office to find a memo written in ptydepe, an artificially constructed language designed “to guarantee to every statement, by purposefully limiting all similarities between individual words, a degree of precision, reliability and lack of equivocation quite unattainable in any natural language” (Havel, 1993: 66). The play follows Gross’s attempts to have the memorandum translated, a task which proves difficult as almost no one knows ptydepe and obtaining authorization for the translation is a bureaucratic nightmare of epic proportions. When the memorandum’s message is finally revealed, after it has cost several people their jobs, it is revealed to contain an order for its immediate disuse.

In his review of 6 May, *New York Times* critic Clive Barnes hails the play as a “political satire [...] light, rather than bitter, rather in the style of Hasek’s *Schweik*” (sic) (1968: 55).³¹ Barnes notes that the play’s Czechoslovak provenance provides “added interest”; further, “in America it is bound to appear anti-Communist, although this probably is not the case” (Ibid.). Barnes bases this analysis on the fact that Havel had attended the première, staying in New York as a guest of Jiří Voskovec, and would return to Prague undeterred. This, coupled with Havel’s position as dramaturg at Divadlo Na zábradlí and the unimpeded production of his plays across Czechoslovakia, leads the critic to conclude that “it is unlikely...that this play can be regarded as totally inimical to Czechoslovakia’s existing political system” (Ibid.). While he labels the play a satire, Barnes

³¹ Jaroslav Hašek’s *The Good Soldier Švejk* is a classic Czech satirical novel. First serialized in the 1920s, it has, according to Ladislav Holy, “become the secular ‘bible’ of most educated Czechs, some of whom know it almost by heart and quote freely from it in their everyday discourse” (1996: 207). Beginning with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, it follows the exploits of the title character, a private in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Švejk is frequently invoked, for good and ill, as a symbol of “the little Czech,” whom Holy describes as “the embodiment of ordinariness and healthy common sense,” but who also can play along with the powers that be to avoid trouble (1996: 72).

does remind his readers that its lessons are equally valid for Americans: “because the concept that the human being is more valuable than any bureaucratic organization controlling him is not irrelevant to our own paternalistic corporation-structured society” (Ibid.).

Two weeks after Barnes’ review, Walter Kerr contrasts *The Memorandum* with *Collision Course*, a collection of short plays by prominent and emerging American playwrights. Positioning the productions as competitors for his readers’ attendance, Kerr leans heavily in favour of the latter. In hindsight, his emphasis on the productions’ differences, rather than their similarities, feels puzzling. Kerr writes that *Collision Course*, while engaging with the alienation and isolation of contemporary life, is inherently more hopeful than the plays of the Absurdists, which led to a conviction that “all sense is nonsense, and we’d just as well quit” (1968: D1). In *Collision Course*, Kerr argues:

Instead of focusing upon the inherent inadequacy of words, we are giving much more of our attention to interferences with words, to the private fears and the public structures that inhibit the movement of the lips. We *wish* we could manage the whole sorry thing – the whole funny thing – better”. (Ibid.)

In *The Memorandum*, while communication is also deterred, this time it is by “officially imposed, quite deliberate obstacles” imposed by “a totalitarian state” (Ibid.). Kerr seems unable to detect any human life or broader themes in *The Memorandum* – he cannot see past the socio-political context in which the play was written, and which he accepts as its only possible given circumstances (Havel never prescribes a Czech setting for his plays), to realize that Havel’s project is the same as the playwrights who collaborated on *Collision Course*: all recognize that language does not work quite as it used to, not only on a bureaucratic or transactional level, but in the private sphere as well. Yet, for Kerr, Havel’s play remains ghettoized; its country of origin limits its relevance and bars it from

participation in a broader discussion of human communication in post-industrial society.

The Memorandum is completely isolated.

Goetz-Stankiewicz proposes several factors, both theatrical and socio-political, which contribute to reductive readings of Havel's works, at least initially, by critics such as Kerr. The first point concerns distinctions between hero and villain, and guilt and innocence. While the everyman heroes, Absurdist or not, of the Western stage (Willy Loman, Berenger, Alfred III) are cast as victims, similar Czech characters may begin their lives as victims but, by the end of the play, take on active roles in perpetuating the very institutions that once persecuted them. Hugo Pludek's is a case in point: he begins the play excluded from the system; by the end of the fourth act, by virtue of his linguistic adaptability, he has become a bureaucrat in the very system that initially excluded him (1979: 241, 252-53). Thus success is hard to define, as each gain is typically accompanied by a loss. A second difference concerns the impossibility of apolitical action in a society in which every action is imbued with political relevance. What Kerr misses in his review of Havel is the inherent challenge that any assertion of individuality posed to the totalitarian regime (Ibid.: 256-257). Theatre practitioners and other artists, including Havel, who stressed the non-ideological nature of their work, did so within the context of a theatre community of practitioners and spectators long adept at subterfuge and veiled criticism submerged deeply enough within an allegory, metaphor or classic text that it could reach the stage.

The plays Havel wrote in the 1960s outline the contours of his future political writings. Both reflect the influence of Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, whose writings, notes Edward F. Findlay, constituted "something of an unofficial handbook for Czech dissidents" (1999: 407). A student of Edmund Husserl, Patočka remains largely unknown in

Anglophone scholarship and his complete works are untranslated. Findlay is primarily concerned that lack of access to Patočka impoverishes considerations of Havel's political writing outside the Czech Republic, but Patočka's influence is equally palpable in the plays. For Patočka, writing in the 1930s, the European crises of the twentieth century stem from a refusal "to embrace history, inasmuch as it treats it as a puzzle to be decoded, a problem to be solved. [...] The recognition of history – of human life as problematic and the human being as historical – is precisely what contemporary, technological society denies" (Findlay, 2002: 122). Patočka's later writings function as a broad-based critique of ideology. For both Havel and Patočka, "ideology becomes disengaged from reality, replacing it with ritual and appearances and demanding conformity to keep the vision from disintegrating. With Patočka, Havel is arguing that a life ruled by an idea, a life dominated by ideology, is never free nor authentic" (1999: 425). Where ideology seeks to obscure complexity, Patočka advocates a more confrontational approach: "History arises from the shaking of the naïve and absolute meaning in the virtually simultaneous and mutually interdependent rise of politics and philosophy" (Patočka, *Heretical Essays* p. 77 quoted in Findlay 1999: 430). Havel's early plays, then, may be read as a theatrical manifestation of Patočka's ideas. The content of the plays juxtaposes individual human experience with the totalizing machinery of ideology, while the nature of the work, particularly at Divadlo Na zábradlí, as noted by Just, facilitated a "being-together" of individuals broadly opposed to the regimen. Accordingly, the production of the plays takes on a strong social dimension; following Patočka, they "shake" the assumptions of the ruling ideology.

2.5. From the Prague Spring to Normalization, 1968-1972

By December of 1967, the reform element within the party had strengthened

considerably, as had opposition to Antonin Novotný, then both party leader and president. That same month, during a visit to Prague, Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev, effectively approved Novotný's removal and, in the first week of January, 1968, he was replaced as First Party Secretary by the Slovak Alexander Dubček, though Novotný maintained the office of the presidency. Renner warns that the role of Dubček in the reform process that followed must not be overstated since, at the time of his appointment, Dubček's credentials were not those of a liberal reformer. Further, as previously discussed, the reforms of 1968 did not emerge, *sui generis*, with Dubček, but were instead the result of a process of re-evaluation of the Stalinist economic, socio-political and cultural policies pursued by the Gottwald and Novotný governments. In March, under pressure following the defection to the United States of a major supporter, Major General Jan Šejna, Novotný resigned as President, replaced by General Ludvík Svoboda, who expressed his support for the reform movement.³²

As a result of these events "the political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia changed dramatically, and the public, led by the newly liberated mass media, operating virtually uncensored, engaged in an honest critique of the last twenty years" (Brown, 2010: 379). The Stalinist governments of Gottwald and Novotný had driven a wedge between the state and the nation. In the new political climate, with its emphasis on creating a specifically Czechoslovak brand of socialism, the gulf between nation and state narrowed. A demonstrable sign of this process were the "calls for a return of Tomáš Masaryk to the place of honour in the history of his country which he had enjoyed before the Communists came to power," a move which would have promoted an integrated national narrative

³² That Svoboda came to be considered a hero of the Prague Spring is highly ironic, given his support of the coercive methods of the communist coup d'état in 1948.

connecting the present government's values to those of the First Republic (Brown, 2010: 380). After the Marshall Plan fiasco and the coup of 1948, discussion of “national” brands of socialism was taboo, though warming relations between Moscow and Yugoslavia and a joint communiqué from Khrushchev and Tito stating that “different forms of Socialist development are solely the concern of the individual countries” made the time seem ripe for re-opening the question (Ibid.: 276).

Despite the seemingly auspicious context in which it unfolded, the reform plan did not succeed. Renner argues that this is due in part to Dubček’s failure to manage the process effectively; it became a popular movement when “it should have remained ‘a revolution from above’: a controllable process with a well-balanced number of reforms” (1989: 52). The delay between Dubček’s appointment in January and the official articulation of reform policy in the Action Programme (AP), released only in April (though Williams argues that it was completed by February and merely subjected to several months of bureaucratic delay), provided time and space for the public, aided by the media, to seize hold of the process. By the time the AP was published, the most radical reformers had already moved past the measured, incremental approach it prescribed. Still, the AP was a government-issued document refreshingly bereft of ideology and manipulative language; “as far as both form and content were concerned, it exuded a different spirit” than other party documents and “was surprising in its openness with which the numerous problems in Czechoslovak society were discussed and with which the political mistakes of the past were admitted” (Renner, 1989: 55-56).

Included in the AP’s proposed reforms were rights to freedom of assembly and association, a statement of the government’s responsibility to protect its citizens from

excessive oversight by the StB, a dedication to support and foster the re-emergence of civil society and an acknowledgement of the party's intention to follow democratic rules of political engagement. The AP also addressed tensions between Czechs and Slovaks through the proposed federalization of the country, including the creation of an autonomous Slovak legislative body in Bratislava. In the economic sphere, the AP condemned the previous two decades' emphasis on heavy manufacturing and the complete liquidation of private enterprise, which was to again be possible on a small scale. Results of a survey conducted in the Czech lands immediately following its publication showed that 88% of party members and 72% percent of non-party members supported the AP and its plans to create 'socialism with a human face' (Renner, 1989: 56-59).

Following the publication of the AP, the Czechoslovak media "was unequalled in giving concrete form to 'democratic socialism' by taking the concept 'democratic' to mean the fundamental right of virtually unrestricted freedom of the press and freedom of opinion" (Renner, 1988: 61). The movement's popular momentum and attendant media frenzy quickly caught the attention of Moscow. Fearing that the policies of liberalisation emanating from Prague would provoke similar demands in other Warsaw Pact nations, Brezhnev, along with the leaders of the GDR, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary repeatedly warned the Czechoslovak government to exert greater control and reconsider its course of action. In a series of five meetings held between 23 March and 5 August, the leaders of the Warsaw Pact Five failed to check the reform process. The final set of talks, held in the Slovak capital, produced the Bratislava Agreement, calling on Czechoslovakia to express its continued adherence to Marxism-Leninism and its on-going cooperation with the Warsaw Pact countries. At the same time, the agreement endeavoured to secure the basis of

the reforms in accordance with the principle that “each fraternal party decides all questions of further socialist development in a creative way, taking into account specific national features and conditions” (Brown, 2010: 391). The Czechoslovak delegation in Bratislava included a five-member anti-reform faction. Comprised of individuals who opposed the reforms for their own purposes and others whose views had been nurtured by the Communists, these delegates passed the Soviet delegation a request for military assistance from other Warsaw Pact countries to protect and defend Czechoslovak socialism against an “anti-communist and anti-Soviet psychosis” (Brown, 2010: 391). This wording greatly misrepresented the nature of the reform, but accorded with the Soviet-led decision to intervene. At midnight on 20 August 1968, the armies of the USSR, GDR, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia.

The Presidium of the Central Committee, meeting in Prague at the time, immediately condemned the invasion by a margin of seven votes to four (Brown, 2010: 394). The leaders of the reform movement, including Dubček, were immediately taken to Moscow for negotiations. The invasion and occupation mobilized society, which reacted with non-violent protests and a powerful resistance movement. In addition to large demonstrations in the major cities, “the names on the sign of villages and towns in the country were changed into Dubčekovo (belonging to Dubček), or made unreadable” (Renner, 1989: 75). The invasion also marked the start of Václav Havel’s dissident activity. At the time of the invasion, Havel and the actor Jan Tříska were in the northern Bohemian city of Liberec, where they took part in the local resistance. Havel would later recall: “I saw and experienced many things, but what affected me most powerfully was that special phenomenon of solidarity and community which was so typical of that time” (1990: 107).

Havel contrasted the spirit and energy of the Czechoslovak people with the behaviour of the delegation in Moscow: “Instead of behaving like the proud representatives of a sovereign country, they behaved like guilty servants,” making multiple concessions to the Soviets, in hopes of preserving at least a remnant of the reform (1990: 106). While the citizens’ resistance to the occupation derailed Soviet plans to remove the Czechoslovak party leadership, the Moscow Agreements signed by Dubček delayed the reforms until such time as Czechoslovakia’s political situation had “normalized.” The feelings of national pride and civic responsibility stimulated by the Prague Spring quickly dissipated as despondency took hold. Political continuity, too, was short-lived: By January 1970, Dubček, along with all the other significant members of the reform movement, with the exception of President Svoboda, who again quickly acclimatized to a new regime, had been removed from the Central Committee.

2.6. The Social and Cultural Policies of Normalization

The post-1968 government pursued a set of policies that dismantled the burgeoning civil society of the Prague Spring and brought about a profound stagnation in Czechoslovak social and cultural life. The ambiguous wording of the Moscow Agreement sanctioned the presence of Warsaw Pact troops and Soviet intervention in Czechoslovak politics for an indeterminate length of time. With the installation of Gustav Husák as party leader, media censorship was reinstated (Burian, 2000, p. 145). Like their counterparts in the political sphere, the cultural leaders of the 1960s were marginalized – persecuted, banished to the provinces and denied publication or performance. Some members of the reformist intelligentsia were demoted to manual labour positions, while others emigrated, some of their own volition, others in response to pointed suggestions from the StB. As in the

Stalinist era, society was again restructured, though this time the means of repression were less overtly violent. Instead, Husák's government made, in effect, an unspoken deal with the citizens of Czechoslovakia. Unlike the reform communists, who had deplored social and political apathy, Husák and his supporters based their power on it. They reached a tacit agreement with the population, whereby the divergence of public and private behaviour was highly encouraged. Citizens were no longer expected to believe in the party's programme, but merely to behave as if they did. In return for an outward show of compliance with the regime, citizens were left alone to find fulfilment in their private lives, their country homes, and the black market economic activity that increased their standard of living. As LeCaine Agnew notes, increased opportunities for financial gain were intended to promote compliance: "for people to fear the consequences of disobedience, they must have something to lose. Thus the second prong of the regime's policy focused on the consumer economy" (2004: 276). The shortages of the 1950s gave way to one of the highest standards of living in any communist country, accessible to all who publicly supported the party.

In the cultural sector, artistic appointments too rested on complicity. Burian writes that, by the 1970s, those charged with meting out positions of power in official cultural organizations, including the nation's theatres, were "less concerned with a theatre leader's convictions than with his or her political practices" (2000: 146). After 1978, Dennis C. Beck notes, independent theatres were forced under the umbrella of state-administered institutions and all artistic directors had to be party members, a policy which led to the promotion of inexperienced, but ideologically sound, enthusiasts to positions of artistic leadership (Beck, 1996: 429).

Post-1968 artistic policy re-imposed socialist realism as the official aesthetic doctrine. The sharp divisions between the small theatres and the stone, or large, multi-ensemble repertory houses, had eased throughout the 1960s, but the post-invasion climate re-established these and forced theatre professionals to consider their allegiances. Olga Chitiguel observes that “stone theatres underwent a wave of short-lived protests, but soon accommodated themselves to the [normalization] regime” (1990: 91). Such accommodation was much harder for artists associated with the *malé divadlo* movement, since both their dramaturgical choices and extra-theatrical activity openly critiqued the regime. The leading theatrical voices of the 1960s were gradually silenced: although plays by Havel, Topol, Smoček, Vostrá, Kundera, Klíma and Landovský appeared in the two years following the invasion, they were eventually denied production (Burian, 2000: 144-46). The independence of the Prague small theatre venues was also compromised as “the government closed some theatres and brought the rest under centralized control” (Beck, 1996: 420). The process was not immediate, but played out over a period of years. In 1972, Krejča's *Divadlo za branou* was closed, two years after the director's expulsion from the communist party. The same year saw the dissolution of the acclaimed Alfred Jarry Pantomime, whose collaborators included renowned mimes Turba and Hybner. To discredit the *malé divadlo* movement, a new group of party-approved critics “declared that ‘60s theatre was subservient and under the influence of the decadent bourgeois West” (Ibid.). The subtext of this assessment suggests a justification predicated on the interest of Western critics and practitioners in the *malé divadlo* movement, the most visible manifestation of which was Papp's 1968 production of *The Memorandum*.

Ironically, given the charges of complicity with the West, the closing of theatres and

limitations on performance opportunities forced many Czech practitioners overseas. Capitalising on the reputation he gained with a 1968 production of *Three Sisters* at Théâtre des Nations in Paris, Krejča worked frequently in France throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Banu and Sallenave, 2010: 49). After injury ended his career as a performer, Turba taught across Europe, as well as in the United States, New Zealand and Japan (Anton, 2000: vii). Radok accepted a position with the municipal theatre in Göteborg, Sweden, while Grossman spent several years working in Holland (Burian, 2000: 146-7). Burian notes that Svoboda, who, as a scenic designer, had enjoyed the greatest freedom of movement prior to normalization, “remained in Prague but could work abroad under certain restrictions”, though he “would not have been allowed to work with Radok after 1970” (2000: 146). Such a policy demonstrates the extent to which the state sought to control and limit contact between Czech artists, even, or perhaps especially, beyond national borders. While the normalization exodus constituted a great loss to the domestic theatre scene, particularly in Prague, where most exiled artists had worked, the activities of Czech theatre artists on world stages throughout the 1970s and 1980s would later prove beneficial in the post-communist era, as the Czech theatre community sought to reengage with international practice.

The members of the cultural sector and intelligentsia who remained in Czechoslovakia, but refused to become ‘normalized’, created an underground, dissident culture, which gained momentum from the late 1970s onwards. The activities of the unofficial cultural sector, or ‘grey zone’ included samizdat publishing (the reproduction and circulation of proscribed texts as typed manuscripts), apartment theatre productions (including the premiere of Havel’s *Žebrácká opera* (*The Beggar’s Opera*)) and the

smuggling of foreign texts into and out of Czechoslovakia, where they could be published abroad in translation, or disseminated amongst the Czechoslovak diaspora by émigré presses.³³ Émigré presses provided a link between Czechoslovak writers and foreign audiences, particularly as foreign contracts became more difficult to negotiate in the early 1970s. International publication rights for any author banned from the Czechoslovak Union of Writers were to be negotiated by the state agency, Dilia, which would receive 40% commission, instead of the 10% it made on union writers. Much of what remained was lost to taxes, while circumventing Dilia could lead to “persecution on the grounds of ‘illegal profiteering’” (Jellinek, 1972: BR71). Dilia was also encouraged to dissolve existing contracts with proscribed authors and to steer foreign publishers instead to “advantageous contracts with loyal authors” (Ibid.). Restricting banned writers’ access to foreign publication served the dual purposes of minimizing negative publicity (in the form of texts critical of the regime), and financially crippling the opposition. As unemployment was not permitted in Czechoslovakia, writers expelled from the union were forced into menial labour; even Havel was driven by economic necessity to work at a brewery in the 1970s.

While Havel participated actively in Czech samizdat culture (even founding his own press, *Edice Expedice*), in an effort reminiscent of Masaryk’s World War I activities he also worked to cultivate international outrage at the Czechoslovak government’s abuse of its citizens’ rights. Unable to see his plays produced, Havel turned to letters and essays, beginning with an open letter to Gustav Husák. Written in 1975 and immediately disseminated abroad, “Dopis Gustávu Husákovi” (“Dear Dr. Husák”), describes the distortion of Czechoslovak culture by normalization policies. Havel argues that an

³³ Barbara J. Falk notes that the most important of these presses, 68 Publishers, was based in the Toronto home of Czech writers Josef Skoverecký and Zdena Salivarová. Started by Salivarová, the house published “over two hundred titles in Czech [distributed via] a brisk mail-order business” (2003: 95).

“aesthetics of banality” has lulled the nation into a torpor from which it will not easily recover: “The overall question is this: What profound *intellectual* and *moral* impotence will the nation suffer tomorrow, following the castration of its culture today?” (1992: 71). Referencing the national revival, Havel fears that the nation, withdrawn from political life and stupefied by the intractability of the status quo, will be unable to take action when the opportune moment arises. Building on his plays’ critique of ideological speech, Havel sharply critiques the insidiousness of party ideology and its penetration into all areas of human life. Tellingly, even in his dissident writings, including *Moc bezmocných* (*The Power of the Powerless*), Havel does not limit himself to a critique of communist ideology. His argument remains broader, encompassing any ideology that seeks to totalize and supplant individual, human-scale experience of the world as the basis of knowledge, and, accordingly, of any system of governance.

The letter to Husák began Havel’s career as a dissident, a term he dislikes. Just as the political artist is in a double-bind, simultaneously consecrated and limited by his/her social relevance, so too the dissident sits upon diverging ground. Havel’s international prominence, gained through his theatrical activity during the 1960s, was of tremendous value to his political activity. The organization VONS (The Committee for the Unjustly Persecuted) and the Charter 77 movement, both co-founded by Havel, benefited from his notoriety and contacts, which provided access to an international platform. Still, Havel’s fame also functioned as a shield that protected him from the forms of persecution suffered by those who could be harassed or imprisoned without attracting world attention. The disparity between these notions of justice was a motivating factor in the formation of VONS and Charter 77. The anti-ideological bent of the Czech dissident movement reflects,

like Havel's plays, the influence of Patočka, and it is significant that the post-1968 dissident movement included both ex-reform communists and those like Havel, who had never belonged to the party.³⁴ Neither VONS nor Charter 77 advocated violent regime change. Instead, they focused on issues of law and miscarriages of justice, based upon the espoused rules of engagement (such as the Helsinki Accords) that the party itself had publicly adopted. As such, the dissenting voices were morally unassailable, as they advocated no competing ideology, but argued only for the fair application of existing law. The values of the Czech dissident movement gained it much support in western Europe and North America.

Despite the measures taken to reduce contact between "dissident" Czech writers and artists and contacts in western Europe and North America, plays from Czechoslovakia continued to trickle onto the stages of New York, London, Vienna and Berlin. Czech companies including the Fialka Puppet Theatre, also based at Divadlo Na zábradlí, and Činoherní Klub travelled to London for the World Theatre Festival throughout the 1970s. At the time of the latter's appearance, in February 1970, a *London Times* theatre critic reported that the festival "has already taken more companies from Prague than from any other theatrical capital" (*Times*, 70FEB03). That same month saw the first staging of any Havel play in Britain: *The Memorandum*, having previously appeared as a BBC radio play (1966) and television series (1967), was performed by a student drama group at Pembroke College, Cambridge (*The Times*, *Ibid.*). Despite an aborted attempt to adapt *The Garden Party* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964, and a later commission, *The*

³⁴ Patočka's own active engagement in the dissident movement was relatively short-lived and tragic. After avoiding direct political engagement for years, Patočka, together with Havel, became a spokesman for Charter 77; he died shortly thereafter as his health collapsed following interrogation by the StB (Findlay, 1999: 405). Still, his philosophy lives on in the activities of the dissident community and, eventually, in Havel's approach to the Czech presidency.

Conspirators, which remained unstaged, for the National Theatre, a significant production in the British professional theatre eluded Havel until 1977, when *Audience/Private View* and *The Memorandum* were staged by Sam Walters at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond (Woods, 2010: 4). By then, the signing of Charter 77 had catapulted Havel and other so-called dissident writers into an international cause celebre, championed by fellow writers including Czechoslovak émigrés and those with ties to the region, notably Czech-born playwright Tom Stoppard.

The charges of “obscurity” that surfaced repeatedly in Anglophone reviews of Havel’s plays throughout the 1960s were silenced, due in part to the change in their author’s circumstances; it was much easier to believe that a play directly opposed a totalitarian regime if its author had been imprisoned, forbidden to publish, and continually harassed by the authorities. Hesitation and a degree of suspicion gave way to an embrace of Havel’s plays as political acts, the production of which constituted an act of solidarity. The re-imposition of censorship and stronger government controls after the Prague Spring clarified the status and, to a large degree, the *function* of Czech plays in the West. The liberalized, open, reform-communist government or the socialist democracy that so many Czechs longed for was, in actual fact, a greater threat to the balance of power and preservation of the Cold War status quo: the Czechoslovak “third way”, if it had been realized, would have undoubtedly muddied the black and white binary opposition of the Cold War with shades of grey. The ousting of Dubček and abandonment of the reform process removed this possibility. The Czechoslovak censor’s proscription of any given playwright effectively consecrated his/her work for western stages. To that end, Michelle Woods notes Milan Kundera’s assertion of the political expediency that overshadowed any

Czech play in translation: “Translated Czech literature had a political function which allowed it to be translated” (Woods: 4). After 1977, that political function tended to supersede the plays’ artistic merit in favour of their value as anti-communist propaganda.

Numerous productions, evoking the atmosphere of protests or vigils, were mounted throughout the 1970s and 1980s, sometimes combining Havel’s plays with his political writings and texts contributed by other playwrights. When his decision to open the 1977 season with a pair of Havel one-acts serendipitously coincided with the advent of Charter 77, Sam Walters, artistic director of London’s Orange Tree Theatre, turned the stairs leading to his upstairs theatre in a Richmond pub into impromptu press room, collecting and displaying news clippings relating to unfolding events in Czechoslovakia. The size of the Orange Tree, not unlike the Prague small theatres, allowed Walters to move quickly:

we found we were doing the play by the playwright who was suddenly the best known living playwright in the world, of whom no one had heard of the week before. And I certainly was able, because we hadn’t planned ahead, to decide to follow it with *The Memorandum* and we decided to do a documentary about Britain’s relationship with Czechoslovakia and called it “A Faraway Country.” (Walters, personal interview, 2011)

The Orange Tree developed a policy of accompanying each Havel production with additional programming which provided a richer context to the work. Later examples included readings of the VONS trial transcript and excerpts from *The Power of the Powerless* read by notable theatre people including Tom Stoppard and Dame Peggy Ashcroft (Walters). Michelle Woods cites a similar event, an “Afternoon with Havel”, at the National Theatre in London in 1980, while Joseph Papp’s Public Theatre followed suit. *Václav Havel, or Living in Truth*, edited by Jan Vladislav and including contributions by Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, captured such events in book form.

By 1977, concerns over the need for adaptation fell away, allowing the plays to be

produced in the form prepared by Havel's original translator, Vera Blackwell. Hailed by Woods as "an active agent of cultural exchange and an astute interpreter of Havel's work", Blackwell had earlier faced opposition to her translations from John Roberts at the RSC and Tynan at the National (2010: 14). The lack of objections to Blackwell's translations from 1977 onwards should not, however, be interpreted as the triumph of dramaturgical content over political relevance. Woods asserts: "it is also important to recognize that the very worthy and valuable interest in [Havel's] plays at the time carried with it domestic ideological and political imperatives that resulted in reductive readings of his work" (Ibid.).

Of immediate concern to the Czech context, however, is a subsequent result of the politicizing of Havel's work, specifically the extent to which they confirmed and heightened the Czech theatre's historically-constituted preference for playtexts as the most consecrated expressions of national theatre practice. Kimball's thesis, discussed in the previous chapter, correlates periods of increased Czech theatrical activity with moments when the possibilities for political agency are fewest. Czechoslovakia under normalization was characterized by political powerlessness and a re-opening of the schism between nation and state that mirrored the situation of the Czech lands under in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Warsaw Pact invasion, as Holy notes, casts the communist government

as yet another form of foreign domination which served first of all foreign – specifically Soviet – rather than Czech interests and, moreover, was alien to what the Czechs perceived as their national traditions. Because it was a state which imposed this alien system on the Czech nation, the opposition to communism pitted the nation against the state, and the overthrow of the communist regime was seen as yet another national liberation. (Holy 1996: 51)

Accordingly, the theatre was again called upon to mediate between Czech nation and Soviet-imposed state domestically. As in previous generations, the theatre also presupposed an external, or foreign audience, to which it would appeal on behalf of the nation. While,

previously, institutions like Národní divadlo could pursue both projects simultaneously, the repressive policies of normalization separated them. Denied production domestically, Havel's plays, together with his other writings, functioned as the cultural wing of an underground, or dissident, national foreign policy, a role which invested their form, the dramatic play, with added symbolic capital. In contrast, the theatre tasked with providing a domestic space in which the nation could gather in defiance (however covert) of the state, was not a playwrights' theatre, but instead possessed a very different dramaturgical orientation.

2.7. Living in Truth: The Autorské Divadlo of the 1970s and 1980s

By 1972, Czechoslovak theatre had stagnated, in what J. Burian describes as “the triumph of political orthodoxy over art” (2000: 148). Havel refers to the decade of the 1970s as “bland, boring, and bleak”, characterised by “a long period of moribund silence” as an exhausted population “withdrew into themselves and stopped taking an interest in public affairs” (1990: 119). The excitement that infused the theatre from the late 1950s-onward dissipated, as domestic playwrights were repressed and the Soviet and Warsaw Pact plays excised from the repertoire during the Prague Spring reasserted themselves as required material on Prague stages. Artistic standards fell as government oversight of theatres, and subsequent emphasis on efficiency over art, increased. Reflecting on a research trip to Prague in 1974, J. Burian writes:

It seemed to me that the Czech theatre was doing penance and marking time, without direction or motivation [...] In terms of repertoire, it was almost a throwback to the Stalinist years. Moreover, guest directors and actors from the Soviet bloc appeared regularly with Czech ensembles, a collaborative activity inconceivable a few years earlier. (2000: 148)

The “aesthetics of banality” described by Havel rendered artistic rigour suspicious. Burian

notes that more than one actor was let go after giving a performance that was deemed to be “too good,” and likely to remind audiences of the truth-telling power of performance. Overwhelmingly, the field of theatre corresponded to Timothy Garton Ash’s assessment of normalized Czechoslovakia as comparable to “to a lake permanently covered by a thick layer of ice. On the surface nothing moves. But under the ice, among the philosopher-labourers, the window-cleaning journalists, and night watchmen-monks – here, things are on the move” (1989: 57). As discussed above, literary and academic circles in the grey zone worked to disseminate Czech literature domestically, through the samizdat presses, as well as internationally. In the field of theatre as well, a grey zone of experimental theatres emerged to offer an alternative to the official theatre culture, which would emphasize total theatricality over text.

Originating in the 1960s as amateur organizations, a bureaucratic distinction which guaranteed greater autonomy and freedom from censorship, three experimental theatre companies came to dominate this faction of Czech theatre landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, with significant implications for the subsequent development of Czech theatre. They emerged in regional cities, where censorship was less intense: Divadlo na provázku (Theatre on a String) in Brno, HaDivadlo in Prostějov and Studio Ypsilon in Liberec.³⁵ While their styles and dramaturgical goals were not uniform, they shared a common artistic lineage with direct links to the interwar avant-garde and the text-appeal wing of the small theatre. Czech critics describe this work as *autorská divadla*. The term has been translated into English as authorial (Burian), auteur's (Oslzlý) or authored (Beck) theatre, referencing the non-literary nature of the work and the fact that "the true author of the performance was

³⁵ Divadlo na provázku was originally known as Divadlo Husa na Provázku [Theatre Goose on a String], though it was forced to change its name due to the similarity between the word ‘Husa’ and the name Husák. Following Dennis C. Beck, the company will be referred to in the nominative case, as Provázek.

not the author but the stage creator" (Chitiguel, 1990: 89). A reduced emphasis on playtexts, or different attitude towards them, differentiates autorská divadla from those small theatres of the 1960s that made their names producing contemporary plays.

This methodological reorientation was, in large part, strategic, a coping mechanism developed to circumvent censorship. Petr Oslzlý, actor and dramaturg with Provozék, explains that the party-led, post-1968 "witch-hunt against the written word" motivated his generation to find a different means of theatrical expression: "As long as we wanted to perform theatre truthfully, [...] we had to free ourselves from plays that already existed and create our own texts, through a montage of prose works, factual literature, poetry, and inspiration from the world around us" (1990: 99). In combination with montaged textual elements, Provozék and the other autorská divadla worked with music (often played by the actors themselves), a minimalist design aesthetic and a physical vocabulary that encompassed mime, clowning and different styles of dance (Burian, 2000: 152). The resulting style was "individualistic, playful, seemingly unpolished, raw and spontaneous" (Chitiguel, 1990: 92). As such, it represented a continuation of the appellative, anti-illusionistic acting styles developed in the 1960s to undermine and contradict the official socialist-realist aesthetic, which, after 1968, "was redeployed as a governmental weapon against pluralism. Stylistic regulation and textual censorship allowed for the policing of plurality, the suppression of multiple realities" which had come to the fore in the work of the Prague small theatres (Beck, 1996: 423). While Beck, Just and Burian analyse the emergence of the autorská divadla's aesthetics primarily in response to normalization policies, developments in international performance-making processes throughout the 1960s doubtless also played a role in shaping the most experimental Czech work of the

1970s and 1980s.³⁶ The autorská divadla emphasized movement as the primary theatrical language and carrier of meaning. Prevailing conditions, Beck notes, “did not inspire new writing talent attuned to the issues of the day to write for a medium from which any accurate reflection of contemporary conditions would be excluded” (1996: 420). New plays had to first pass the censor to be included in a theatre's repertoire. In contrast, devised work, in which a collectively authored performance text takes shape through rehearsal, benefited from its lack of a pre-existing script. Theatres working in this way proposed a non-dramatic text, usually a pre-approved classic, and then built a performance around it, grafting contemporary material onto the classic basis; a “dramaturgic plan” submitted to the cultural authorities was expected to include, notes Beck, “a title, description and performance dates, as well as a list of materials from which it would probably be composed and the names of those persons who would work on the project” (1996: 248). Russian texts, or any work that could be construed as anti-Fascist was particularly useful for these purposes, as the tenets of socialist-realism, including the Bratislava Ladder, made them difficult to suppress.

Provázek was the most important and politically engaged of the autorská divadla. While it did not use the direct-address method favoured by Studio Ypsilon, Provázek placed audience and performer in close proximity, often using non-traditional performance spaces. The company's main stage from the mid-1970s until 1993 was an art gallery with minimal technical provision. In its dramaturgical direction, Provázek sought to bridge generic boundaries, placing techniques traditionally associated with dramatic performance in combination with elements of opera and dance. Led by directors Peter Scherhauser and Eva Talská along with Oslzlý, the company also acted as cultural centre, organizing a

³⁶ Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre seems a likely influence, as much autorská divadla work mirrored its practice, in which “the actor played a central role in generating and researching material for performance, with the writer or dramaturg contributing, shaping and editing material” (Hulton, 2010: 167).

programme of concerts, exhibitions, and youth theatre projects. At a time when Czechoslovak artists working in the “unofficial” cultural sphere were largely isolated from their international colleagues, Provázek encouraged international collaboration through exchanges with individual artists or companies: “The all-embracing goal was to sustain and enhance Czech and Central European culture in view of the effects of World War II, the Stalinist post-war era, the trauma of August 1968 and its aftermath” (Burian, 2000: 165). Beck views the work in more subversive terms, citing a desire “to diversify and deregularize their activities even further” as the decisive factor in Provázek’s cultivation of an international profile, which itself “constitutes a weapon of irregularity also used by Kantor and Grotowski” (1996: 427-428). A further, domestic, parallel might be found in the international positioning of Havel’s work, both by the playwright himself, and by others on his behalf.

In his discussion of Provázek, J. Burian notes that, while the group’s work unquestionably possessed artistic merit, it was not remarkably innovative in style and tended to follow international trends in theatre making; Oslzlý himself acknowledges Provázek’s participation in a global turn away from text that began in the 1960s. In their programmes, Provázek openly acknowledged a debt to Jerzy Grotowski, Vsevelod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht, as well as American companies the Bread and Puppet Theatre and the Living Theatre, whose commitment to socially and politically engaged theatre mirrored their own (Burian, 2000: 165).³⁷ The theatre achieved its largest and most

³⁷ Like Provázek, the Bread and Puppet Theater’s founder, Peter Schumann, believed in the necessity of a politically engaged theatre, but, in a 1968 interview added “We are not very interested in ideology” (Schumann, Schechner, et. al., 1964: 64). Like Husa na Provázku, Bread and Puppet’s work contained elements of reportage and non-fictional texts; Schumann believes these have “a substance that invented stuff can’t have” (Ibid.: 64). Both Bread and Puppet and the Living Theatre shared Provázek’s interest in anti-illusionist acting styles, either through use of puppets reaching eighteen feet in height or, in the case of the

revolutionary impact in the sphere of audience interaction and the extent to which it offered a genuine alternative to the stultified “official” culture of the day. In its desire to function not merely as an individual theatre, but as a cultural centre, Provázek was continuing in the tradition of E. F. Burian’s D34. But whereas Burian’s project constituted a local rallying point for anti-fascist artists with socialist sympathies, Provázek attempted to fill the void created by the crippling of civil society under normalization on various levels and without recourse to ideology. As such, the company operated as an unofficial Ministry of Culture, fostering a network of relationships: between artists working in different fields, between performers and their audiences and, eventually, between the dissident and official cultures.

They also cultivated international relationships, in part because, as Beck explains, “Soviet bloc countries were loath to tightly restrict groups or individuals whose actions were being closely watched from beyond the country's borders” (1996: 427-8). Provázek's foreign activity includes a 1975 trip to the World Festival of Theatre in Nancy, France, which resulted in thirty-five invitations to perform in various countries. In 1986, the company established, with HaDivadlo, Brno's Centre for Experimental Theatre, which “takes as its starting point the search or study, and restoration of a Central European cultural identity...[and] invites and encourages groups from around the world to join the centre in its work” (Beck, 1996: 474). These activities demonstrate Provázek's commitment to pushing the boundaries between official and non-official culture. Because censorship was never an officially articulated policy of the normalization government, Provázek’s work forced the regime to draw lines and make decisions that would open the door for other companies’ work and represented, over the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, a slow increase

Living Theatre, through the development of “nonfictional acting based on the actor's political and physical commitment to using the theatre as a medium for further social change” (The Living Theatre, 2010).

in transparency and liberalisation. On a political level, the work mirrored Charter 77's role as an umbrella under which opposition groups with different motivations and experiences could coalesce and benefit from each other's strengths. Oslzlý, speaking in 1990, explained that his generation felt a

conscious desire to link up with the creative and intellectual currents of the 1960s, the pre-war Czechoslovak democracy, with the humanitarian and cultural history of their country at a time when the totalitarian regime was disrupting this continuity and wiping out history. (Oslzlý, 1990: 100)

By its activities – its emphasis on continuity with Czech cultural history, its aesthetic denial of socialist realism, and by extension, the totalitarian regime, as well as its broader cultural programming – Provázek effectively adapted Havel's notion of living in truth to the field of cultural production. The work of other autorská divadla proceeded in the same vein.

HaDivadlo was originally founded in the town of Prostějov, north-east of Brno, in 1967. The youngest of the three companies, it was also the smallest, with a staff of sixteen, of whom nine were actors (Burian, 2000: 170). HaDivadlo drew direct inspiration from Studio Ypsilon and Provázek, but relied more on scripted texts than either company. Playwright Arnošt Goldflam and dramaturg Josef Kovalčuk joined the company in the late 1970s and Goldflam's plays, or scenarios developed by both men, quickly became the company's signature. While the performances were scripted, the process of composition frequently involved a significant give-and-take between actors and playwright; Goldflam, whose style was non-realistic and shared the grotesque and surreal aesthetic of the other autorská divadla, wrote specifically for the HaDivadlo company, taking the skills and personalities of the actors into account. The texts were open to modification by performers during the rehearsal process, a continuation of the *týmová práce* principles advocated, two decades earlier, by Krejča and his team. At other times, the genesis of a performance

emerged from “scenarios worked up by the actors and finally given an overall coherence by Goldflamm” (Burian, 1989: 391). The collaborative nature of the process prevented an imposition of authorial control and preserved the non-hierarchical methodology that characterized the work. Goldflamm's plays relied on an allegiance with directors and actors to develop “an aesthetic of allusion, insinuation and innuendo, a coded language of critique and resistance, a tacit alliance with an appreciative and understanding public” (Klaic, 2009: xiii).

The third significant auteur's theatre, Studio Ypsilon, was founded in Liberec in 1966, before its transfer to Prague in 1978. J. Burian describes the mode of performance as “a thinking person's cabaret” that combined E. F. Burian-style textual montage with a strong musical component and improvisational character reminiscent of Semafor. Led by Jan Schmid, the company was stable, with very little turnover. As result, the performers were known quantities and an Ypsilon production emphasized the maintenance “of one's own identity and point of view while respecting the personalities of other performers” (Burian, 2000: 163). Unsurprisingly, given its formal similarity to Semafor, Ypsilon produced comparable audience reaction, engaging viewers “in considerations of effectiveness, potential and choice, rather than rectitude,” effectively subverting the apathy cultivated and nurtured by normalization and turning the act of spectatorship into political practice (Beck, 2000: 270).

Beck and Burian both mention the work of Jerzy Grotowski's laboratory theatre as a reference point for the autorská divadla, particularly in the case of Provázek. Farma v jeskyni's work is regularly placed within the post-Grotowski tradition, thus necessitating a consideration of the dissemination of Grotowski's work in Czechoslovakia and, more broadly, the position of laboratory theatre in the Czech theatre-making context.

Grotowski's writings had been available in the Czech lands since 1959, but would take a decade or more to manifest in domestic practice.³⁸ As Vladimír Just notes, Provázek's period of greatest influence corresponds to the period when theatre in the Czech lands "caught up" with its Polish neighbour: "While our northern neighbour's attempts at "alternative", "open" or "studio" theatre had already reached their zenith by the mid-1960s [...] the impact on the Czech alternative scene was felt only later, in the 1970s and 1980s" (2010: 112). A significant point of correspondence between Provázek and Grotowski's Theatre of Productions is Provázek's use of compositional techniques, including montage, to construct its "irregular dramaturgy." Its international orientation and pedagogical activities constitute another. Still, even acknowledging that the vanguard of Czech alternative theatre had appropriated, adopted or otherwise developed, by the 1970s, certain techniques or values associated with the practice of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, it cannot be said that these techniques were deployed in the same way.

Beck's study of Provázek makes clear the extent to which the company's original dramaturg, Bořivoj Srba, and his successor, Petr Oslzlý, calibrated the productions to achieve specific political aims, cleverly manipulating the censors (Beck, 1996: 428). As an example Beck cites *Theatrum Anatomicum* (1973), which disguised an indictment of the current regime as a critique of Fascist occupying forces during WWII: the anti-fascist stance of the communist party would not allow the censor to shut down the production,

³⁸ "Theatre and the Cosmic Man" was published in the 18 March 1959 edition of *Divadelní noviny* and was followed by "The Theatre of the Thirteen Rows in Opole" (*Acta Scaenographica* II, August 1962) and "Towards a Poor Theatre" and "I wasn't entirely myself", both published in the June 1967 edition of *Divadlo* (Pilátová, 2009: 403). For other writing on Grotowski that appeared in Czech publications throughout the 1960s, see Bablet, Denis, "Techniky herce: rozhovor s Grotowským" (*Divadlo*, June 1967); Hořínek, Zdeněk. "Obnažený herec v chudém divadle" and "Druhé setkání s Grotowským" (*Divadlo*, October 1966 and June 1967 respectively); and Maydl, Přemysl, "Kain čili Jak zabít autora: diskuse" (*Scénographie* 2, 1965), "Cíl a charakter divadla – laboratoře 13 řad" (*Divadlo*, June 1967) and "Jerzy Grotowski a jeho metoda" (*Acta Scaenographica IX*, January 1969) (Pilátová, 2009: 403).

even if, “observing spectator reactions to this popular piece, the censors understood that its actual subject was the contemporary situation” (Ibid.: 424). Further, Provázek’s extra-theatrical activities were explicitly political in nature; by the 1980s, Beck notes, Oslzlý and other collaborators were meeting regularly with dissidents, as well as incorporating texts by proscribed writers into their own, collectively devised and authored performance texts (Ibid.: 431). Overt political engagement of this type, to the point of collaborating with dissidents, is not found in the history of the Laboratory Theatre.³⁹ This is not to dismiss the argument put forward by Robert Findlay that, towards the end of his life, Grotowski revised his assertion, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, that his work was apolitical, stating: “I had to say I was not political in order to be political” (Wolford and Schechner, 1997: 180). Grotowski’s words here echo Havel’s assessment of his early plays, and indicate an implicit, rather than explicit, political dimension. Put another way, Provázek’s politically-engaged theatre expressed itself differently than Grotowski’s, through ways that better suited its aims and interests, which might be said to inhere within a practical political realm, as opposed to a metaphysical or spiritual one.⁴⁰

³⁹ A possible exception might be *Thanatos Polski*, a production mounted by Theatre Laboratory actors in response to the Solidarity movement in 1980/81, but this took place under the leadership of Ryszard Cieslak and did not involve Grotowski (Findlay in Schechner and Wolford, 1997: 177).

⁴⁰ If Provázek’s work represents a practical application of techniques developed by Grotowski and his collaborators, Bílé Divadlo (White Theatre) was more interested in the psycho-spiritual dimension of Grotowski’s work, particularly as The Theatre of Productions came to an end. Based in Ostrava, the capital of Moravia-Silesia, Bílé Divadlo was the product of writers František Hrdlická and Zdena Bratřovská from 1969-1972. Inspired by their viewing of the Laboratory Theatre’s *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, they rarely gave performances, but instead conducted theatrical experiments (Pilátová, 2009: 404). While their work remains under-researched, both Pilátová and Just note the group’s influence on later practitioners and small, but high-quality alternative groups including Kresadlo, Nedivadlo (Non-Theatre) and Studio Pohybového Divadla (Physical Theatre Studio) (Pilátová, 2009: 404-405/Just 2010: 112-113). The limited writing available on Bílé Divadlo reveals a degree of suspicion about their methods. An anonymous entry on the online Czech Literature Portal, operated by the Institute of Art with funding from the Ministry of Culture, describes Bílé Divadlo as “an isolated community, vaguely reminiscent of a strict and heretical sect” (2008). Scepticism towards the practice of laboratory theatre in the Czech lands will be revisited with reference to *Farma v jeskyni* in Chapter 5.

The contrasting acting techniques used by The Laboratory Theatre and Czech autorská divadla illustrate this point of difference. Both sought to actively engage their audiences in self-reflection, and, in the case of Provázek, occasionally in direct participation. Grotowski describes the actor's task as follows: "If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration" (1968: 34). The actor does not *exhibit* her body, but "annihilates it, burns it, frees it from any resistance to any psychic impulse" (Ibid.). In contrast, the Czech approach is more dialectical, intentionally fragmented, with the actor striving to make explicit on-stage the automization of normalization, with its sharp divisions between public (outwardly compliant) and private (potentially subversive) spheres. This often took the form of an interrogation of the relationship between actor and role. Beck cites the example of HaDivadlo's critical acting, which

dare[s] not only to present the private self publicly but also to assert it as empowered to choose and confess its relationship to an externally imposed role. Not disappearing into the character thus became one political act that began in the theatre and extended beyond it. (2000: 273)

The autorská divadla, then, share with Grotowski's approach a desire to prompt the audience to "unmask". If Grotowski's theatre seeks to do so by annihilating the mask, the Czech approach might be said to do so through diagramming the mask, making it explicit, visible.

Burian notes that the press reaction to the autorská divadla was small to non-existent, in part because sympathetic journalists did not want to draw the censor's attention to the critical nature of the message submerged under the surface of the work. Further, prefiguring

the reception of the twenty-first century *nové divadlo* (new theatre) movement by the Czech press, some critical voices dismissed the authorial theatre's self-conscious lack of polish, arguing that excellence was being forsaken in favour of

the allegedly superficial values of audience involvement, improvisatory spontaneity, and gratification of the actors' egos, all of which were viewed as dubious virtues against the lack of powerful themes treated with dramaturgical complexity, distinctive language and high-theatrical imagination. (Burian, 2000: 176)

In addition to the debt it owes to socialist realism and the articulated values and priorities of the "official" theatre of the time, this assessment carries echoes of the nineteenth-century debates regarding the appropriate form and content for a "serious" national theatre culture. The work of the studio theatres, with its tendency to span genres, did not fit neatly into the existing notions of didactic theatre, conservative both in content and execution, as they existed in the consciousness of the majority. Klaic argues that "critical, dissident, subversive drama was everywhere a small minority in the total theatre output, dominated otherwise by appeasement, opportunism, escapist entertainment and allegiance to official interpretations of reality" (2009: xiii-xiv). Despite making up only a small fraction of overall theatrical activity, such theatres nevertheless wielded power and, alleges Oslzlý, were even feared by regime. Like the small theatres of the 1960s, their great strength lay in creating a unified, engaged audience, a product of, in the words of Julian Beck, co-founder of the Living Theatre, their commitment to "seek awareness and to increase conscious awareness" in that audience (1964: 180). As such, the *autorská divadla* inherited not only the legacy of the 1960s, but also that of Josef Kajetán Tyl, who called for the theatre to rehearse Czechs towards autonomous rule and political will in the nineteenth century. At the same time, perhaps more practically, the work of the *autorská divadla*, refreshingly free of the self-censorship that plagued official or less courageous theatres, repeatedly backed

the authorities into uncomfortable corners by forcing them to make precedent-setting decisions on what could be shown on Czechoslovakia's stages. These tactics indisputably helped contribute to decreased censorship in the 1980s and helped to undermine government policies by exposing their incoherence.

2.8. The Velvet Revolution of November 1989

The Velvet Revolution of November 1989 took both foreign and domestic observers by surprise. As in the case of the Prague Spring, events in the Soviet Union opened the possibility for change, but, just as the Novotný government of the 1960s pursued its Stalinist policies even after the 1956 party conference, so Husák's government remained firm in the face of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *uskorenie* (acceleration), *glasnost* (openness or transparency) and *perestroika* (restructuring) (Brown, 2010: 489). Like Alexander Dubček, to whom some Czechs and Slovaks compared him, Gorbachev did not possess the pedigree of a reformer. He came to power in 1985 and initially looked as if he would, in Fawn's words, "retain and even intensify" the Soviet Union's control of central eastern Europe. By late 1986, however, "Gorbachev was embarking on substantial reforms at home and pronouncing policy changes for Eastern Europe" (Fawn, 2000: 25). The Czechoslovak Communist Party still failed to embrace the changes, at most suggesting a few mild economic reforms and introducing the term *přestavba* as a Czech equivalent to *perestroika*. In December 1987, Husák was replaced as First Secretary by Miloš Jakeš; he too saw no reason to embrace a deviation from the status quo.

Domestic dissident activity continued, with Charter 77, as well as the universities, samizdat presses and autorská divadla as focal points. Yet such activity involved only a small minority of the population. Without challenging its importance as "a national

conscience,” Fawn emphasizes that the “scope and influence [of Charter 77] was limited. It never achieved the mass membership of Poland’s independent Solidarity trade union, having only 231 original signatories...and its membership never exceeded 2,000” (2000: 24-25). Still, as noted above, Charter 77 functioned as an umbrella organization in which disparate groups opposed to the regime could coalesce. Its diverse membership and wider network of supporters reflected the increasing unity in opposition that characterized the late normalization era. Similarly, in the field of theatre, the *autorská divadla* began to build bridges between underground and official cultural institutions. Grey zone theatres like *Provázek*, whose leaders had been taking monthly meetings with Havel and other Chartists since 1977, worked to build what Petr Oslzlý terms: “a steadily growing, strong, intellectually dynamic and active sphere between the official culture and the forbidden culture of the dissidents and the underground” (Beck, 1996: 431/Oslzlý, 1990:101-102).

Grey zone projects of the mid- to late-1980s included an open letter “demanding freedom of speech and freedom of association,” proposals for a network of independent theatres free of state control, numerous meetings between representatives of dissident and alternative theatre organizations and a May 1988 series of workshopped productions of forbidden plays, staged by a number of alternative theatres (Oslzlý, 1990: 102). In October 1988, *Provázek* and *HaDivadlo* collaborated on *Rozrazil I/88 (On Democracy)*, a “stage magazine” in collage form that explored the theme of democracy and, on tour in Prague, transmitted news obtained from Austrian television feeds inaccessible in the capital. Among the texts used in the piece was *Zitra to spustíme (Tomorrow We’ll Start it Up)*, a new one-act play by Václav Havel. The play dealt with the founding of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and was presented without naming the author. The same month,

Prague's Realistické divadlo (Realistic Theatre) staged *Res publica I*, combining "poetry, prose, and dramatic scenes of Czech life during the interwar republic (Burian, 2000: 183-184). The production made use of texts by T. G. Masaryk and Karel Čapek, two men whose reputations and historical contributions to Czech history and culture had suffered at the hands of the Communists, and also featured occasional on-stage interviews with dissidents.

Burian notes that both performances encountered difficulties with the authorities: *Rozrazil I* was shut down for several months in December 1988 (2000: 184). Eventually, however, and due in part to protests from the Czechoslovak Union of Dramatic Artists working in concert with the alternative theatres, both performances were allowed to continue, usually appearing twice per month. At the same time, a steady stream of returning exiles arrived in Prague. Among these were leading theatre practitioners of the 1960s, including Otomar Krejča, Jan Grossman, Jan Kačer and Josef Topol. While their activities were monitored, their presence and interactions with the current generation of theatre artists was both artistically and politically significant. These changes were neither dramatic nor decisive and seem to illustrate Marc Robinson's 1989 assessment following a trip to Prague: "Czechoslovakia, unlike Poland, Yugoslavia and Hungary, still doesn't know what to say, and so is saying many things, all at once" (1989: 232). Still, both a relaxation in control of theatrical activity (whether from the realization that Soviet support for repressive measures was unlikely, or genuine belief in *přestavba* is unclear, though the former seems more plausible) and a narrowing of the gap between official and underground culture are palpable in the 1980s. The latter development would prove extremely important in November 1989, as theatres from both spheres would collaborate in support of the revolution.

The year of the Velvet Revolution was marked by protests, which, Holy argues, maximized their impact through the use of symbolically laden locations, giving them the appearance of a well-dramaturged piece of promenade theatre. “Symbolic centres” included the statue of Jan Hus in Staroměstské náměstí, Národní divadlo and Václavské náměstí and, as Holy notes, their use carried logistical, as well as symbolic, benefits: “[b]ecause these centres were given, the demonstrators knew beforehand where to assemble, and the demonstrations could develop spontaneously without any previous planning or organisation” (Holy, 1996: 33-34). Along with their symbolic organization in space, the protests unfolded in accordance to a calendar of anniversaries of significant events. Together, these served to orientate the protests in real and symbolic time and space, however shared cultural knowledge of the times and places likely to witness protests assisted the police and militia in containing and preventing them, a circumstance which gave rise to the violence and arrests associated with protests throughout 1989. The first demonstration of the revolutionary year took place on 15 January, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the self-immolation of student Jan Palach in reaction to the Warsaw Pact invasion. While the march proceeded without incident, Havel was arrested the following day and, in February, sentenced to nine months in prison. Reflecting the political inconsistency of late 1980s, the sentencing coincided with Provázek’s receipt of permission to recommence performances of *Rozrazil I*, featuring Havel’s text.

In March of 1989, theatre artists petitioned for Havel’s release. The authorities responded by forbidding any signatories to appear on television or radio, a ruling which, Oslzly explains, was broadly ignored (1990: 103). Theatre artists further challenged the regime when, at a national dramaturgs’ conference in May 1989, Oslzly announced the end

of “the taboo” in Czech theatre and theatres began preparation for a season of banned plays, while Havel was released under local and international pressure (Ibid.). J. Burian notes that May 1989 also saw “the departure of a Soviet battalion from the Olomouc region, part of the USSR’s pull-out of 50,000 troops from East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia” (2000: 183). Though the withdrawal attracted little attention at the time, it was a physical manifestation of regional change which demonstrated clearly that conservative factions in Czechoslovakia would not be able to rely on the Soviet Union to put down domestic unrest, as they had in 1968.

Despite rapid changes in other Warsaw Pact countries throughout the summer, the situation in Czechoslovakia remained stagnant and, according to Fawn, defeatist:

Students in particular pursued the view ‘it won’t happen here’ and stated that the Czech national mentality differed from the German, Polish or even Slovak. Similarly, even after the resignation of the East German leadership, Czech academics expressed their pessimism, exclaiming, ‘but here we have Jakeš! Nothing changes.’ (2000: 26).

Still, “Několiv vět” (A Few Sentences), a “petition to redress a variety of wrongs and to allow free discussion of socio-political matters since 1968,” began to circulate in June and had “gathered some 40,000 signatures by the fall” (Burian, 2000: 183). Encouragement from abroad came in July, when Prague hosted its first international festival of experimental theatre. The participating artists and companies stressed their solidarity with the Czechs throughout the festival, which occurred despite attempts by the StB to prevent it (Oslzlý, 1990: 103). The last major event of the summer was a demonstration on Václavské náměstí to mark the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968. While the police had allowed 1,500 human rights activists to hold a silent protest in June, the August demonstrations, with a similar number of participants, were dealt with harshly. Eva Novotná writes that 990

participants had their documents checked or were otherwise questioned, while 105 people were detained, among them Hungarian activists who had come to lend support (2009: 8).

By October, the East German government was in a state of collapse and East Germans flooded into Prague's West German Embassy. Emboldened by the state of affairs, Realistické Divadlo mounted *Res publica II*, addressing the period of 1945 to 1968 and including scenes from Havel's *The Garden Party*, while a festival of independent Czechoslovak culture was held in Vratislav, Poland. On 28 October, mass demonstrations commemorated the founding of the First Republic. Again, the police reacted with arrests and detainments; Novotná further notes that some 1100 people were prevented, through screening and detainment, from being present in Prague during the demonstrations (2009: 8).

The demonstration that catalysed the Velvet Revolution took place on 17 November 1989. Students had been granted permission for a march to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Jan Opletal, a medical student who had been killed by the Nazi occupational force in 1939 (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 284) The police response to the action, which J. Burian describes as "disciplined" in atmosphere, was so harsh and disproportionately brutal that it triggered an unprecedented public reaction (2000: 185). The demonstrators were met by the police around Národní třída (National Avenue), mid-way between Národní divadlo and Václavské náměstí. The confrontation quickly became violent, with police beating the students, many of them from AMU's theatre and film faculties. On the night of 17 November, Provázek and HaDivadlo were in Prague performing *Rozrazil I* at the theatre club Na Chmelnici on the outskirts of the city. A theatre student from Brno, who had been injured in the protest, made his way to the theatre where he testified from the stage to the

events unfolding in the city centre. Oslzlý, who was taking part in the performance, writes that “the audience was appalled by what it heard” (1990: 104).

AMU students had been largely responsible for organizing the 17 November march and also took the lead in its aftermath. On the morning of 18 November, they organized a student strike and called for the professional theatres to join them. In the afternoon, the Prague theatre community, along with representatives from theatres in other towns and cities, gathered at the Realistické Divadlo. After some debate, those assembled agreed to a strike. Differing from previous Prague-based uprisings, it was, according to Oslzlý, the regional theatres that led the way. Describing the atmosphere as “impassioned,” Oslzlý explains that while some participants in the debates had to be convinced that striking was the best response, ultimately “It was impossible to go on acting while blood was being shed in the streets. It was impossible to go on acting in a country where all divergent views were brutally suppressed. It was impossible to go on acting in the dark” (1990: 104). While performances would be cancelled, theatre buildings would remain open to act as centres of information, debate and discussion; performances were cancelled in protest of the state, while theatres remained open in service to the nation. Oslzlý writes that the difficulties faced in spreading word about the strike – the police endeavoured to keep the theatres closed and to prevent word of the strike from spreading throughout the country – were overcome by the theatre network, encompassing official, independent and dissident artists and activists. On 19 November, at the Činoherní Klub in Prague, Občanské Forum (Civic Forum), a broad umbrella organization in which the varied opposition forces could coalesce and establish a programme with which to proceed, was founded, under the leadership of Václav Havel. By 21 November, approximately 80,000 university students were on strike

and the Czechoslovak Union of Dramatic Arts had become the first state union to support the revolution, demonstrating the unity of theatre practitioners working in all cultural spheres. Miloš Jakeš resigned as First Secretary on 24 November. On 27 November, a nationwide general strike was held from noon until two o'clock in the afternoon. On 5 December, a new government was established. Five days later, Husák abdicated the presidency and the theatre strike came to an end. Alexander Dubček was made head of the Federal Assembly on 28 December and, one day later, Parliament elected Václav Havel President.

It is hard to overestimate the role played by theatres and theatre people in the Velvet Revolution. Their networks provided the infrastructure and their buildings became the headquarters that enabled the revolution to proceed. When the authorities endeavoured to stop word of the revolution from spreading, parties of well-known and popular actors travelled to rural factories and farms to encourage participation in the general strike. Observers of the events of November 1989 discuss the theatrical flavour and atmosphere that infused both the form and content of the proceedings. Timothy Garton Ash, present in Prague at the time, described the ousting of the communist government as “the most delightful of all the year’s Central European revolutions: the speed, the improvisation, the merriness and the absolutely central role of Václav Havel, who was at once director, playwright, stage-manager and leading actor in this, his greatest play” (1993: 79). The theatrical flavour extended to the “tickets” visitors were issued in order to gain access to the Laterna Magika stage of Národní Divadlo, the larger venue that the Civic Forum moved into when it outgrew its quarters at the Činoherní Klub. Ash describes demonstrations that

took on the appearance of street theatre, with spontaneous chants improvised by demonstrators in response to speeches and the rhythmic shaking of keys. Guerrilla

theatre invaded plenum sessions dedicated to plans for transforming Czechoslovakia into a democratic federation” (Ibid.: 85).

Burian describes the establishment of the Civic Forum as occurring “almost as if [the participants] were improvising a scene in a play” (2000: 186).

While the nature of the Velvet Revolution – its non-violence, its intelligent, cultured leadership, its good humour and its speed – unquestionably deserve celebration, discussions which parse the events of November 1989 in strictly theatrical terms feel troubling and reductive. Suggestions that the curtain had fallen on totalitarianism and its attending distortions as easily as it might have marked the end of a performance at Národní Divadlo, support a narrative which views forty years of communist rule as an aberration, and neglect the extent to which, at least at certain junctures, the socialist government reflected popular opinion. Again, too, the speed of the revolution obscures the decades of small, obscure actions that prepared the way for its success. The Velvet Revolution can be understood, in one sense, as the ultimate achievement of *kulturnost*, an irrefutable demonstration that forty years of communism had not dulled the national consciousness that emerged in the nineteenth century, aided by the work of a different generation of theatre people. In the aftermath of November, Czech periodicals reflected on this fact. J. Burian quotes a representative statement from the periodical *Scéna (Stage)*: “The fact that theatres by and large came to be the natural focal points of political life during those days that shook the world [...] is simply characteristic of the noble mission of theatre as the most vital laboratory of society,” (2000: 187). Oslzlý concurs, emphasizing the composition of the opposition: “The regime was opposed by the creative artists, the spirit of the nation; and by students, the future of the nation. Immediately they were joined by the dissidents, the conscience of the nation” (1990: 105).). Both Oslzlý and the *Scéna* commentator invoke

nationalistic language, updating the myth of *kulturnost* for the late-twentieth century and suggesting the ways in which this idea would be politically leveraged throughout the 1990s.

In contrast, Václav Havel's first major address as President, a New Year's speech, delivered 1 January 1990, bears consideration. While acknowledging his happiness that "[t]he recent period – and in particular, the last six weeks of our peaceful revolution – has shown the enormous human, moral, and spiritual potential and civic culture that slumbered in our society under the enforced mask of apathy," he acknowledged that there was much work to be done (1991: 392). Drawing a parallel between the polluted state of the environment and the post-communist moral climate, he argued for collective responsibility in repairing the nation's socio-political life:

We had all become used to the totalitarian system as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all – though naturally to differing extents – responsible for the operation of the totalitarian machinery; none of us is just its victim: we are also all its co-creators. Why do I say this? It would be very unreasonable to understand the sad legacy of the last forty years as something alien, which some distant relative bequeathed us. On the contrary, we have to accept this legacy as a sin we committed against ourselves. If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and up to us only, to do something about it. (1990: 391-392)

Within Havel's message is the same argument put forth in the text of *The Garden Party*: a recognition of the cycle of complicity and victimization inherent in the totalitarian system, which profoundly distorted Czechoslovak society. Havel's call to responsibility is one which recognizes a deeper and more complete historical continuity than a facile acknowledgement that theatre has often played a role in changes in Czech government from the nineteenth century forward. The theatre's greater legacy and achievement is its endurance and unflagging defence of a human scale and resistance to ideology, a trait it shares with Havel, himself a product of its cumulative culture. Both these qualities would

be challenged, and the role of the theatre in a late twentieth-century market economy debated, in the transitional decades that followed.

Chapter Three:
The Czech Theatre Landscape in Flux: Transformation, Continuity and Rupture:
1989-2000

Pavel: We made a pact. We'll never collaborate with them.

Kajetán: With whom?

Pavel: With the void.

Kajetán: You are still living in *The Neverending Story*, my boy. Wake up! The Commies are gone!

Pavel: They're not. They are inside each and every one of us. Like some kind of cancer.

Kajetán: It's holding you back, that stuff blew over. Should I be bitter and fret about it?

Life is a cabaret. A game. No one is oppressing anyone anymore. You're not going to ruin your life just because Czechs have bad taste.

Pavel: I didn't want it this way. It's all about consumerism. It has no class.

Kajetán: So put on your T-shirt with Che Guevara, strap yourself up with bombs and dive between the shelves of detergents in Walmart and clean the world! Idiot!

Pavel: I'm so pissed off, I could just kill someone. It's horrible.

~from *Akvabely (Aquabelles)* (2003) by David Drábek (trans Don Nixon, 2009:
171-172)

Like previous changes of government, the Velvet Revolution initiated a period of political, economic and social change that had a significant impact on the organization of the cultural sector. The field of theatre, in particular, found itself forced to renegotiate its social role to an unprecedented extent. Such a reorientation follows Maria Shevtsova's assertion that "Theatre works and their audiences share to a lesser or greater degree the society that they are both in and shape and form. The network of actions implied in this schema makes theatre an institution that, for all its durability, cannot escape changing historically" (2006: 155). While the on-going evolution of the theatre in response to changing social conditions is inevitable, and demonstrable in the Czech context by phenomena such as the *malé* or *autorské divadlo* movements, which emerged as both symptoms of and reactions to social change, the nature of the challenges presented by the post-communist era caught the theatre community by surprise. As discussed in the previous chapter, the role of theatre artists in the Velvet Revolution was undisputed and the rapprochement between the grey zone and stone theatres had resulted in a unity that directly

contributed to its success. Theatre artists, then, might have expected a hero's thanks from the new Czechoslovak, and, later, Czech government. Instead, the explosion of cultural variety and economic reforms of the 1990s complicated the practice of theatre. The field fragmented as the commercial theatre sector grew and theatres pre-dating the revolution struggled with low attendance, loss of buildings and existential malaise, as they fought to determine their relationship to the new social order. Bourdieu's observation of the field of cultural production as "a field of struggles" is relevant here:

The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions (i.e. their position-takings) [...] [A] position-taking changes, even if the position remains identical, whenever there is change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from. (1993: 30)

Applied to the present context, the Velvet Revolution flooded the existing theatre infrastructure with a deluge of new options for the producers and consumers of Prague theatre. The dominant positions occupied by repertory theatres such as Národní divadlo and Divadlo na Vinohradech were no longer secure in an environment of intense competition for uncertain resources and an audience base inundated from all sides.

As noted in the previous chapter, the speed and success of the Velvet Revolution (aided by its theatrical nature), fostered a simplistic narrative positing the previous forty years as an aberration. However, the contours of post-communist Czech theatre practice reflect the extent to which values and biases originating in the communist era, as well as in earlier periods of Czech history, continue to shape the field, including the internationally-orientated *nové divadlo* movement that gained pace from 2000 onwards. This faction of Czech theatre practice will be the focus of Chapters Four and Five, but a consideration of post-communist social, political and economic changes and their impact on the mainstream

of Czech theatre practice (here referring to theatres, both grey zone and official, predating the revolution) will serve to establish the field of production as encountered by emerging companies.

3.1. Appropriating Kulturnost: Post-Communist Political and Economic Narratives

In a manner analogous to the field of theatre, the emerging Czech political sector experienced fragmentation, particularly after the first free elections in June of 1990. As LeCaine Agnew observes, “[t]he umbrella “movements” that had won the 1990 elections sheltered a broad range of political views. Predictably, once the elections were over and the communists repudiated, they began to reveal internal tensions, and finally broke up into more “normal” political parties” (2004: 294). LeCaine Agnew cites attitudes to economic change and personality differences as leading forces in the process of political differentiation. Although, as president, Václav Havel “had to avoid openly supporting any party’s political ideas”, his vision for Czech society clashed with the policies of Václav Klaus throughout the 1990s (Ibid.). A Cornell-trained economist who served as Minister of Finance and, from 1992, Prime Minister, Klaus came from the ranks of those had spent the last years of communism amassing “professional experience and expertise, developing skills needed now, while not openly opposing the regime” (Ibid.: 293-294). While Timothy Garton Ash notes the difficulty of translating Havel’s Patočkan socio-political philosophy into practical political terms, he concedes that Havel’s views are essentially those of “an ecologically minded social democrat, stressing the importance of culture, local government, civic participation and civil society” (1995: 19).

Widely reported in western European and North American news outlets, the differing visions possessed by Havel and Klaus represent not only competing visions for the future of the nation, but different appropriations of kulturnost, or the myth of the cultured Czech

nation. Holy points out that *kulturnost* must be understood as operating, simultaneously, on two planes: “ ‘culture’ is understood not only as ‘high culture’ but also as the ‘culture of everyday life’, and the discourse in which the notion of *kulturnost* is invoked plays on both its meanings” (1996: 86-87). While Klaus’s invocation of *kulturnost* will be revealed as more instrumental than self-reflexive, Havel acknowledges both dimensions of culture: “what I would like to accentuate in every possible way in my practice of politics is culture. Culture in the widest possible sense of the word, including everything from what might be called the culture of everyday life – or ‘civility’ – to what we know as high culture” (1992: 12).

Havel’s nuanced vision clashed with Klaus’s market-led transition policies. Often described as a technocrat, neoliberal or Thatcherite, Klaus famously questioned the need for the strong civil society emphasized by Havel. Instead, he contended that the “millions of diverging views contained within a society could be reconciled by the market”, which would function as its dominant organizing principle (Fawn, 2000: 88). His reform program, Rick Fawn writes, “can be summarized as the replacement of the irrationality of the command economy with the mechanisms of the market” (Ibid.). Klaus’s vision emphasized individual initiative and posited the entrepreneurial capitalist as the best contemporary expression of the cultured Czech. Throughout the early 1990s, Klaus dressed his economic policies in nationalist language. Weiner cites his belief that “people must be retrained to embrace “good”, market-friendly behaviours, aided by their *natural national characteristics*” (2007: 21, emphasis mine). The natural characteristics referred to here are those thought to demonstrate continuity with the democracy and capitalism of the First Republic. This argument, which also strengthened the popular view of communism as

externally imposed and anathema to the values of the Czech nation, was a powerful tool for gathering public support.

Unlike their Polish and Hungarian neighbours, “the Czechs were buoyed by the historical knowledge of their economic success in the interwar period” (Fawn, 2000: 86). Such historical knowledge amounts to what Pierre Bourdieu terms “embodied cultural capital” (2010: 63). When inherited from previous generations, such cultural capital “provide[s] from the outset the example of culture incarnate in familiar models, [and] enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of legitimate culture” (Ibid.). Legitimate culture, in the Czech case, was represented by democracy and market capitalism on a western European model. Emphasis on the democratic, capitalist heritage of the First Republic, albeit somewhat simplistically, resulted in widespread social acceptance of Klaus’s economic policies, despite their attendant difficulties. However, in highlighting the example of the First Republic, Klaus’s policies also reactivated the tensions between Czechs and Slovaks associated with the period, placing dynamics in play that would contribute to the Velvet Divorce.

While Klaus cast the market economy as the driving force of transition and the entrepreneur as the epitome of the cultured Czech, Havel’s speeches as president reveal a different vision for the future of Czech society. As noted at the end of Chapter Two, Havel’s New Year’s Address of 1990 stressed collective responsibility for the evils of communism and the “contaminated moral environment” it had cultivated (1992: 391-2). A Patočkan resistance to oversimplification and denial of history is palpable here. Still, later in the speech Havel employs the messianic language of Czech exceptionalism:

Our first president wrote: “Jesus, not Caesar.” In this he followed our philosophers Chelčický and Comenius. I dare say that we may even have an opportunity to spread this idea further and introduce a new element into European and global politics. Our

country, if that is what we want, can now permanently radiate love, understanding, the power of the intellect and ideas. This is precisely what we can offer as our specific contribution to international politics. [...] We are a small country, yet at one time we were the spiritual crossroads of Europe. Is there any reason why we could not become so again? (1997:7)

This passage demonstrates Havel's own appropriation of *kulturnost*, albeit along very different lines than those of Klaus. Where the former emphasizes the economic and political heritage of the First Republic, Havel's *kulturnost* stretches further back into the Czech past, positioning the new nation as the inheritor of centuries of political and religious progressiveness. Referencing Masaryk, whose politics he describes as "based in morality", together with philosophers John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and Petr Chelčický (1390-1460), Havel calls for a distinctly national politics capable of transcending politics as usual. Central to his ethos is the responsibility of the individual, not simply for his/her own success, as in Klaus's thought, but to society. In *Summer Meditations*, Havel writes: "if we don't try, within ourselves, to discover, or rediscover, or cultivate what I call "higher responsibility", things will turn out very badly indeed for our country" (1993: 1).

Unsurprisingly, given the suspicion of ideology reflected in Havel's plays and political writings, his critique of Klaus's policies questions the extent to which market capitalism has merely taken over the role once played by party ideology. Klaus's language does demonstrate ideological characteristics and tends to trade on slogans and buzzwords, as in this 1990 interview for *Lidové noviny*:

As a slogan of our 'gentle revolution', we chose 'the return to Europe', including the adoption of an economic system which is characteristic of the civilized world and which shows that, in spite of all its shortcomings, no better arrangement of economic relations exists. (Holy, 1996: 151)

As Holy notes, Klaus's rhetoric casts the market "as a symbol of the civilisation to which Czech society [...] aspired. As this symbol, the market was an integral part of the package

of ideological notions, [including] democracy and the pluralism of ideas, all ‘civilising mechanisms’ which were destroyed under socialism” (Ibid.). Holy’s observation highlights an important distinction between Havel and Klaus. While Klaus repudiates communist ideology, he is quite happy to replace it with equally totalizing, albeit neoliberally-orientated, rhetoric. In contrast, Havel’s critique of ideological language, as previously discussed, is not limited to specifically communist ideology. While he agrees with Klaus on the desirability and necessity of a free market economy, he advises caution: “It seems both ridiculous and dangerous when, for so many people, [...] the market economy suddenly becomes a cult, a collection of dogmas, uncompromisingly defended and more important, even, than what the economic system is intended to serve – that is, life itself” (1993: 66).

If Havel and Klaus disagreed about the driving force of transition, the Velvet Divorce of 1993, which separated the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR) into the Czech and Slovak Republics, proved another point of divergence. After 1989, each republic elected representatives to both the Federal Assembly and individual, national assemblies. LeCaine Agnew notes that post-communist fragmentation of Občanské Forum and VPN (its Slovak counterpart), did not result in any state-wide political parties or movements, as a result of which political discourse and policies tended to reflect the interest of one nation or the other, but rarely both. Economic policy proved a significant site of divergence. Weiner notes that Slovaks in the Federal Assembly supported a gradualist approach to transition, a position informed by a Slovak unemployment rate three times higher than that of the Czech lands (2007: 52). Slovak leaders also feared that the privatisation process, begun in 1991, was “ill-suited to the Slovak economy and suspected that Czech leaders paid scant attention

to Slovak interests in framing economic reforms” (East and Pontin, 1997: 82).⁴¹ Economic disparity activated memories of Czech dominance associated with the First Republic, including an “image of the Slovak as the Czech’s younger brother” (Holy, 1996: 104). The republics also diverged politically. While Klaus’s neoliberal policies were broadly accepted by the Czech population, in Slovakia “populist leaders like Vladímír Mečiar backed continued state support of industry” (East and Pontin, 1997: 82-83). With its greater ethnic diversity and weaker economy, aspects of Slovakia’s political climate resembled the eastern nationalism discussed in Chapter One. The popularity of the nationalist Mečiar seemed, to Czech observers, indicative of latent fascist and totalitarian tendencies in Slovak society.

This last point was particularly troubling in light of Klaus’s ‘return to Europe’ slogan, which mandated emphasis on continuity with the First Republic and the rhetorical positioning of the country as central, rather than eastern, European. The presence of Slovakia, with its economic and historical differences, complicated these narratives. Holy notes that the view, held by many Czechs that “Slovaks had adapted well to the communist regime after 1968 [and] Czechs had suffered more from ‘normalisation’ resulted in a tendency to view the Czech/Slovak border as the boundary between the cultured West and the uncultured East” (1996: 106). The Czech narrative would be streamlined, and the nation’s return to Europe eased, by jettisoning Slovakia, a project Klaus duly pursued from 1992, in tandem with Mečiar, whose enthusiasm stemmed from more nationalistic motives. The separation of the Czech and Slovak Republics, East and Pontin argue, “confirmed a

⁴¹ Privatisation took place in two waves. The first, “small” privatisation, begun in January 1991, concerned small industry and the retail and service sectors. Nationalized properties were sold in two phases, with foreign investors permitted to take part in the second. Large privatisation, dealing with complex assets “too large to be purchased by a single individual”, began in 1992. Under a scheme devised by Klaus, citizens could buy voucher booklets which could be exchanged for shares of companies for sale. By 1994, 80% of businesses had reverted to private ownership and the process was deemed a success, despite subsequent charges of corruption and the failure of the banks to privatise. See Fawn 2000: 92; Jan Svejnar’s *The Czech Republic and Economic Transition in Eastern Europe*, 1995: 159-2010.

historic trend in Central and Eastern Europe, as multi-ethnic states created in the wake of the First World War, including the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, collapsed in turmoil following the end of the Cold War” (1997: 86). Garton Ash concurs, citing countries “that are ethnically the most homogenous: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and [...] Slovenia” as the most successful post-communist states (1999: 8). Foreign investment patterns in the CSFR, even prior to the Velvet Divorce, bear this out: investment was centred in Prague, while Slovakia, with significant minority populations of Hungarians, Ukrainians and Ruthenians, received less than a quarter of foreign funds (Fawn, 2000: 113/East and Pontin 1997:83).

Paradoxically, however, the move towards ethnic homogeneity simultaneously served to contradict the Central European identity claimed by the Czech lands. The notion of Central Europe, as Ash acknowledges, is tied to

the region’s pre-war ethnic and cultural *mélange*: mixed cities like Prague or Czernowitz or Bratislava before it was called Bratislava, where people habitually spoke three or four languages; large minorities, especially Jewish and German ones; multiculturalism *avant la lettre*. (1999: 9)

Along these lines, in claiming a Central European heritage, Czech politicians referenced a diverse past, even as their attitudes towards Slovakia furthered the homogenization of Czech culture. Additional discrepancies trouble this narrative. As Ash notes, the notion of Central Europe evokes multilingualism and ethno-linguistic diversity. While protected by First Republic policies, minority languages in the Czech lands had already declined in the interwar period (through German assimilation, particularly in Prague) and were further eradicated by the Holocaust and post-war expulsion of ethnic Germans from Bohemia. Such discrepancies were elided in the marketing of Prague as a tourist destination; German-Jewish writer Franz Kafka became a popular emblem of the city, reproduced on t-shirts and

coffee mugs (Ash, 1994: 1). More significantly, Klaus saw no contradiction between his support of the 'return to Europe' and a number of isolationist policies, including his reluctance to join NATO and lack of interest in the Visegrád Group, a regional cooperation between Poland, Hungary and the CSFR.⁴²

Havel, in contrast, strongly advocated the benefits of NATO membership and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Visegrád Group. Further, in 1989, Havel sent a letter of apology to Richard von Weizsäcker, in which he discussed the post-war German expulsion as "a deeply immoral act", a statement that was deeply unpopular with the Czech public (LeCaine Agnew, 2004: 298-9). Havel also opposed the Velvet Divorce, and temporarily resigned as president rather than preside over the dissolution of the CSFR. While asserting Slovakia's right to decide its fate, Havel cited the historic precedent for the survival of a Czech and Slovak state:

From time immemorial our two nations have been bound together by thousands of historical, cultural and personal ties [...] If we were to go our separate ways now, it would be a rejection of the will of whole generations, a rejection of the ideals that brought about our common state. (1993: 35)

As in the debate over economic transition, Havel's invocation of history differs from Klaus's. Where Havel sees a shared history, Klaus positions Slovakia as the eastern other, which has benefited from, but does not share, the Czech qualities of democracy and

⁴² Pavel Koutecký's 2008 documentary *Občan Havel (Citizen Havel)* contains a scene in which then-President Havel attributes Klaus's unwillingness to join international organizations as symptomatic of his "maloměst'ácká" (translated as "petty bourgeois", but literally "small-town") mentality. Advisor Ivan Medek's reply emphasizes the difference between Klaus and Havel's positions: "Maybe Klaus isn't necessarily petty bourgeois. Maybe he's very cunning and recognizing that most people are petty bourgeois and he's cleverly riding that wave. The problem for a politician is basically this: Should he aim for the average where most people stand - and "average" always means "below average", or should he try to do something with that society? That's the essential difference and Klaus won't go there" (Koutecký, 2008). Havel's refusal to pander to the lowest common denominator, if that was indeed a strategy employed by Klaus, represents Havel's continued commitment to living in truth.

capitalism.⁴³ Havel's position on Slovakia more closely reflected national feeling. Weiner note that, while no public referendum was held on the Velvet Divorce, it is unlikely that the public would have voted for dissolution (2007: 53). East and Pontin note that, as political talks on separation continued, "opinion polls continued to show that a majority of both Czechs and Slovaks [...] favoured the preservation of the union in some form" (1997: 83).

Still, Klaus's position carried the day and the dissolution took place on 1 December 1993. Unencumbered by Slovak challenges to his economic reforms and supported by the majority of the Czech population, Klaus won recognition from the international community for the nation's successful economic transformation. In 1996, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) declared the Czech Republic's transformation complete, making it the first post-communist nation to join (Weiner, 2007: 53). Further praise came from the New Democracies Barometer, which reported that "Czechs' pro-market inclinations [...] significantly surpassed those of citizens of other CEE [Central Eastern European] nations [...] and [Czechs] are far more hopeful about their country's future economic prospects" (Weiner, 2007: 55). Although such commendations are significant, they tell only a portion of the story. Weiner notes that Klaus's reforms received more prominent foreign and domestic press coverage than, for example, concurrent social security measures enacted by the Social Democrats in Parliament (2007: 50). Many of these, such as child benefit, were continuations of communist policies, while others, including subsidies to offset rising utility prices and a conservative approach to the lifting of rent controls, were designed to counter hardships resulting from Klaus's transition

⁴³ A similar attitude was palpable in the Czech press during the dissolution crisis. Holy cites an article in the award-winning weekly magazine *Respekt* that ran with the headline "On our own into Europe, together into the Balkans" (1996: 107).

policies (Ibid.: 53). The low visibility of these initiatives, however, fuelled the perception of the Czech transformation as a complete repudiation of socialism led by the market.

3.2. The Culture Sector's "Terra Incognita": Czech Theatre in the 1990s.

As well as guiding economic transition, Klaus's neoliberal, market-led agenda served as a structuring principle for post-communist society, with troubling implications for the cultural sector. Writing in 1995, Ash observes:

With remarkable speed, the intelligentsia has fragmented into separate professions, as in the West: journalists, publishers, academics, actors, not to mention those who have become officials, lawyers, diplomats, the *milieus* have faded, the "circles of friends" have dispersed or lost their special significance. Those who have remained in purely "intellectual" professions – above all, academics – have found themselves impoverished. Moreover, it is businessmen and entrepreneurs who are the tone-setting heroes of this time. Thus, from having an abnormal importance before 1989, independent intellectuals have plummeted to abnormal unimportance. (1995)⁴⁴

Paradoxically, the social reconfiguration noted by Garton Ash prompts an analogy with the Stalinist social restructuring of 1948, this time, however, at the impetus of market capitalism. The irony of this situation, and the disorientation it engendered, cannot be discounted. Market capitalism, as Bourdieu observes, tends towards "the valorisation of economic and political culture at the expense of literary and artistic culture", in an attempt by the most dominant factions "to discredit the values recognized by the 'intellectual' faction" (2010: 89). While, previously, a lack of material success suggested dissident values, the new regime increasingly defined success in material terms, a reorientation that left the ex-dissident intelligentsia reeling.⁴⁵ Cultural products reflect this disorientation.

⁴⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1995/jan/12/prague-intellectuals-politicians/>.

⁴⁵ Bedřich Mára, the protagonist of Jan Hřebejk's film *Pupendo* (2003), set in 1980s Prague, epitomizes the noble poverty of the dissident. Played by Boleslav Polívka, Mára is a celebrated sculptor, whose refusal to

Michal Viewegh's 1997 satirical novel *Výchova dívek v Čekách* (*Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia*), is narrated by Oskar, a teacher/novelist who finds himself amongst Prague's nouveau riche entrepreneurial class when he begins to tutor the daughter of newly minted millionaire Karel Král (tellingly, král is the Czech word for king). David Drábek's play *Akvabely* (*Aquabelles*), follows the post-revolution journeys of a group of friends, whose choices reflect different attitudes towards the changes in Czech society. Opportunist Kajetán has a high-flying job as a TV presenter, while Pavel so despairs of Czech culture's pandering to the lowest common denominator that his attempts to protect his family and friends transform him into a petty tyrant. Drábek wrote *Akvabely* in 2003, when it won the Radok Award for Best Play of the Year, and it is significant the play does appear until over a decade after the Velvet Revolution, after the theatre had sustained the worst of its growing pains.

In the field of theatre, the juxtaposition between pre- and post-revolutionary positions was made particularly stark by the alternative theatres' deep involvement in the grey zone cultural activities that led up to the revolution and the unified theatre sector's active participation in the events of late 1989. These experiences, coupled with changing conditions of production in the early 1990s contributed to a growing crisis of purpose. A significant source of stress was the proliferation of commercial venues that followed the lifting of government restrictions on the establishment of theatres. The vast majority of the new theatres, with names like Divadlo Ta Fantastika or Divadlo Broadway, presented escapist fare of dubious artistic merit, much of it aimed at the tourists who increasingly

collaborate has left him mass-producing novelty piggy banks and wrangling money from the government through a series of bogus insurance claims. Mára's basement flat is contrasted with the comfortable lifestyles of former colleagues still in favour with the party, most notably when he is observed in his rundown boat by a gathering of the artistic elite from the windows of the river-side Manes gallery.

flooded Prague streets. Often, such theatres appropriated historical Prague figures with little care for accuracy or context; Marie Boková cites the example of the Opera Mozart Association's "Mozartian-Kafkaesque-Golemesque entertainment" whose "sky-rocking ticket prices account for the near-absence of Czech audiences" (2000). Ctibor Turba, an internationally successful mime who returned to Prague after 1989, was openly critical of the trend towards lowbrow tourist fare: "It's not just idiots, who fancy some funny blacklight theatre images, tired mime creations or amusing variety programmes, that come here as tourists" (Anton, 2000: vii). Turba's comments echo Karel Havlíček Borovský's mid-nineteenth-century concerns, discussed in Chapter One, that international spectators will react negatively to insufficient artistic rigour on Prague stages. However, unlike Havlíček Borovský, Turba's comments reflect the diversified theatre scene of the late twentieth century; he is not calling for better plays, either foreign or domestic, but for a commitment to high professional standards across all genres.

Beyond concerns about their artistic shortcomings, the new commercial theatres were particularly troubling to the pre-revolutionary mainstream and alternative theatres because of the lack of clearly differentiated tax designations that would assert their non-profit status. Under communism, theatres had been closely monitored, but also heavily subsidized. After 1989, responsibility for funding the nation's theatres devolved from the state to local municipalities, some of which were hard pressed to maintain the multi-ensemble venues found even in small cities (Machalická, 2000a: 47-48; Šimek 2005a: 44). Some theatres became embroiled in restitution proceedings initiated by the families of prior owners who had been displaced after the communist coup in 1948. The anxiety regarding the theatre sector's day-to-day logistics and future was accompanied by a precipitous drop in audience numbers in the early 1990s (Burian, 2000: 102). Jana Machalická attributes declining

audience numbers to the diversification of leisure options as “all kinds of commercial pap came pouring into the country [...] and a nation for whom commercial culture had for years been limited, if not directly prohibited, could not get enough” (2000: 50). She also cites reduced leisure time as a contributing factor: “the popular habit of socialist week-ends beginning in the middle of the week passed away” (Ibid.). These are doubtless contributing factors. However, Shevtsova’s argument that “the transformations undergone by the theatre as a social institution provide clues to its purpose, perceived and real, for this or that collectivity at particular points in history”, suggests that lower rates of attendance indicate a significant renegotiation of the theatre’s social function in the post-communist context (2006: 155).

As discussed in the previous chapters, communist censorship policies and, after 1968, an increasing gulf between nation and state, necessitated that the Czech theatre continue to mediate between citizens and their government. As it had from the nineteenth century onwards, the theatre stood in for politics, facilitating a national conversation that could not take place via other, more overtly political, channels. This function depended on the existence of a concrete opponent, a role filled by the imperial government in Vienna, the occupying Nazis and, most recently, the Moscow-backed communist government. Under communism, Beck writes, particularly for grey zone theatres like the *autorská divadla*, “Divergence characterized every dimension of experience, from the economic and political to the psychological and filial. The removal of the communist state also removed its polar counterpart: the parallel polis” (1996: 439). In other words, the grey zone ceased to exist. No longer required to mediate between nation and state, or to substitute for political activity, “theatre companies and individuals lost their prior sense of identity and purpose”

(Ibid.). This existential dimension of the theatre's woes expressed itself in on-going self-analysis, as well as dramaturgical anxiety concerning theatres' repertoire.

Throughout the 1990s, the writing of theatre practitioners and critics reveals a consistent concern with values. As late as 2000, Machalická, assessing the first decade of post-communist theatre, writes "[i]t is paradoxical [...] that the values which were created during the previous regime are today trivialized and underestimated" (2000:56).⁴⁶ New opportunities for commercial activity presented theatre artists with moral dilemmas; particularly for the *autorská divadlo*, the decision to engage or not, writes Beck "hinges on a question of values" (1996: 43). The desire to uphold pre-revolution values influenced artistic policy, as well as a theatre's business decisions. The first significant generation of directors to emerge after 1989 exhibited an artistic preference for work grounded in personal psychology and design, and was perceived by a faction of observers as lacking a social dimension. Petr Lébl, a young director who best epitomizes these tendencies, divided audiences and critics. As Beck explains:

One side sees in Lébl's highly visual style an embrace of the primacy of aesthetics and a rejection of social commentary, which, they argue, befits theatres in a democratic environment. Opposing this view stands a group of theatre artists and spectators who continue to believe that theatre has a significant social, even spiritual role to play. (1996: 436)

Beck has studied Provázek extensively, and his assessment reflects the point of view of the *autorská divadla*, which, despite its own experimentation with theatre semiotics, struggled, in the post-communist era, to maintain the theatre's position as an explicitly *social*, rather than purely aesthetic, space. Beyond the oppositions between commercial and non-profit

⁴⁶ Machalická's article appears in English, in *Czech Theatre*, an annual magazine published by the Arts and Theatre Institute, which serves as an annual digest for the the Institute's scholarly journal, *Švět a divadlo* (*World and Theatre*).

theatres, and stone and small theatres, the gap between Provázek's and Lébl's visions points to a tertiary fragmentation in the field of theatre: the fragmentation of the small, non-profit faction of production, a development driven by artistic, practical and generational factors.

Prior to 1989, significant alternative, or grey zone, theatres included both the autorská divadlo (Provázek, HaDivadlo, Studio Ypsilon) and unofficial "amateur" companies (the Prague Five, Petr Lébl's Jelo). The election of Václav Havel to the presidency provided a model for direct civic engagement on the part of theatre artists, and many of them, particularly those of Havel's generation, placed their theatrical careers on hold to "share in the new management of public matters" (Sloupková, 2000:8). Petr Oslzlý, dramaturg at Provázek, became Havel's cultural affairs adviser. John Keane emphasizes the dramaturgical dimension of their efforts to transform Hradčany from a grim, communist fortress into a "work of art", encompassing substantial set and costume changes: "Under Havel, the Changing of the Guard was transformed into a fifteen-minute midday theatrical event costumed by Theodor Pištěk, who designed Miloš Forman's *Amadeus*" (2000: 384-5). Theatre artists taking government positions came from all spheres of practice, not just the grey zone: Milan Lukeš, the first post-revolution Minister of Culture, had formerly led the drama ensemble at Národní divadlo. Subsequent Ministers of Culture from the field of theatre included playwright and dissident Milan Uhde (1990-1992) and Pavel Dostal (1998-2005), a theatre director active in the regional city of Olomouc (Bohumil Nekolný, 2003: 122-27).

As older artists transitioned into roles outside the theatre, younger artists active in the unofficial, "amateur" ranks transitioned into the professional sphere, accepting appointments at important theatres. Examples include Petr Lébl's artistic leadership of

Divadlo Na zábradlí from 1993 until his death by suicide in 1999. Other members of the Prague 5 focused increasingly on careers in media and “more or less severed their connection with the theatre” (Vladimír Hulec, 2000: 22). Some practitioners migrated to the expanding commercial theatre sector, including, for a brief period and despite its dissident pedigree, Studio Ypsilon; others, like Činoherní Klub’s Jaroslav Vostrý, transitioned to academia (Vostrý would later supervise the doctoral work of Farma v jeskyni founder Viliam Dočolomanský) (Burian, 2000: 206-207). Those who continued to create into the 1990s, particularly artists who had come to prominence in the malé or autorská divadla scenes, suffered from the same dramaturgical and programming uncertainties facing the repertory system.

These artistic concerns are most clearly reflected in the perceived crisis in post-communist Czech playwriting. In the two seasons after the Velvet Revolution, notes Burian, “theatres rushed to put on all the plays of Václav Havel as well as those of other previously performed dissidents” (2000: 192). Some, including a production of Havel’s *Largo Desolato*, directed at Divadlo Na zábradlí by Jan Grossman, newly returned from exile, proved successful.⁴⁷ Still, the majority of productions failed to engage audiences: “no longer having the appeal of forbidden fruit, [the plays] no longer attracted audiences” (Ibid.). Accordingly, dissident plays practically vanished from theatres after the 1990/1991 season, with few new works emerging to take their place. Lébl and Hana Burešová, another leading young director of the 1990s, favoured classic texts; Lébl’s productions of Chekhov are among the most iconic of his short career. In 1992, a playwriting competition was

⁴⁷ Burian describes Grossman’s *Largo Desolato* as “notable for its relatively comic treatment of the autobiographical protagonist, an approach heightened by incorporating a voiceover of Havel himself reading the opening and closing stage directions to accompany the protagonist’s very funny mimed actions” (2000: 193-194). Havel would subsequently incorporate voiceover into his final play, *Leaving* (2007).

incorporated into the annual Alfréd Radok Awards, the Czech equivalent of the Olivier Awards, in an effort to stimulate a new generation of playwrights. Still, the competing plays have been criticised for low quality and an absence of the socio-political resonance expected of the Czech play, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, constitutes the Czech theatre's most symbolically laden form. Machalická characterizes early submissions as suffering from "introspective infantilism", and the Radok jury has declined to name a first prize winner eight times over the course of its history (1993-94, 1995, 1999-2001, 2006, 2009) (2000a: 51).

Machalická's critique conceives of the personal and the political as mutually exclusive poles. By focusing so strongly on Czech playwriting, she obscures the importance of the *autorská divadla*'s devised, hybrid-form work, a move which serves to discredit contemporary iterations of this form. Burian attributes the dearth of new writing to the scale of social and political change: "For most playwrights and most theatres, the sheer quantity and ambivalence of the new conditions fail to offer the clear target or motivation that inspired most of the outstanding work of the past" (2000: 201). Implicit in Burian's assessment is the notion that changing social conditions necessitate formal evolution. Accordingly, political theatre in the post-communist era may not assume the same form as it did in previous generations. When viewed without a bias in favour of playwriting, Czech theatre history demonstrates that this is so: one need only compare the interwar anti-Fascist cabaret of V+W to the absurdist plays of Havel or the devised work of Provázek to see that theatre has engaged with society via radically different means. What sets the 1990s context apart from all precedents is the absence of a clear target at which the theatre may take aim. While foreign and domestic critics acknowledge this point, there is little to no suggestion that the evolution of socially-engaged theatre might occur

independently of playwriting, or speak to more than the content of a given play or production.

3.3. Cultural Policy in the Post-Communist Era

The adjustment pains of the theatre sector were heightened by the field's interaction with the government bodies tasked with determining its financial and organizational future. If theatres had expected preferential treatment and fat subsidies from their playwright president, Havel's views on cultural funding were bound to disappoint them:

The nostalgic complaint by artists who fondly remember their "social security" under socialism [...] leaves me unmoved. Culture must, in part at least, learn how to make its own way. It should be partially funded through tax write-offs, and through foundations, development funds, and the like – which, by the way, are the forms that best suit its plurality and its freedom. [...] The state should – in ways that are rational, open to scrutiny, and well thought out – support only those aspects of culture that are fundamental to our national identity and the civilized traditions of our land and that can't be conserved through market mechanisms alone. I am thinking of heritage sites, [...] libraries, museums, public archives, and such institutions which are today in an appalling state of disrepair. (Havel, 1993a: 13)

Two issues raised by Havel emerge as flashpoints in conversations about post-communist cultural policy: the need for a tax structure that would recognize the non-profit status of cultural institutions and the distinction between living culture and cultural heritage. Any attempt to analyse post-communist cultural policy must begin by acknowledging that the sheer scale of the transition allowed government bodies little time to debate matters of concern to the cultural sector. Further, forty years of direct government and party oversight of culture resulted in a wariness towards direct government involvement in the arts. This fear extended even to the drafting of a national cultural policy, despite pressures to conform to EU standards by doing so; indeed, Pavla Petrová notes that the "first strategic document in the field of culture", a government White Book, was not drafted until 1996 (2010: 2). Klaus's government avoided a firm commitment to the financial support of culture

throughout his premiership, despite a pledge to allocate 1% of the total national budget to the cultural sector, a figure, notes Petrová, which has never been met (Šimek, 2005a: 48/Petrová, 2010: 16).

When cultural matters did receive government attention, the focus was, in line with Havel's comments, most often placed on cultural heritage. Lawmakers sought to address the neglect of cultural monuments and archives under communism, as a result of which, Bohumil Nekolný notes, "the priority for the entire 1990s became cultural heritage [...] and the so-called living art was relegated to second place" (2003:124). Petrová concurs, in a report for the Council of Europe: "support and protection of monuments and cultural heritage in the Czech Republic has been the main aim of all cultural policies" (2010: 16). This orientation has shown longevity; of the thirty organizations subsidized by the Ministry of Culture, twenty-four of these fall into the category of heritage (Ibid.: 7). Beyond direct subsidies, government support of cultural heritage provided assistance to private owners of smaller cultural monuments (Ibid.: 16). Nekolný's suggestion of a two-tiered system prompts a query regarding the criteria for determining whether or not a given cultural institution merits heritage status.

The insulating power of heritage status is best demonstrated by a comparison of the different fates suffered by significant Prague venues drawn from different factions of the field: Divadlo E. F. Buriana (formerly D34), Realistické Divadlo, Divadlo za branou II and Národní Divadlo. In the self-reflexive and anxious theatrical climate discussed above, all four theatres experienced programming challenges following the Velvet Revolution, so their differing fates cannot be attributed solely to dramaturgical issues or poor production values. Instead, they reflect each venue's relative value in the transitioning society, in line with Bourdieu's assertion that "most [cultural] products only derive their value from the

social use that is made of them” (2010: 13). The first three theatres are smaller houses, associated with periods of political upheaval: Burian’s theatre came to prominence during the First Republic, while the Realistické was instrumental in the run-up to the Velvet Revolution, serving, for a time, as the OF headquarters. Divadlo za branou II was a new iteration of Otomar Krejča’s 1960s small theatre, Divadlo za branou. Despite their political credentials, all three theatres suffered significant upheaval in the early 1990s. The E. F. Burian was closed, gutted and later reopened as the internationally-orientated Divadlo Archa, of which more will be said in Chapter Four. The Realistické, which changed its name to Labyrint (Labyrinth) after 1989, nurtured a generation of excellent directors, including Lébl and Burešová, but operated for years under threat of closure due to an unresolved restitution claim before coming under the management of the Prague municipal government (Burian, 2000: 211).

While the Realistické (now Švandovo divadlo) and Burian/Archa theatres emerged relatively unscathed by the stresses of the early 1990s, Divadlo za branou II was less successful. As shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, despite a few critical successes, Krejča’s reconstituted company failed to find its footing in time to prevent its closure, despite a strong international profile and dissident heritage. Národní Divadlo, though it suffered the same artistic malaise as the smaller theatres, faced no comparable logistical headaches, insulated by its status as a national heritage site. While efforts to secure the future of Národní Divadlo are not surprising, the relative ease with which Krejča’s theatre, in particular, was abandoned, speaks to the value accorded to small, ex-dissident theatres in the post-communist era. As the Czech Republic worked towards EU ascension and pursued its aim of returning to Europe, the value of cultural institutions emphasizing a shared, Central European heritage outstripped those that derived their

significance more recently and locally. In this formulation, Krejča's theatre is merely a theatre, and so falls victim to the strictures of the market. A national theatre, in contrast, supports Czech claims to a Central European cultural tradition, and, at the same time, furthers the ascendant view of communism as a forty-year interruption of Czech participation in democratic, Central European society. A symbol of the nation's heritage, its value transcends its function as a theatre and it is far too significant to fail.

While most theatres were excluded from the government's focus on cultural heritage, theatre artists still looked to the government to create a tax infrastructure that would provide clear for- and non-profit designations and provide initiatives to stimulate corporate sponsorship and charitable giving. Such measures would facilitate the multi-source funding system Havel identified as the most desirable funding paradigm for the theatre sector, yet tax reform stalled in a "thirteen-year outpouring of suggested reforms and legislative paralysis" (Šimek, 2005b: 45). The lack of a clearly defined non-profit tax designation frustrated companies' efforts to apply for grants, including those from international bodies. Theatres were forced to rely primarily on shrinking municipal subsidies, with few options to supplement their diminishing incomes with grants or donations. Ironically, the success of Klaus's economic reforms exacerbated the theatres' financial woes, since membership in the OECD led foreign organizations, such as the Open Society Fund and ProHelvetia, to cease operations in the Czech Republic, including their financial support of independent Czech culture (McLaren, 2012).⁴⁸

Calls for reform in the cultural sector, and the establishment of a national cultural policy had gained some momentum by 1997, when they were derailed by the economic stagnation that followed the defeat of the Klaus government on charges of corruption.

⁴⁸ Interview with the author, 12 October 2012.

Economic slowing led to the abandonment of programmes intended for the financing of culture, including the national lottery, which went bankrupt during the parliamentary crisis catalysed by Klaus's resignation, and investment in state-funded institutions was reduced by 15% (Nekolný, 2003: 126). National plans to transform subsidized organizations into non-profit or commercial ventures were stalled: "self-transformation should have begun in 1997 under the aegis of the Minister of Finance" (Ibid.). Neither the interim government, nor the coalition that came to power in 1998 took decisive action to alleviate the on-going legal confusion, despite Prime Minister Miloš Zeman's avowed commitment to "legislative initiatives, to the principles and assurance of multi-source funding and the transformation of all cultural institutions" (2003: 127). Updating the situation in 2010, Petrová notes that, while the Civic Association of Czech Donors has been established as a resource for companies interested in philanthropic activity and corporate responsibility, "there are currently no tax incentives for investment in the field of culture" (2010: 35). As Nekolný observes, the lack of decisive government intervention in the field of culture meant that "the transformation of the theatres depends on the initiative of city governments" (2003: 127).

3.4. New Paradigms: The Prague Experiment

The need for theatre finance reform was greatest in Prague, characterized by a high concentration of venues and companies and the coexistence of subsidized and non-subsidized theatres in the same market.⁴⁹ The city government set about finding a municipal solution with the election of Alena Brabencová to the post of Prague Theatre Commissioner in 1996. Brabencová was instrumental in instituting a limited system of

⁴⁹ For a discussion of funding strategies affecting regional theatres, see Štěpán Šimek's "Unravelling the Gordian Knot: The Transformation of Czech Theatre Financing in the Twenty-First Century", *Slavic and East European Performance*, Fall 2005: 25:3, pp. 49-52.

competitive grants available to theatres, then numbering between 50 and 80, that existed outside the municipal subsidy system (Šimek, 2005b: 46). In 2000, under guidance from Brabencová, the Prague City Council commissioned the Institut umění – divadelní ústav (Arts and Theatre Institute, or IDU) to research and develop a proposal for the transformation of the city's theatre financing (Ibid.). While serving as a blueprint for the logistical transformation of the cities' theatres, the document also explicitly addressed their social function. Positing “culture as a basic human right”, the document acknowledges “the role of theatre as a means of social cohesion” (Ibid.). Such sentiments assert the continuity of the theatre's importance to Czech national consciousness, even in a society no longer polarized by an opposing nation and state.

If the document seeks to affirm a continual social impetus for theatrical activity, it also addresses a purely economic dimension. The report, notes Šimek “calls the theatre an “industry” and spells out the economic advantages of a vital theatre network for the city, including the so-called multiplication effect,” referring to the effectiveness of theatrical activity in generating subsequent economic activity, such as increased tourism, or the patronage of businesses located in close proximity to theatres (Ibid.). Such an argument constitutes an application of Klaus's economic principles to the field of theatre. As such, it expands upon the historical “Czech and Middle-European model of the theatre as a community building and a provider of enlightened cultural services to the population” to conceive of the theatre in economic terms (Šimek, 2005b: 52). Theatre is seen, at least in part, as an instrumental activity promoting economic growth and development.

In a 2002 step towards competitive, multi-source funding, Prague City Hall adopted the IDU's plan for the establishment of a municipal grant system, open only to theatres legally established as non-profits. Four of the city's subsidized theatres took part in the first

phase of the transformation (Petrová, 2010: 44; CCCP, 2006: 11).⁵⁰ Little risk was involved, as participating theatres were assured that funding levels would remain consistent, at least for the duration of the first four years. Even so, Šimek notes that the newly transformed theatres benefited from increased financial and administrative autonomy, as non-profit status meant that City Hall no longer had a hand in their budgetary or personnel decisions. Further, the transformed non-profits could now access multi-source funding, including, after 2004, grants from the European Union (2005b: 48). Additionally, for some practitioners, the grant application process served to ground the potentially destructive self-reflexivity that had plagued the theatre from the early 1990s onwards; Šimek cites the experience of Doubravka Svobodová, artistic director of Divadlo Na zábradlí, who found that “the need to re-apply for funding every four years in a competitive environment forces each theatre to justify its existence, re-state its mission [and] ruminate on its existence” (Ibid.).

Despite positive initial feedback from participants, the new system was not without its critics. Observers, notes Šimek, were concerned by “the on-going presence of the political nomenklatura in the grant decision process” (2005b: 48). Under the municipal government’s system, representatives of the cultural sector could nominate, but not elect, members of the Grant Council, all of whom were subject to final approval from the City Council, a political body (2005b: 48). This system, many feared, would favour “the long-established flagship Prague theatres [...while] newly formed companies with young directors will have a hard time obtaining adequate funding” (2005b: 49). Still, writing in 2005, Šimek expresses cautious optimism that “the Prague Transformation shows that

⁵⁰ These included Činoherní Klub, Semafor, Divadlo Komédie, and Divadlo Archa (CCCP, 2006:11-12).

reorganization of the Czech Theatre has finally gained momentum. [...] Czech theatre remains financially healthy – if sometimes confusing” (2005b: 52).

Shortly after Šimek’s assessment, the grant system experienced its first significant crisis. According to City Hall’s 2006 “Conception of Cultural Policy” (CCP), municipal grants were open to “not for profit organizations (civic associations, generally beneficial companies, publicly beneficial companies, societies, foundations and others) as well as [...] entrepreneurial subjects like natural persons, limited liability companies and joint stock companies” (2006: 13). The crisis stemmed from a query regarding which “entrepreneurial subjects” were eligible to participate. In August 2007, Petr Kratochvíl, co-owner of Divadlo Ta Fantastika, a commercial theatre with an audience largely comprised of tourists, sued the municipal government in European Court for “disruption of economic competition” (Hiss, 2007). City Hall responded by suspending the entire municipal grant system until the case was resolved, a move which jeopardized the financial health of many Prague theatres. The programme reopened on 6 November 2007, with a new strand, comprising 25% of total funding, to be “distributed according to ticket sales,” and open to commercial theatres (Ibid.).

Unsurprisingly, the concession angered the non-profit sector. Dissatisfaction grew when the release of grant monies in March 2008 revealed insufficient funds for the financing of the transformed theatres. In defence of the policy, Milan Richter, City Councillor for Culture, argued that, despite the cuts to existing grantees, “hundreds of new groups had entered the grant allocation system...resulting in significantly more money being awarded to more artists” (Hiss, 2008). The non-profit theatre community responded with a series of protests dubbed the Weeks of Disquiet and petitioned City Hall for the resignations of Richter and the head of the grant allocating committee. As Šimek notes,

Richter is deeply unpopular with the city's cultural elite and "gleefully participates in the highly vulgar world of Czech commercial culture, complete with appearances on reality TV shows, interviews with tabloid newspapers and attendance at lavish parties given by the Czech nouveau riche. He admittedly doesn't go to the theatre" (2009: 47) The presence of an individual like Richter at the centre of the funding debate must be understood as further acerbating non-profit theatre artists' fears of domination by the commercial entertainment sector. Even Karel Král, editor of the IDU's *Svět a divadlo* journal experiences this anxiety: "I'm also afraid. It's so easy for someone to scrap the budget [of the journal]" (Machalická, 2006: 20). While theatres and practitioners ultimately continued the work of the 2008 season as best they could, complaints about the inconsistent implementation of the grant system and its various legal designations continue to be voiced. Still, as of this writing, the grant allocation system remains unchanged.

3.5. Defining Political Theatre for a New Millennium

Writing in 2006, Jana Machalická expresses a cautious optimism, heralding a re-emergence of socio-politically engaged playwriting. In an article titled "The Czech Lands Rediscover Political Theatre" for the English-language *Czech Theatre* journal, Machalická defines two strands of political theatre solely in terms of content: works that engage with the relationship between individuals and society, or directly and literally address the nation's political scene (2006: 21).⁵¹ She cites *Horáková x. Gottwald* as an example of the

⁵¹ The placement of the article in *Czech Theatre* is significant, as the publication acts an annual digest, in English, of Czech theatre scholarship. It draws much of its material from the quarterly journal *Svět a Divadlo*, though, as shall be explored with reference to *Farma v jeskyni* in Chapter 5, English translations published in *Czech Theatre* do not always reflect the original content of the Czech versions. Like *Svět a Divadlo*, *Czech Theatre* is published by the Divadelní ústav (Theatre Institute), which receives funding from the Ministry of Culture and is also responsible for promoting Czech theatre abroad, through national showcases and festival appearances. Its provenance allows *Svět a Divadlo* to lay claim to a consecrated position in domestic theatre scholarship, while *Czech Theatre* takes on the role of interpreting and transmitting Czech theatre scholarship to an international, Anglophone audience (the publication was also published in French from 1991 to 1998).

first type. Written by Karel Steigerwald (b. 1945), a long-time collaborator with the Drama Studio in Ústí nad Labem, the play was staged by Viktorie Čermáková in La Fabrika, a converted aluminium factory in Prague's Holešovice. *Horáková* was the second instalment of *Perzekuce.cz* (*Persecution.cz*), playwright/director Miroslav Bambušek's four-part exploration of post-World War II Czech history. Despite the iconic stature of his titular characters, Steigerwald's text transcends the historical specificities of Milada Horáková's life and persecution during the Stalinist show trials to provide "a timeless picture of a person caught up in the turmoil of the time" (2006: 26).⁵² As well as the title roles, the play includes the character of director E. F. Burian, who represents the figure of the artist attempting to maintain his own identity in a sharply politicized context (Machalická, 2006: 26). The layering of these stories, together with "a grotesque and disturbing tone" and Čermáková's "collage method" result in "a plurality of meaning" (Ibid.). As shall be discussed in the next chapter, such open dramaturgy is often cited as problematic in the reception of nové divadlo work and is significant that Machalická does not find it troubling here.

Machalická offers Iva Volánková-Klestilová's 2005 "satirical trilogy" *Má vlast* (*My Country*) as an example of the second type. "[T]he first very hard-hitting, openly political farce about our politicians", *Má vlast* was written in response to a call for submissions by the journal *Švět a divadlo* and originally produced at Divadlo v Dlouhé (Theatre on Dlouhá)

Articles appearing in *Czech Theatre*, then, may be understood as broadly reflecting a mainstream, domestically-oriented view.

⁵² Milada Horáková (1901-1950) was a member of Czech Parliament for the National Socialist Party. Imprisoned at Terezín during WWII for her resistance activities, Horáková was tried and executed by the Communists in 1950. A symbol of the era and a national heroine, she is buried in the national pantheon at Vyšehrad and a major thoroughfare running from Hradčany to the Vltava River has been named after her. *Horáková x Gottwald* was the third play presented in the framework of *Perzekuce.cz*. Other works, in chronological order, included *Porta Apostolorum*, written by Bambušek and directed by David Czesany; *Útěcha polní cesty* (The Consolation of a Dirt Road), written by Rainald Goetz and Martin Heidegger and directed by Bambušek and Bambušek's *Zóna* (The Zone), directed by Thomas Zielinski. Further information on the project, and Bambušek's other work, may be found at www.perzekuce.cz.

as a staged reading with puppets directed by the publication's editor, Král (Ibid.: 26-27).

For Machalická, the specificity of the work, which made no attempt to disguise its targets, contributed to its effectiveness:

[I]ts dispassionate viewpoint and humour had a liberating effect [...and] did not hide the fact that it was created "for one use only" and that it was simply a topical response to events (which is nevertheless extremely necessary in order to keep politics clean), which would fade away over time. (Ibid.: 27)

Klestilová's literal engagement with the personalities and scandals of contemporary Czech politicians is not merely an opportunity to laugh at the nation's much-derided political class. For Machalická, the play appears to function practically as a check on the political process, though it is unclear precisely how, as the production has not had any demonstrable impact on the careers of those it satirizes. Instead, the work's dramaturgy feels analogous to the medieval feast of fools. It travesties the powerful without mounting a direct challenge to their position.

Machalická's chosen examples and the parameters of her analysis reveal assumptions and biases inherent within national discourse on Czech dramatic theatre. While she alludes to the earlier periods of politically-engaged theatre, the majority of her reference points are dramatists:

In the First Republic [...], the genre of political theatre was primarily cultivated by Karel Čapek [...] It's enough to recall his *R.U.R.*, which was world famous at the time [...] Of course, the absurd plays of Václav Havel, for example, or some productions of classical texts by Alfred Radok or Otomar Krejča were perceived as parables on the reality of socialist Czechoslovakia, which were only slightly exaggerated. (Ibid.: 21-22).

The *autorské divadlo* movement is noticeably absent from her discussion, which serves to affirm the position of the dramatic play (or, failing this, the well-directed classic text), as the most consecrated and politically resonant cultural product in the field of Czech theatrical production. Indeed, the productions Machalická references, despite employing

innovative staging techniques, are all plays, which reflect the broadly conservative tendencies identified by Klaic as representative of twenty-first century theatre programming, particularly that which attempts to speak to a national audience: “a dramatization of a bestselling novel, a documentary play on some well-known personality or event of local significance” (2008: 204). In her discussion of Čapek and Havel, Machalická does not consider the extent to which the plays’ political dimension transcends their (arguably) political content. While she notes that communist-era audiences “went to the theatre in order to express their point of view”, there is little sense of the complicity or “being-together” as discussed by Beck and Just in Chapter Two (2006: 22). For Machalická, the designation “political” speaks primarily to a production’s content; indeed, she attributes the emergence of political plays in the first decade of the twenty-first century to increased drama in the political sphere: “the political scene began to take so many absurd twists and turns that theatre could not fail to take note” (Ibid.: 20).

Conspicuous by its absence in a survey of political theatre is *Poslední dvě hodiny* (The Last Hours), a collaborative international project by Farma v jeskyni, Teatr ZAR (Poland) and TheaterLabor (Germany). Staged at La Fabrika in the same season as *Perzekuce.cz*, the production credits “La Fabrika Perzekuce.cz” as its partner organization (Návrátová, 2006)⁵³. Devised collectively by the three companies, *Poslední dvě hodiny* uses little language, relying on physical imagery and a rich aural landscape of intonations. Still, like *Perzekuce.cz*, it engages with loaded material from twentieth-century Czech history, in this case German reprisals in the aftermath of the 1942 assassination of Reinhard Heydrich,

⁵³ “Poslední dvě hodiny: kolaborace”, *Divadlo.cz*, retrieved from: <http://host.divadlo.cz/art/clanek.asp?id=10426>.

Acting Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia.⁵⁴ Its content renders it political by Machalická's definition, but the work's further significance surely lies in the extent to which its rehearsal and performance constitute a political process of reconciliation and healing. The collaboration of Czechs, Poles and, most significantly, a German company, in a project of this nature demands its inclusion in any attempt to survey Czech political theatre of the early 2000s. Still, Machalická, in the publication responsible for the international dissemination of developments in Czech theatre, ignores it, demonstrating the persistent equation of politics with text.

Following Machalická's reasoning, one would expect Václav Havel's final play, *Odcházení (Leaving)* (2007), to be met with universal acclaim, yet its production and reception reveal further contradictions. Initially, *Leaving* appears to conform to Machalická's content-based definition with a cast of characters that draws obvious parallels with contemporary political figures. The central character, the intellectual Vilém Reiger, has just completed his tenure as Chancellor of an unnamed Central European country in which his nemesis, Vlastik Klein (whose name bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Václav Klaus), wields increasing influence. The titular leaving refers to the pending expulsion of Reiger and his household (including his long-time companion Irena, a role Havel wrote for his second wife, Dagmar) from the government villa they occupy, at the hands of Klein, who plans to develop it into a casino. Havel denies that the play depicts specific individuals, explaining to Zdeněk Tichý in a 2008 interview that he had already

⁵⁴ British-trained Czech and Slovak paratroopers sent by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile attached Heydrich as he drove through the streets of Prague in his open-topped car. Heydrich was not killed immediately, but died several days later of his wounds. The paratroopers sought sanctuary in the Orthodox Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius. SS troops laid siege to the church, attempting to flush the men with tear gas and water before finally bowing an entrance in the building. The paratroopers committed suicide rather than submit to capture. As retribution, Hitler ordered the complete destruction of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky. Over 1,000 Czechs died in the incident (Agnew, 2000: 214).

written two-thirds of a draft by 1989, inspired by his observations, after 1969 “of the former politicians who were thrown out of office” and had to take menial jobs (2008).⁵⁵ Still, autobiographical readings persist, and these, in turn, frame the play’s reception.

Šimek notes that, somewhat unusually, *Odcházení* had been published, “reviewed, analysed, and hailed as Havel’s best play to date months before it opened” (2009: 39). Stylistically, it displays elements of intertextuality, quoting directly from Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Perhaps inspired by Jan Grossman’s 1990 staging of *Largo Desolato*, the authorial voice is present via humorous pre-recorded instructions to the actors and self-deprecating comments on the writing delivered over a loudspeaker. The play makes use of Havel’s trademark repetition, as well as a range of post-communist types, such as Reiger’s materialistic daughter Vlasta, primarily concerned with securing her own inheritance, and the television crew that come to the villa repeatedly for interviews with Reiger. Everyday banalities (missing office supplies, Irena’s make-up, the blanket she insists Reiger drape across her lap), are juxtaposed with artefacts from the ex-Chancellor’s distinguished political career, many of which are in the process of being repossessed by the state. This works to subvert the grandeur of the office, exposing pettiness and absurdity at the highest levels of government. Havel the playwright seems engaged in a de-mythologizing process distinctly at odds with the symbolic position occupied by Havel the statesman in post-communist narratives.

Domestic reception supports this hypothesis, as Czech critics express frustration and even anxiety concerning the character of Reiger as a surrogate Havel. Martin J. Švejda finds that Reiger’s lack of internal conflict hurts the play’s structure – it lacks a centre. Writing in *Respekt* magazine, Magdaléna Platzová concurs in her assessment of Reiger:

⁵⁵ “Václav Havel: Moc má...”, retrieved from <http://host.divadlo.cz/noviny/clanek.asp?id=16922>

He has no thoughts, only a programme. He has no internal doubts [...] he references the values that he once embodied, but no one knows what these values could really be [...] Reiger isn't fighting for personal integrity or integrity of the spirit. If anything, he's fighting for the villa. (2008: 51)

She is discomfited by the way in which Havel has created a buffoonish alter-ego that one must perforce associate with his distinguished author. Such associations are encouraged by the play's ending, with a tongue and cheek reference to Havel's famous revolutionary-era slogan: "I'd like to thank the actors for not over-acting. The theatre would like to thank the audience for turning off their mobile phones. Truth and love must triumph over lies and hatred. You may turn your phones back on. Goodnight and pleasant dreams!" (Havel, 2008: 82). Such apparent self-parody prompts Platzová to ask, "If *Odcházení* is a play about relative values, one of these is surely President Havel. [...] What did he really think about his love and hatred? Was it a false symbol or a real one?" (2008: 51).

Ironically, given Havel's lifelong pursuit of freedom from ideological discourse, reviews of *Odcházení* reveal the extent to which Havel's political career has assumed a symbolic quality and become the stuff of national mythology. Reflecting Havel's belief that "anyone who takes himself too seriously always runs the risk of looking ridiculous; anyone who can consciously laugh at himself does not", *Odcházení* reads as Havel's attempt to subvert or prevent his own appropriation by ideology, albeit within a democratic context. The play thus begins to function as a humorous, yet no less serious, reminder to the nation that any ideology, even an ideology of freedom, truth and love, can distort and manipulate. Despite its conventional five-act structure, *Odcházení* seeks to actively engage the spectator; as Platzová's analysis demonstrates, the play asks more questions than it answers, creating a theatre-going experience that is actively political in the same terms as Havel's earlier work, with its Patočkan commitment to "skaking" or otherwise destabilizing

ideological speech. By maintaining continuity with Havel's plays of the 1960s, *Odcházení* challenges the dominant post-communist narrative of Czech theatre history. This dimension of the work perhaps helps to explain its fraught journey to production in a sequence of events that feels counterintuitive in the case of so important a figure as Havel.

As detailed by Šimek, Havel approached Divadlo Na zábradlí, Národní divadlo and Divadlo na Vinohradech in turn, each of which ultimately declined to produce the work for technical, dramaturgical or personnel reasons related to Havel's insistence of director David Radok and actors Jan Tříska and Dagmar Havlová-Veškrnová as Reiger and Irena. Eventually, *Odcházení* was produced by Divadlo Archa, where the venue's flexible space and lack of a resident ensemble helped to accommodate Havel's vision. Led by Ondřej Hrab, Archa (as discussed in Chapter Four) is a groundbreaking Prague venue by virtue of its international orientation and rejection of the repertory system in favour of a production house model, in which the theatre invites artists and companies to collaborate on specific projects. As noted above, Archa was one of the first Prague theatres to achieve non-profit status and compete for municipal grants, a model of financing for which Havel strongly advocated. Archa's international outlook and progressive organisational structure arguably position it as a natural ally for Havel, yet Šimek interprets its hosting of *Odcházení* as a consolation prize: "The play was rejected by the established theatres and forced into a less prestigious house" (2009: 49).

As Šimek notes, the premier of *Odcházení* in May 2008 coincided with the Weeks of Discontent, the previously discussed protests against the municipal grant commission's decision to extent a portion of its funding to for-profit companies. As Šimek argues, the conflict between City Hall and the non-profit theatre community echoed the divergent positions of Reiger and Klein in *Odcházení*, and served to reactivate Havel and Klaus's

cultural debates of the 1990s. This was intensified by Havel's public support of the theatre community, expressed in the pages of daily newspaper *Lidové noviny*:

Havel himself published a scathing critique of the Prague government's current cultural policy in particular and an elegiac rumination about the "wholesale destruction of Prague's charm" by the market-driven politics of the governing party in general. That in turn provoked an even more scathing rebuttal by the mayor of Prague [Pavel Bem], whose conclusion basically argued that Havel was irrelevant and that he should finally move over and get used to modernity. (Ibid.: 48)

This exchange, together with the play's difficult journey to production, speaks to Havel's paradoxical position within the Czech political landscape of the mid-2000s. While Havel remained a popular figure abroad, and the amount of media attention devoted to *Odcházení* testifies to on-going domestic interest, he was also subject to charges of elitism. As Fawn writes, "he has consistently remained aloof, living in an intellectual ghetto" (2000: 47).⁵⁶ Such accusations expose the dual and self-contradictory nature of *kulturnost* as a means of both conferring and discrediting consecrated status. Neither the playwright nor his play sit easily within the Czech theatre landscape of the early twenty-first century.

3.6. Import and Export: Culture as a Foreign Policy

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the post-communist evolution of Czech theatre in the domestic context, yet, as established in the preceding chapters, Czech theatre has, throughout its history, presupposed the existence of a foreign or international spectator. As discussed, the communist schism between the nation and state closed after 1989 as a result of a democratically elected government. Domestically, this removed the need for the theatre

⁵⁶ Recent events suggest, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Havel's legacy will far outstrip that of Klaus. While the nation responded to Havel's death in December 2011 with a public outpouring of affection and mourning, Kalus has not fared as well. Video of Klaus pocketing a pen during a state visit to Chile went viral on Youtube in the spring of 2011 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uToMvq3yw2A>), while, more recently, Klaus's bodyguards failed to intervene when a man describing himself as a communist sympathiser fired seven plastic bullets at Klaus during a public appearance (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bUSR2Qph1Q>).

to mediate between state and nation; concurrently, Czech theatre was no longer required to function abroad as a surrogate foreign policy. Heavily-politicized vigil-style performances of Havel's plays abroad ceased, paralleling the absence of dissident plays on Czech stages. As shall be discussed further in Chapter Four, the Czech performing arts scene began, almost immediately, to reap the benefits of the international networks and contacts cultivated by practitioners who had emigrated after 1968 and now reengaged with Czech practice. Particularly in the fields of contemporary dance and movement theatre, an increasingly international orientation was reflected in a proliferation of international festivals centred in Prague, but mirrored elsewhere in the Czech Republic.⁵⁷

Grassroots international activity was accompanied by municipal and national government initiatives to promote Czech culture abroad. Cultural policy documents generated by the municipal and national governments emphasize the dual strategy of pursuing opportunities for international exchange and outreach, while also emphasizing Prague and the Czech Republic as world-class cultural destinations. The CCP of 2006 lays claim to a multicultural, Central European identity, positioning Prague as “a place where people from both near and faraway countries meet” and “a reputable cultural metropolis of Central Europe” keen to “build new cultural establishments of nationwide and international importance” (CCP: 3). Echoing Havlíček Borovský's observation of foreign spectators in Czech theatres, the CCP defines its audience as “inhabitants and visitors of the city” (CCP: 3). The relationship is reciprocal; both groups “participate, directly and indirectly, in the creation and development of Prague culture” (CCP: 5-6). While both serving and co-

⁵⁷ Tanec Praha (Dance Prague) was established in the summer of 1989. International festivals established after the Velvet Revolution include Čtyři dny v pohybu (Four Days in Motion) (1996); Fringe Festival Praha (2001); and Letní Letna (Summer Letna) (2003). Festivals with more domestically programming include ...příští vlna/next wave... (1993); Česká taneční platforma (Czech Dance Platform) (2002) and Malá Inventura (Small Inventory) (2003). Festivals will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

establishing the domestic cultural milieu, the city's cultural institutions are also expected to “satisfy public interests through marketing and promotion of the city abroad” (Ibid.: 6).

Finally, the CCP invests the cultural sector with “the ability to overcome language, national, ethnic, mental, geographic as well as other borders, barriers and prejudices” (Ibid.: 7).

The National Cultural Policy of the Czech Republic 2009-2014 (NCPCR) presents a more nuanced reading of the role of culture internationally: “[culture] connects the Czech Republic with the outside world and at the same time it separates it and characterises it in comparison to other nations” (Petrová, 2010: 4). Culture, then, is both a bridge to the wider world and a point of national distinction. Despite emphasis in the NCPCR on the role of culture internationally, Petrová notes that no foreign cultural policy exists; duties for promoting Czech culture abroad and encouraging international partnerships are divided between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Culture offers direct financial support to events of international importance. These are classed as “so-called priority events of the [Ministry of Culture] and they do not go through the normal grant selection procedure of the Ministry” (Petrová, 2010: 13). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is involved in culture chiefly through the activities of the Czech Centres, with twenty-four subsidiaries in twenty countries on three continents. Tasked with developing “a dialogue with the foreign public in the field of culture, education, business and tourism,” they “focus on organizing exhibitions, concerts, theatre and dance performances, film screenings, design shows, authors' readings, discussion seminars or bigger projects” (Petrová, 2010: 11). Efforts by the ministries are supplemented in the field of theatre by the activities of the IDU, encompassing an international relations office and annual publication, *Czech Theatre Magazine*, published in English. Additionally, IDU acts

as a broker for Czech performing arts, publishing a catalogue and accompanying DVD with details of Czech performances available for international touring.

The promotion of Czech theatre abroad has been problematized by linguistic and financial factors. In accordance with the high status conferred on playwriting, productions of dramatic plays constitute the most consecrated Czech theatre works. Paradoxically, their reliance on the Czech language renders them the work least likely to find an international audience, despite attempts at surtitling, as in Divadlo Komedie's 2010 production of *Heroes Like Us* at London's Riverside Studios.⁵⁸ Renata Clark, Deputy Director of the Czech Centre in London, notes that the Centre's most successful work has been in the areas of film, literature, design and visual art, acknowledging further barriers to the international presentation of theatre:

It's quite difficult to bring a whole company over, particularly in the sort of classical theatre. It's easier with physical theatre, or dance, but still it's quite a bit of financial involvement, so we don't do it on our own, unless there is interest expressed from some organizer. (Clark, 2011)⁵⁹

As Clark explains, the Czech Centre most often acts as a broker, mediating between a local producer and the Czech performing arts scene and suggesting companies or productions that will slot into a particular event. Exceptions to this rule have been national showcases involving multiple companies, as at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival, or Czech participation in the FeEast Festival (2005-2009) at Riverside Studios (Ibid.). Barriers to international touring are not unique to the Czech theatre sector and reflect the challenges encountered by national and repertory theatres in an increasingly international performance market. As Dragan Klaic observes,

⁵⁸ The surtitling stopped functioning half-way through the performance I attended, as a result of which spectators without access to the Czech language quickly lost the narrative thread of the one-man production.

⁵⁹ Interview with the author, 17 October 2011, London.

The performing arts landscape across Europe is becoming more chequered, dynamic and diverse, with an explosive growth of festivals of all sorts [...] This crowded international scene and the explosive growth of the *postdramatic* theatres and other performing practices liberated from the habitual play's dominance, do not allow National Theatres to claim any special privileges nor to count on some automatic advantages. (2008: 225-6)

While Klaic's research specifically concerns national theatres, his comments are equally applicable to the many repertory houses, including Divadlo na Vinohradech, Švandovo divadlo and Divadlo Na zábradlí, that dominate Prague's theatre landscape.

A consideration of the international dimension of post-communist Czech theatre must also address the diversification of domestic audiences. In 2010, the Czech Statistical Office recorded a resident foreigner population of 431,578. Of these, 148,578 live in Prague, where they make up 11% of the total population. 36% hold long-term residency visas (Czech Statistical Office, 2010). Such demographic changes point to the existence of a domestic audience base, international in composition and with varied levels of access to the Czech language, and, accordingly, to the nation's most consecrated theatres. Linguistic competency was introduced as a requirement for permanent residency only in 2009, and then only at the entry-level A1 band of the Common European Framework (CEF). Heeding Klaic's warning that national and repertory theatres "will lose credibility if they perpetuate indifference towards the cultural diversity issues and continue to evade the inclusion of other ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups on stage, behind the stage and in the auditorium", some Prague houses have introduced policies catering to a diversified audience (2008: 227). Švandovo divadlo surtitles the majority of its productions in English, a practice also employed, for certain productions, by Divadlo Archa. The Prague Anglophone community's interest in theatre, as both spectators and theatre-makers, is demonstrated by the persistence presence, since the early 1990s, of numerous English-

language theatres (ELTs), though such organizations have been plagued by short lifespans.⁶⁰

Of those currently active, The Prague Playhouse has shown considerable longevity as an umbrella organization for smaller ELT companies and serves as focal point for the ELT community. Still, as Gwendolen A. Orel observes, the vast majority of Prague ELTs fail “to establish themselves within the Czech arts economy” (2005: 212). They also struggle to find audiences, as the work is easily ghettoised (appealing only to members of a local expatriate arts community), reduced to a language-learning tool (through productions aimed at students of English), or artistically compromised through inexperience, lack of funding and/or direct appeal to tourists. Unlike the ELTs, which overwhelmingly produce plays in English, the Prague Fringe Festival, founded in 2001 by Scottish producer Steve Gove, a long-term Prague resident and fluent Czech speaker, has succeeded with a programming policy that encourages work able to transcend language barriers. Still, despite its status as an organization regularly funded by the municipal government, the Prague Fringe has experienced a decline in participation from Czech companies over its eleven year existence. Tereza Raabová’s 2010 study of the Festival’s economic impact, notes that “approximately 26% of festival participants are foreigners living in Prague” (2010: 3). 58% of the Festival’s audience live in Prague, yet only 32% of the total number are Czech, establishing a strong link between the Festival and a community of resident foreigners active as both producers and consumers of cultural products.

⁶⁰ A consideration of such work may seem tangential to the present study, but is justified by the on-going presence of such companies on the Czech performing arts scene. While most companies fail to gain a footing on the terrain of the cultural mainstream, their activities, constituting a theatrical subculture, are too numerous and visible to ignore.

Of greater interest to the present study is the emergence of a parallel sphere of theatre production, denoted by the term *nové divadlo* (new theatre). Unlike the ELTs and even the Prague Fringe, the international dimension of the *nové divadlo* does not speak to the city's diversifying population from an immigrant or expatriate perspective. Instead, it is strongly rooted within Czech theatre practice and possesses a fluidity that allows it to benefit from an established Czech infrastructure (including the Prague and Brno conservatories and, where relevant, the promotion activities of the DU and Ministry of Culture), as well as a broader international network. The adjective *mezinárodní* (international), which both *Krepsko* and *Farma v jeskyni* apply to their work, speaks not only to the composition of the companies themselves, but extends to include international events, including workshops, festivals and lectures. While the work of the *nové divadlo* and international companies varies thematically and aesthetically, common characteristics include a rejection of text as the sole carrier of meaning, an exploration of the sonic (as opposed to narrative) possibilities of multiple languages in performance, the role of music in the dramaturgical structure and a strong physical vocabulary. Such qualities serve to position the work in opposition to the dominance of the Czech play and to align it with the work of both the interwar avant-garde and the *autorská divadla* of the normalization era, as well as the strand of contemporary practice designated postdramatic theatre by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006).

Given their synchronic overlap, the assumption of a causal relationship between Prague's increasingly international population and the emergence of such groups is logical. Certainly, socio-political changes since the Velvet Revolution and, more recently, EU ascension have created conditions conducive to international cooperation. International touring and cultural exchanges, particularly at the regional level, are easier now than for previous generations and the city receives a constant stream of international cultural

producers and consumers, including tourists with varying degrees of cultural capital. At the same time, demographic changes are reversing the homogenizing impact of communism; increasingly, the city's demographics reflect a diversity reminiscent of the fin d'siecle and First Republic, both periods characterized by an international cultural orientation and fertile cross-pollination across borders. Along these lines, the chief motivation for Czech theatre artists to classify their work as international seems, as shall be explored presently, most rooted in a desire to take part in an international conversation about the making of contemporary performance. This desire is reflected in interviews with key practitioners, as well as in practical approaches to international collaboration (emphasizing, for example, participation in foreign festivals over engagement with local minority communities).

Reflecting the frustration, expressed by previous generations of theatre artists, with an overtly nationalist agenda, the *nové divadlo* and young international theatres position their work in a global network predicated on mobility and intelligibility across linguistic borders. Ironically, given their subaltern position vis-à-vis dramatic theatre as the most consecrated exponent of Czech theatre heritage, it is the work of such companies that is best placed to represent the Czech Republic on the world stage and, increasingly, does so. "Statistics on Culture 2008", a report by the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture" (NIPOS), notes that while "physical and dance theatre" accounted for just 3% of performances on Czech stages from 2004 to 2008, the same category was responsible for 19-24% of all Czech performances abroad.⁶¹ That this is the case despite a two-tiered funding system which restricts most *nové divadlo* and international companies to applying only for short-term project funding, rather than multi-year grants encompassing

⁶¹ National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (2008) "Statistics on Culture 2008", retrieved from: <http://www.nipos-mk.cz/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/statistics-of-culture-2008.pdf>

administrative overheads, speaks to the excellence of the work and the tenacity of its creators and the parallel structures which have emerged to foster, support and disseminate the work. These activities, and the extent to which such work poses a real challenge to the dominance of Czech dramatic theatre, is the focus of the next two chapters.

Chapter Four:
Něco nového/Something New: New Czech Theatre 2000-2012

Ženská z televize: Alfred ve dvoře říkáte? No, neznám. Jo, alternativní. No, nevím. Jo, aha.

Tak nevím. No nic vám neslibuju. No, uvidíme...

TV Presenter: Alfred ve dvoře you say? No, I'm not familiar with it. Oh, alternative. No, I don't know. Yes, aha...Mmm...I don't know. No, I'm not promising you anything. We'll see... (Transcribed from a cartoon drawn on the wall of Motus's office, Prague.)

The logistical and dramaturgical challenges facing Czech theatres from the early 1990s onward do not tell the entire story of the evolution of post-communist Czech theatre. A second narrative (here borrowing a phrase from the communist era), concerns what may be termed a parallel polis of production. The parallel sphere possesses its own infrastructure venues, festivals, producers and educational structures, many of them established between 2000 and 2012. The term nové divadlo (new theatre) speaks to an emerging third theatre-making space, distinct from the mainstream and avant-garde spheres which pre-dated the Velvet Revolution and, as discussed in the previous chapter, suffered the greatest anxiety and upheaval in its aftermath. It remains small, young and independent, though it has generated a strong infrastructure. It is concentrated in Prague, but conceives of its work and objectives in national, regional and international contexts. While not artistically monolithic, the majority of its projects are characterized by a breakdown of generic borders and hierarchies. These hierarchies and generic boundaries must themselves be understood as proceeding from the evolving social role of Czech theatre discussed in the preceding chapters. That many performances dispense with words altogether in favour of a language of the body represents a strong point of departure from the established norms of Czech

theatre practice, particularly work thought to possess a socio-political resonance. Other work contains a strong multi-media component, skirting the boundary between the performing and live arts.

Largely ignored by the mainstream Czech theatre press and news dailies, when *nové divadlo* does receive coverage it is often accused of amateurism, yet many of its leading artists are products of the Czech conservatory system and/or combine pedagogical activity in the nation's leading institutions with their creative work. It must perpetually justify its existence and fight for funding and resources, yet it has become remarkably self-sustaining. Despite its marginalized position and less than optimal conditions of production, internationally successful companies have emerged from this sphere of production, most notably *Farma v jeskyni*, but also *Krepesko* and individual artists such as Jiří Adámek. Notwithstanding their significant divergence from the repertory system at the heart of mainstream Czech theatre practice, it is companies from the *nové divadlo* scene who increasingly represent Czech theatre abroad, becoming (somewhat ironically) national standard bearers in a global network of festivals, venues and practitioners.

4.1. Spaces and Festivals in Flux, 1989-2001

In contrast to the fragmentation and subsequent loss of momentum of the pre-1989 avant-garde, Hulec notes that the early 1990s were characterized by a frenetic energy approaching a carnivalesque “feast of fools”, as new independent cultural spaces rapidly came and went (2000: 26). As “support for independent art on the part of official institutions went into virtual reverse for several years after November 1989 [...] young experimental creators were thrown on their own resources”, a state of affairs which gave rise to a countercultural arts scene characterized by its appropriation of non-traditional spaces (Ibid.). Alternative cultural centres including *Asylum* (established 1992), *Ladronka*

(established 1993) and Cibulka, an ad hoc cultural space that predated the revolution, were effectively squats. Čtyři dny v pohybu (Four Days in Motion), founded in 1996 as the first Prague festival to focus on the programming of new, international theatre, shared the squats' interest in appropriating non-traditional spaces with an emphasis on site-specific work and, beginning in 1998 with the Old Sewage Plant, organized each year's festival around a specific location.⁶²

Of the three squat venues, Asylum was the most official, but shortest-lived, lasting just six months, from December 1992 until May 1993.⁶³ Located in an abandoned building on Betlemská Street in Staré Město, Asylum is representative of the early 1990s, when restitution claims threw ownership and rights of access to numerous buildings into dispute. Asylum was notable for its international character; the space was used both by Czech students and young Americans (and other Anglophones) who flocked to the city in the early 1990s to teach English while often pursuing theatre, journalism, creative writing or music (Orel, 2005: 67-68).⁶⁴ While, as Orel observes, Asylum's "usage was not wholly integrated", with Czechs and non-Czechs scheduling their activities at different times during the day, the venue nevertheless functioned as a shared space, hosting exhibitions and concerts by Czech photographers and musicians, as well as English-language theatre

⁶² For a full archive, including performance sites, see <http://www.ctyridny.cz>.

⁶³ Ladronka and Cibulka are large houses (something between chateaux and farmhouses) situated within parkland in Prague 6 and 5, respectively. While the website of the restaurant currently occupying Ladronka notes that "the centre of alternative culture run here [from 1993 to 2000] was famous in its time, even among independent subculture in Europe", squatters were officially ejected by the police in 2000 and the building was restored and gentrified in 2002 by City Hall and Prague 6 government. In contrast, Cibulka no longer functions as a cultural centre and remains in a state of disrepair, with squatters last evicted in May 2012 ("Police Evict Košíře Squatters"). A non-profit group dedicated to its restoration and incorporation into the increasingly gentrified Košíře neighbourhood of Prague 5 has maintained an online presence since April 2011 (www.cibulky.info).

⁶⁴ In her chronicle of the early 1990s English Language Theatre (ELT) movement in Prague, Orel notes that the space was initially accessed by Jeff Godwin, an Australian, assisted by DAMU student Karel Umlauf, who had discovered it as part of a project to map disused buildings in Prague (2005: 68).

productions. It closed when DAMU, which had taken the building under its administration, claimed the space for costume and properties storage (2005: 68-69).

Despite its shortcomings and brief lifespan, the existence of Asylum as an intracultural, multi-lingual, internationally-positioned cross-arts space helped to establish the parameters that characterize the Czech new theatre scene. Chief among these are scepticism of borders, whether they are found between nations, genres or roles in a given performance-making context and fluidity in relationships between venues, companies and artists. Such practices are very much at odds with the permanent ensemble model practised by repertory theatres. In addition to the exuberant but ephemeral art squats, the early 1990s also witnessed the emergence of lasting venues and affiliations which shared the international outlook, flexibility and cross-arts sensibilities of venues on the fringes. They would rapidly manifest in more enduring forms, such as the theatres Divadlo Archa (Ark Theatre) and Alfred ve dvoře (Alfred in the Courtyard), the Tanec Praha (Dance Prague) Festival and the Department of Nonverbal Theatre at HAMU.

4.2. Out of the Ark and onto the World Stage

4.2.1. Divadlo Archa

The theatre which contributed most to the Czech theatre's re-engagement with the cutting edge of European and international theatre practice is surely Divadlo Archa, established in 1994. Conceived, radically at the time, as "a production house, where contemporary art is shown and made", Archa is the brainchild of Ondřej Hrab, a sociologist and economist turned theatre-maker (Divadlo Archa, "O nás").⁶⁵ Hrab was awarded the leadership of the E. F. Buriana (formerly home to D34) on Na Poříčí street based on his plan to transform the venue into "a flexible, functional, hi-tech "production house," with a

⁶⁵ Information compiled from: Divadlo Archa, "O nás", retrieved from: <http://www.archatheatre.cz/cs/o-nas/>.

minimal administrative, technical and dramaturgical staff”, a plan that represented a strong point of departure from the dominant repertory model (Burian, 2000: 205). The content of Archa’s programming matched its progressive form. Eschewing the trend to pander to the lowest common denominator with American-style musicals or tourist fare, Hrab sought to present “non-profit, innovative, experimentally slanted international work in dance, music, mime, film and multimedia, as well as more traditional theatre. Whether Czech-made or imported, it would be aimed at Prague audiences” (Ibid.).

Unsurprisingly, given its founder’s background, Archa also thought differently about its financing. Corporate sponsorship of theatres in the Czech Republic is rare, as the tax code does not incentivize it and, as discussed in Chapter Three, also lacked a clearly defined non-profit legal status. Still, Archa forged a relationship with Komerční Banka, which owned the Archa building and “was willing to underwrite many of the theatre’s expenses” (Burian, 2000: 205). Archa also instituted a practice of scheduling the occasional high-profile and lucrative rock concert, the proceeds from which helped to further offset the company’s more artistic work, a model also used by venues Roxy/NoD and Palác Akropolis. In addition to its innovative funding approaches, Archa also relied on the Municipal Grant system and was in the first group of four theatres to take part in the Prague Transformation to non-profit status described in the previous chapter.⁶⁶

Its pursuit of multiple funding streams allowed Archa to become the first Czech venue with the resources to consistently attract elite international theatre practitioners.

Burian emphasizes the importance of “Robert Wilson’s touring production of *Dr. Faustus*

⁶⁶ Ewan McLaren, producer at Alfred ve dvoře, relates that this practice of off-setting artistic costs with rock concerts remains a contentious issue within the theatre community, with purely non-profit venues, such as Divadlo Ponoc and Alfred ve dvoře questioning the grant-eligibility of venues such as NoD, which is heavily subsidized by the commercial activities of the Roxy club and café which share its building (McLaren, 2012).

Lights the Lights, the first of his works to be shown in Prague, under Wilson's on-site supervision,” while “subsequently performances and workshops have involved Kabuki and Bunraku artists, Meredith Monk, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre, Japanese choreographer and mime Min Tanaka” as well as Allen Ginsberg, the Royal Shakespeare Company and Cheek by Jowl (2000: 205). The impact these performances had on the next generation of artists then training in Prague was significant. Actor Jiří Zeman, a graduate of DAMU’s alternative acting programme and member of the international physical theatre company Krepesko, recalls:

In the nineties, when I came to Prague, I really loved the multicultural theatre scene [...] Mostly because of this Archa, and then the Fringe Festival and a lot of festivals, DV8 and this stuff, which were beautiful. In the nineties it was everywhere, it was in films, it was all around. (Zeman 2012)⁶⁷

Zeman’s comments highlight not only the artistically stimulating nature of work by companies like DV8, but also the international, “multicultural” dimension of the theatre scene. Because of the work of Archa, and the festivals Zeman mentions (of which more momentarily), the generation of theatre practitioners coming of age in the 1990s, particularly those working at the more experimental end of the theatre-making spectrum, experienced their city as an obvious stop on the touring schedules of internationally significant work. It is unsurprising, then, that they conceived of their own work within a similarly international, highly mobile framework of festivals and international touring, facilitated by a theatre-making language that deemphasized vernacular text in favour of the more easily exportable language of the body.

In addition to showcasing world-class performance, Archa presents the work of established Prague-based and regional Czech companies, regularly hosting Brno’s Divadlo

⁶⁷ Interview with the author, Prague, 22 April 2012.

Husa na Provázku. Archa's support of new work includes both the nurturing of emerging companies and artists and the development of projects produced by Archa itself. The latter occur most frequently in the venue's smaller space, Archa.Lab, established in 2003 and directed by Jana Svobodová. Archa.Lab works to given themes for a period of 2 to 3 years. Work on each theme includes projects by guest artists as well as Svobodová's own activities, which often take the form of research-based devised productions described as socially-theatrical (sociálně-divadelní) projects. Archa.Lab's work has a strong social component and the work often engages with the situation of the Czech Republic's minorities, as in 2005/2006's *Divnej Soused (Strange Neighbours)* and *V 11.20 tě opouštím (At 11.20 I'm Leaving You)*, a project based on fieldwork conducted at the Bělá-Jezová refugee camp (Divadlo Archa, "Historie Archa.Lab").⁶⁸ Archa further serves the Czech theatre community through the hosting of international meetings and symposia and has been active in such events as Prague's 2000 hosting of the Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM) and numerous Prague Quadrennial Events, most recently 2012's Devising: Symposium for the Makers.

4.2.2. Ctibor Turba and Alfred ve dvoře

While Ondřej Hrab was a newcomer to the Prague theatre scene, Ctibor Turba was among the theatre artists of international stature, including Jan Grossman and Otomar Krejča, who returned to live and work in Prague after the Velvet Revolution. Of the three, Turba had the most significant impact on the post-communist evolution of theatre, both through his pedagogical work at HAMU's Department of Nonverbal Acting and the establishment of his own mime theatre, Alfred ve dvoře, in Prague's Holešovice district.

⁶⁸ Information compiled from: Divadlo Archa, "Historie Archa.Lab", retrieved from: <http://www.archatheatre.cz/cs/historie-archa-lab/>

Significantly, Turba's relocation to Prague 7 catalysed the transformation of the neighbourhood, which has subsequently become home to a concentration of alternative cultural venues.⁶⁹ In contrast with Turba's, Grossman's and Krejča's post-revolution contributions were short-lived and beset by difficulties; Grossman's return to leadership of Divadlo Na zábradlí in 1990 precipitated a split in the acting company, half of whom left to establish Divadlo bez Zábradlí (Theatre without the Balustrade) (Burian, 2000: 214). Grossman died in 1993 and Lébl's tenure as artistic director began, marking, as Burian notes, a clear generational shift.

Krejča's situation at Divadlo za branou II is, in many respects, analogous to Turba's at Alfred ve dvoře. Although the dramaturgy of the two theatres was wildly different, both were revived studio theatres led by internationally successful directors whose previous theatres had been closed during normalization. While both theatres ultimately closed due to financial difficulties, their differing experiences speak to the shifting terrain of avant-garde theatre practice in the 1990s. At Za branou II, Krejča maintained continuity with his previous work, collaborating with his old team of dramaturg Karel Kraus and, from 1992, Josef Svoboda to produce work reflecting "talents which, in the context of the 1990s, were perhaps becoming unfashionable: deep study of text and characterization based on respect for the playwright, masterfully orchestrated, disciplined staging and a sixth sense for touching the nerve of contemporary issues" (Burian, 2000: 202-203). While citing Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants*, staged in spring 1994, as a notable exception, Burian characterizes the majority of Krejča's work at Za Branou II as achieving only "middling

⁶⁹ These include the independent Bio Oko cinema, Kross Klub, La Fabrika and the alternative publishing house/performance space Divus, along with numerous venues catering to expatriates. Prague's first English bookstore, The Globe, opened here. Other expatriate enterprises in Prague 7 include the offices of the English-language Prague.tv community website, Bohemian Bagel, The Bear Educational Theatre Company and the E-space, a performance and rehearsal space.

success. A necessary spark seemed to be missing” (Ibid.: 202). By the time the Ministry of Culture withdrew its funding of the theatre in 1994, as part of the plan to decentralize the financing of theatres by transferring the responsibility to municipal governments, Divadlo za branou II had not established a firm enough audience base to sustain itself and the theatre closed at the end of the 1994 season.

While Krejča revived his theatre shortly after the Velvet Revolution, Turba did not establish Alfred ve dvoře until 1997, five years into his leadership of the Faculty of Nonverbal Theatre at HAMU. Turba’s activity, both at HAMU and Alfred, differed markedly from Krejča’s in two key aspects: its engagement with the next generation of practitioners and its international outlook. After the dissolution of Prague’s acclaimed Alfred Jarry Pantomime in 1972, Turba performed internationally and taught in Switzerland and France. When he returned to the Czech Republic and assumed leadership of the Faculty of Nonverbal Theatre, the programme and its students reaped artistic and logistical benefits from his international profile and network.

Of the state of Czech nonverbal theatre upon his return, Turba remarked in a 1992 interview: “There’s not much going on in our field here, so if a person is seeking quality, they must look elsewhere” (Bachoriková, 1992).⁷⁰ To address this discrepancy, in 1992, with the support of the local government, Turba established the International Studio of Physical Theatre at St. Anne’s Chapel in Nečtiny, a village of 650 inhabitants located 92 kilometres west of Prague (Nejezchlebová, 2004: 21).⁷¹ Quickly, the studio began to attract

⁷⁰ “Mezinárodní Studio Pohybového Divadla v Nečtinách”, *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, 13 June, no page number available; the article is held in the Theatre Institute archive, Prague.

⁷¹ Turba’s decision to seek a rural training base for his students may be viewed as a further example of what Alison Hodge terms “De-urbanisation [...] an important part of the history of twentieth-century actor training. Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Copeau and Brook have all, at some point, sought rural retreats for their work. In the early 1970s, Jerzy Grotowski also moved the focus of his practice from the city of Wrocław to Brzezinka

international students, whose fees helped to offset the cost of training for Czech students (Bachoriková, 1992). The Studio also functioned as an auxiliary space for HAMU: “we agreed that the first ten days in the month would be in Nečtiny, to deal with teaching the main technical subjects” (“Výuka pantomimy studentů”, 1992: 9). The international character of Turba’s pedagogy encompassed both teachers and students; Linnea Happonen, the Finnish founder and director of Krepisko, was representative of the increasing numbers of foreign students studying at HAMU, while, at Nečtiny, explains Turba “Americans, French, Dutch, Spanish and Swiss rotated as teachers” (Anton, 2000: II).

Alfred ve dvoře, the studio theatre Turba established in 1997, reflected his values as a pedagogue. Unlike Divadlo Archa, it was an entirely new space, on Františka Křížka street in Prague 7, a neighbourhood, at that time, without a theatre. However it shared with Archa a strong commitment to international engagement. The Alfred company achieved significant success, both domestically and internationally. In two years the company produced:

Nine premieres, some created in international co-productions. The most famous [was] *Hanging Man*, nominated by critics for the Alfréd Radok award for the best performance of the year; the theatre itself was then nominated for the title of Theatre of the Year. Turba’s group took part in festivals in Périgueux, Locarno, Brussels, Berlin and Japan and were also hosted, extremely successfully, in New York this year. (Tichý, 1999: 25)

Turba’s work with Alfred ve dvoře was strongly supported by the international funding bodies dedicated to the support of independent culture, which were active in Prague throughout the 1990s. Turba’s former production assistant Maria Cavina cites the Open Society Fund (OSF) as an important source of funding, while Zdeněk P. Tichý emphasizes

in rural Poland.” (2010: 271). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, *Farma v jeskyni* also used rural rehearsal spaces (including Brzezinka) in the creation of *Sclavi / Emigrantova píseň*.

the support of the Swiss foundation ProHelvetia, both of which ceased operations in the Czech Republic in 1999 following the country's ascension to the OECD (McLaren 2012; Tichý, 1999: 25). Despite ProHelvetia's withdrawal, Walter Fetscherin, Swiss Ambassador to the Czech Republic, continued to advocate on the theatre's behalf, petitioning City Hall to extend further funds when grant reductions threatened, and ultimately necessitated, the venue's closure in late 1999 (Tichý, Ibid.).

Turba's decision to close the theatre, in which he had invested substantial amounts of his personal funds, was largely an act of protest against City Hall's grant system (Tichý, 1999: 25). While it would have been possible to continue with more streamlined operations and fewer international guests, Turba refused to work in what he considered less than professional conditions (McLaren, 2012). Turba has been an outspoken critic of the commercialization of Czech theatre since 1989, arguing that the majority of commercial productions presuppose a lack of sophistication on the part of spectators and ignore "people who are interested in quality culture, which, in my opinion, is dying out" (Anton, 2000: VII). Turba is less concerned with lack of funds than the fact that "the minimal money which is given to culture is allocated in a completely absurd way. [...] commercial theatres receive four-year grants for the support of their activities, which they don't need if they manage to fill 40% of their seats" (Ibid.). Turba attributes this "very stupid cultural policy" to the conservatism and ignorance of city councillors unable to distinguish between popularity and artistic merit:

They think that it's best to give grants to theatres where everyone knows the actors from television. They don't realize that the small area of non-commercial theatre can bring us prestige in the world. [...] I worked in four ensembles, which gradually perished due to financing. But all four earned prestige in the world. (Ibid.)

Turba highlights an important discrepancy concerning the lack of financial support for the very theatre work that best advances the cause of the Czech Republic internationally. Tichý echoes his position, arguing that:

Prague has a large debt towards pantomime – for decades [Ladislav] Fialka’s company was part of Divadlo Na zábradlí and an item of export for the capital city. And if this genre remained part of Divadlo Na zábradlí to this day [...it would] automatically receive grants as part of a theatre subsidized by the city. But the mimes left and it is little use to them that they collect prizes and disseminate the fame of Prague from Japan to New York. (Tichý, 1999: 25)

Tichý’s remarks highlight the extent to which funding decisions in Prague are highly dependent on framing. The municipal cultural policy adopted by City Hall in 2000 acknowledges the “presentation and promotion of culture and art beyond the country borders” as “important factors in promoting the city” (CCP, 2000: 6). However, the experience of Alfred ve dvoře suggests that the framers of the document did not consider that the theatrical productions best placed to fulfil this goal might originate outside the city’s pre-revolution network of established venues.

Turba’s and Tichý’s analyses both point to the historic achievements of Czech mime internationally, a condition which both resulted from and continues to shape the field’s outward-looking orientation. Vladimír Just notes the international dimension of the work done in the 1960s by Turba, Hybner and others, citing “contemporary French mimes (Jean-Louis Barrault, Marcel Marceau)” as influences on the Turba’s generation, including the above-mentioned Fialka, whose move “away from romantic pantomime styles of the nineteenth century [...] won him considerable popularity at home and abroad” (2010: 92). While Turba’s Alfred Jarry Pantomime was shut down under normalization, Turba himself experienced less persecution, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, than artists of similar stature in the dramatic theatre and was able to combine foreign work with the occasional

Czechoslovak production.⁷² Turba's experience reflects the fact that pantomime suffered less suppression than dramatic theatre, or even *autorská divadla*, after the Prague Spring.⁷³

This international heritage, combined with a complete absence of the linguistic limitations and artistic conservatism plaguing the repertory theatre system, placed the work of Turba's students within a well-established international framework, and it was to his students that Turba turned his attentions after closing his theatre. Even earlier, in interviews throughout the 1990s, he repeatedly stresses the importance of the next generation of theatre artists. In April of 1999, he cut back his own activities at Alfred, in part to make way for the work of his students: "An old mime is a dead mime. I really believe that pantomime is an affair for the younger generation" ("Ctibor Turba odchází", 1999: 14). Turba's emphasis on the next generation would ultimately ensure his legacy in Prague's new theatre scene; Alfred ve dvoře remained closed for only two seasons before it was reopened by the non-profit production company Motus, established by two of Turba's former students, Šarka Havličková and Daniela Voráčková, for the sole purpose of reopening the theatre.

While maintaining the dramaturgical values of the original Alfred ve dvoře, the second incarnation of the theatre was intentionally smaller and more focused on the development of emerging Prague-based companies:

Motus currently creates concrete opportunities for the collaboration of artists, producers, students and professionals, which combine performance, production, education, advice services, mentoring projects, research, practical training, international exchange, the public, promotion, media, documentation, publication activities and work with informational bodies. (Motus, 2003: 2)

⁷² Vladimír Just records one or more performances in Czechoslovakia, often in small venues or outside of Prague from 1974-77, 1980-81, 1984-86 and 1989 (see Just, 2011: 462- 598).

⁷³ Compare the fate of Divadlo Na zábradlí's dramatic ensemble, led by Jan Grossman and Václav Havel, to that of Ladislav Fialka's mime troupe, which also operated out of the theatre. Whereas Grossman and Havel were expelled from the theatre after the Prague Spring, the mime troupe continued to operate in the venue and tour abroad, while Fialka taught pantomime at HAMU until his death, when Turba replaced him.

Limited by its smaller capacity and location (in the internal courtyard of several residential buildings), the theatre, as led by Motus, would come to be associated with the most experimental of Prague's independent theatre groups, including Stage Code and Hande Gote Research and Development. Moreover, as will be discussed in a subsequent section, Motus itself became a major driving force of the *nové divadlo* as an instigator of festivals and networks that would greatly raise the profile of new Czech theatre in and beyond Prague.

4.2.3. Czech Contemporary Dance and the *Nové Divadlo* Scene

Observing the consolidation of the *nové divadlo* scene and the evolution of its infrastructure, Ondřej David notes a significant overlap with the contemporary Czech dance scene: “the leading personalities [...] come from the dance environment. [...] In a certain sense, [dance] is a driving force in the interaction of scenic forms and facilitates interactions between different artistic genres” (2006: 10). The falling away of generic borders within the Czech dance scene makes it a natural ally of *nové divadlo*. Similarly to *nové divadlo*, the dance scene's disinterest in maintaining formal boundaries is in stark contrast to the conservative orientation of dramatic theatre, which remains far more invested in their maintenance and endurance and tends to oppose theatre taking place across generic boundaries. Like their counterparts in the field of pantomime, Czech dancers faced less scrutiny during normalization and were able to participate in international collaboration more freely than dramatic ensembles. Further, like pantomime, Czech contemporary dance benefited, throughout the 1990s, from the international stature and networks of Czech dancers and choreographers abroad, such as Jiří Kylián, artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theatre from 1975 to 2006.

In another correlation with pantomime, the international orientation and formal eclecticism of Czech contemporary dance dates to the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Czech ballet, beginning with the company at the Státní Divadlo in Brno under Luboš Ogoun, began to look beyond the Soviet repertoire that had dominated its stages since 1948, when contemporary dance was repressed, along with pantomime, as formalist and ideologically bankrupt (Just, 2010: 85). By the mid-1950s, and accelerating after the end of Stalinism in 1956, new ballets, like Benjamin Britten's *Prince of the Pagodas* and Bela Bartok's *The Miraculous Mandarin* began appearing on Czech stages (Ibid.). Vladimír Just cites the 1960 Festival of Contemporary Ballet held in Brno as a watershed moment which made explicit the emancipation of Czech ballet and its evolution towards contemporary dance:

in discussions [at the festival], the opinion that interest in form did not have to mean sliding into an ideologically empty formalism; that classical dance is not the sole, obligatory movement system for all work, regardless of its theme, music and milieu, and that choreography is a free, artistic creation emerged victorious. (Ibid.)

Subsequent original Czech dance works were characterized by shorter running times and freer movement choreographed to symphonic music, which, Just argues, allowed for greater creative range than the narrative-driven classical ballet repertoire (Ibid.).

These developments in dance “contributed to the recovery of pantomime, a genre of movement theatre that had been almost forgotten in the Czech lands” due to Stalinist repression (Ibid.). Simultaneous evolutions in the fields of dance and pantomime throughout the 1960s (which, as noted above, saw the emergence of the Fialka Mime Company at Divadlo Na zábradlí, and, a few years later, a second generation of mimes including Hybner, Turba and Bolek Polívka, all of whom worked extensively abroad) restored continuity with the genre-blurring work of the interwar avant-garde. In doing so,

they rescued a hybrid form of cultural expression cited as indigenously Czech by numerous critics. The historically fluid boundary between contemporary dance and pantomime, argues Nina Vangeli, “inculcates into the dancer a tendency to the grotesque, to the theatricalization of dance and inclines the taste of the audience in this direction. It is therefore no wonder that the most characteristic style of the Czech dance seems to be danced clownery” (2000: 38). While Ondřej David emphasizes dance’s influence on *nové divadlo*, including modern derivations of Czech pantomime, such as *Krepsko*, Vangeli sees pantomime as instrumental in the evolution of contemporary Czech dance: “In the mime tradition [...] Czech dance on stage has a form of support which substitutes for the missing tradition [due to Stalinist suppression] of modern and contemporary dance ” (David, 2006:10/Vangeli, *Ibid.*). Arguments regarding the direction and chronology of influence aside, it is perhaps sufficient to characterize the interaction between pantomime and contemporary dance as mutually stimulating and artistically enlivening, providing dance with an alternative movement vocabulary and, as David notes, investing pantomime’s descendants with “discipline...clear dramaturgy and order” (2006: 10).

As mentioned above, Czech contemporary dance benefited from an international network of festivals that predated the Velvet Revolution. The *Tanec Praha* (Dance Prague) festival of contemporary dance was established in 1989 and continues to bring international dance companies to the city. In 1991, the Isadora Duncan Centre was established as an alternative to the classical dance training provided by the Prague State Conservatory. Vangeli characterizes it as invested in the cultivation of the grotesque aesthetic, together with a “powerful theatrical vision” (2000: 38). Like the Faculty of Nonverbal Theatre at HAMU, the Duncan Centre was a space where returning Czech artists, visiting teachers from abroad and an increasingly international student body coalesced. An illustrative

example of a journey facilitated by the Duncan Centre is that of Lenka Flory, who, after training in the Czech Republic, went on to dance with companies in Germany and Belgium before returning in 1993 to teach contemporary technique at the Duncan Centre. Two years later, Flory founded the Duncan Centre student company, which subsequently evolved into the *Déjà Donné* international dance theatre company. Based in Prague until 2005, the company, which Flory runs with Italian dancer Simone Sandroni, now operates from Perugia, Italy (Vangeli, *Ibid.*).⁷⁴

While Flory's work eventually led her away from Prague, other internationally successful Czech dance artists settled permanently in the city, such as choreographer Jan Kodet, who now works with the ballet ensemble at *Národní Divadlo*. Czech artists who remained abroad found opportunities to enrich the Czech dance scene. Jiří Kylián's eponymous *Kylián Project*, "part of the Dutch Programme Cooperation with Eastern Europe...was established to support the development of modern dance in the Czech Republic" by establishing a framework for on-going collaboration between Dutch and Czech dancers (Grau and Jordan, 1999: 5). The *Kylián Project* also established a video library of dance on film within the IDU in Prague, which, to date, houses the only complete video archive of Kylián's work.

Andrée Grau and Stephanie Jordan are sceptical as to the motivations behind such projects, suggesting the Netherlands' support of Kylián's post-1989 exchange initiative is significantly motivated by Dutch companies' desires to capitalise on emerging business and investment opportunities in the Czech market; they also express concerns about cultural imperialism. While these merit consideration within a debate on the ethics and logistics of cultural brokering, the internationalization of the Czech contemporary dance scene is

⁷⁴ Additional information on Lenka Flory's work retrieved from: <http://www.dejadonne.com>.

important for the extent to which, like Turba's work at HAMU and Alfred ve dvoře, it placed Czech dance work immediately within an internationally mobile community of practice. As such, the work developed by the students of the Duncan Centre, or Turba's faculty, while it may happen in Prague, is part of a larger conversation, not reducible to national boundaries. Finally, just as Motus would rapidly expand, working to develop the infrastructure to support a broad range of nové divadlo projects, the establishment of the Duncan Centre and continuity of the Tanec Praha festival throughout the 1990s laid a comparable foundation in the field of dance, which, too, would expand significantly in the next decade to include direct engagement with the nové divadlo scene.

4.3. New Stages for a New Millennium

By 2000, key venues (Archa, NoD/Roxy), festivals (Čtyři dny, Tanec Praha, ... příští vlna/next wave...) and values (lack of concern with generic values, international outlook) had emerged as belonging to, and characteristic of, nové divadlo. As the decade progressed, additional venues and festivals added to their ranks as the infrastructure for the support of new and experimental theatre work became denser, more professional and better organized. As noted above, with reference to Ctibor Turba's Alfred ve dvoře, the withdrawal from the Czech Republic of foreign cultural institutions (Open Society Fund, ProHelvetia, the British Council) increased pressure on Prague's municipal government to enhance its support of culture, resulting in the 2002 restructuring of the subsidy system to include competitive grants offered for a period of one to four years. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter Three, City Hall made provisions for the transformation of four Prague theatres, including Archa, from organizations directly subsidized by the city into non-profit venues, which would receive their funding through the grant system. The Prague grant system has suffered numerous hiccups in its ten years of operation, including the lack of clear

distinctions between commercial and not-for-profit companies. Still, practitioners and observers are broadly positive regarding the grant system, specifically the extent to which it has increased opportunities for emerging Prague companies and venues (McLaren, 2012; Skala, 2011: 4).

The launching of the competitive grant system took place more or less concurrently with the opening in 2001 of two important new theatre venues: Divadlo Ponec, conceived by Tanec Praha director Yvonna Kreuzmannová as a theatre for contemporary dance and physical theatre, and the reopened Alfred ve dvoře, now administered by the production company Motus. While the flexible Ponec space provided a dedicated dance theatre and headquarters for Tanec Praha and the Česká Taneční Platforma (Czech Dance Platform), a showcase of the best Czech dance for international producers established by Kreuzmannová and her team in 2002, the activities of Motus also brought a focused energy and organization to the support of nové divadlo. In addition to operating Alfred, Motus organized Malá inventura (Small Inventory), an annual showcase of the best of its programming. Malá inventura (MI) illustrates Motus's commitment not only to creating a space for nové divadlo, but to advocating strongly on its behalf, with the aim of raising its profile in the broader field of Czech theatre. The festival was initially intended to provide additional performance opportunities to companies produced by Alfred, who often spent months or years in preparation for productions that were only performed a handful of times (Hošna, 2004/McLaren, 2012).⁷⁵ From these origins, MI evolved into an independent entity, expanding to include selections from other production houses, including NoD/Roxy

⁷⁵ Hošna's article was originally posted on the website Divadlo.cz. It is no longer available electronically, but is held in the Motus archive.

and Archa, and increasingly targeting international producers as a showcase of the best new Czech theatre.

Along with MI, Motus was responsible for launching two related initiatives: Nová Sít' (New Web) and Velká inventura (Big Inventory). Nová Sít' began as a Motus project in 2003 and operated as an independent organization from 2004. It engages in "art, education, networking and arts advocacy", serving as a resource for independent theatre artists, companies and projects ("About Nová sit'" 2008).⁷⁶ Producer Markéta Krausová describes Nová Sít' as "a kitchen, where we cook according to new recipes. [The results] can be good, but they don't have to be. Our work is predominantly a process of creation" (Jarvis, 2005).⁷⁷ Like Alfred, Nová Sít' nurtures projects selected from an annual call for proposals and has acted as chief organising body for MI three times.⁷⁸ In its advocacy capacity, Nová Sít' sponsors cultural policy debates, produces publications and runs workshops for artists, effectively functioning as a non-governmental advice bureau and agency for independent performing artists and companies. It is part of both foreign and domestic networks and, through Velká inventura, a year-long travelling festival, which it has organized six times, works to raise the profile of nové divadlo beyond Prague.

While Velká inventura's regional venues offer further performance opportunities for Prague-based companies, a second aim is to address the gap in professionalism that persists between independent groups working in Prague and those based outside the capital. Ondřej David's observation that, by 2006, "nové divadlo lives only in Prague; presentations of out-of-Prague projects in Malá inventura were all on the level of amateur theatre", suggests a

⁷⁶ Information retrieved from: <http://www.novasit.cz/en/about-nova-sit.php>

⁷⁷ Originally published in the 14 February 2005 issue of *Nový Prostor*. Article held in the Motus Archive.

⁷⁸The Nová sít' website credits the organization with supporting, in the first seven years of its existence "70 stage projects for which it arranged 335 reprises in the Czech Republic and abroad, provided 11 art residencies, collaborated with nearly 200 artists or art groups and has worked closely with more than 40 organizations involved in similar fields in the Czech Republic and six Prague production companies" (Ibid.).

reconfiguration of the Czech theatre landscape, with centre of high-quality experimentation relocating back to Prague from Brno (2006: 10). While the density of Prague's nové divadlo network finds no equivalent elsewhere in the country, David's observation is representative of a Prague-centric approach which obscures the work of theatres existing outside the network, either artistically or geographically. These include such groups as Divadlo Continuo, an international company based in the South Bohemian village of Malovice, whose genre-crossing work involves elements of physical theatre, puppetry and laboratory-style research, as well as much of the emerging Czech New Circus scene, most famously Cirk LaPutyka. Differentiation within the Prague nové divadlo scene, centred around the venues participating in MI (NoD, Archa, Alfred ve dvoře and Ponec) is discernible, for example, in the list of participants in the 2012 Prague Quadrennial's Devising: Symposium for the Makers, held in Divadlo Archa. While network collaborators (Hande Gote Research and Development, Stage Code, Secondhand Women) were present in significant numbers, companies on the fringes, or outside the network (such as Continuo or Farma v jeskyni) were conspicuous by their absence.

4.4. Accusations of Amateurism – Nové Divadlo Meets the Press

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify, to the greatest extent possible within the parameters of this project, the ways in the new theatre scene, in contrast to the mainstream Czech theatre system, created a space which allowed the work it nurtured, showcased and promoted to be placed in an international context presupposing an international community of practice. In such a context, national designations are of secondary importance. Internationalism is not achieved through the placement of different countries' cultural products side-by-side; instead, the context of international presentation itself presupposes the positioning of all participants with a discussion that is, by definition, orientation and

inclination, mobile across borders. As a different sort of ‘imagined community’ than that discussed by Benedict Anderson, the international discursive sphere in which the new theatre scene’s projects appeared has different values, expectations and, indeed, schemata for the classification and evaluation of work. As discussed above, identifiable characteristics of the movement include fluidity with respect to generic boundaries and tendency for artists to multi-task, fulfilling different roles in different projects. Such a model is incompatible with the more conservative, dramatic faction of Czech theatre, in which roles are clearly defined and generic boundaries fixed. Given this disparity, it is thus unsurprising that *nové divadlo* has often been ignored by the industry press and the Czech dailies, or, if it is covered, accused of a lack of professionalism as defined by the historically dominant model of theatre.

Responses of the Czech press to the *nové divadlo* scene can be tracked by following the critical discourse surrounding MI as the leading annual showcase of high-quality, experimental work.⁷⁹ Early coverage of the festival consists predominantly of restatements of press releases issued by Motus, which themselves reveal the organisers’ struggles to find the right language to describe their work: “[MI] presents original projects from the fields of dance, movement and experimental theatre... Individual projects represent types of authorial (autorské) non-dramatic (nečinoherního) theatre” (web 2003). If early terminology was imprecise, Motus would eventually advocate for a new vocabulary to discuss its work. Specifically, the use of the adjective *nové* (new), was proposed as an alternative to adjectives associated with the normalization era, such as authorial (autorské)

⁷⁹ Productions programmed in *Malá Inventura* are nominated by the participating production houses, which, in addition to *Alfred ve dvoře*, normally include *Archa*, *Roxy/NoD* and *Ponec*. Productions sponsored by *Nová Sít’* are often included, and since 2011 the festival has featured a small off-festival, consisting of work submitted by its creators to the organizers. All work programmed in the festival is thus vetted and peer-reviewed repeatedly prior to acceptance.

or alternative (alternativní). Not only did Motus need to find more appropriate terminology, but it also had to articulate its difference from other forms of Czech theatre. An early Malá inventura press release demonstrates Motus's attempt to establish the parameters of the new theatre field:

[C]reators from several European countries are involved [in some of the work]... Creators are usually not only actors, but also directors, scenographers and dramaturgs. Their versatility leads to the overall effectiveness of the performance, because an actor, who is simultaneously an author, more sensitively perceives the production as a whole. (Frajerová, 2003: 19)

The extent to which Motus understands it must help to manage expectations and educate its audience about what is going to see is palpable in the almost didactic tone of the early coverage.

Motus's emphatic self-definition prompts a comparison to Eugenio Barba's project at Odin Teatret in Holstebro, Denmark. Barba collaborated with Jerzy Grotowski prior to establishing his Odin Teatret in Oslo, Norway in 1964. He has advocated strongly for the existence of a "third theatre", which, as Ian Watson explains, avoids "succumbing to commercial considerations or current trends in the avant-garde" (1993: 21). This sphere of theatre-making is characterized by "the autonomous construction of meaning which does not recognize the boundaries assigned to our craft by the surrounding culture" (Barba, in Watson, 1993: 21). As the third theatre is not reducible to pre-existing categories, it faces the task of repeatedly justifying its existence. Third theatre groups, explains Barba, "survive by...succeeding through continuous work to individualize their own area, seeking for them what is essential and trying to force others to respect this diversity" (1986a: 193-194).

Nina Vangeli alludes to this process of differentiation when she describes Czech physical theatre as having “gropingly sketched its own particular face” throughout the 1990s. By the early 2000s, Motus demonstrably engages in this strategy through its repeated articulation of goals of the organization and its network. The network itself represents a further point of congruence with Barba, whose early work at Odin relied on barter. Described by Maria Shevtsova as “a networking operation between small, unofficial and even off-track theatre groups,” an affinity with Barba’s barter system is reflected in the strong emphasis Motus and its off-shoots place on networking (2009: 10). Certainly by 2000, the scene had coalesced around key venues and festivals; shared values, both aesthetic and spiritual, were discernible. What remained was to further professionalize the field and raise its profile with the public. This would be the task of the 2000s.

One might object to the idea that a movement of theatre artists working, by definition, outside the established structures actually *needs* to professionalize. It is surely in the nature of experimental cultural movements in any field to protect their autonomy by remaining below the radar, where they may research and experiment freely, removed from the demands of the marketplace. Such an approach characterizes Barba’s work in Holstebro. Shevtsova notes that

the Odin evolved from principles that Barba had inherited from Grotowski: improvisation-based practice, intensely personal internal experience made flesh, and the idea that performance was not only a craft but a way of life and, first and foremost, a matter of research in laboratory conditions. (2009: 9)

These values and performance-making strategies of third theatre are strongly in evidence in the Czech *nové divadlo* scene. However, an important distinction must be made between Barba’s conditions of production and those in Prague. Specifically, this distinction relates to the dominance of the Czech repertory system and its impact on the entire field of Czech

theatre practice. By insisting on its professionalism, rather than just its diversity, nové divadlo resists the still-prevalent belief that quality work is done only by permanent ensembles working within their own theatre buildings. Work occurring outside such venues, or moving between spaces, is easily dismissed as amateur: professionalism equals building. The simplicity of this equation belies that fact that the artists creating new Czech theatre are, in many instances, graduates of the same conservatory programs as their age peers working in the repertory system.

As such, their position is not wholly analogous to that of Barba's company. Barba has described the makers of third theatre as

people who define themselves as actors, directors, theatre workers, although they have seldom undergone a traditional theatrical education and are therefore not recognized as professionals. But they are not amateurs. Their entire day is filled with theatrical experience. Sometimes by what they call training, or by the preparation of performances for which they must fight to find an audience. (Barba, 1986: 193)

Whereas Barba notes that third theatre artists often follow unconsecrated pathways to the theatre, many leading creators of Czech new theatre are conservatory graduates, who have been effectively de-professionalized by their refusal to respect generic boundaries and take up positions within the existing theatre-making structures. The domestic nature of this dispute represents a further point of differentiation between Barba's idea of third theatre and the Czech nové divadlo. The international orientation of Barba's theatre is not interested in geographical boundaries between nations and theatre cultures:

When you meet another theatrical culture, tradition or scenic style, you can look at them through the eyes of a geographer or a geologist. If your attitude is that of a geographer, you think in categories of borders. You will say, 'Here is Poland, and here is Russia. Here is Bulgaria, and here is Romania.' Then you will add, 'This is what the Romanian landscape looks like and this is the Bulgarian one', and you start pointing out the differences. But as a geologist, you look deeper, into the subterranean layers, which do not respect borders. When you watch the theatre as a geographer, you will notice the differences. I look at it as a geologist, trying to find shared layers. (Quoted in Shevtsova and Innes, 2009: 23)

Significantly, then, despite its self-articulated international outlook, the Czech *nové divadlo* scene remains trapped within a domestic dispute. In this dynamic, anxiety about the professionalism and standing of new theatre is exacerbated by the socio-political importance of Czech playwriting and the repertory theatre system. These domestic concerns must be understood as a driving force in the building of both the new theatre infrastructure and the discourse that surrounds it. At the same time, they problematize the *nové divadlo*'s desire to achieve world standing. An awareness of the factors limiting production does not necessarily make them easy to surmount, despite the best of intentions. In a subsequent chapter, I will argue that *Farma v jeskyni*'s greater success in transcending the national discussion has resulted in a rift between the company and what has become the mainstream of the *nové divadlo* scene. This state of affairs may be taken to demonstrate the extent to which the scene remains trapped in – and even reproduces – a domestic conversation it also wishes to escape.

New theatre producers have worked hard to emphasize the professionalism of the scene's artists and productions. Thus Šarka Havličková, interviewed by the English-language weekly *Prague Post* in 2005, when *Malá inventura* was still largely ignored by the Czech theatre press states: “[T]here is a big group of professional artists working on these kinds of projects. We are not underground” (Barendsen, 2005: 35). Canadian Ewan McLaren, formerly a freelance director in Czech repertory theatre and now acting artistic director of *Alfred ve dvoře*, finds a trace of irony in the situation: “Prague has a reputation of being avant-garde. There is a lot of avant-garde stuff happening here, but it's not being supported by the establishment” (Barendsen, 2005: 35). The aim of the *nové divadlo*'s network, then, was to communicate the quality of the work and create a parallel support

system that would enable the creation and circulation of new work whilst avoiding the artistic complacency and conservatism engendered, at times, by the repertory system.

Arguments for the quality and legitimacy of the work emphasize three key elements: genealogy, international prospects and the cohesiveness of the scene itself. The first of these strategies, an emphasis on genealogy, links the work directly to recognized artists and institutions. The 2003 MI press release notes that work from “former students of the faculty of nonverbal theatre at HAMU” will be presented (“Alfred ve dvoře zve na Malou inventuru” 2003). In 2004, Markéta Krausová of Motus states that the festival “is also strongly supported by mime and director Ctibor Turba” (Eisenhammerová, 2004: 6). References to the work’s international character begin with acknowledging that “creators from Finland, France and Slovakia” take part in some performances (“Inventura Alfreda ve dvoře”, 2003), and by 2006 the international success of festival alumni is touted as a selling point: “the group Krepsko, which has already amassed a lot of experience in international festivals will perform at NoD” (“Ve středu 22. Února zahajuje festival...”, 2006).

In a press conference preceding the 2007 festival, Motus producer Tereza Vohrzyková is explicit about the festival’s contribution to raising the profile of Czech theatre abroad:

As a showcase of independent, project-based theatre work, [Malá inventura] plays a fundamental role in the presentation of Czech theatre abroad. Theatrical genres such as movement, physical, multimedia and cross-over theatre have an advantage over classical dramatic theatre, namely that they are often “without a language barrier” (jazykově bezbariérové) and can therefore attempt to represent Czech work abroad. (“Malá Inventura 2007”, 2007)⁸⁰

In the same press conference, Iva Macháčová, then dramaturg for NoD, highlights the presence in the festival of *Farma v jeskyni*, “which won three of the most prestigious prizes

⁸⁰ Article held in the Motus Archive.

at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this year” (Ibid.). Gabriela Shayebova of the Duncan Centre Theatre, participating for the first time in MI, adds that her venue will “present to viewers three choreographers and dancers, who last year received awards both in the Czech Republic and abroad: Lea Čapková, Dora Hořtová and Dagmar Chaloupková” (Ibid.). There is a self-perpetuating element to the relationship between genealogy and international success as principles of re-legitimation of given work. As companies like *Farma v jeskyni* and *Krepisko* succeed abroad, they come to constitute celebrated branches of the festival’s family tree, providing newer genealogical links to support the legitimation of younger companies and less visible projects.

The third strategy of emphasizing the cohesiveness of the new theatre scene speaks to the collaborative relationships of the participating venues, which, together, constitute a single, multi-stage space for the production of new work. Collaboration between venues, emphasizes former NoD dramaturg Ondřej David, does not result in a uniform dramaturgy: “The collaboration of our theatres is very unique... we don’t have to agree on everything, but rather to collaborate” (Hořna, 2004). Recalling the Czech association of professionalism with possession of a theatre building, the unification of a group of venues, all functioning as production houses for new theatre, assisted in the legitimization of the form by producing the effect of a single, multi-stage venue dedicated to its development. Where once the practice of moving between theatres would have been associated with itinerant companies of amateur standing, the cooperation of the *nové divadlo* venues allows companies like *Krepisko* and *Farma* to present their work on different stages in different buildings whilst remaining within the network. The work of *Nová Sít’* and *Velká inventura* aims to expand this network throughout the country, effectively creating a cohesive, national context for the presentation and discussion of new work. As alluded to above, a

danger of this mechanism is the potential homogenization of the field, since the curation of venues results in a discernible style, which may be said to influence unduly the choices of young artists looking to gain the support of the network. As *Malá inventura* has expanded to include newer Prague performance venues such as ALT@Art, MEETFactory and La Fabrika, this situation seems to merit further monitoring.

A secondary consideration arising from the discourse surrounding new theatre concerns its audience. As mentioned in previous chapters, Prague's resident-foreigner population accounts for approximately 10% of its population. This group includes likely theatre-goers drawn from the ranks of the international student population and short- and long-term expatriates, some of whom actively engage in theatre-making and other cultural activity. Prague has five large international schools, all offering some form of theatre training. In addition to foreign students enrolled in Czech programmes, the AMU conservatories run programmes specifically for foreign students, while New York University maintains a Prague campus. While the English language theatre (ELT) phenomenon chronicled by Gwendolen A. Orel is much reduced from its heyday of the early 1990s, the city still boasts a number of expatriate-run theatre organizations including The Prague Playhouse (2003), Akanda (2007), Blood Love and Rhetoric (2009), Prague Youth Theatre (2011) and the Prague Film and Theatre Centre (2012). The tightening of immigration policies following the Czech Republic's ascension to the Schengen zone in 2008 eliminated the practice, common among non-Europeans resident in Prague, of leaving and re-entering the country every three months on a new tourist visa. As a result, both the Anglophone expatriate community and its theatres are more stable than in previous decades. Though lack of engagement with Czech theatre artists remains a problem in their own work, they nevertheless constitute a potential audience for *nové divadlo*.

The existence of this potential audience cohort is recognized by practitioners and critics alike. Actor Jirka Zeman of MI favourite Krepsko, a company comprised of both Czech and foreign artists, acknowledges the extent to which Krepsko's nonverbal aesthetic evolved in response to barriers encountered by its foreign members and their friends: "A lot of foreigners living here want to go to the theatre, but they don't want to go hear [dramatic repertory company] Divadlo na Vinohradech. So what do they do?" (Zeman, 2012). By emphasizing expressive means other than text, the theatre programmed by MI is well-positioned to draw audience from this community, which effectively functions as on-site international audience. MI's organizers recognized this early, advertising the festival on English-language websites like *Prague.tv* and *Expats.cz*, while *The Prague Post* was among the first newspapers to closely follow the festival, emphasizing both programming and its broader aims regarding the promotion of nové divadlo. This excerpt from *Prague Post* theatre critic Steffen Silvis' preview of the 2006 festival is representative: "with a plethora of physical and nonverbal pieces included on the bill, English speakers will be able to check their language fears at the door" (2006).⁸¹ This line of thinking also appears in Czech-language media, with Lukáš Nozar advising "...if you have friends, who don't speak Czech and you take them only to concerts, take them to something similar[ly accessible, like Krepsko]" (2006).⁸²

If the audience for new theatre is international, it is also younger: "For these young artists, as for young viewers who visit the theatre, established borders and demarcations are

⁸¹ "Winter stock: Small inventory recaps the best...", retrieved from <http://www.praguepost.com/archivescontent/1184-winter-stock.html>

⁸² "Půlkulaté narozeniny souboru Krepsko", retrieved from: <http://blisty.cz/art/27911.html>

not interesting. Perhaps that's why a common element of the production is overlap (přesah). The overlap between artistic forms, opinions and borders" ("Malá inventura", 2004).⁸³ Jana Návratová makes explicit the complicity between artists and spectators alluded to above: "all the venues are production houses, non-repertory theatres without permanent ensembles, but with an affiliated community of artists and spectators" (2007: 7). Producer Šarka Havličková cites the "strong interest of young viewers" as proof that new theatre is more than a movement confined to "a certain group of artists" and possesses resonance outside its own network ("Festival Malá inventura: Loňská divadelní líheň", 2007).⁸⁴

The growth of the *nové divadlo* movement has not taken place without criticism and resistance. As if oblivious to the efforts of Motus and its affiliate groups to address imprecision in terminology, daily newspaper *Lidové noviny* previewed the 2006 festival under the headline "Festival of amateurs returns to Prague" with the subtitle "alternative theatre", encapsulating in a single short entry two of the most persistently problematic assumptions about the field ("Do Prahy se vrací festival amaterů", 2006).⁸⁵ More constructively, Marta Ljubková, responding to the 2007 festival, takes issue with weak dramaturgy: "many of the works presented lack strong basic stories, clearly defined and – we hope it doesn't sound too banal to the *nové divadlo*'s ears – a message, an attempt to begin to speak about something" (2007).⁸⁶ She also raises the concern highlighted above regarding the danger of homogenization and stagnation: "the *nové divadlo* has been working with all its expressive experiments for years now. We're familiar with projections, we also understand very well how to distort sound. It's time to again think a little bit about

⁸³ Originally published in the February 2004 edition of *Student Life*; held as a clipping in the Motus archive.

⁸⁴ Article held in Motus Archive.

⁸⁵ Article held in Motus Archive.

⁸⁶ "S čím se vrací...", retrieved from: <http://www.advojka.cz/archiv/2007/9/s-cim-se-vraci-nove-divadlo>

what...how and why we are really performing” (Ibid.). Tellingly, Jana Machalická, a critic persistently sceptical of *nové divadlo*, does not mention MI efforts – and successes – in creating international performance opportunities for Czech theatre in an article devoted to the subject, noting that, increasingly, “no one is curious about all kinds of alternative and movement things” and, when international trends in contemporary performance are considered, “the return to searching for a deeper meaning of text [...] is unmistakable” (2011: 8).

Internal analysis comes from Ondřej David, formerly dramaturg at NoD. Writing in 2006, David describes a new theatre scene rendered “invisible” by the dominance of the repertory model: “Meeting with *nové divadlo* is often similar to sitting with a comatose patient whose end is in sight” (2006: 10). Turning to artistic concerns, David identifies the multi-tasking of new theatre artists as both a blessing and a curse; while “it’s quite nice to see some participants in *Malá inventura* in different positions”, there are decided drawbacks:

A director decides that he will act, the scenographer decides that he will direct, an actor jumps up to dance, and the dancer has a headache because he doesn’t know what to do with the light board, which he has decided to run during the performance. Roughly half the projects presented in *Malá inventura* were characterized by a certain deficiency in craft. (Ibid.)

Overall, David finds the new theatre scene functioning as well as can be expected within its given circumstances, which are “quite poor” in comparison with those enjoyed by repertory companies.

Still, at the time of this writing, it is possible to assess the past ten years as an exciting period of growth for new Czech theatre, which has succeeded in creating an alternative infrastructure for the support of independent theatre created outside both established government programmes and theatrical institution pre-dating the Velvet Revolution. Its

parameters reflect demographic and generational shifts resulting in an increasingly international cohort of spectators encountered both domestically and internationally. At the turn of the millennium, Grau and Jordan questioned the utility of continuing to discuss cultural products in terms of nationality:

Do we talk about “national” or occasionally “bloc” culture for reasons of nostalgia or for more invidious reasons? Is it relevant to talk in these terms, or is it not far more relevant to...look at what is concealed behind “natural” boundaries and what more productive imaginings of community they might hide? (1999: 2)

The evolution of Prague’s new theatre scene largely resists, or at least refuses to rely upon, national institutions like the Ministry of Culture or network of Czech Centres to promote it abroad; instead, the work reflects both the international mind-set of its creators and the extent to which the forefront of Czech contemporary performing arts culture is constituted, as a fundamental condition of its existence, within an international conversation about the development of theatre in the twenty-first century. While this chapter maps the strongest contours of the nové divadlo infrastructure, the movement is by no means monolithic; theatre belonging to the Czech Republic’s new and experimental work is found outside its structures and those companies benefiting from them may engage with its offerings more or less intensely at different points in their career.

The following case study considers the work of Krepsko as a company which has benefited substantially from the new theatre infrastructure discussed in this section. The case study will not feature in-depth analysis of individual productions, but instead seek to view the development of the company in relation to the new theatre infrastructure evolving concurrently with it. While Krepsko shares the dominant genealogy and aesthetic values of the new theatre groups centred around and originating from Motus and Alfred ve dvoře, Farma v jeskyni, with a genealogy connecting it to groups outside the Czech lands, a fierce

sense of independence and a strong interest in establishing its own infrastructure, diverges from the dominant faction of new theatre. A subsequent discussion of Farma v jeskyni's experience of the Prague theatre scene questions the extent to which even the field of new theatre is subject to fragmentation and probes the limits of the international orientation and openness of the nové divadlo infrastructure discussed above.

4.5. Something Czech, or not Czech: Krepsko

Like those of Motus, Krepsko's origins are directly linked to the work of Ctibor Turba at HAMU's Faculty of Nonverbal and Puppet Theatre, where founding artists Linnea Happonen and Petr Lorenc both studied, although after Turba had stopped leading the department. While at HAMU, Happonen and Lorenc met Jirka Zeman, a student in DAMU's Faculty of Alternative Acting, at an acrobatics class convened for students of both programmes (Zeman: 2012). Vojta Švejda, an all-round practitioner active in numerous new theatre projects, was the fourth founder. Finnish Happonen and Czech Lorenc (who tragically died at the age of 31 in a 2006 auto accident en route home from a festival in Poland) in particular possessed the sort of diverse skillsets which gave rise to new Czech nové divadlo's best examples of creative multi-tasking. Prior to his studies at HAMU, Lorenc had studied animation and new media at FAMU; in addition to his work with Krepsko, which was usually in the areas of performance and lighting design, he contributed to the cult documentary film *Česky Sen (Czech Dream)* and collaborated on a series of productions for Divadlo Archa. He was also a visual artist whose work was displayed at Prague's Rudolfinum gallery and at the Czech pavilion during EXPO 2005 in Japan (Nixon, 2006).⁸⁷ Happonen is a performer, director and puppeteer who had studied in

⁸⁷ "Krepsko Theatre Founder Petr Lorenc Tragically Killed...", retrieved from: <http://host.divadlo.cz/art/clanek-tisk.asp?id=11278>.

Denmark prior to moving to Prague. All of these skills have found ways into Krepsko's diverse repertoire of productions which combine elements of physical theatre, dance, pantomime, puppetry, film projections, live music and object theatre.

Established in 2001, Krepsko has premiered thirteen productions and staged numerous improvisational, one-off and site-specific actions. In 2005, the company received ...příští vlna/next wave... festival's award for Project of the Year for *Ukradené ovace (The Stolen Ovation)*, an action representing perhaps the most direct attack on the repertory theatre system ever mounted by a nové divadlo company. Happonen, Lorenc, Švejda and two other Krepsko performers managed to get backstage during a production of Alois Jirásek's 1905 play *Lucerna (The Lantern)*. When the cast came out for the curtain call, the Krepsko actors joined them. The incident was captured on hidden camera, as was Lorenc and Švejda's interrogation by the production's irate assistant director, who eventually summoned the police to the theatre.⁸⁸ In addition to a strong presence within the Czech Republic, Krepsko has toured in Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Pakistan, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United States (Krepsko, "Historie"; Maraček, 2007: C5).⁸⁹ Like many groups operating within the Czech new theatre scene, Krepsko has received little press coverage and few professional reviews, a state of

⁸⁸ The resulting short film is available on Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZ-DvpybUR4>) and well worth watching for the way it captures a complete lack of understanding between the mainstream repertory and nové divadlo scenes. Highlights include the assistant director threatening to summon a communist-era police force dissolved sixteen years previously, as well as her response, to a Krepsko actor's explanation of the project, that "Národní Divadlo is not an improvisational theatre!" The video ends with her suggestion that Krepsko repeat the action at Divadlo na Vinohradech (historically the ND's main competitor) the following week.

⁸⁹ Touring information compiled from "Historie", *Krepsko*, retrieved from: <http://www.krepsko.com/historieCZ.pdf>

affairs that frustrates attempts to subject the work to rigorous scholarly study. Early in Krepsko's career, Nina Vangeli challenged her colleagues on their treatment of the company:

I have [...] noticed that the work of Krepsko is accompanied by a certain scepticism from the ranks of the "consecrated" public, which concerns me. I believe that with consideration befitting their talent and the talent of their colleagues and the understanding of the public, particularly the professional sector, with regard to the artistic potential of this group, there could soon be found in Krepsko a group and style which could be a new and distinct phase in the history of absurd pantomime as initiated by the generation of Turba, Hyber and Polívka. (2002: 74)

Vangeli's phrasing calls to mind Pierre Bourdieu's observation that, within the field of cultural production "adversaries whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring them cannot be combated without consecrating them" (1993: 42). In the case of Krepsko, the majority of the mainstream theatre press avoided the unintentional consecration through critique by ignoring the company completely. An exception is Miroslav Pudlák's review of *Fragile*, a production in which Happonen played the character of Laura Wingfield from Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*. Writing in *Literární noviny* (*Literary news*, significantly not a theatre publication), Pudlák is highly complementary: "everything is expressed with movement, art objects, the large role played by light and projections...action (through the greatest economy of movement and gestures), lights and music create a magical, hypnotic atmosphere" (2005). Of the company's aesthetics, Lukáš Jiříčka, a rare theatre critic discussing Krepsko's work, writes "All of Krepsko's performances speak a clear language of enchanting pictures where words are superfluous" (2007: 25).

Krepsko's strongly visual stage language emanates from the founders' shared physical vocabulary of grotesque clownery with absurd touches that places them firmly

within the dominant aesthetics of the Czech pantomime tradition as practised and disseminated by Turba and his contemporaries. Early in Krepsko's history, as noted above, Nina Vangeli highlighted this connection. Lukáš Nozar concurs: "Maybe you think that the Czech [school] of great mimes: Fialka, Hybner, Turba, Polívka is finished, but it seems that this is still not the case. Great pantomime lives on in Bohemia, and it is in the international group Krespko" (2006). The inclusion of puppetry and skilful manipulation of objects linked the company to the Czech Republic's strong tradition of marionette theatre and furthered the understanding of Krepsko, despite its international composition, as a company with a distinctly Czech aesthetic.

Krepsko's earliest productions combined the founders' grounding in pantomime with improvisation. The resulting work succeeded, Zeman suggests, at least in part "because of the lack of such things here [in the Czech Republic]" and, early on, the company emphasized its improvisational quality as a point of differentiation, as in this 2004 Alfred ve dvoře press release for a performance entitled *Improvizace (Improvisation)*: "Krepsko is a unique group on the experimental scene, mostly due to the fact that its main projects are improvised" (Alfred ve dvoře: 2004a). While Krepsko was, in fact, not the only Prague company experimenting with improvisation in the early 2000s (competitive improv groups pra.li.ny and D.I.S.Harmonie were founded in 2000 and 2002, respectively), Krepsko's work was distinct for an almost complete absence of language.⁹⁰ Previous Czech improvisational work, such as Jiří Suchý and Ivan Vyskočil's text-appeals were "informal"

⁹⁰ The work of pra.li.ny (2000) and D.I.S.Harmonie (2002) is closely linked to the Ligue National d'Improvisation as developed in Montreal, Canada, by Yvon LeDuc and Robert Gravel in 1977. Unlike Krepsko, whose improvisations were programmed by Alfred ve dvoře and NoD, pra.li.ny and D.I.S.Harmonie performed predominantly at alternative music clubs, such as Klamovka or Cross Klub. D.I.S.Harmonie has subsequently become more involved with nové divadlo venues; it was an official selection of Nová Sít' in 2008 and now performs in more traditional theatre venues.

and “semi-improvised”, but, as the form’s name implies, reliant on text (Burian, 2000: 17). Krepsko instead relied on a language of movement and play of images rooted in the bodies of performers augmented, or distorted, by carefully chosen found or made objects. With time, Krepsko’s touring productions became fixed, although improvisation remains central to the company’s process of scenic composition.⁹¹

If its genealogical links to the performance traditions of puppetry and pantomime positioned Krepsko’s aesthetic as indigenously Czech, the company’s work is equally inspired by the international milieu in which it is created. Zeman, as quoted above, found the international programming of Divadlo Archa extremely stimulating and he, Happonen and Lorenc would likely have also attended performances by the internationally renowned companies Turba programmed at Alfred ve dvoře from 1997 to 1999. Also, as noted above, Zeman found himself collaborating with non-Czechs, a process which made him, and Krepsko’s other Czech artists, acutely aware of the limitations and access barriers associated with dramatic theatre. These have been discussed above with reference to spectator experience, but Krepsko, with regular collaborators from the United States and Spain and a wide network of guest artists from France, Russia, Estonia, Denmark and Hungary, encountered the language barrier from the performer’s perspective (Zeman, 2012). Zeman emphasizes that the international composition of Krepsko was not something he, Happonen, and Lorenc set out to achieve; rather, it reflected creative relationships that arose organically as the company developed: “we – even all the foreigners – came here not

⁹¹ Zeman’s description of Krepsko’s performance-making methodology emphasizes the company’s reluctance to in anyway systematize its approach; instead, the process is as organic as possible, with actors responding to provocations, in the form of scenarios or objects, usually originating from Happonen. Zeman cites the creation of *Errorism*, a nonverbal production on the theme of relationships in which antique ice skates feature prominently: “Linnea just appeared with a few blades, which were old and we started to fool around with them and it just became...the main object of the show. When you have such objects [...] it’s really like swimming in a pool full of them. You are just letting them influence and you are trying to [combine] this feeling of yours with the feeling of your colleagues” (Zeman, 2012).

for doing Krepsko, but for doing something in Prague, and then happened to be part of Krepsko” (Ibid.). Krepsko’s international character is organic rather than curated, reflective of an increase in international artists attracted to the city’s expanding training and performance opportunities.

As an indigenous Prague company that was also not entirely Czech, Krepsko’s decision to deemphasize and, where possible, eliminate text in its performances was as much a pragmatic as an artistic decision. Zeman explains the company’s thinking:

Okay, let’s face it. We have a lot of foreigners in our group, so in the performance, if we would [...] speak on stage, it would be a foreigner speaking Czech. Which at first doesn’t always sound so convincing, especially onstage. [...] So this is one aspect: okay, you are Finnish, how will you speak Czech? [It will sound] funny. Although they [Happonen and the other international members] speak excellent Czech, [the audience] will recognize that it’s not the *Czech* Czech. [...] And so I think at the beginning it was not a purpose, “let’s do a theatre without words” [...] it was just, “all right, we cannot speak, because we don’t like it too much, and also we don’t speak very well and we are not Czech, so let’s just try to use the words only if we really need to. (Zeman, 2012)

Zeman’s assessment of Krepsko’s language issues serves to highlight further the impact of the Czech theatre’s historical association with the revival and development of Czech as a literary and national language. Czech dramatic theatre is deeply embedded in this heritage. The Czech language on stage is not merely communicative, it is symbolic, its articulation being a reassertion of national sovereignty. This dimension of Czech theatre underlies struggles for control of the field and galvanizes issues such as the post-1989 anxiety concerning an apparent stagnation of Czech playwriting and the Czech theatrical mainstream’s resistance to the new theatre movement. It is worth mentioning that, despite so much anxiety regarding its future, playwriting is not taught in any Czech universities, a bizarre truth which rather reinforces the notion of Czech plays as symbolically-laden. In this context, Krepsko’s functional Czech, the Czech of the rehearsal room, able to

accommodate collaborators with varying degrees of access to the language, has no place on stage, even on the stages of NoD or Alfred ve dvoře.

From its beginnings, Krepsko was positioned firmly within the new theatre network. In the first year of the company's existence, performances, many of them improvisations, took place at NoD, Divadlo Ponec (as part of the 2001 Česká Taneční Platform), and in the framework of the Čtyři Dny festival. In November 2001, Krepsko gave three performances of *KENKÄ*, a set production, and staged three improvisations as part of Alfred ve dvoře's inaugural Opět v Provozu (Back in Service) Festival. Krepsko and Alfred were a natural fit – a company led by HAMU graduates performing in a venue run by HAMU graduates – and Krepsko premiered five productions there between 2001 and 2005. Another six productions, the latest in 2008, premiered at NoD, while the company's most recent work has premiered in Archa. Even as Krepsko's work has been concentrated at different venues at different times – first Alfred, then NoD, now Archa – the function of a particular Prague space as a temporary centre of operations, a relationship that often included a degree of financial support and/or co-production, has not prevented the company from performing in other network spaces in the same season. This illustrates the extent to which nové divadlo venues constitute a single, multifaceted performance space.

In addition to staging its work at Alfred and NoD, Krepsko maintained a strong presence at Prague festivals. Between 2001 and 2009 the company participated in MI five times, in Čtyři Dny four times (serving as the leading participant in 2006), in Letní Letna (*Summer in Letna*) four times and twice at the Česká Taneční Platform. Unusually for a Czech company of its level, Krepsko also took part in the Prague Fringe Festival four times between 2004 and 2008. Organized annually since 2001, the Fringe recruits performers internationally and has a reputation for being English-language friendly. Despite efforts to

increase Czech participation by waiving the participation fee for local companies, Prague-based companies at Fringe have more often represented the expatriate ELT community, though there have been notable exceptions, such as Krepsko and, in 2012, Spitfire Company, an emerging dance theatre company, which won the festival's award for best performance.⁹² While the frequency of Krepsko's performances has decreased in recent years due to personal events in the lives of company members and Happonen's relocation to Helsinki, Krepsko's most intense period of activity was characterized by frequent performances outside of Prague at regional venues (25 between 2001 and 2008) and festivals such as Divadelní Flora in Olomouc and Festival Mimorial Kolin (Krepsko, "Historie"). While Krepsko did perform in the town of Opava as part of the 2005 Velká inventura festival, designed to increase performance opportunities for Prague companies and raise the profile of new theatre in regional cities, participation in the festival does not seem to have radically impacted on the company's regional touring. Krepsko records show eleven performances in regional cities from 2001 until the Opava performance and a further twelve from May 2005 until the end of 2008 (Ibid.)

In addition to domestic touring, Krepsko has toured extensively abroad, beginning, in 2002, with appearances in Hungary, Croatia, Germany and the United States. Contrary to Lukáš Jiříčka's assertion that "the absence of words is not the main reason that makes this group's entrance to the world possible", Zeman cites the nonverbal nature of the work as essential for securing international opportunities: "we were very lucky [...] that there

⁹² David Havel, producer of the movement theatre company Veselé Skoky (Jolly Jumps) cites the Prague Fringe Festival's preference for companies who can perform daily over the course of the festival, which has grown to 10 days, as a deterrent to participation for Czech companies. The Czech festival model, in contrast, usually features only 2 to 3 reprises of a single production over the course of a week. This is a particular concern for Veselé Skoky, as many company members also perform in repertory companies and, even with multi-casting and swings, Havel struggles to schedule full casts for consecutive performances (interview with the author 19 October 2010).

[were] not so many groups, non-verbal, in [the] Czech [Republic] at that time, so when somebody at an international festival wanted to have [a] Czech group there was always this language barrier. [...] [A]nd then out popped Krepsko” (Jiříčka, 2007: 16/Zeman, 2012). Zeman’s narrative emphasizes the importance of word-of-mouth in securing invitations to perform:

We were not writing [...] applications that we would like to come. We [...] were invited to one festival, there we were seen, so we were invited to another festival, and then we got some awards. [...] [W]e are very lucky that we have many invitations and don't have to push and promote ourselves” (Ibid.).

While Zeman does not explicitly credit the network of Czech nové divadlo festivals for assistance in raising the company’s profile with producers in the Czech Republic and abroad, a review of Krepsko’s extremely active participation in Czech new theatre festivals argues strongly for their role in propelling the company onto the international circuit. This hypothesis is further supported when the level of support and promotion Krepsko received from government-sponsored Czech cultural bodies is considered. While Krepsko took part in the Czech Season in Canada (2003) and the Season of Latin American (2005), both organized by the Czech IDU, the company did not participate in the Czech Republic at the [Edinburgh] Fringe, a national showcase organized by the UK Czech Centre and the Ministry of Culture in 2008. Nor is Krepsko listed in the IDU’s *Czech Performance Collection 2010*, a catalogue of touring work aimed at international producers.⁹³ While the Latin American and Canadian seasons provided opportunities in geographically distant areas that Krepsko might have struggled to access on its own, or via the infrastructure of

⁹³ Companies featured in Czech Republic at the Fringe include DOT: 504, Skutr, Adriatic, Teatr Novogo Fronta and children’s theatre group Theatre Neslysim. Groups listed in Czech Performance Collection 2010 in the capacious category of Physical / Visual / New Writing Theatre include Boca Loca Lab, Cirk La Putyka, Forman Brothers Theatre, Handa Gote research & development, Ioana Mona Popovici Company, Farma v jeskyni and Skutr (Theatre Institute: 2010).

the nové divadlo network, the company’s touring history (illustrated in Figure 1) suggests that connections made regionally – the sort of the relationships Motus, Nová Sít’ and the Malá and Velká inventuras have cultivated – have produced the greatest number of performance opportunities.

Figure 1. Krepsko performances, 2001 to 2008

Location	Number of performances (including reprises)
Prague	110
Czech Regions & Slovakia	33
Europe (including non-EU member countries)	44
Other	8

An emphasis on small-scale projects and regional activity, including close relationships with TeaterLabor im Tor 6 in Bielefeld, Germany (where Krepsko also performs frequently at the Unidram Festival) and Kana Theatre in Szczecin, Poland, have allowed Krepsko to maintain a significant degree of artistic and financial independence: “we are still keeping [the productions] humble [...] or low-budget, easy to do and easy to move” (Zeman, 2012). Zeman notes that while the group used to apply for funding from the Ministry of Culture and the City of Prague, as well from other foundations, they no longer do so, preferring to pay their own way with appearance and workshop fees. Unlike their contemporary, Farma v jeskyni, Krepsko’s leaders have no interest in acquiring a dedicated space, and are happy to rotate between theatre spaces in Prague (both those belonging to the

nové divadlo network and others outside of it, including site specific work in untraditional spaces) and touring opportunities abroad. Increasingly, Krepsko follows a residency model of performance-making, characterized by short periods of intensive work at various locations in the different countries, a development precipitated by Happonen's return to Finland.

In addition to its participation in key nové divadlo festivals, Krepsko has initiated its own microfestivals, a demonstration of the extent to which the company, as age-peers of the leading nové divadlo producers, share, or have absorbed, an interest in the networking, performance and cross-fertilization opportunities facilitated by festivals and co-production. As mentioned above, Zeman sees a correlation between the work of his company and the larger-scale work of Divadlo Archa. With its importation of foreign performances to Prague, Krepsko effectively functions as a mini-Archa. Krepsko's microfestivals often take the form of annual birthday celebrations, with foreign companies present as invited guests:

[W]hen we travel, sometimes we meet people [...who] when we see that they are doing something interesting on stage [...] then, if we have the funds [...] we ask this artist that we like, 'would you like to spend a week in Prague with us, just to work, for some lousy money and accommodation and we will do these four shows together.' [...] [W]e offer [...] a week of hopefully beautiful work and nice memories. (Ibid.)

Krepsko's birthday festivals emphasize the unrepeatable nature of theatre as an encounter between specific people, a value shared by Farma v jeskyni's Viliam Dočolomanský. Shows staged in the framework of the birthday microfestivals are "unique, only for the festival"; as such, "they have this glitter, or this smell of the uniqueness, like you know [there there] will be only four and never again" (Ibid.).

While he admits that "we are not seen so much in Prague now", Zeman's assessment of Krepsko's position within Prague's theatre scene demonstrates clear links to the values and priorities of the nové divadlo movement:

I think definitely [we work] in the alternative, movement-theatre way. [...] I think there is still a faithful [following] of the things that we do. [...] Krepsko is one thing that is here long enough to have the proof that we are, that this is, right. [...] After the 1990s, there were so many foreigners in Prague, and still there are a lot of foreigners here who are liking theatre, so I think this is exactly [the] theatre for them. Plus for the Czechs, who want also to see some experiments and some new things. [...] I think, in the map of theatres in Prague, we are the small cousin, the small, weird cousin. Probably gay. (Zeman, 2012)

Zeman's assessment, after over a decade of work, demonstrates the extent to which the company's understanding of itself – and its very existence – is intimately bound up with changes in Czech society after 1989. These include the growth of Prague's international population, increasingly stable after 2008, as well as the expansion of performing arts training like that offered by HAMU and the Duncan Centre, aimed at international students whose studies further contributed to the sense of Prague as an important European theatre city. These changes brought Happonen into contact with Krepsko's Czech founders and allowed the company to connect with a range of international collaborators whilst remaining based in Prague. Krepsko's links to HAMU and Motus served to position it simultaneously in Czech and international milieux; this liminality, or existence, simultaneously, within multiple contexts, must be understood as directly influencing the company's decision to work primarily without language.

While Krepsko's work is not reducible to a set of conventions common to all new Czech theatre work (indeed, a list of these could be identified only with difficulty), it does share certain key values and orientations, among them an emphasis on physical expression, use of multi-media elements (projections, film), a scenic composition process rooted in devising and a decidedly open dramaturgy, in which the absence of a definitively discernible plot invites the spectator to accept responsibility for co-creating his/her

experience of a given work. Beyond aesthetic concerns, the company shares the nové divadlo's interest in networking and mobility, as evidenced by its efforts, inspired by company members' own experiences of inspiring programming at venues like Archa, to present the work of foreign companies in Prague through its birthday microfestivals. Krepsko is increasingly less Prague-based, working between countries on a mobile, residency-based mode; as its members reach their late thirties and focus on personal commitments or other collaborations, the number of premieres has slowed in recent years. Still, Krepsko's relative longevity, as well as the on-going activity of its individual members as working theatre artists, argues for an understanding of company members as successful "graduates" of the nové divadlo infrastructure forged by Motus, Nová Sít' and Prague's network of new theatre venues. This constitutes a strong argument in support of these structures' success in achieving their stated aims of supporting the development of Czech new theatre within a professional, international context.

Chapter Five: Immigrants in Prague: Farma v jeskyni/ Farm in the Cave

Jsem rád emigrantem v České republice a rád ji reprezentuji v zahraničí, přestože jsem Slovák. Právě tady nás mezinárodní soubor může tvořit a rozvíjet se.

I like being an immigrant in the Czech Republic and am glad to represent it abroad, even though I am Slovak. Here our international group can really create and develop. – Viliam Dočolomanský,
March 2006

5.1. Origins

Farma v jeskyni (Farm in the Cave) was founded in 2002 by Slovakian director Viliam Dočolomanský (b. 1975) and a group of Czech and Slovak actors, of whom Roman Horák, Róbert Nižník, and Hana Varadzinová still perform with the company. The group crystallized during Project Lorca, an independent research and performance project initiated by Dočolomanský following his graduation from the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (JAMU) in Brno. The project, which resulted in Farma's first production, *Sonety temné lásky* (*Sonnets of Dark Love*), established the key parameters of its on-going practice. These include research, in the form of expeditions to remote cultural terrains, in search of what Dočolomanský terms “human expression” (lidský výraz), rigorous, daily training of the voice and body, and a performance-making process that transforms the cultural expressions collected on expeditions into scenic material via actors' work on individual scores, which are then composed by Dočolomanský into a narrative whole through a process of montage. In addition to *Sonety*, which premiered in 2003, but is no longer performed, Farma has mounted three other productions: *Sclavi: Emigrantova píseň* (*Sclavi: The Song of an Emigrant*) (2005), *Čekárna* (*Waiting Room*) (2006) and *Divadlo* (*The Theatre*) (2010). The company has participated in collaborative projects,

including 2003's *Cesta do stanice* (*Journey to the Station*) in Žilina, Slovakia and, in 2006, *Poslední dvě hodiny* (*The Last Hours*) with Germany's Theaterlabor im Tor 6 and Poland's Teatr ZAR. Farma also holds workshops and stages work demonstrations, both in Prague and abroad, independently and in concert with the touring of its performances.⁹⁴

Among the independent Czech theatre companies that have emerged since 2000, including those associated with the nové divadlo scene, none has achieved international recognition and success to the degree of Farma v jeskyni. Nevertheless, on-going funding woes have threatened to dilute and disrupt the work. The company's loss of its building on Preslová Street (the Preslovka) in 2010 was particularly disturbing in this regard. Still, Farma v jeskyni's strong body of work and foreign and domestic successes, including the 2005 Alfréd Radok Award for Performance of the Year and 2011 European Prize for New Theatrical Realities, make a strong argument that the much-longed for future of politically-engaged Czech theatre may lie not with a re-emergence of dramatic theatre, but with a movement into the body. Farma v jeskyni's performances are relentless, described by critics as infused with "brutal physicality", their soundscapes characterized by "high-lonesome polyphonic singing" (Steffen Silvis, 2008) with "[w]ords [in multiple languages]...used deliberately for their sound quality rather than their actual meaning" (Val Baskott, 2006).⁹⁵ In a 2006 review of *SCLAVI: The song of an emigrant*, *The Guardian's* Lyn Gardner writes: "This is Beckett rendered into movement and song".⁹⁶ Describing the

⁹⁴ Farma v jeskyni gave 46 performances outside the Czech Republic and Slovakia between 2001 and 2008. Full touring history, including a map of countries in which Farma has performed, may be found at http://infarma.info/archiv_divadlo.php.

⁹⁵ "Sclavi / Song of an Emigrant", retrieved from: http://www.edinburghguide.com/festival/2006/fringe/review_dance_physical_theatre.php?page=s

⁹⁶ "Sclavi / Song of the Emigrant", retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2006/aug/11/edinburgh2006.edinburghfestival2>

company's physical vocabulary, Jana Návrátová writes "Farma is choreographic theatre par excellence" ("Farma v jeskyni Zaostřeno...", 2006: 40).

As Návrátová's description of the work suggests, Farma shares with its generational peers in the Prague nové divadlo scene a disregard for generic boundaries. A gifted musician since childhood, Dočolomanský cites music and rhythm as his greatest inspirations. Further, he describes the group as being "like a chameleon. [...] In Germany [...] they called us "singing dancers" or "dancing singers", for still others we are a dance or movement theatre" (Dočolomanský, 2011: 8). The company has been lauded by both the theatre and dance communities in the Czech Republic. In addition to its Radok Award, most often awarded to a dramatic theatre production, in 2007 Dočolomanský received *Respekt* magazine's award for Best Choreography of the Year for *Čekárna*. Still, the company resists complete identification with the contemporary dance scene. This is in part a question of training; as Varadzinová notes, prior to Farma, "none of us did dance or physical theatre" and "we all came to the work as dramatic actors (činoherci)" (Varadzinová interviewed by Novák, 2007).⁹⁷ For Vangeli, this constitutes a strength of Farma's, imbuing the company's physical vocabulary with freshness and originality (2006: 9).

The company's international orientation is another quality it shares with the nové divadlo scene. In addition to its touring profile and specific international collaborators, this includes the company's composition. Although based in Prague since its establishment, and touring internationally as a Czech company, the ensemble has included actors and

⁹⁷ Interviewed by Michal Novák, retrieved from: <http://www.i-divadlo.cz/rozhovor-s/hana-varadzinova-a-eliska-vavrikova/>

apprentices from at least nine different countries and Dočolomanský himself is not Czech, but Slovak.⁹⁸

Czech and foreign writing on *Farma v jeskyni* frequently proposes three companies as the group's most relevant ancestors: Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, which developed from The Theatre of 13 Rows originally established by Grotowski and Ludwik Flaszen in Opole, Poland in 1957; Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret, founded in Oslo, Norway in 1964 and Włodimierz Staniewski's Gardzienice Theatre Association, located outside of Lublin, Poland.⁹⁹ While Dočolomanský has published on Staniewski and invited Barba to Prague during 2007's Festival *Farma*, he also asserts his group's independence: "Unfortunately I am not a direct successor of either Grotowski or Barba. I never completed any practical residencies or workshops with them. [...] I am not their successor, but I feel like a member of the family of such theatre artists" (Dočolomanský, 2011: 8). The family to which Dočolomanský refers is a distinctly international one. Other 'relatives' include Poland's Teatr ZAR and Germany's Theaterlabor im Tor 6, both collaborators in *Poslední dvě Hodiny*. *Poslední dvě Hodiny* was co-organized by the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, Poland and the organization has demonstrated on-going interest and support of *Farma*'s work since *Sonety*.

If, as Dočolomanský states, there is no direct genealogical link, why are these companies cited by foreign and domestic observers as reference points for *Farma*? Beneath

⁹⁸ These include Brazil, the Canary Islands, France, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, South Korea and Vietnam, as well as the Czech Republic. The nationalities represent countries in which laboratory theatre has a strong presence (Italy, or Poland, for example) or reflect *Farma*'s touring patterns (Brazil, South Korea).

⁹⁹ See interviews with Dočolomanský by Martina Černá (*Právo* 2011) and Kateřina Kolářová (*MF Dnes* 2007); a review of *Divadlo (The Theatre)* by Jana Machalická (*Lidové noviny*, 2010); Jana Pilátová's *Hnízdo Grotowského: na prahu divadlení antropologie* (Divadelní ústav, Prague: 2010); Małgorzata Jabłońska quoted in Pilátová 2010: 502; and "A tragedy in movement", Steffen Silvis's review of *Sclavi* for *The Prague Post* (14.10.2008).

and beyond practical similarities in performance-making methodology, actor training or what might be termed a socio-spiritual dimension of Farma's work, lies another question. This concerns the position of Grotowski, Barba and Staniewski's laboratory theatre work within the field of Czech theatre, not only as it emerged in the 1960s (as discussed in Chapter Two), but now, in the post-communist context. An exploration of the extent to which Farma's work may be classified both as international and firmly rooted in the laboratory theatre tradition will serve not only to provide insight into the working methods of this under-researched company, as well as the values and interests it shares with the illustrious ancestors with which it is associated, but will also serve to further delineate the field of Czech theatre production as a whole.

Acknowledging a generational difference does not deny the aptness of connecting Farma v jeskyni's work to that of Grotowski, Barba and Staniewski – indeed, they have much in common, not least their constitution as theatre laboratories. As noted in the Introduction to this work, Mirella Schino, while noting “the term theatre laboratory does not designate an external point of reference or a model to be followed”, suggests several keywords associated with ‘laboratoriness’ (2009: 7). These include “*training*: a permanent activity performed by the actor independently of periods spent rehearsing a performance. Another keyword is *body*, taken to mean physical expression” (2009: 9). To these terms, Schino adds three more concepts, the first of which “derives from the experiences of Jerzy Grotowski: a meeting with oneself, ethics, spiritual dimensions and value” (2009: 9-10). The final two are pedagogy and science, the former relating to “an autonomous process of basic training for the actor and also – for more mature theatres – a desire to transmit knowledge” (2009: 10). While consideration of what, for lack of a better term, we may call the socio-spiritual dimension of Farma's laboratory theatre practice will require deeper

analysis, it is possible, at the outset, to identify the presence of Schino's key concepts, beginning with training.

Training is the heart of Farma v jeskyni's work. Its detailed and precise performances demand it, and yet training transcends the mere preparation of productions. Books written by Farma actresses Eliška Vavříková and Maja Jawor detail the company's rigorous physical and vocal training regimes, key aims of which include the cultivation of spontaneity, the "spontaneous intrinsic expression of internal processes through physical articulation" (Vavříková, 2009: 31). Areas of work as itemized by Vavříková include the grounding of the performer into the floor, segmentation of the body, partner exercises (weight-bearing exercises or "leader and slave", in which one actor must follow another), work with oppositional energy, vocal training, work with rhythm, acrobatics and improvisation, all leading to the creation of individual actors' scores (Ibid.: 32-35; see also Jawor 2010: 71-94). Significantly, in terms of locating the work within a genealogy of laboratory theatre stretching from Grotowski to Staniewski, the areas of work identified by Vavříková overlap with the categories of training Alison Hodge identifies as defining Gardzienice's training priorities: musicality, mutuality, the spine, assistance, acrobatics and iconography, or work with images (2010: 276-282). Grotowski's *via negativa*, "not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks" is palpably present in Farma's emphasis on preparing the body to react (Grotowski, 1968: 17). Such rigorous training is necessary to meet the extreme physical demands of Farma v jeskyni's performances, sixty-minute marathons of movement at once fierce and precise, with vocalization ranging from song to intonation and, above all, the relentless and unflagging projection of energy and maintenance of tension. Like the Laboratory Theatre, Farma's work finds its eloquence in

an articulation of the body and voice, and, accordingly, presupposes an actor committed to a process of rigorous and daily training.¹⁰⁰

Pedagogy is another of Farma's laboratorial priorities; the company has both been nurtured by existing Czech pedagogical structures and sought to transmit its practice by creating those of its own. Jana Pilátová, a professor at DAMU and the leading proponent of Theatre Anthropology in the Czech Republic has collaborated with Farm since 2004 and testifies to Dočolomanský's rootedness in the Czech theatre training system. Such trademarks of Farma's work as the importance of music and training and source material drawn from indigenous cultures, developed by an international ensemble were, she notes, already visible, if not yet fully formed, in the work-in-progress Dočolomanský presented as an undergraduate directing student at JAMU (Pilátová, 2003: 24). Farma's development has been further supported in Prague by DAMU, as Dočolomanský, Varadzinová, Vavříková and Jawor all completed practice-as-research doctorates in connection with their work on *Sclavi* (Dočolomanský, 2007c: v). Association with DAMU brought logistical benefits, such as the use of the conservatory's out-of-town rehearsal spaces, which eased the financial difficulties the company had encountered during Project Lorca and *Sonety*.

¹⁰⁰ Vavříková's and Jawor's texts merit translation, not least for their detailed insight into Farma's training and performance-making methodology. While I frequently consulted both texts in the research of this Chapter, an in-depth discussion of the company's training practices falls outside the remit of this work, which is more concerned with Farma's position within the Czech theatre landscape than with specific methodologies. The orientation of the research is also informed by the care Dočolomanský takes in limiting access to rehearsals and training sessions. Such an approach is found in older laboratory theatres. Discussing Grotowski's paratheatre, Paul Allain notes that "'observers' were not allowed to simply watch but had to partake and therefore write from the inside" (1997: 52). Referring to the issue of company training in his own study of Gardzienice Theatre Association, Allain states that "there is almost nothing written about either its development or its role within their practice.[...]. The absence of material is attributable to several causes: limited access to a usually hermetic world; the difficulty of finding a language to describe movement and vocal exploration; and the need to analyse a slow, personal process" (Ibid.: 60). During the research of this Chapter, I obtained unprecedented permission to observe a week-long Farma workshop, which provided tremendous insight into the company's actor training and Dočolomanský's role in shaping disparate scores into a coherent performance. However a detailed description of the work observed raises ethical concerns and is best left to the reflections of participants.

Despite close relationships with the Czech conservatory system, Farma has sought to disseminate its methodology through independent pedagogical structures. This is a point of difference from its generational peers in the *nové divadlo* scene, many of whom teach within the conservatory system as they pursue their own artistic projects. At any given time, Farma is training several international apprentices, some of whom may go on to become collaborating artists or full members. Pedagogical activity also takes the form of workshops for participants who must already possess a degree of professional competence; Pilátová notes that Dočolomanský has no interest in working, for example, with community groups (Pilátová, 2012).¹⁰¹ Access to Farma's working methods is not reserved for professional audiences only; the company regularly performs a work demonstration entitled *Cesta* (*Journey*), which features audio, visual and photographic materials from expeditions. Extracts from the productions are performed by Farma actors, while Dočolomanský narrates and takes questions from the audience. Other pedagogical activity includes the organization of conferences, performances and master classes, programmes which emulate Odin Teatret's International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) or Gardzienice's Centre for Theatre Practices. The company's failure to pursue these initiatives further is linked to persistent difficulties in obtaining an appropriate venue for on-going pedagogical work, a problem itself rooted in Czech funding bodies' misunderstanding of the nature of the work and its logistical requirements, as will be discussed.

In addition to manifesting the key concepts Schino notes as constituent of laboratory theatre practice, Farma takes a laboratorial approach to performance-making. As demonstrated by Grotowski's decision to cease staging public productions after 1969's *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, a laboratory theatre need not necessarily be engaged in

¹⁰¹ Jana Pilátová interviewed by author, 13 April 2012, Prague.

performance-making. Farma v jeskyni is, however, despite its commitment to research, training and pedagogy, a company that makes performances, indeed, extremely successful performances that regularly sell out their Prague venues and which have been recognized by prestigious award-giving bodies across Europe (Dočolomanský, 2005: 56-58). Many of the performance-making practices the company employs, which shall be discussed in greater detail with reference to specific productions, find inspirations and antecedents in the work of Grotowski, Barba and Staniewski. Among these practices we may count a composition process relying on montage (both textual montage and the montage of scores, or repeatable sequences of physical and vocal articulations devised by actors), and work on source materials gathered on expeditions. The company's dedication to on-site research in the form of expeditions positions it close to Grotowski's Theatre of Sources project, as well as Gardzienice's work. This topic will be revisited in connection with *Sclavi*.

Farma's – and Dočolomanský's – connection to Gardzienice Theatre Association merits special consideration, as it is this company's practice which most closely resembles Farma's own methodology. A significant point of similarity concerns the primacy of music as a language of scenic composition. For Gardzienice, Allain writes, "the main function of song and music is to express emotion, create mood and dynamise movement" (1997: 46). The resulting performances are characterised by Alison Hodge as "a 'polyphony' of sound, but and text within a reverberating space which engages all the senses", a description which resonates and overlaps with the critical assessments of Farma found at the beginning of this Chapter (2010: 270). Gardzienice's use of language, in which "[w]ords might be spoken but they are as valuable for their musical quality as their meaning", is also echoed in Farma's approach (Ibid.: 63).

Dočolomanský's musical background has already been noted; it is perhaps not surprising, then, that Pilátová describes his first encounter with Gardzienice as a revelation. In 2000, Dočolomanský attended Cosmos Gardzienice, a "marathon meeting that also included training and performances" (Pilátová, 2009: 274). He was struck by the use of music in Gardzienice's *Avvakum*: "With such singing, the boundary between life and theatre disappears. Dočolomanský had encountered a theatre close to his own dreams" (Pilátová 2009: 274). This initial encounter forged a relationship between Dočolomanský and Gardzienice; in March of 2003, Farma gave its first international performance of *Sonety* at Gardzienice, with Staniewski in attendance and Gardzienice performer Marjana Sadovská subsequently collaborated with Farma on *Sclavi* (Ibid.). In addition to the importance of music in shaping and animating their productions, Dočolomanský and Staniewski share a concern, to be discussed later in relation to *Sclavi*, regarding the impact of globalisation on specific cultural expressions, which has led both their companies to undertake expeditions to remote terrains.

Despite these similarities, the companies are also markedly different. Unlike Gardzienice, with its rural location, Farma operates from the Czech capital; its primary audiences are not villagers, but a sophisticated, international cohort. The company's artists have not entered theatre from other backgrounds, but are graduates of leading Czech and international conservatories. The generational difference alluded to above is also relevant. Unlike Gardzienice, Farma came into being after the fall of communism in 1989; both the company and its artists have reached artistic maturity in a performance landscape that presupposes the existence of international performance opportunities centred on a network of festivals. In contrast, as Allain notes, since 1989 Gardzienice has experienced an "evolution from the margins towards the mainstream [...] This development is partly

attributable to the group's own inevitable progression and increasing world-wide recognition, as they now respond to the demands of international festivals in urban contexts" (1997: 1). Where Gardzienice must adapt to the post-1989 milieu, Farma has coalesced and come into being within it. As alluded to earlier, Farma's claim to the international character often associated with laboratory theatre begins with Dočolomanský himself, born into a theatrical family in the Slovakian part of then-Czechoslovakia. As discussed in Chapter Three, Slovakia possesses greater ethnic diversity than the comparatively (at least from the 1950s-onward) mono-ethnic Czech lands.¹⁰² At times, Dočolomanský has made much of his own mixed heritage, as in this 2006 interview:

I have a Romanian grandmother from Transylvania and it's true that there is also greater sensitivity and dark genes there. I think there's something [to it...] why my sister is an actress, my uncle Michal is an actor, we have some cameramen in the family, a dramaturg...my mother danced. They rejoice that I am doing theatre, that everything is fine biologically. (Dočolomanský 2006b: 68)

The interest of the Czech press in Dočolomanský's heritage may be interpreted as indicative of a need to understand not only the artistic genealogy of Farma's laboratory approach, so unlike anything else on the Czech scene, but also its geopolitical and biological sources. Articles for the cultural sections of daily newspapers and weekly magazines probe Dočolomanský's biography for clues. Speaking to Ondřej Nezbeda, he describes a childhood spent "mov[ing] frequently, from place to place", following his father's military career (Ibid.). In an interview with Machalická, he continues on the theme of transience: "I wasn't a child who had to return home to his mother, which of course

¹⁰² In the 2011 Slovak census, 80.7% of respondents declared themselves of Slovak nationality, a decrease from 85.8% in 2001 and 85.7% in 1991, suggesting that the country is becoming more diverse (Slovak Office of National Statistics 2011). In contrast, Prague, with the nation's most diverse city, records 93% of respondents to the 2001 census as Czech (Czech Office of National Statistics).

doesn't mean that I don't honour my roots or don't like my family" (2007c: v). If the words 'roots' and 'family' in this statement are replaced with 'nation', 'culture', 'theatre tradition' or 'language', Dočolomanský's statement could be taken a reflection on the international character of his artistic policy.

Since he is able to claim three nationalities before ever leaving what is now Slovakia, it is perhaps not surprising that Dočolomanský is not overly concerned with questions of nationality. As he explains to Machalická "When I'm really speaking with someone, I never really perceive their nationality" (2007c: v). Questioned by Nezbeda about the origins of his international ensemble, Dočolomanský replies "it wasn't intentional. I moved in an international field from the age of seventeen, or eighteen, so I remained in it. It is more coincidence, and possibly the nature of what we do, that is it is interesting to people from other countries" (2006b: 67). Dočolomanský was 18 in 1993, the year Slovakia and the Czech Republic went their separate ways. His relationship to concepts like 'home' and 'nationality' inevitably reflects the experience of the Velvet Revolution and Divorce, which made possible a degree of internationalism unthinkable for artists of previous generations and also highlighted the arbitrariness of borders and nationalities. Like Jirka Zeman of Krepisko, and other artists of his generation, Dočolomanský has grown up, artistically and socially, in a time and place increasingly characterized by mobility and fluidity between borders. The international orientation of his company, then, is not something contrived, but rather reflects the nomadic reality of the milieu in which it was established.

Asked repeatedly to define home, Dočolomanský admits that he is most at home at work: "I like to work with people with whom I feel good, who inspire me... maybe this is a certain kind of home" (2007c: v). Responding to Machalická's observation that he has moved consistently west since leaving for university, Dočolomanský replies "after my

studies Prague was more pleasant than Brno, I could breathe better here” (Ibid.). In an earlier interview, he emphasizes that, like his actors, he is in Prague because of the work: “Everyone moved here due to work. We are immigrants in Prague” (Dočolomanský, 2005: 56). Of course, there are relative degrees of immigration. Dočolomanský’s presentation of himself as an outsider in the Czech theatre landscape, as a Slovak immigrant in Prague, belies the fact that he, along with his Czech and Slovak collaborators in Farma, were all born as citizens of the same nation state – Czechoslovakia – and are, for the most part, products of the Czech conservatory system. Their position accordingly differs practically and culturally from that, for example, of South Korean Farma actor Jun Wan Kim, whose immigrant status is of another, more immediately visible kind. Kim’s experience, in turn, varies from that of Europeans, such as Italian actress Cecilia Vertiglia, or French actress Cecile da Costa, who have relocated to Prague to work with the company. As in the case of Krepsko, the presence of international performers alters and expands the performance-making vocabularies of the company. Simultaneously, the work rooted in Slavic cultures is propelled into a broader context, harder to ghettoize by virtue of its embodiment by an international ensemble.

Whether or not Dočolomanský’s claim to the title of immigrant is problematic, the use of this terminology, as well his emphasis on his mixed ethnic heritage, serve to position himself and his group as outsiders – both theatrically and socially. The liminal position of the laboratory theatre tradition in the Czech lands has already been established and Farma’s divergence from the mainstream of Czech repertory theatre practice cannot be over stated. More nuanced is its difference from what might be termed the mainstream avant-garde, including the institutions associated with the *nové divadlo* scene. From its establishment onwards, and more consistently in the years before and after Farma’s residence in the

Preslovka, the company has presented its work in venues and festivals associated with the nové divadlo movement, which, as discussed in Chapter Four, gathered steam in the early 2000s. These venues include Roxy/NoD, where Farma regularly performs *Čekárna* and Divadlo Ponec, the Žižkov contemporary dance theatre which hosts *Divadlo*. With the exception of *Sonety*, each Farma production has been presented as part of the Česká Taneční Platforma (Czech Dance Platform), an annual showcase of the country's best contemporary dance and dance theatre, organized by Divadlo Ponec.¹⁰³ In 2007, *Čekárna* was staged as part of the Malá inventura Festival. In 2012, the company took part again, this time presenting the *Cesta* work demonstration.

Despite its use of such venues, and participation in showcase festivals aimed at international producers, Farma retains a degree of separation from the mainstream of the new theatre scene. This manifests in myriad ways. For example, no company members attended a 2012 Prague Quadrennial Symposium on devised theatre held at Divadlo Archa. Moreover the company's work was not mentioned during the two days of conversations among Czech and international theatre practitioners, scholars and cultural producers, though *Divadlo* (then showing at Divadlo Ponec) was listed among the performances recommended to symposium attendees. Dočolomanský and his group seem far less invested in ruminating on the conditions of theatrical production in the Czech Republic (a recurring theme at the PQ symposium), than they are in getting on with the work itself. Speaking of the Laboratory Theatre, Jan Kott states, "During all those years [of its existence] Grotowski's theatre did not enter into Poland's theatrical life; it did not attract even the

¹⁰³ *Sclavi* was presented in 2006, followed by *Čekárna* in 2007 and *Divadlo* in 2011. *The Theatre* was nominated for best dance production of the year and company member Patricie Poráková received a nomination for dancer of the year for her performance in the production (www.tanecniplatforma.cz).

young. It was in Poland, but really did not exist in Poland” (in Schechner and Wolford, 1997: 134). It cannot be said that Farma does not attract audiences. As Bednářová notes, performances frequently sell out and my repeat experiences as a spectator suggest that young people in their teens, twenties and thirties are the dominant cohort in Farma’s audiences (Dočolomanský, 2005: 58). Still, the sense of being within a nation’s geo-political borders, and yet removed from its dominant community of practice, resonates with Farma’s position.

Dočolomanský himself recognizes Farma’s liminal position, clearly not within the mainstream, but also not sitting easily within the *nové divadlo* scene: “After school [...] I understood that a mainstream institution isn’t for me. [...] I wanted to choose a riskier existence” (2007c: v). This meant defining his own space, creating the conditions for the work he wanted to do. Dočolomanský’s articulation of Farma’s suspended position echoes Eugenio Barba’s idea of third theatre, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is also an important touchstone for the *nové divadlo* scene. Barba is an acknowledged point of reference for Dočolomanský, who credits Pilátová with his understanding of “the “third theatre”, the theatre of the 1960s” (Dočolomanský, 2011: 8). Barba’s notion of autonomy, both from the assumptions of culture and an either/or choice of avant-garde versus mainstream, resonates strongly with Farma’s work. The company’s need to further differentiate its position also suggests the extent to which the *nové divadlo* network, without ceasing to be a third sphere of production distinguished from both dramatic repertory theatres and grey-zone avant-garde, has come to function as the mainstream of the avant-garde.

The notion of the theatre artist as outsider is essential to the way in which both Barba and Dočolomanský frame their companies’ work. It also may help to explain

Dočolomanský's cultivation of such an identity. A sense of personal and collective difference, of being on the edges, or borders, of society is traceable to Barba himself. Maria Shevtsova identifies "The Grotowskian legacy, together with Barba's experience of negotiating different cultures and languages, his sense of being an outsider (to which he refers freely in his books and articles) and his thirst for intellectual research" as guiding principles in determining the values and priorities of Odin Teatret (2009: 9). Further parallels are found in Double Edge Theatre founder/director Stacy Klein's description of herself and her group: "We consider ourselves outsiders, and the group considers itself to be cultural outsiders" or in the words of British Asian director Jatinder Verma, of Tara Arts: "I have become more and more aware that what I need, and that what Tara needs, are actors who are in some ways outsiders. [...] Who are outsiders, who have the sensibility of outsiders" (Klein interviewed by Shevtsova 2011: 56; Verma interviewed by Shevtsova 2009: 212). Taken together, these practitioners' words argue that an 'outsider' or external position is a fertile basis from which to create a theatre of searching, of on-going engagement with, and interrogation of, the self and society, together with their assumptions. Such a theatre will not sit comfortably within classification schema predicated on national differences or national theatre cultures, since such theatre groups are self-created communities, composed of fellow seekers, who, like Dočolomanský, "chose a riskier existence."

The extent of Farma's international success and the laboratorial dimensions of its work constitute points of difference from other companies currently working in Prague. However, these same attributes are often met with ambiguity or negativity from the Czech press. Concern regarding the company's internationalism and outsider standing vis-à-vis its relationship to the Czech Republic, and to Prague, emerges repeatedly in interviews with

Dočolomanský and, as well, in reviews of the company's work. In his review of *Divadlo*, for *Lidové noviny*, Pavel Vokatý glibly suggests that the name "Farm on a Journey" would be a more appropriate moniker than Farm in the Cave (2010: 32). Interviewing Dočolomanský in April 2011, Černá is bluntly dissatisfied with the frequency of Farma's performances: "In Prague you perform on average about twice a month. It's not much" (2011: 8). Questions concerning the company's rootedness in Prague and the Czech Republic reached their zenith when the company lost its building, the Preslovka. Owned by Švandovo divadlo in Smíchov, which supported the development of *Sclavi* and still hosts the production when it is performed in Prague, the building was allocated for the company's use, with plans to develop the space as a residential centre with facilities for workshops, guest artists and ample rehearsal space. After three years of bureaucratic cat-and-mouse, during which, Dočolomanský explains, the company applied workshop and appearance fees to its on-going maintenance, Prague's municipal government had still not granted Švandovo divadlo permission to allocate funds to the building's renovation. During the 2010 summer theatre hiatus, the company received word that the building's state of disrepair had rendered it unsafe and unsuitable for further use (Dočolomanský, 2010).¹⁰⁴

In an interview in *Taneční zóna (Dance Zone)* magazine, Marek Godovič poses this question to Dočolomanský:

Farma v jeskyni has represented the Czech Republic many times in the world's most prestigious theatre and dance festivals. Someone could object that you're able to live by guest performances alone, since you are so successful in that context. Does the loss of a space in Prague really threaten Farma with liquidation? (Ibid.)

¹⁰⁴ The full-text of Godovič's article is available at <http://host.divadlo.cz/art/clanek.asp?id=22376>.

Godovič worked as assistant director on *Čekárna*, and it is likely he thus phrases the question in order to allow Dočolomanský to respond to a feeling within the Prague theatre scene, left more or less unarticulated, that the company does not really need its own building or even, by extension, the city itself. When he puts the question to Dočolomanský so explicitly, Godovič allows him to employ the third theatre survival strategy proposed by Barba. In this framework, groups “survive by...succeeding through continuous work to individualize their own area, seeking what for them is essential and trying to force others to respect this diversity” (Barba, 1986: 193-194). With the aim of engendering respect for Farma’s unique contribution, Godovič reminds his readership that its success also belongs to the Czech Republic. In answering him, Dočolomanský emphasizes that the nature of the work demands a roof over its head:

The existence of a group, which involves, apart from the creation of productions, also research into chosen cultural terrains and into interpretation, which organizes and holds international workshops and lectures and has as a priority daily work for the development of each of its members, is difficult to manage without a building. (Dočolomanský, 2010)

It is striking that in this interview, conducted in 2010, nine years into the company’s existence and four years after the Radok prize, Dočolomanský is still forced to explain and justify the conditions necessary for group’s work to continue. Later in the interview he laments the funding disparities, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, that effectively limit non-repertory companies to applying for project-based funding, which makes the overheads and daily artistic and administrative work of running a laboratory theatre financially untenable. Such funding paradigms reward tangible, saleable products – productions, tours, and the like – without acknowledging that these require time and space to prepare.

The laboratory orientation is equally problematic for the press. Echoes of the scepticism, referenced in Chapter Two, concerning Bílé Divadlo's resemblance to a sect may be found – quite explicitly – in interviews with Dočolomanský. Machalická, for example, confronts Dočolomanský with the perception of his group “as a closed community, almost a sect” (2007c: v). Recalling Lukáš Jiřicka's comments, cited in the previous chapter, concerning “the theatrical sectarianism of a hermetically sealed society”, accusations of exclusivity prove a significant barrier to the embracing of *Farma v jeskyni*'s work by the Czech theatrical mainstream (or even the dominant fraction of the non-mainstream, or alternative, theatre community) (2007: 25). While it is true that, somewhat atypically within the Czech theatre-making context, *Farma v jeskyni*'s members are rarely interviewed individually or seen performing with other companies, accusations of inaccessibility emerge from the professional sphere.¹⁰⁵ This is a strong point of differentiation from other new theatre groups, which, as noted in Chapter Four, are often characterized by multi-tasking, with artistic alliances forming and dissolving on a project-to-project basis.

Mogilnicka attributes Czech critics' misunderstanding of laboratory theatre and the accusations of exclusivity to the potency of the “most serious thing related to this theatre form, which is the concept of devotion. It is due to this extreme devotion that some

¹⁰⁵ In recent years, this has begun to change somewhat. French actress Cécile Da Costa performed with *Farma* from 2005 to 2010 and now choreographs and performs with Spitfire Company, a younger Prague company founded by Petr Boháč and Miřenka Čechová, which has also presented work at the Grotowski Institute. While Da Costa no longer collaborates with *Farma*, performers Roman Horák and Patricie Poráková perform with both companies, though, perhaps significantly, both are credited as “cooperators” (sic) as opposed to “Actual team” on *Farma*'s website (information compiled from <http://www.spitfirecompany.cz> and <http://www.infarma.info>).

laboratory theatre groups have been called “sects”” (2011: 16).¹⁰⁶ The impact and the difference conferred by the devotion Mogilnicka cites are understandably heightened in a theatre culture based on a repertory system still recovering from communist era complacency. The “egalitarian collectivism” Ladislav Holy describes as characteristic of Czech society may also be understood as a contributing factor, especially if specific conditions demanded by the work are misconstrued as pretentious, rather than necessary (1996: 160-63). Although Pierre Bourdieu observes that conflict between generations constitutes a means of defining the borders of an artistic field, within the Czech *nové divadlo* scene and among the critics writing about it, the voices most sharply critiquing or ignoring Farma, tend, with some exceptions, to belong to their age peers, while older critics (Jiří P. Kříž, for example), or those with dance backgrounds (such as Nina Vangeli) are more supportive (1993: 53). Following Ondřej David’s argument in the preceding chapter, Farma’s embrace by the Czech contemporary dance scene may be understood as an expression of that field’s relatively greater maturity and understanding of physically rigorous, daily training.

While remaining uncompromising about the company’s training needs, Dočolomanský combats charges of exclusivity by emphasizing the company’s openness. To demonstrate this, he cites Farma’s commitment to pedagogy and the dissemination of its work:

Every year and a half, from the basic workshops open to the wider public, we choose apprentices from all over the world – in this sense, I don’t know a more open company. Understandably we don’t work with everyone who comes in off the street, but openness is a principle of our work. (Dočolomanský, 2007c: v)

¹⁰⁶ Jana Pilátová likens the functioning of a laboratory theatre group to marriage, citing the difficulty of maintaining Farma v jeskyni’s ensemble and its ideal working conditions, as symptomatic of a culture in which over half of all marriages end in divorce (personal conversation, 13 April 2011).

If a commitment to process is necessary to collaborate with Farma, so too the company seeks a collaborative relationship with its spectators. This extends from the open dramaturgy of the productions themselves, which invites the audience to become co-creators of meaning. Varadzinová explains: “We as actors also create our own narrative links, [and] whole narrative is eventually created by the director. But it doesn’t have to be definitive, because viewer can also create, together with us, an individual narrative [based on what they see]” (Varadzinová, 2007).

Such complicity between audiences and theatre artists recalls normalization era grey-zone theatres like *Provázek*. Significantly, however, Farma’s productions are not allegories; they cannot be “decoded”, in the same way a fascist government, for example, could be read as representing the communist government in a *Provázek* show. *Provázek*’s dramaturgy still resulted in a production made to be apprehended intellectually, a distinction relevant in a Czech theatrical discourse still invested in a Cartesian dichotomy vis-à-vis the perception and semiology of theatre. Farma’s work, reflecting Dočolomanský’s assertion that the company proceeds intuitively rather than programmatically, reaches its spectator differently (Dočolomanský interviewed by Kolářová, 2007b: 82-83). Such an approach, in the Czech context, is likely to meet with criticism. Dočolomanský explains:

There are people who would never come to our performances, because they need to apply the intellect in order to have some sort of experience from theatre. So when they encounter something, for which intellect and words aren’t enough, they don’t know how to understand it. We’re not telling a story on the basis of external facts, we’re looking at our internal world. [...] we take the viewer like a partner, who inspires us and guides us, so that she decrypts the story based on what she sees. It’s like poetry. You don’t explain that either. (Bednářová, 2005: web)

Dočolomanský's comments demonstrate his understanding that his work is unlikely to meet with universal acceptance from Czech audiences and critics. As discussed in previous chapters (and as shall be discussed further), this is due in part to Czech critics' historically constituted bias in favour of dramatic theatre.

5.2. The Productions

Three productions are central to this discussion. They are: *Sclavi: Emigrantova píseň* (2005), *Čekárna* (2006) and *Divadlo* (2010). The discussion will consider the processes that created the productions, as well as analysis of the productions themselves and is based on my repeated viewing of the work from 2006 to 2012. *Sonety temné lasky* will not be addressed as this work passed out of the repertoire before I began to follow the company.¹⁰⁷ The discussion of *Sclavi* benefits from the detailed accounts of the expedition and rehearsal process given by Farma actresses Eliška Vavříková and Maja Jawor in published monographs based on their doctoral theses at DAMU.¹⁰⁸ Critical reception of the works domestically and internationally will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

5.2.1. *Sclavi / Emigrantova píseň (Sclavi / The Song of an Emigrant)*

Work on *Sclavi* began with a series of expeditions to villages in the north-eastern Prešov region of Slovakia, beginning in July 2003, with subsequent follow-up expeditions in November 2003 and July 2004 (Vavříková, 2009: 15). This area is home to the highest

¹⁰⁷ The production was inspired by the life and poetry of Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca and a 2001 expedition to Andalusia, where Farma studied flamenco, the movement of toreadors and cante jondo singing. *Sonety* premiered at Palác Akropolis in Žižkov, a venue in a working-class neighbourhood more associated with alternative music culture than with theatre, a significant decision which framed the production and highlighted the work's difference. Reviews of the production testify to its impact. Responding to two performances in October 2002, Pilátová recalls that she "trembled at the significance of the event," writing "the production is arched to such tension that it is obvious that the performance can collapse. If opposing measures are not balanced perfectly, like an archer's bow, it is overcome by one side or the other: to the bare structure or to the plasma of emotion" (2009: 500, trans. Eva Daníčková).

¹⁰⁸ See Vavříková, Eliška, *Mimesis a poiesis: od etnoscénologického výzkumu k hereckému projevu v inscenaci Farmy v jeskyni Sclavi/Emigrantova píseň* (Prague: Kant 2009) and Jawor, Maja, *Hlas a pohyb: Herecký technika a herecká tvořivost*, trans. Michala Benešová (Prague: Kant 2010).

concentration of Slovakia's Ruthenian population.¹⁰⁹ Described by Timothy Garton Ash as a population of "hill farmers, wood-cutters and impoverished town dwellers", Ruthenians have historically lived along the borderlands of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, Poland and former Yugoslavia, locations which have placed them on the frontlines of twentieth-century European geopolitics (1999: 52). The Ruthenians have historical ties to former Czechoslovakia, where their population was most concentrated following World War I, and where they enjoyed a degree of relative autonomy during the First Republic (Vavříková, 2009: 18). While the decision to search among the minority cultures of Slovakia's borderlands might be attributed to Dočolomanský's knowledge and interest in Gardzienice, which has undertaken similar expeditions in rural Poland, Dočolomanský states that he was not instrumental in choosing the expedition site: "The impulse to go among the Ruthenians came from the actors. After the expedition in Andalusia [for *Sonety*], they wanted to go "to their own", to seek something closer to their own roots" (Dočolomanský, 2007a: 147).¹¹⁰ Vavříková writes:

We had a feeling that in the remote villages of eastern Slovakia, there might still exist remnants of such manifestations of life, which are bound to the place [...] to nature. Ceremonies and habits. And so we began to be interested in the Ruthenian ethnicity, of whom it can be said, that they still live on the borders of the contemporary, civilized world. (2009: 15)

¹⁰⁹ According to statistics from the 2001 and 2011 Slovak censuses, individuals espousing Ruthenian nationality counted for 3.5% (28,835 individuals) of the Prešov region's total population in 2011, up from 2.7% (21,150 individuals) in 2001. Residents selecting Ruthenian as their mother tongue were higher, 5.9% in 2011 and 6.1% in 2001. 2011 census figures for the villages of Jarabina (population 881) and Kamienska (population 1,394), both visited by Farma in 2003, record 41% and 37% identifications with Ruthenian nationality, respectively. 54% of Jarabina residents and 64% of Kamienska residents chose Ruthenian as their mother tongue. The disparity between these figures is attributable to differing attitudes towards the Slovak state within this minority ethnic group. Some Ruthenians see no contradiction between their ethno-linguistic identity and Slovak nationality, while other factions of the population desire greater autonomy within Slovakia, or even the creation of a Ruthenian state.

¹¹⁰ Alison Hodge notes that "Staniewski, [Tomasz] Rodowicz and their colleagues travelled to the borderland villages of eastern and south-east Poland seeking traces of the region's [...] marginal Roma, Belorussian, Lemko and Ukrainian cultures" (2010: 272).

Implicit in Vavříková's comments and central to the specific attraction of Ruthenian culture is the extent to which cultural expressions are still integrated into the ritual life of the community rather than formally codified as performance per se. Vavříková notes that, for Slovaks more than Czechs, and even more so for Ruthenians, "to sing for another is [a] foreign [concept]", with Roma musicians often hired to provide music for celebrations and dancing (Ibid.: 58). Music, especially song, is undertaken collectively. Vavříková describes song in Ruthenian culture as "second nature", with specific songs fulfilling specific purposes: "from childhood they encounter Ruthenian musical culture in church, at weddings and christenings, or simply at home" (Ibid.). The sense, then, is of a living musical tradition, emphasizing voice over instrumentation (Vavříková notes the absence of organs in Ruthenian churches) and ritual over performance, or following Richard Schechner's terminology, performance/theatre over drama/script (1977: 72).

The timing of *Farma v jeskyni*'s expeditions in search of Ruthenian culture in the eighteen months leading up to the Czech Republic's and Slovakia's ascension to the European Union is not insignificant. As discussed in Chapter Three, the pace of economic transformation in the immediate post-communist years was rapid, with Václav Klaus's neo-liberal doctrine its driving force. The super-narratives dominating the Czech political discourse, characterized by "Return to Europe" rhetoric, articulations of Central European identity and significant foreign investment, left little space for considerations of rural minority folk cultures on the easternmost borders of former Czechoslovakia, particularly those which could not be easily packaged and commodified for tourist consumption.¹¹¹ The

¹¹¹ The tension between rural and urban, and local and global cultures that drove *Farma* to eastern Slovakia echoes the dynamics motivating Gardzienice's expeditions in rural Poland nearly thirty years earlier: "It was an area rich with the songs and stories retained by the elderly inhabitants. Many of these rural communities were on the brink of extinction as the younger people migrated to the towns" (Hodge, 2010: 272).

interest of a group of young, highly educated theatre-makers from Prague in Ruthenian culture, must be understood as an act of resistance to the homogenizing narratives at play in Czech discourse at the time (and, due to the company's Prague base, it is in reference to a specifically *Czech* discourse that the work must be considered, despite the Slovak source material of *Sclavi* and the pan-Slavic composition of the company at the time of its creation).¹¹²

Dočolomanský makes explicit the extent to which the work is a personal and collective strategy for mediating the neoliberal agenda shaping Czech society:

The reason that *Farma v jeskyni* searches among different minority cultures [...] is something in the manner of a personal ecology. It looks paradoxical and romantic, that we look for testimonies of the reality, in which we live, and then we go into those tucked away places. In comparison with the culture that is found there, we are all products of the culture of Britney Spears, dead and dispossessed. [...] A person goes to places other than those where globalization has swept the country and in confrontation with what he experiences there is newly defined. (Dočolomanský 2007b: 82-3)

The decision to engage with the history and contemporary reality of a culturally and economically marginalized group places *Farma* at odds with the dominant discourse in that, here, it looks eastward, rather than to the west. As such, the company runs counter to the narrative of the Czech Republic's economic triumph. This is particularly the case when the production seems to suggest parallels between the early twentieth-century *gastarbeiters* and contemporary economic migrants. The stories and songs that form the scenic materials of *Sclavi* are rooted in the Ruthenian experience of emigration fuelled by poverty and socio-economic marginalization. Finally, in opposition to neo-liberal enthusiasm for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, *Sclavi* serves to emphasize a shared Czech *and* Slovak

¹¹² The original cast of *Sclavi* consisted of Roman Horák (CZ), Maja Jawor (PL), Matej Matejka (CZ), Róbert Nižník (SK), Hana Varadinová (CZ), and Eliška Vavříková (CZ), all of whom took part in one or more expeditions to eastern Slovakia.

history, placed within historical complexities and paradoxes, rather than eliding them in service of a newer, more saleable narrative.¹¹³

Vavříková's, Jawor's and Dočolomanský's accounts of the expeditions and subsequent work with the materials gathered are essential to an understanding of the company's manner of working with sources. While sources gathered on expedition originate with concrete, specific communities, the inclination of the company is not to *replicate* the cultural forms they encounter. Nor is it to conduct ethnographical research as such:

The goal wasn't ethnographic research and the collection of facts. We were searching for old cultural forms, which persist to the present, for that which is rarely encountered in ordinary city life. [...] We were not researching the ethnicity as a whole, but through specific people and their experiences, which we later developed in rehearsal. (Vavříková, 2009: 16)

The expeditions were not pre-planned: “[We...] didn't prepare for the expedition, we didn't study Ruthenian culture or history in-depth, we weren't tipped off about places or people with whom we wanted to meet [...] it depended on our skills in finding the right places and people” (Ibid.: 15). The actors would drive to a village and inquire after the most elderly residents at the office of the local municipal authority. Sometimes villagers would invite them home for stories and songs, which they would record on minidisk. Following the principles of barter, as practised by Barba and Odin Teatret, the actors would thank the residents by singing for them in return (Ibid.: 16). Throughout the expedition, the actors engaged in daily training, which created physically-embodied memories of the villages as spaces of artistic creativity and development, not merely as objects of study or places of

¹¹³ This aspect of the work constitutes a strong thematic link to the work of Staniewski and Barba. Paul Allain notes, “As in Staniewski's rural Poland, the places Odin visited were declining, with people torn between their traditional agrarian world and a pervasive technological urban one. Young and old were dislocated by their awareness of the fastpaced changes around them and the draw of the cities, problems accerabated by economic necessity” (1997: 108). This dynamic, even more accelerated and palpable in 2003, focused Farma's expeditions and shaped the content of *Sclavi*.

transactional performance. This methodology echoes Gardzienice's habit of "[r]ehearsing and training as they travelled into [the] isolated territory" of remote Polish villages (Hodge, 2010: 272).

The practice of working in more-or-less foreign surroundings also provided the actors with an initial experiential insight into the processes of emigration and return, which would ultimately emerge as the dominant theme of *Sclavi*. In keeping with the unplanned nature of the expeditions, the theme of emigration emerged organically, towards the end of the first expedition, when the company visited the villages of Kamienka and Jarabina. There they encountered the Derevjanka Trio, and, on a return visit to Jarabina, Pol'ana, a women's choral group drawn from the village and surrounding area, whose repertoire contained many of the emigration songs that would become important source material for *Sclavi* (Ibid.: 62). To the songs were added letters sent home from Ruthenian emigrants in the United States from the 1920s to 1950s, which the company received from Jan Lazarík, a local historian from the village of Krivany (Ibid.: 100).

Reflecting Farma's interest in a continuum of experience linking past and present, the company's logistical circumstances during work with the collected materials and, eventually, rehearsals of *Sclavi*, was sufficiently transient to provide an additional way into the source material. As Jawor writes, the company lacked a permanent workspace and worked variously in Poland at the Grotowski Institute's Brzezinka studio, at a DAMU studio located thirty kilometres southwest of Prague in the town of Beroun, and eventually, at the Preslovka building in Prague 5: "we had to [...] migrate from place to place. [...] We lived out of suitcases" (2010: 40). Often working for long hours in relative isolation, the work evoked parallels with the emigrant experience: "we worked from morning to night, with breaks only for food. [...] We considered what it is to work long hours in a factory.

How it is not to understand language, to have no rights, to be in this sense completely vulnerable and dependent on others, like a child” (Ibid.: 40-41). The resulting production, then, reflects not only the transformation of the source material, but the actors’ embodied memories of the creation process itself, the nature of which, as Jawor states, facilitated a deeper level of access to the thematic concerns of the work.

Farma’s priorities with regard to the basic training of performers have been discussed above, but it is useful to explore, in the context of *Sclavi*, some of the strategies used to transform the collected cultural expressions – songs, letters, photographs and stories – into the building blocks of scenic composition. As Dočolomanský has stated, the company applies different methodologies to the creation of different productions, without an attempt to codify a single working method. Still, parameters and values may be teased out through consideration of some specific examples of relevance to *Sclavi*. One key consideration is the primacy of rhythm and intonation over meaning in a linguistic or syntactical sense. The dominance of rhythm and intonation is seen in Farma’s work with the emigrant letters, stories and the songs. Vavříková and Jawor detail work on the source materials that includes variations of rhythm (speeding up or slowing down the original tempo of a song, for instance), montages of intonations derived, for example, from a few phrases extracted from recorded interview with an elderly villager, or the combination of sources, as when words from a letter are sung to a rhythm derived from a recorded song or speech. This methodology is similar to Gardzienice’s; like Staniewski’s company, Farma also works from folk songs that have been “transformed [...] so that they differ extensively from their original form” (Allain, 1997: 61). This is particularly true of *Sclavi*, thanks to the work of Gardzienice collaborator Mariana Sadovská as the production’s music director (Vavříkova,

2009: 73).¹¹⁴ The material generated by work with text, songs and intonations, much of it created individually, as actors pursued the sources they were most drawn to, eventually became the basis of collective improvisation and scenic composition, as Dočolomanský arranged individual actors' scores into a scenic structure.

Source material in the creation of *Sclavi* was not limited to materials gathered on the Ruthenian expeditions. Other sources cited by Vavříková and Jawor include a 2004 documentary film, *Jednoduchá odpověď* (*A Simple Answer*), following the experiences of Ukrainian prostitutes, choreographic and rhythmic vocabularies drama from Igor Stravinski's and Václav Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, along with biographic details of Nijinsky's life and his letters (these last two elements were omitted in the final montage). As with the work on the Ruthenian sources, nothing was transplanted verbatim into the scenic structures, but was transformed, through processes analogous, if not always identical to, those detailed above. The work resulted in "a gradual penetration and permeation of one material to another in digging for the essential nature of the theme we are looking for" (Dočolomanský, 2007a: 248; Pilátová, 2009: 501). Scenic themes and unity, then, emerge from a process of interweaving, rather than juxtaposition – the overall effect, in *Sclavi*, despite the many elements feeding into it, is one of seamlessness, a quality which tends to obscure the extent of the work involved in the process of scenic composition. While not necessarily problematic, or even undesirable, the impact of this effect on the perception and evaluation of future Farma productions, most notably *Divadlo*, will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹¹⁴ Ukrainian actress and singer Sadovská (spelled Sadowska in Polish) joined Gardzienice Theatre Association in 1992 (Allain, 1997: 60). Vavříková notes that Sadovská visited the company four times during the performance-making process. An initial visit in December 2003 was devoted to selecting which songs from the expedition recordings would be worked on further and incorporated into the production. Three additional visits focused on vocal training and on-going development of the materials took place in the winter and spring of 2004 (Vavříková, 2009: 73-78).

From the point of view of dramaturgical structure, the most significant component of the production originating outside the expeditions is Karel Čapek's novella, *Hordubal*, which dramaturg Pilátová brought to the company's attention in June 2004 (Vavříková, 2009: 152). Written between 1933 and 1934, *Hordubal* tells the story of an emigrant returning home to a Slovakian village. Hopeful, as he approaches, of a loving reunion with his wife, Polana, and young daughter, Hafie, Hordubal finds relations with his family strained, and his place usurped by Manya, the hired hand. While characters from the novella, as well as the outlines of its main narrative arc are visible in the final montage, *Hordubal* is not allowed to dominate the dramaturgy: "Viliam emphasized that we should not feel bound by the characters from *Hordubal*," Vavříková recounts. Further:

He wanted us to understand them primarily as an inspiration towards the building of acting scores... We rehearsed chosen situations from *Hordubal* and used them with acting scores [we had] already outlined, which were thus transported [through this process] to a different context. But the core stayed the same. (2009: 153)

Indeed, the production took pains to prevent too literal an adaptation of the novella to the stage. This extended to the use of the characters' names; "actors are not called by their characters' names [...] and the names of the characters are not even mentioned in the production's programme" (Dočolomanský, 2007a: 248).

While individual actors worked with specific characters, at no point did any performer cease to be a member of the ensemble. Jawor, the Polish actress who had previously studied at the Gardzienice Theatre Association, originated the role of Hafie, Hordubal's daughter. As mentioned above, Jawor was struck by *Farma v jeskyni*'s emphasis, particularly in comparison with Gardzienice, on the individual work of the actor and identifies the coexistence of individual (character) and collective (ensemble) elements as central to the experience of creating *Sclavi*:

It was interesting to have a name, to be Hafie, a little girl, and then, in some scenes [...] to lose this name, to be a person without a face, an emigrant, a widow, a prostitute, to submit to the collective rhythm and expression of the whole group. These two realities, the reality of home, in which a person has his own place, her own story, his own name, her own close circle and the reality of emigration, isolation, anonymity, are for me the essence of the entire production. (2010: 51)

Jawor's account makes it clear that, at least in her experience, the process of making and performing *Sclavi* affected both the artistic process of the actor, and, recalling her comments above, the logistical experience of making the performance. Further, this was an experience deeply resonant with thematic content of emigration, displacement and return.

Sclavi premiered on the main stage at Švandovo divadlo on 3 and 4 March 2005. A repertory house with a proscenium stage and its own acting ensemble, Švandovo divadlo was previously Divadlo Labyrint, and, as noted in Chapter Three, significant for launching the careers of post-1989 directors Petr Lébl and Hana Burešová. Despite its on-going support of Farma, it is not known as a venue associated with the nové divadlo scene, though it is familiar to Prague's international theatre-goers because it consistently surtitles its productions in English. The scenic austerity of *Sclavi* – a single, rusting caravan that serves variously as home, café and means of transport – is the dominant element of Barbora Ernildová's design and it is highlighted by the size of the proscenium stage, in which the caravan serves as a focal point, an island of light and activity.

Lighting designer Daniel Tesař creates a dark sea surrounding it, conveying both the isolation of the community gathered around the caravan and also the necessity of belonging, of avoiding the unknown. In its opening moments *Sclavi* establishes a trademark of Farma v jeskyni's performances – an explosion of percussive sound, in this instance suggestive of passing trains, which begins before the first actors appear and initiates a continuous soundscape of live and recorded music, song and intonation. This first

sequence, titled “Najézd emigrantů” (“Invasion of the Emigrants”), serves as a prologue to the main action of Hordubal’s return home. For ease of description, I will reference the *Hordubal* characters by name, though, as noted above, they are not portrayed literally or called by name in the production. The caravan doors open and two men, Hordubal (played by Róbert Nižník) and Manya (a role originated by Matej Matejka and now played by Jun Wan Kim), jump to the ground.¹¹⁵ A brief moment of silence interposes between the rattling of the train tracks and a fast, harmonic rendition of the emigration song “Pyšla by ja, pyšla” underscored by Roman Horák on accordion.

As the song progresses, other actors join the tableau in front of the caravan and a family unit is discernible as Nižník links arms with Hana Varadzinová’s Polana; she, in turn, places an arm around Hafie, their daughter, played by a crouching adult actress (originated by Jawor, the role was subsequently taken over by French actress Cecile da Costa). Other actors (the cast numbers seven in total, not including one or more percussionists) suggest the presence of a broader community. Colours are muted; individual costumes are covered with blue uniform work jackets. The actresses playing Polana and Hafie wear head coverings sourced in Slovakia by Ernholdová, who also designed the costumes. This initial sequence, encompassing material drawn from emigrant letters emphasizing the need for good teeth to pass the Ellis Island inspection, is full of nervous excitement and preparation for the journey. The mood is highly energized, enthusiastic, almost hopeful.

¹¹⁵ Slovak performer Matej Matejka was an original member of the company and performed with Farma until 2006. Since 2005, he has collaborated closely with the Grotowski Institute. In addition to performing with Teatr ZAR and leading that company’s performer training programme, he directs his own Studio Matejka in Wrocław, with support from the Institute (Information compiled from <http://www.studiomatejka.com>).

Upon Hordubal's return, his outsider status is physically palpable. Nižník and Varadinová are unable to relate to each other physically, the rhythm of their movements irretrievably out of sync, attempts at intimacy taking on the appearance of rape or business transactions (at one point, Varadinová, unsure how to relate to him, repeats the question "Water? Coffee? Tea?"). The physical dysfunction of Varadinová and Nižník's relationship is further problematized by the arrival of Manya, whose unfettered physicality (the movement of horses was explored in rehearsal) acts like a magnet, drawing Hafie and Polana to him or sending them skittering across the space, seemingly no longer in control of their bodies (Jawor, 2010: 183-185). Where other characters' movements are jagged, limbs and segments of the body moving in isolation, Kim's fluid physicality is that of a fully integrated, animal body. A tense encounter between the men sees Manya and Hordubal's attempt to shake hands dissolve into a slapping contest, as they clap each other on the back with increasing violence; Nižník eventually bites Kim's hand.

Certain sequences depart completely from the *Hordubal* framing to build the broader picture of emigration that emerges from the production as a whole. In the sequence "Prostitutky" ("Prostitutes"), the women in the company change their work jackets for white shirts with great elasticity and dance in front of the caravan, their movements inspired by choreographic elements of *The Rite of Spring*. As the intensity of the percussion increases, they cover their faces with the shirts, repeating a movement from the opening sequence – legs spread apart to an approximate second position, balls of the feet rhythmically alternating in beating the floor. In that comparatively optimistic context, the rhythmic beating suggested hard, but ultimately productive work, whereas here it feels like drudgery. Faceless and anonymous, their labour futile, the performers' bodies are reduced to commodities. They dance, chests bared, while the men of the company, and the

audience, watch. We are witnessing the effect of economic marginalization on women, whether they remain at home while the men depart (a frequent theme of the Ruthenian emigrant songs), or emigrate themselves (as in the case of the Ukrainian prostitutes).

The performance culminates with its most visually stunning moment, as Nižník spies, from the roof of the caravan, on Polana and Manya below. The sequence begins with the caravan placed horizontally across the stage, the stage left side barely lit. As the sequence progresses, the caravan turns, with Nižník supported by Horák, who alternately counterbalances his weight or lifts and carries him as he attempts to see what is happening below. As the open end of the caravan spins towards the audience, we see Manya inside, suspended, through the use of ropes and poles inside the caravan, his feet resting on those of Hafie, who lies on her back below him, feet suspended in the air. The effect is discomfiting. Is he molesting her? We can't be sure. Vavříková's neighbour is there too, in black, peering at the audience from behind Hafie, then from the window of the caravan as Manya steps onto the stage, and it continues rotating. Music stops as Manya and Polana find each other – the only sound is the metallic scraping of their hands on the aluminium of the caravan. Nižník collapses into Horák, then drops, as if a hanged man, from the side of the caravan, suspended by Horák's feet.

The characteristics of *Sclavi* established the parameters of Farma v jeskyni's oeuvre and, to a significant degree, as will be demonstrated later, the production remains the standard against which all subsequent productions have been judged. *Sclavi* served to establish Farma as a peerless company on the Czech performing arts scene, remarkable for continuous movement that is both virtuosic in the level of control demonstrated by the performers and dramaturgically effective in its precision and intentionality. Despite the tragic ending, a soundscape that is at times plaintive and inconsolable and the sad, muted

tones of the design, *Sclavi* burns with a vitality and significance, indeed an urgency bordering on necessity, that holds one rapt and transforms the work into something hopeful, transcendent and profoundly powerful. The transformative powers of live performance are notoriously difficult to capture in writing and, of course, inherently subjective, so perhaps it shall suffice to state that the production remains my strongest experience as a spectator of any performance.

5.2.2. Čekárna (Waiting Room)

Farma's third production, *Čekárna* (2006) has much in common with *Sclavi*, beginning with its Slovakian source material, in this case a physical building, the Žilina-Záriečie train station. Located in Slovakia's fourth most populous region, which shares its name, Žilina, with a population of 154,205 stands in the northwest of the country, bordering Poland to the north.¹¹⁶ Located to the west of the Žilina city centre, the Žilina-Záriečie station served, from 1942, as a point of transportation for 18,000 to 24,000 Slovak Jews (Adamov, 2003).¹¹⁷ The region's Jewish population was decimated in the Holocaust; figures from the 2011 Slovak census number the city's current Jewish population at 10 individuals.

In September 2003, the autumn after the first round of *Sclavi* expeditions in July 2003, Farma v jeskyni was invited to lead *Cesta do Stanice (Journey to the Station)*, along with Norwegian company Stella Polaris. Initiated by local NGO Truc Sphérique, which was working to develop the station into an arts centre, *Cesta* was intended as a "baptismal" event. Truc Sphérique's director, Marek Adamov, invited 100 participants to transform the

¹¹⁶ Population figures are drawn from Slovakia's 2011 census and represent the total population of the Žilina metro area (Slovakian Bureau of Statistics, www.scitanie2011.sk).

¹¹⁷ Full text of Adamek's article retrieved from: http://www.policiesforculture.org/administration/upload/MAdamov_ZilinaProject_2003_EN.pdf

station into “a place of spectacular theatre celebration of the world around us” (Ibid.).

Without erasing its history, the physical inhabitation of the building by 100 performers and an audience would somehow reclaim it and dance it back into the circle of the community, transformed from a reminder of Slovakia’s wartime experience as a Nazi puppet state into a space of contemporary creation. Like *Sclavi* and, eventually, *Čekárna*, *Cesta* arose from a willingness to work through and with the past, rather than obliterating it entirely. During their time at Stanica, Farma v jeskyni began work on what would become *Čekárna* and presented an early “miniature” version at the public showing that concluded the event. Marek Godovič, who would later serve as the full-length production’s assistant director, was in attendance and writes of the initial showing: “Characters fused gradually. [...] There were no words. Important were emotions, frankness, filling of the space with emotions and transferring this state to the spectator. The space for any fable was minimal” (sic) (quoted in Adamov, 2003). Godovič’s reference to fable acknowledges the potential, in such surroundings, to oversimplify or to deny history. The simple testimony spoken by the presence of bodies achieves the event’s aim of reinhabiting, and thus, rehabilitating the station.

If participation in *Journey* allowed the company, only two years into its existence, to consider its relationship to mid-twentieth century Czech and Slovak history, Adamov’s account of the event records Dočolomanský’s articulation of another Farma value – the idea of performance as a meeting between people:

Stanica is a place where people meet by chance. Passengers as they arrive and leave, bring and take away with them their roots, tradition and history...At Stanica is the only possibility these people have to get to know each other, to interact with one another; and to experience a few unrepeatable moments together in a concrete space. (Ibid.)

Dočolomanský's words convey an understanding of the individual as a socio-culturally and historically rooted subject. Performance does not erase this, or conflate audiences into a monolithic whole, but rather, provides a space in which they can coexist, physically and dialogically, in space. This language of meeting would later resurface in bilingual promotional materials written by the company for ACKE (ACTION), a series of work demonstrations: "ACTION will carry the atmosphere of the workshop as an unrepeated and unrepeatable meeting of people from different countries of the world, which is as such becoming its theme" (Farma v jeskyni, 2011b). At the March 2011 edition of ACKE, Dočolomanský emphasized the international character of the workshop participants by asking each to begin by explaining to the audience, in her native language, her motivation for taking part (Ibid.). The effect was to affirm the specificity of the event – *these* people in *this* place – in a way that testified to the company's aim, expressed by Dočolomanský, to approach "something universal, which can communicate with everyone"; to find a way of approaching the universal in a manner that avoids homogenization and conflation of multiple perspectives into a literal (or metaphorical) lingua franca (Dočolomanský 2007b: 82). In the same interview, Dočolomanský notes, "I really believe that if a person speaks a language, which is his own, [he] then has a chance to address others" (Ibid.).

The company returned to Žilina after *Sclavi* to continue work on the miniature, which evolved into the full-length work that premiered in 2006. The resulting production's design works to transmit the physical experience of the station to audiences as completely as possible. Photos of the initial work in situ at the station and in performance in Prague demonstrate the success of Markéta Sládečková's set design in achieving this aim, as well as the important role played by the venue. Like Farma's other productions, *Čekárna* is associated with a specific Prague venue, in this case NoD/Roxy, where light green panels

attached to the space's grey concrete walls from floor to chair-rail height reproduce the station's physical appearance.¹¹⁸ Like *Sclavi*, the production begins with an explosion of sound as a conductor's whistle immediately establishes the train station setting, which functions as a constant in a production driven by the fluidity of time. Two temporal settings – the station today and circa 1942 – initially alternate and gradually come to overlap and bleed into one another. The central characters in both these worlds are women: the Journalist, played by Varadzinová and the One Who Returns, played by Vavříková. Other characters are station employees, fellow travellers, men whose advances vis-à-vis the women range from playful to (more often) predatory. As in *Sclavi*, language is used primarily for its tonal qualities and the dominant sonic element is music — Slovak tango played live by a band located stage right.

Bearing in mind that Farma's open dramaturgy renders any reading of a production's narrative arc highly subjective, repeated viewings suggest that Varadzinová's character has come to Žilina-Záriečie to research the station and its past. She carries a mini cassette recorder into which she frequently speaks and which is later stolen by Nižník's character, a tough-looking local in torn combat trousers whose relationship to the Journalist is sexually menacing. The encroachment of technology as an alienating mechanism between people is a motif of the production; one darkly humorous scene has all the passengers in the contemporary station muttering into their mobile phones. In contrast to the stilted communications in the contemporary setting, which are either impersonal and mediated by technology or violent, relationships in the 1942 station feel joyful – at least initially. There is a sense of a playful love triangle between Vavříková, Patricie Poráková and Roman

¹¹⁸ Photos of the Žilina-Záriečie station and the production of *Waiting Room* at Roxy/NOD may be found in the "Projects" section of Farma's website (http://infarma.info/index_en.php) under "Journey to the Station" and "Waiting Room", respectively.

Horák, which reaches its climax as both girls sit on the floor, enticingly swinging their handbags at Horák, who, rather than choose between them, joins them, swinging his pullover. Images evoking the Holocaust gradually infiltrate. In one sequence Vavříková and Poráková are packed into suitcases, from which they struggle to escape, only to be recaptured by Horák, whose presence in the scene has become more ambiguous. Later a cart carrying the limp bodies of three actresses, wearing only underwear, is wheeled across the stage.

As the production progresses, the presence of Vavříková's character bleeds into the contemporary scenes. Perhaps it is Varadzinová's seeking that has called her back, perhaps she merely remains within the building, a metaphor for the coexistence of the present and the past. The space itself is an important element of the production. Where, in *Sclavi*, the caravan proves a focal point on an otherwise bare stage, a surrogate campfire which draws the performers, along with the viewer's attention, to the centre like a magnet, in *Čekárna* the performance fills the entire (smaller) space at NoD. At times, this feels claustrophobic. The actors, in movements likely developed from Farma's "wall-as-partner" training exercises, climb and bounce off the walls, which serve both as support and opponent. Dramaturgically, this highlights the significance of the space as a container and witness of history from which it is impossible to escape. The heavy upstage centre doors, when opened late in the performance, reveal not another space, but a wall of mirrors, in which Varadzinová's and Vavříková's reflections kaleidoscopically merge. Violence remains a constant presence in the production, with the sexual advances of Nižník's character preventing the two women from truly connecting.

Both through its content and dramaturgy, *Čekárna*, like *Sclavi*, abides within the complexities of history. In a televised interview following *Farma v jeskyni*'s receipt of

Respekt magazine's award for the strongest choreography of 2007, Dočolomanský

discusses the context of the work:

[*Čekárna*] is not some reverent look back at our ancestors but more of a confrontation with what we have to live in today. [...] We found the parallels between the accidental relationships of commuters and the potential of violence and human arrogance and human evil. Think about what has happened in that place. Let's stop pretending it happened 300 years ago. Those were our fathers and the fathers of our fathers who didn't come back to the train station to say goodbye. So this unresolved issue is within us still. Until all of us find a way to face this thing and stop looking at it as just 'another anniversary' of the catastrophe that happened here. Unless we deal with it, I think the evil will continue. It was very painful and often very unpleasant to deal with this issue. I am Slovak and this is our national shit, but I think this process may have moved something within us and it gets moved even further with the people who come see this performance. (Dočolomanský 2007, trans Eva Daničková)

As was the case with *Sclavi*, Dočolomanský's comments speak to the social context of production. In 2006, the year that *Čekárna* premiered, the Slovak government implemented a new penal code, imposing harsher penalties for those convicted of racially motivated crimes, though discrimination against minorities, particularly the country's Roma population, remains a perennial problem (Human Rights First 2007: 38). As noted in previous chapters, with its greater ethnic diversity and a less prosperous economic past, Slovakia has experienced greater discord between minority groups than has the Czech Republic, though its record is not entirely clean, either (Harris, 2010: 193). Speaking of the Slovak context, Erika Harris observes, "There is a deep-rooted tradition in Slovakia which understands politics only as a struggle for national realization and confuses political solidarity with ethnic solidarity. This [...] creates on-going tension in the majority-minority relationships" (Ibid.). *Čekárna*, then, represents an opportunity to interrogate past and present articulations of social currents and problems. Dočolomanský's comments explicitly address the capacity of theatre to provide space for audience reflection (quite literally,

through the use of the upstage mirror) and transformation at the level of the individual, who as, co-creator of the production, must navigate his or her way through its complexities.

5.2.3. *Divadlo (The Theatre)*

Farma's most recent production, *Divadlo*, premiered on 10 February 2010 at the Preslová space. Until *Divadlo*, the company's work had been understood within a European and, specifically Slavic, cultural context. Kurt Taroff characterizes Farma as "Czech-based, but pan-Slavic", noting that *Sclavi* is "[c]omposed and performed by a cast made up of Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ukrainians and Serbs" (2008: 90-91). While there were neither Poles, Ukrainians or Serbs in the cast at the time, Taroff's commentary also ignores the fact that, when he viewed *Sclavi* on tour in Belfast in October 2007, the cast already included the South Korean Kim and French Da Costa, both of whom are clearly visible in the photos accompanying his article. Further, no mention is made of *Sonety*, with its Andalusian source material. The example of Taroff's article serves to illustrate how the combined impact of *Sclavi* and *Čekárna* established Farma as a Slavic theatre company, investigating a Slavic past – a strong enough characterization to elide both the prominent presence of non-Slavic actors in performance (Kim's role as the Manya-inspired character makes him highly visible), and the existence of Farma's first production. While Taroff is writing from outside the Czech theatre community, a similar act of negligence occurs within the Czech press. This is subtle (and will be discussed shortly), yet it tends to privilege questions of content (what a given production is 'about') over methodology (*how* is the work created through work on source materials?) and contributes to misunderstandings about the company.

Divadlo draws its source material from Afro-Brazilian dance traditions: the dramatic dance forms of Bumba-meu-Boi and Cavallo marinho, the Frevo and Samba Roda dance

styles, the Candomblé ceremony and Capoeira Angola. Krystyna Mogilnicka, a Polish doctoral candidate at Charles University who assisted Dočolomanský throughout the creation of *Divadlo*, traces the impulse of the inspiration to a lecture on Brazilian possession cults delivered by theatre anthropologist Leszek Kolankiewicz at the 2007 Festival Farma, held by the company to mark the opening of the Preslovka (Mogilnicka, 2011: 5-6).¹¹⁹ When Farma was invited to perform and lecture in Brazil in the summer of 2010, the company abandoned plans to study voodoo in Cuba and, instead, began conducting research into Afro-Brazilian folk culture. Over the course of that trip, and a follow-up visit lasting from December 2008 to January 2009, the company identified thematic concepts and cultural expressions that would inform the creation of *Divadlo*.

Among these, Mogilnicka cites the pervasiveness of slavery in both the physicality of the movements and the dramaturgy of the cultural expressions. Examples include Roda Samba, which is danced in such a way that the dancer's feet, which would have been manacled, never leave the floor, and Bumba-meu-Boi, with its cast of characters including both slaves and masters. Like the better known capoeira, the development of these cultural expressions is inextricably bound to Brazil's history of slavery and oppression. Forms associated with slave culture struggled to find cultural acceptance, particularly after the emancipation of Brazil's slaves; in 1890, Brazil made the practice of capoeira a criminal offense and repeat offenders could be sentenced to up to three years in prison (Merrell, 2005: 8). While capoeira is now a worldwide phenomenon with adherents around the globe,

¹¹⁹ Citations refer to "*The Theatre – From anthropological inspiration to theatre practice*", a chapter from Mogilnicka's unpublished doctoral thesis, which she shared with me in manuscript form following my observation of a March 2011 workshop run by Farma v jeskyni at NoD/Roxy. Mogilnicka's work is based upon her notes taken throughout the rehearsal process, as well as interviews with actors and notes and artefacts, including Dočolomanský's journal, from the company archive.

and Bumba-meu-Boi and Roda Samba have been codified and accepted as authentic Brazilian cultural forms, they retain an aura of resistance. As Matthias Röhrig Assunção notes, “although the slave system as such has disappeared, many [capoeira] adepts still ascribe to [the] aim, [of] seeking through practice their emancipation from any kind of oppression” (2005: 209). Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, then, retain an element of dissent, even when they are exported.

That this aspect of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions would resonate with Dočolomanský and his actors is hardly surprising since the concept of slavery connects *Divadlo* to previous work. *Sclavi*, as Silvis notes, among others, notes “is Latin for both “Slavs” and “slaves”, definitions that carried over into English: Slav(e)” (Silvis, 2008: web). *Sclavi* consciously plays with this etymological detail, connecting it to the current geopolitical reality of peoples from the former communist bloc. As Dočolomanský tells Bednářová, “To this day, we – as Slavs in Europe – are a cheap labour force” (2005: web). Vangeli notes that “Even today this word [Slavs] implies a slavish existence”, while “poverty, more exactly our poverty, the poverty of our region, the region of the ‘other’ Europe” is a unifying motif of *Sclavi* (2010: 50). Lyn Gardner, writing for *The Guardian*, notes that *Sclavi* “is infused not just with the polyphonic music and ritual songs of the Slavic people, but also with their history and pain: our word ‘slave’ comes from *Sclavi*, the Latin word for Slav” (2006: web). The relative unity of content and expression achieved by *Sclavi* – Slavic source material, initially researched and transformed by a ‘pan-Slavic’ company into a production that resonates with contemporary issues impacting Slavic countries – shows why the company might be understood to be producing ethnically-specific theatre. Within the context of such a reading, then, *Divadlo* is a completely unexpected deviation – there is nothing Slavic about it.

Yet this is to miss the point. As mentioned previously, Dočolomanský locates an element of personal ecology in Farma's work, yet both *Sclavi* and *Divadlo* transcend the personal to engage with a larger question: the relationship between minority and dominant cultural expressions in an increasingly globalized age. Added to this is a critique of the metanarratives that seek to homogenize and elide historical complexities. When Farma's work is considered within this larger framework, the similarities between *Divadlo* and the company's earlier work becomes clear. Following this reasoning, then, *Divadlo* may be understood as a logical next step in the development of the company.

Still, because there is less superficial unity between the performers and their material, *Divadlo* renders Farma's way of working with source material more visible than in previous productions. *Divadlo* lacks the structural dimension *Sclavi* possesses through the emigrant letters, *Hordubal* and the testimony of individual interviews. Further, as detailed by Mogilnicka, the expedition research was focused primarily on Afro-Brazilian dramatic dance forms, and the actors, in between performances of *Sclavi*, participated in a variety of classes and workshops, resulting in a cache of source material more physical and visual than *Sclavi*'s (2011: 9-10). As Dočolomanský explained in a workshop based on the expedition materials, specific steps are learned and repeated not to *imitate* the original, but to tap into the vitality inherent in the steps, the essential human need to move in this way (Farma v jeskyni, 2011b).

As Mogilnicka notes, the expedition, particularly the traces of slavery in popular cultural expressions, catalysed in Dočolomanský a reflection on the actor/director/spectator relationship and the extent to which there exists a "parallel of slave-master / actor-director, in which all involved (including master and director) somehow become enslaved to the larger community/audience within the context of fulfilling their roles within the play"

(2011: 18). *Divadlo*, then, while containing recognizable elements of Afro-Brazilian folk culture, is also, as its name implies, deeply invested in questions of the role and functioning of theatre generally, and the group dynamics of *Farma v jeskyni*, specifically:

The audience's first relationship to the material is witnessing a play about Brazil. Quickly it becomes clear that the underlying story is about *Farma v jeskyni* – the actors and the director themselves. It is apparent that Capitão is a Brazilian master in a historical drama, but it is also Dočolomanský himself as the director/master of the company. (Mogilnicka, 2011: 34)

As Mogilnicka implies, what emerges is a parallel dramaturgy, a tense dance between the source material as embodied and transformed by the actors and a meta-discursive consideration of the theatre and, more specifically, the laboratory theatre.

To the expedition material from Brazil may be added the presence, within the final montage, of numerous elements originating outside the expedition. In contrast to *Sclavi*, where form and content fuse through a shared Slavic orientation, the juxtapositions in *Divadlo* are sharper and less familial, producing a jarring effect. References to reality TV culture, the presence of marionettes, which are deeply embedded in Czech theatre culture, or a shamanic vocalization learned in Korea, infuse *Divadlo* “with a strong uniquely non-Brazilian component within a performance whose “choreography” – movements, words and rhythms – was decidedly Brazil-based” (Mogilnicka, 2011: 6). Even the *Bumba-meu-Boi* (Get Up My Ox), the cultural expression left most intact in the production, is layered with other materials which complicate its function in the production.

This dramatic dance form concerns resurrection of a favourite ox after it is killed by a slave to placate his pregnant wife, who longs to eat its tongue. While scholars debate the origins of *Bumba-meu-Boi*, Kazadi wa Mukuna argues convincingly for the practice's roots in African slaves' experience of colonial Brazil, noting the presence in the traditional

narrative (Farma's version is significantly edited) of representatives of colonial society's upper and lower classes as well as its three races (European, African and native) (2003: 11).¹²⁰ Following Mukuna's interpretation, "Bumba-meu-Boi is also a means of challenging the authority of the ruling class [...H]aving no other recourse to vindicate their rights, the oppressed members of society created a play in which despised authorities are caricatured and denounced" (Ibid.: 23). The social function of the Boi, then, is analogous to the medieval Feast of Fools, a carnivalesque inversion of power relations that serves to release social tension, however temporarily.

In *Divadlo*, the Bumba-meu-Boi narrative functions as a play performed by the company of actors led by Anna Kršiaková's Capitão. From the outset of the performance, which begins, like *Sclavi* and *Čekárna*, with an explosion of noise and energy, an additional spectator/performer dynamic is established, in the form of a second, or "false", audience. This is portrayed by blind-folded Farma actors sitting at the back of the stage, facing (and mirroring) the paying, or "real" audience. In Jana Preková's design, the space between – a raised platform, sometimes further demarcated by tall silver poles – is the space of Capitão and his company. The layering of Kršiaková's character is extremely dense. She is playing Capitão in two senses. On the one hand, she is the leader of the ensemble of actors (we see her rehearsing them). On the other, she is playing Capitão in the Boi, the role of an authority figure satirized and made ridiculous by the very work she has been preparing her actors to perform. In a sense, then, her work becomes an act of self-annihilation. The presence of the false audience, costumed, particularly Nižník, who wears riding trousers

¹²⁰ While versions of the story differ, the basic narrative calls for additional characters, including an Indian Shaman and Portuguese doctor, who try to revive the ox, and is played in a cycle to coincide with the feasts days of St. John, St. Peter and St. Mark (Mukuna 2003:7). In Farma's version, the slave character played by Roman Horák is called Vacquiero, rather than Pai Francisco, as is traditional, and Kršiaková's Capitão contains elements of both Cavalho Marinho (the Captain) and Amo (the rancher). For a sample Bumba-meu-Boi narrative, see Mukuna 2003: 22-23.

and a militaristic jacket, by Barbora Ernšildov to suggest an historical aristocracy, adds another layer. In its original context, Bumba-meu-Boi, like other Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions, was proscribed due to its associations (more or less imagined) with criminality and lawlessness and would not have been presented as it is in *Divadlo*, in a context suggestive of court performance.

As the performance unfolds, sequences explore the audience/performer dynamic, suggesting elements of exploitation, power and appropriation contained therein. The encroachment of the false audience onto the platform, announced by demanding foot-stamping, rhythmic and aggressive, intrudes upon the intimate, “backstage” moment of actor training we have been witnessing and throws us into performance mode. The shift of power is striking: Capito has been rigorously coaching Hork’s Vacquiero, but the arrival of the audience transforms him/her (Capito is a man being played by a woman) from master to obsequious servant as s/he welcomes the audience in intentionally bad English:

Welcome everyone / Our show begins, / That’s great that you are here / And fill your glass with whiskey and ice / Nobody can stay alone this night / Do you hear me everyone? / Everybody has fun? / Oh, yes my dear friend, / Today is the time to say to yourself: / “I am here” / Enjoy Ya! / I go! / You are our guest, / And have a nice time with us. (Farma v jeskyni, “Divadlo programme”)

Krřiakov delivers her opening gambit using a vocalization technique learned from a shaman during Farma’s South Korean tour. This has the effect of extending some phonemes while compressing others and also varies the tempo of delivery, lending a comic element to the monologue and also making it difficult to understand. If the playing of the Bumba-meu-Boi before the elitist, false audience represented an opportunity to attack and satirize the spectators, it is clear by the end of the performance that they are unmoved, and Capito is the figure of fun.

Subsequent scenes address power dynamics between performers and spectators, questioning who is dominant, and on what terrain. Before Róbert Nižník's audience member "shoots" the troupe of actors, they dance towards the false audience, now seated onstage, with an explosive energy drawn heavily from Capoeira Angola, their hands extended towards the false audience, seemingly requesting some form of compensation for their efforts. The callousness of the shooting, and the departure of the fake spectators (they mutter nonsensical syllables in snooty tones as they disappear under the platform), juxtaposed with the prior intimacy of the training scene – and the now (seemingly) dead Capitão's complete mastery over it, testifies to the gap between the practitioner's and consumer's understanding of theatre. This is a reminder that the director, who is all powerful in the rehearsal room, may be easily dismissed outside it.

Divadlo equally investigates the attraction and exclusivity of artistic groups and the difficulty experienced by outsiders in gaining admission to them. A successful enactment of the Bumba-meu-Boi story produces an energy that sweeps a false spectator on stage for a resurrection dance informed by orixás. In its aftermath, she is initiated into the company of performers in a sequence that strips her of the long dress worn by female spectators and dresses her as a performer. In contrast to the spectators, who are costumed according to gender, the performers wear uniform burgundy trousers and matching waistcoats. In this sequence, all the actors exchange the top halves of their costumes, embracing each other as they dress and undress one-another. While there are elements suggestive of "hazing", this is, by and large, an intimate ritual conferring insider status on the new recruit and contrasts markedly with the experience of the next spectator to be swept on stage.

Drawn not by the rhythm of the performance, but by an obsession with Horák's Vacquiero, this spectator, played by Eliška Vavříková, first attracts the attention of the

company by showering them with gold dust. “They like it!” she observes, in English. More than in other Farma productions it is possible to follow language in *Divadlo*, most often a clumsy, almost vulgar English that is purely transactional, chosen only for its efficacy in communication. Vavříková’s spectator enjoys her power over the performers in the moments before her supply runs out and they swarm around her like a flock of hungry birds. Vavříková’s pursuit of Horák acts as a structuring principle for the second half of the production, as Capitão’s death (this time genuine) and their subsequent marriage paralyzes Horák. In a manner reminiscent of a game show host, Vavříková’s character welcomes us, the paying audience, to her wedding with the assistance of a handheld microphone and flowers thrown into the risers. In a scene at the wedding party, Vavříková enlists Patricie Poráková’s assistance in getting Horák to dance. Originally a member of the acting troupe, but now playing a spectator, Poráková moves in a parody of ballet. Her jerky, puppet-like motions are a grotesque parody of the concentrated energy and intentionality she displayed as a member of the acting company under Capitão’s direction at the beginning of the performance. Implicit here is the sense that life “off-stage”, no matter how performative, is a pale imitation of artistic life. As *Divadlo* approaches its final moments, Horák’s condition deteriorates until, following Capitão’s voice, he throws himself into a hole in the floor of the stage.

Even more than Farma’s other productions, *Divadlo* is a symbolically dense, at times disorienting performance that seems to demand repeat viewing.¹²¹ Reviews of the production have stressed its incomprehensibility, suggesting self-indulgence. Yet it seems

¹²¹ In the course of this research, I have seen the production half a dozen times and each viewing has brought new observations. At an April 2012 performance, Jana Pilátová related to me that a similar process of on-going discovery is occurring for the actors, that they – and the production – grow and evolve through its performance.

to me that, like the language of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the barriers that *Divadlo* may present to its viewers stems from the highly specific and personal nature of story being told. Mogilnicka's insight into the process of making *Divadlo* provides useful context here. Her observation and involvement leads her to assert that the process skirted, and at times strayed into, a dangerous space, as immersion in the laboratory theatre process meant that "life started to be less real, less vivid, and less desired than the state [the actors] were reaching in their rehearsals, process and performance" (2011: 19). As work on *Divadlo* progressed, Mogilnicka writes, the company "was mirroring itself as a laboratory theatre group. They were caught in a mirror within a mirror, a play within a play, a situation that was both beyond them (stronger than they) and simultaneously of their own making" (2011: 19). In this context, the relationship to the source material becomes admittedly somewhat problematized, as the Brazilian material became the rhythmic and physical means by which the company carried out self-analysis.

In considering the necessity and aims of such analysis it is helpful to recall Dočolomanský's assertion, cited above, that the subject is "newly defined" in relation to experience gained in "places other than those where globalization has swept the country." Implicit here is a self-reflexivity that is central to Farma's practice. The work does not seek answers, but instead probes the spaces between those most readily given. As such, it is incompatible with a fixed subjectivity (whether individual or collective) and presupposes a continual self-interrogation. Mogilnicka's comments together with the production itself suggest that the Brazilian expeditions catalysed a period of genuine self-reflexivity in the group. This drove the company to consider its position vis-à-vis its spectators, as well as the relationships and dynamics structuring the group itself; a concern with both of these dimensions is reflected in the production. Accordingly, *Divadlo* must be understood as a

production reflecting Farma's genuine engagement with the source material as provoking a self-reflexive impulse.

This is not to imply a lack of care or sense of exploitation vis-à-vis the Brazilian source materials. A Brazilian apprentice, Guto Martins, returned to Prague with Farma and acted as an official dramaturg throughout the scenic composition process. Martins, notes Mogilnicka, "helped contextualize the current history of Brazil (transformation from colonial monarchy to the Empire of Brazil, and from dictatorship to democracy.) He also inspired work with symbolic elements such as Brazilian anthems and well known political slogans" (2011: 21). Still, the cultural distance from Prague to Londrina serves to render Farma's process of transforming its source material more explicit and visible than in previous processes. While I have endeavoured to demonstrate the link between the Brazilian context of the source material and the more personal issues occupying Farma throughout the creation process, admittedly the overlap between these is not easily discernible in a first viewing of *Divadlo*. While I find greater integrity in Farma's use of the material than, for example, in a hypothetical version of the production that might have included a discernibly Brazilian narrative arc, the absence of such undoubtedly complicated the reception of *Divadlo* by the Czech theatre press. As will be discussed presently, the mixed reception of the production by Czech critics again calls into question the necessity of Farma's laboratory theatre process and even the company's connection to Prague and the Czech Republic.

5.3. Critical Reception

The reviews discussed here include material from four types of domestic publications: mainstream daily newspapers (*Hospodářské noviny*, *Lidové noviny*, *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, *Právo*), cultural magazines (*Respekt*, *Reflex*), industry publications

(*Divadelní noviny, Svět a divadlo, Taneční zóna*) and English-language periodicals (*Czech Theatre, The Prague Post*). Where relevant and available, foreign reviews are included, though reviews are limited to those available in Czech or English. As Eva Stehlíková notes in her review of *Čekárna*, Farma's productions continue to develop as they are performed: "The production is never in its final form and following the progress of each individual performance can therefore be very exciting" (2007: 84). While this is doubtless true, the on-going development of productions as they remain in the repertory over an expanse of years and accommodate cast changes may create difficulties in putting reviews, even of the same production, in direct conversation with one another. Accordingly, reviews are discussed with reference to time and place of performance.

Since its establishment Farma v jeskyni has received consistently more press coverage than its peers in the nové divadlo scene. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, members of the nové divadlo scene, including Krepsko, struggle to obtain adequate coverage and are often ignored by mainstream dailies. Several factors may explain Farma's different relationship to the media. Firstly, Dočolomanský is a member of an established theatre family, and, accordingly the press may have been more tuned into his activities from the outset. Then there is the framing of Farma's work, in terms of the spaces it has occupied in Prague and the extent to which it has engaged (or not) with the emerging nové divadlo infrastructure. A final factor is the company's international success, which, to date, no Czech company of any description has equalled. On 26 August 2008, *Mladá Fronta Dnes* ran an uncredited article about other Czech companies' efforts to match Farma's achievements at the Edinburgh festival with the amusing headline "They came, they saw, they performed daily. But they didn't conquer" ("Edinburg – Přijeli, viděli, denně hráli...", 2008: 26). The tone of the article expresses a sense, palpable in a certain sort of press

coverage of Farma, of puzzlement as to the company's international track record. It also reveals the existence of two or more discrete schools of thought about what constitutes theatrical excellence and, building from this, engages with the fundamental question facing post-communist Czech theatre: what the role of theatre in the Czech Republic should be.

Vladimír Hulec, editor of the bi-weekly *Divadelní noviny* (*Theatre News*) has been a persistent domestic critic of Farma's work. Reviewing *Sclavi* in his publication, he argues that the production represents an "incubational stage" in the company's development, holding out hope that future productions will be "deeper, more layered, more theatrically sophisticated and better structured" (2005: 7). Hulec locates the production's chief shortcoming in its lack of a clearly "readable" (citelný) narrative. While he praises the company's "tasteful treatment" of the source material, he also notes:

[...] director Dočolomanský in collaboration with dramaturg Jana Pilátová has failed to connect either songs or individual situations in a dramatic creation (Čapek's *Hordubal*, to which [*Sclavi*'s] creators refer, would be found in it only with difficulty), the spectator fails to take away from the performance a complete, unified story (most lyrics are sung in Ruthenian). At the same time, neither does a production emerge which might approach Gardzienice's concept of ritual theatre, which relies more on the spiritual dimension of the whole. (Ibid.)

Hulec's frustration stems from an unwillingness to accept Farma's invitation to the spectator. He is looking for the sublime (the spiritual dimension he identifies in Gardzienice's work), or else a clearly decipherable narrative. In truth, Farma's productions offer both these experiences to the spectator, but they rely on the spectator's acceptance of responsibility in navigating the productions' open dramaturgy.

Hulec laments absence of plot as the production's greatest weakness, but it is rather a *single* plot that has been relinquished, as each spectator will make his/her own way through the piece. With regard to the performances, Hulec accuses the company of an excess of

youth: actors “fail to impart the fatality of the songs”; he finds them “too vital, happy, dynamic”. Furthermore, he hypothesizes “Maybe the classic [proscenium stage] of Švandovo divadlo doesn’t suit them, and in a smaller space, perhaps like NoD, their fierce youth would work more proportionally” (Ibid.). In as blatant an assertion of the spatial boundaries between different types of Czech theatre as one is likely to find in a survey of critical discourse in the field, Hulec effectively expels Farma from Švandovo divadlo. His argument rests on the grounds that Farma’s work would be better viewed in an “alternative” theatre venue. At the same time, the excessive vitality Hulec cites as problematic further indicates that he has missed the point; after all, the aim of *Sclavi* is not the reproduction of authentic folk stereotypes, nor the aim to “play” Ruthenians as such.

Contrasting markedly with Hulec’s position is Nina Vangeli’s review of the production in *Hospodářské noviny*. Running under the headline “Event of the year”, Vangeli enthuses “If I’m not mistaken, we have before us the movement theatre – and the general theatre event – of the year” (2005b: 10). In contrast with Hulec, who encases the company’s methodological terminology in inverted commas that feel decidedly pejorative, Vangeli, a dance critic, former practitioner of dance theatre and founding member of the avant-garde 1980s Studio Pohybového Divadla (Physical Theatre Studio), displays an awareness of Farma’s working methods, noting that the perfection of the “eloquent and inventive” movement represents “more than a year’s work” (Ibid.). Where Hulec seems to be hankering after faithfully reproduced and suitably downtrodden Ruthenians, Vangeli highlights *Sclavi*’s contemporary relevance and its ability to connect past and present: “the whole theme of emigration and gastarbeiters is again topical and relevant in our migratory, rapidly accelerating civilization” (Ibid.).

In September 2005, the production is again reviewed by *Divadelní noviny*, this time more favourably by Eva Stehlíková, who declares it “a victory for non-verbal theatre”, as part of a roundup of performances at the 2005 International Theatre Festival in Plzen (2005: 4). Covering the Plzen festival for *Lidové noviny*, Jiří Černý responds to what he perceives as the production’s uniqueness, which is characterized by “rhythms that defy folklorism and music which doesn’t resemble any world music, but is more garage rock. There is a beautiful uniqueness of movement, not similar to any dance school” (2005: 14). Where Hulec identified a company still in search of a theatrical language, Černý’s consideration of the work recognizes its self-determined nature. Jiří P. Kříž, writing in *Právo*, six months after the premiere, echoes Vangeli’s initial assessment, hailing the work as “the best production” of the year (2005: 19). In what feels like a direct response to Hulec’s objections, Kříž finds *Sclavi* to be “a production in which each step, each gesture has [a] deep, but easily decipherable significance (význam) and sense (smysl)” (2005: 1). The critic further notes that Farma’s decision not to buy into the triumphalist narrative of Czech economic transformation represents a barrier to the embrace of the work by the Czech theatre mainstream, pointing out that the dual meanings of *Sclavi* (Slav/Slave or, in Czech, Slovan/otrok), “was for some an instruction on how to perceive the production [and] for others, a barrier, how not to understand it” (2006: 13).

At a ceremony held at Divadlo na Vinohradech on 18 March 2006, Farma v jeskyni received the Radok Award for performance of the year for *Sclavi*. The choice to award a non-dramatic production was a departure for Czech critics: “The Radok was won for the first time by a different type of theatre than a “classic” dramatic or operatic production. Dočolomanský’s production with [its] emphasis on movement and song speaks to audiences with a different, emotional language” (Kolářová, 2006: 5). Magdalena

Čechlovská, writing in *Hospodářské noviny*, also conveys a sense of surprise, emphasizing the unusual demands the production places on Czech spectators: “*Sclavi* [...] showed even Czech audiences, traditionally allergic to even the smallest amount of pathos, [can be] chained to their seats for an hour, gripped by a serious story” (2006: 9). Dočolomanský, interviewed by Kolářová for *Mlada Fronta Dnes* echoes the journalist’s surprise: “We often perform abroad and had very good responses from critics. But I admit that I didn’t hope that Czech critics would also value our work so highly” (2006c: 7).

As elsewhere, Dočolomanský does not propose reasons for the sometimes lukewarm reception and somewhat grudging domestic recognition of his company, but these critical positions are palpable in Jana Machalická’s coverage of the awards for *Lidové noviny*. Machalická notes that “for the first time in the history of the awards, a still relatively unknown creator has received the main prize” (2006: 17). Observing that *Sclavi* received only two more votes than a production of Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *Devotion to the Cross* staged by celebrated director Hana Burešová at the Městské Divadlo (City Theatre) of Brno, Machalická suggests that “external influences of course played a role” in the decision, notably Farma’s performance of *Sclavi* in Plzen, “where the majority of critics viewed it and generally valued it very highly” (2006: 17). Machalická’s interest in this fact comes across as an attempt to discredit the company’s success, as if the Plzen festival has given them an unfair advantage, when Farma is one of many Czech companies, drawn from

both the independent and mainstream theatre scenes, to participate in the festival over its twenty-year history.¹²²

Farma's winning of the Radok predates its success in Edinburgh, yet in her coverage of the awards ceremony, Kolářová notes that already, "Farma v jeskyni is more often on tour than in Prague (2006: 5). Even as Kolářová's remarks note the benchmark achievement of an independent, non-dramatic theatre winning the nation's highest honour, she also voices the frustration, already present in Kříž's November 2005 review, that it is too difficult to see performances of *Sclavi* in Prague. From the outset, then, Farma's work, while celebrated, also carries an aura of remove, a sense of being larger than the Czech Republic's theatre scene. Responding to a performance of *Sclavi* at the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław, Małgorzata Jabłońska describes the socio-cultural context of *Sclavi* in a manner that may prove elucidating with regard to the Prague critics' sense of something approaching abandonment:

In a time of the continuing homogenization of social life, globalisation and unification, people have the opportunity to choose: either to merge with the majority, or to move toward the myth of national specificity and to become a foreigner. So it goes for the heroes of *Sclavi*: one changes and loses his identity, others remain relicts of their home country and become foreigners. Those, who decide to return home, find themselves in a tragic situation: they are ours, and yet they are foreign. (quoted in Pilátová, 2010: 502)

Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, with a production whose content is linked to a national specificity to which many members of Farma may genuinely lay claim, the function of

¹²² Now in its twentieth year, the Festival has hosted mainstream Czech theatres including Divadlo Komedie, Divadlo na Vinohradech, Divadlo na zábradlí, Divadlo v Dlouhé, Městské divadlo v Brně, Národní Divadlo Moravskoslezské(Ostrava) and Národní Divadlo (Prague). Independent and alternative theatres include famous grey-zone theatres of the 1970s and 1980s such as Provázek and HaDivadlo and more recent additions to the scene like Alfred ve dvoře and Misery Loves Company (information compiled from <http://www.festivalidivadlo.cz>).

Sclavi in Farma v jeskyni's trajectory as a company was to launch it, firmly, onto a world stage, or, as Jabłońska puts it, a choice "to move towards the majority" (Ibid.).

The adjective trans- or postnational might be affixed to that majority, reflecting a highly mobile population of artists born from the mid-1970s onward, whose fates and careers are not bound to a singular national context, a choice more possible now than at any previous time in history. The trauma of the emigrants we see in *Sclavi* – the impossibility of return, the sorrow of leaving – here become inverted. To leave is no longer to accept a life of exile. Farma can – and does – return to Prague and, indeed, continues to call it home. Yet at the same time it has transcended its national specificity and, to a large degree, particularly following the company's recognition on the international festival circuit, its need for domestic consecration. The pain experienced as a result of this choice, seems not to lie with those who travel, but rather, following Jabłońska, with those who remain behind, bound to a specific national context. Anthony Elliot and John Urry lend support to Jabłońska's observation, noting that, in a world increasingly reliant upon networks and mobility, "many live in a state of 'permanent anxiety' about whether they are being disconnected, abandoned on the spot by those who are moving around" (2010: 47).

Farma v jeskyni's performance of *Sclavi* at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival, where it was programmed as part of the Aurora Nova dance festival, provided an opportunity for foreign critics to weigh in on the production. Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian* is appreciative, classifying *Sclavi* as "astonishing" dance theatre, as "possessing a strange hallucinatory quality [...] something shattered and fragmented, always happening on the jagged edges rather than in the centre" (2006). Val Baskott displays none of the Czech critics Cartesian dilemmas, describing *Sclavi* as "wholly absorbing total theatre [that] works on feeling and emotion as much as intellect", in which "sound is integral, maintaining tension throughout

as in the rhythm of moving feet creating the sound of train or in a single accordion note tautening the interaction between seducer and seduced” (2006). Mark Monahan provides the only contrasting view, finding the work “folksy but often frantic” and, somewhat bizarrely, containing “next to nothing in the way of eye-catching movement” (2006).¹²³ With regard to the production’s content, Lea Marshall notes that “*Sclavi* brings to light stories that might not otherwise have been told, adds them to the human saga and prays the world to take notice. We do” (2006).¹²⁴ Interestingly, following Taroff’s lead, all the British critics refer to the company as Czech, overlooking its international composition. This is often highlighted by Czech critics, as in Černý’s precise description of Farma as a “Slovak-Polish-Czech-French, Prague-based studio” (2005: 14). Comments in the Czech press on the company’s international composition increase as its membership diversifies. By the time of Kříž’s and Černý’s articles, French actress Cecile da Costa had joined the company as the first non-Slavic member.

Recalling the Czech theatre’s revivalist origins and its role in the development of the Czech language, Farma v jeskyni’s success, as a Czech company on the world stage for whom language is not a dominant element of scenic composition, is particularly charged. Not reliant on a Czech-speaking audience, the company can travel anywhere and work with anyone, capitalizing on a fluidity impossible for the most consecrated Czech dramatic theatres. Through their success and circulation, globally, they become standard bearers for contemporary Czech theatre internationally, albeit a version thereof, which, while it possesses links to past avant-garde and alternative practitioners, is a significant departure

¹²³ “Nuns in knickers and a Sad Slovak”, retrieved from:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/dance/3654614/Nuns-in-knickers-and-a-sad-Slovak.html>

¹²⁴ “Farm in the Cave – Slcavi: The Song of an Emigrant”, retrieved from: <http://www.ballet-dance.com/200609/articles/FarmCave20060806a.html>

from the theatrical mainstream. Despite their historic contributions to the Czech nation, mainstream dramatic productions remain largely unexportable and thus in a dominated position vis-à-vis the global performance market, which contrasts with and threatens to undermine their legitimacy and dominance at home.

Suspicion regarding Farma's international profile colours receptions of *Čekárna* as well. In his review for *Právo*, Kříž notes the production suffered from "bad luck", with "[a] Czech critic ignoring [the production's] success [with] spectators at August's international Plzen Theatre Festival [...] neither does he acknowledge the fact that Farma is already planning trips to festivals and a world tour with *Čekárna*" (2006: 13). After censuring his colleagues for their unprofessional treatment of the company ("I heard, already in Plzen, that *Čekárna* doesn't advance [Farma's work] further artistically"), Kříž moves on to his own assessment, praising the work of the actors and musicians, as well as the choice of subject matter: "The Holocaust, one of Europe's traumas", transports the work to another plane of significance, while the juxtaposition of time periods draws attention to "the continuation of xenophobia and racism in our epoch" (2006: 13).¹²⁵ Kříž ends his review with the assertion, echoing his review of *Sclavi*, that the work will never appeal to critics more interested in "reading" than in the "serious interpretation" of works.

If Kříž remains a firm supporter, Hulec here reiterates his objections to *Sclavi*. While he notes that Dočolomanský "used the site-specific space perfectly" – Hulec is responding to the Plzeň festival performance, where *Čekárna* was performed in a disused railway

¹²⁵ Interestingly and somewhat bizarrely, for an argument appearing under the problematic headline "We are all Jews", Eva Stehlíková, writing in The Theatre Institute's annual English-language digest, attributes the choice of content to Slovak national anxiety: "The production is not just an aestheticized report on an event that we are trying to forget. In this regard it should be noted that the director is from a generation that was not involved in the Holocaust as their predecessors were. He nonetheless also feels the need to come to terms with it, because for a part of the ensemble it is a problem that affects their national identity" (2007: 84).

station – he “can’t help but ask the question, does Viliam Dočolomanský want to be specific, or ‘only’ emotive?” (2006: 4). He concludes the review with folktale about a painter who worked for years in secret on a masterpiece, before finally inviting a group of local citizens to view it. Although entranced by the preliminary sketches, they were unable to see anything but a tangle of lines in the final painting, a situation analogous, he suggests, to the composition of *Čekárna* (Ibid.). It is clear, then, that for Hulec, clarity and the discernability of a concrete narrative remain paramount – and unfulfilled – requirements.

Hulec might expect support from Lukáš Jiříčka, given the latter critic’s concern, in his previously cited review of *Krepsko*, that productions be readable. Reviewing *Čekárna* at Roxy/NoD, Jiříčka finds the task of “reading” the production “immensely difficult” (2006: 22). Although the company’s rigour “could stand as an example to many lax Czech theatres”, the demands it places on its spectators are too much for Jiříčka. Further, he resuscitates the Czech suspicion of laboratory theatres as cult-like. *Farma* is “excessively tightknit”, a “closed community”, whose “on-going reflection on their work means that they cannot [step outside] and view it from a distance, thus depriving [the work] of humour and lightness” (Ibid.). While it is possible to argue with Jiříčka’s assessment, as well as to identify moments of levity in *Čekárna*, such as Horák’s flirtatious swinging of his pullover, or the spectacle of the contemporary characters transfixed by their mobile phones, his remarks, tellingly, reflect the continuation, in Czech discourse, of scepticism towards laboratory theatre practice.

Vangeli, reviewing *Čekárna* immediately after its premiere, in May 2006, counters Hulec, noting that “Today, in a dance world inclining towards minimalism, the dense scenic structures that Viliam Dočolomanský creates [...] are valuable and welcome” (2006: 9). For Vangeli, *Farma* is “choreographic theatre”; and she notes here that Dočolomanský

“approaches dance from another direction, free of clichés” while possessing “a big advantage” in his “musical sensibilities, sense for rhythm and timing” (Ibid.). With regard to the question of “readability” that preoccupies the other critics, Vangeli writes:

If we see suitcases and people in their underwear on stage, we think immediately of the Holocaust. Yet we search for this theme in vain in *Čekárna*. In reality, a broader, but simultaneously more contemporary theme emerges – the theme of violence between men and women. Dance and movement make violence painfully present and explicit. (Ibid.)

Unlike the other critics, particularly Jiříčka and Hulec, Vangeli is at ease with *Čekárna*'s open dramaturgy, a sense which only highlights the difference between her position and that of critics firmly rooted in dramatic theatre. Also absent from Vangeli's assessment is any concern regarding Farma's relationship to the Czech Republic, which may be attributable to the Czech dance scene's longer engagement with international collaboration. Taken together, the reviews of *Čekárna* suggest no great departure from critical opinions on *Sclavi*. If anything, despite – or perhaps because of – Farma's receipt of the Radok award, a sense of veiled resentment and suspicion, particularly with regard to the company's international touring profile and laboratorial working methods, is emergent.

The critical reception of *Divadlo* reveals a continuation and intensification of the patterns visible in the commentary on *Čekárna*. The company's international profile is nearly always cited, although the tone in which this is done varies considerably, from Vangeli's description of Farma as “the beloved of foreign and domestic juries” (2010: 15) to Vokatý's suggestion that the name “Farm on a Journey” would be more appropriate (2010: 32). With the exception of Vangeli, who sees the production's fascination with rhythm as a logical outgrowth of Dočolomanský's “questing after true, essential theatricality”, the critics cite the absence of a clearly defined theme as the production's

chief shortcoming (2010: 15). Where, previously, critical opinion has divided along a fault line between different conceptions of theatre – with the Hulec-Jiríčka camp favouring a more text-based approach than the faction led by Vangeli and Kříž, the thematic challenges of *Divadlo* transcend partisanism.

Radmila Hrdinová, a critic cited by Kříž as one of the first to appreciate *Sclavi*, understands the demands Farma makes on its spectators: “The viewer willingly lets the motion pull him in...however, s/he [then] begins to look for meaning. Not a story, this is not the most essential element of a Farma production, but a theme, to which this whirling is pointing. And there is the problem” (2010: 11). She continues: “It is as if Viliam Dočolomanský and his group were too carried away by the authentic study of Brazilian dance forms and delivered to the viewer more the result of the work than the self-contained testimony of a performance with a concrete leading theme” (Ibid.). Citing the multiple elements and allusions in *Divadlo*, she writes “but always it is only roughly sketched and it is quickly abandoned. And thus, since the play is about everything, it is, simultaneously, about nothing” (Ibid.).

Hrdinová is not the only critic to question the relationship between form, content and methodology in *Divadlo*. In a review under the headline “Farma’s magic dilutes”,

Machalická writes:

The magic of Farma v jeskyni’s first project digested [the material] just enough, which begs the question of whether the scientific approach to living theatrical creation isn’t an excessive requirement. [...]Perhaps Farma would benefit from less robust study and research into theoretical points of departure. (2010a: 9)

Machalická’s parsing of research into specific cultural expressions as ‘theoretical’ is suspect and she subtly rephrases in the English-language version of this article. Now “this ‘research into The Theatre’ does more for the artistic development of the company than it

does for the final form of the production, which [...] lacks a clearly formulated and communicative plot” (2010b: 58). Both articles end with a parting shot that effectively distinguishes between foreign and domestic performance contexts. In the Czech version of the article, she notes, despite her reservations, that *Divadlo* “enhanced all the company’s activities with its cosmopolitan character and it certainly has continuing chances to succeed at international festivals” (2010b: 59). Machalická’s Anglophone readers learn that the production “excited the interest of audiences, critics and theatre festivals abroad, who are drawn to the unique character of the company’s work and outstanding choreographic preparation” (2010: 58). These final arguments, while articulated with subtle differences in each language, deftly recast international theatre festivals, which are generally perceived as gate keepers to the highest levels of the profession and tasked with conferring consecrated status, as repositories of work not good enough to succeed in the Czech context. Implicit is the suggestion that the company’s work belongs less to Prague than to a collection of vaguely sketched international venues and festivals with different and less stringent criteria for the evaluation of work.

5.4. Politics and Praxis: Farma as “Practical Political Opinion”

In an ironic reversal of the experience of theatre artists, including Havel and Grotowski, whose working conditions demanded they assert the apolitical nature of their nevertheless political theatre, Dočolomanský repeatedly asserts Farma’s political dimension, as in this exchange with Martina Černá, following a discussion of the Czech Republic’s troubled cultural policy:

Černá: Isn’t it time to begin to do political theatre?

Dočolomanský: Farma is political theatre. [...] Why can’t a language without words be political?

Černá: No one has noticed this yet, however.

Dočolomanský: Fine, so let's say that Farma is my practical political opinion. (2011: 8)

Dočolomanský's conversation with Černá makes several key points that clearly speak to the company's paradoxical position in the Czech theatre landscape. First, it demonstrates the persistent equation, in Czech discourse, of political theatre with text-based, dramatic theatre. The implicit reference here is the playwrights' theatre of the 1960s discussed in Chapter Two, but Machalická's round-up of political plays of the early 2000s is also relevant. Simultaneously, it reveals a disconnect, approaching historical amnesia, between the present and recent past of Czech theatre. While Farma's scenic language is driven by music and rhythm in a way that the work of Provázek was/is not, it is striking that the critic fails to connect Farma's montage-based performance-making practice with the similarly constructed work of such an explicitly political company. Nor does she connect the work to the avant-garde theatres of the First Republic, discussed in Chapter One, which combined socialist politics with formal experimentation. By contrast, Vangeli does make this connection, in her review of *Sclavi*, referring to the production as a type of "voiceband" theatre, a term that, for Czech readers, instantly evokes E. F. Burian's theatre (2005: 10). Kříž makes the autorské divadlo connection clear, noting that *Sclavi*, with an expressive physical vocabulary that is both deep and readable, "builds on the best that Czech [theatre] has produced", drawing parallels with the work of Provázek and Iva Talská (2005: 1). Still, these are implicit, rather than explicit references to the work's political character.

Arguments for the political dimension of Farma's work are trapped in a complex double bind. To the extent that it shares the politically engaged authorial practices of companies like Provázek, it is implicated, however indirectly, in the same cultural exhaustion with theatre-as-politics that contributed to Czech theatre's crisis of purpose in

the early 1990s.¹²⁶ Yet the domestic critical discourse is in conflict on this issue. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, there is a feeling of celebration that theatre has been emancipated from standing in for politics. At the same time, there is frustration when this freedom results in work in which the personal (at least superficially) appears to outstrip the social (as seen in the varied reactions to Petr Lébš's work, discussed in Chapter Four). Then again, there is an emphasis on production over process, a discursive mechanism which fails to engage with the socio-political implications of the practice of a group like Farma. Finally, there is the problem of the work's laboratory dimension. Farma's association with theatres established in the 1960s, such as Barba's Odin Teatret, tends to engender suspicion, whilst obscuring the artistic and political motivation for the establishment of the company, submerging twenty-first century specificities into values and preoccupations of another generation.

Dočolomanský's comments on his company's associations with Barba's project, and Farma's motivations are worth quoting at length:

I respect the thesis, which this ["third theatre"] movement has brought, but I don't programmatically subscribe to it. Farma is a group of people from different contexts and countries – we don't have a single artistic programme which we follow. The majority of things we do intuitively. I think that a musical sensitivity and a need to express with the body turned me away from classical theatre texts. I greatly respect Eugenio Barba, he recognizes a clear, social basis and therefore I felt a responsibility to bring his Odin Teatret to the Czech scene for the first time in our Farma Festival. However, at the same time we don't live in the 1960s. The reason that Farma v jeskyni searches among different minority cultures is a bit more egotistical. It is something in the manner of a personal ecology. (2007b: 82-3)

¹²⁶ As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, muddled terminology, specifically the persistence of the term "alternative" in press coverage of non-repertory theatre, tends to obscure differences in generations and genres among practitioners and companies because, as Ondřej David notes, "this term implies the time of the so-called normalization of the 1970s and 1980s [encompassing] all progressive theatre productions standing in opposition to the totalitarian regime" (2006: 10).

Later in this interview, as noted earlier, Dočolomanský references increasing globalization and the proliferation of lowest common denominator mass-produced culture, epitomized for him by Britney Spears. In doing so, he draws attention to the fact that the geopolitical realities of Farma's milieu are markedly different from the theatre of the 1960s, a difference exacerbated by rapid political, social and economic change in central and eastern Europe from 1989 onward. The maintenance and furtherance of the narrative put forth by Václav Klaus demand a degree of cultural amnesia: an obliteration of former Czechoslovakia's diverse past. As discussed above, when Dočolomanský refers to a personal ecology, this may be understood as an attempt to subvert the neo-liberal supernarrative, itself constituting another yet another totalizing mechanism.

British Asian director Jatinder Verma, of London's Tara Arts, illuminates the specific paradox of the post-1989 moment in another way:

with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, we have seen an increasing ethnicization of the world and ideologies. Until the fall of the Wall, there was a kind of bigger reality; there was a clear East-West discourse within which we could locate ourselves [...] With the fall of the Wall, the only discourse you could locate yourselves within was one of global capitalism and global consumerism. [...] All of that further helps us to think of ourselves as different, as separate. The more different, the more separate you are, the greater the chances of finding your niche in the global market. (Verma interviewed by Maria Shevtsova, 2009: 206)

The current climate, then, is subject to the pull of two opposing, yet interrelated, poles: on the one hand, the totalizing, homogenizing processes of globalization, capitalism and consumerism; on the other hand, spurred by that process, the cultivation of difference. Verma's experience testifies to the "voluntaristic" behaviour Roland Robertson identifies as responsive to the existence of "a single global arena": "As the general process of globalization proceeds, there is a concomitant constraint upon [...] entities to 'identify'

themselves in relation to the global-circumstance” (Robertson, 1992: 61). Examples of Czech institutions and sectors endeavouring to identify and fill specific niches may be found within the field of cultural production, for example in national showcases organized abroad by the Czech IDU, Ministry of Culture and Czech Centres, discussed in Chapter Three.

By seeking the margins of the former Czechoslovakia’s culture, most evident in *Sclavi* and *Čekárna*, Farma’s work constitutes an opposition to this narrative. That the company then brings these margins to the centre, presenting them in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, the rational, western capital of the former Czechoslovakia, constitutes a direct assault on both the cultivation of homogeneity and the packaging of a unified national culture for tourist consumption. It must be remembered, recalling Chapter One, that Czech-language dramatic theatre developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in part as a justification for self-rule; as Scott Spector notes, the intention was to demonstrate to the Austro-Hungarian Empire the Czech capacity for achievements in the field of culture (2000: 42; Cf. 28). Contemporary repertory theatre practice is rooted in this solidly central European context, and, as such, constitutes an excellent partner in furthering the neo-liberal “Return to Europe” agenda of the post-communist era.

Farma’s willingness to abide with historical complexities, together with its resistance to the ideological pull of metanarratives, places the company within the Czech tradition of political philosophy stretching from Masaryk to Patočka to Havel discussed in preceding chapters. In so doing, it also provides an argument for the political nature of Farma’s practice. Dočolomanský and his actors note that training is highly individual, designed not to produce a monolithic uniformity, but rather to contribute to the growth and evolution of each member: “We are not a factory for manufacturing performances and reprises...we try

to create conditions in which we can personally grow” (Dočolomanský 2011: v). Maja Jawor, when contrasting her work with *Farma* and her experience as an apprentice at *Gardzienice*, emphasizes the personal responsibility demanded by *Farma*:

In “*Gardzienice*” it was always possible to rely on somebody (a partner or a group) – in *Farma v jeskyni* the most important thing was speaking my own language and on behalf of myself. [...] one has to activate one’s own energy resources, one’s own will to act; imagination and instinctive creativity. (2010: 222)

The interplay between individual and collective development of the group and its members is reflected in training. As Vavříková explains: “In order to function in the framework of the whole group, to maintain our condition, group training is necessary. Any restrictions or self-control depend on each one of us” (quoted in Novák, 2007: web).

The same dynamic is present in the process of montage, as each actor’s score (or sequence of movements and vocal intonations) is motivated by a personal narrative which may become clear to the spectator in the course of the performance, but, more often, remains submerged in the dramaturgy of the whole. *Farma*’s productions, then, are like tapestries, composed of individually constituted threads, each thread a work of art itself, emerging from the creator’s specific reality, personal history, and personal truth. The process-based nature of the work, the long rehearsal periods, the refusal to cut corners, again constitute a sort of “living in truth”, far removed from the business-as-usual dynamics, which arose in some repertory contexts during communism and, in place, persist to this day. At the same time, the rigor of the work, recalling *Mogilnicka*’s use of the term “devotion”, or *Pilátová*’s likening of the work of a laboratory theatre group to marriage, equally distinguishes *Farma*’s work from much, though by no means all, that falls under the umbrella of *nové divadlo*, which can look rather slapdash by comparison, a state of affairs which only contributes to the movement’s continued marginalization in the press. This

reality – the sense to which Farma is distinct from both the Czech theatrical mainstream and recognized avant-garde – serves to solidify the position of the company further within the third theatre sector, albeit one whose geopolitical realities differ from those in play at the outset of the movement.

5.5. A Kind of Home

This Chapter began with a quotation from Dočolomanský expressing his affection for Farma’s Czech base. Eleven years into Farma’s existence, it is questionable whether these remarks still hold true, as the company’s position in the Czech Republic has become progressively more tenuous. The loss of the Preslovka in autumn 2010 has been followed by funding cutbacks whose significance cannot be attributed solely to a general decrease in arts funding.¹²⁷ In 2011, Prague’s municipal grant commission gave its third-highest individual award to Farma v jeskyni, a total of 2.3 million Czech crowns (“Praha rozdělila...”, 2011).¹²⁸ When the 2012 grants were announced, the amount had been slashed by 27%. Covering grant allocations for *Právo*, Petr Janiš reports Eliška Vavříková’s question to the grant commission: “We understand that the [city government’s overall] contribution to culture is reduced by 5-10%, but we don’t understand why, in comparison with last year, the contribution for Farma is reduced by a full 27%” (2012: 10). Janiš adds that, according to Vavříková, the funding shortfall “threatens the scheduling of reprises in

¹²⁷ It should be noted, however, that in 2008, Farma v jeskyni received 1,650,000 Czech crowns from the Prague Municipality government, 1.5 million of it (approximately £43,277) intended to be used in connection with the Preslová space. A subsequent 1,210,000 (£34,910) was awarded by the Ministry of Culture. Such a degree of support and investment – at the time of these awards, the company would have been in their second year of using the building – makes the ultimate collapse of the project without intervention by the City Hall or the Ministry of Culture even more puzzling, despite the intervention of the international financial crisis.

¹²⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.denikreferendum.cz/clanek/9151-praha-rozdelila-jednolete-kulturni-granty>

Prague” (Ibid.). Vavříková’s assessment of the situation reiterates what is emerging as a pattern in Farma’s interactions with the organizational infrastructure of Prague theatre: financial and logistical difficulties result in fewer performances, which prompts criticism that the company performs too infrequently in Prague and thus does not require further municipal support.

Writing in *Právo* in November 2011, long-time supporter Kříž expresses his frustration with this state of affairs, attributing it to “incurable Czech narrow-mindedness [and] envy” (2011: web). “Paradoxically,” he writes, Farma’s success at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival “was the moment when their life in the Czech Republic began to peter out (skomírat). [Farma had] without permission outgrown our narrow-mindedness and parochialism” (Ibid.). Kříž’s defence, or perhaps lamentation, of Farma v jeskyni and its plight reads like an attack on the worst aspects of what he perceives as the Czech national character:

Farma v jeskyni lost its rehearsal space, for the most part in the context of incurable Czech spleen (čecháčkovské trudnomyslnosti), envy and bullheadedness, even about grants. Recall the wooden-headed reasoning: They perform abroad more than at home, so how do they represent Prague?! (Ibid.)¹²⁹

Kříž’s frustration is abetted by his assertion that the problems facing Farma are shared by “anyone, who pops their head out of the Czech basin and comes home crowned with success”, citing a number of companies including the Forman Brothers, Continuo, La Putyka and Provázek, whose successes abroad have compromised, rather than enhanced, their positions at home.

¹²⁹ The adjective *čecháčkovský* derives from *čecháček*, defined by Ladislav Holy as “a pejorative diminutive of ‘Czech’” (1996: 76). Further “apart from petty-mindedness, *čecháčkovství* (being a *čecháček*) includes intolerance to views, attitudes and conduct which differ from one’s own, envy and a conviction that whatever one does or thinks is best and that those who deviate from it should be reminded in no uncertain terms of the error of their ways” (Ibid.),

Kříž's terminology evokes Holy's study of the Czech national identity and places Farma v jeskyni at the junction of competing and contradictory cultural currents. Holy characterizes Czech society as collectivist and egalitarian in nature, an assertion he supports with national polls that show a majority of Czechs feared that transition to a market economy would produce greater social inequality (1996: 160-163). Simultaneously, Holy argues that the myth of *kulturnost* – the notion of the Czech Republic as a 'cultured nation' – is predicated on the existence of people

who must be individualists by definition – people able to approach their own lives as conscious objects and to make a selection among the attitudes and customs existing in their social environment. They have to be able to distance themselves critically from the social and cultural environment in which they live... (1996: 164)

Holy attributes Havel's political success to his success in embodying these qualities and functioning a national hero, the veneration of which allows "the autocratic, intolerant, begrudging, and not exceptionally cultured or educated Little Czech [...to] still consider himself to belong to a democratic, cultured and well-educated nation" (Ibid. 167).

Holy writes in 1996, at a time when "criticism of Havel is seen by most Czechs as in bad taste" (Ibid.). While Havel's death, in December 2011, prompted an outpouring of mourning that testified to his position as a beloved national figure, as discussed in Chapter Three with reference to *Odcházení*, the intervening years saw Havel at times criticized for the very exceptionalism which made him such an effective symbol of *kulturnost*. Rick Fawn's observation merits restatement: "Havel earned acclaim abroad; but his position at home was more ambiguous [...] He has [...] been seen as aloof, living in an intellectual ghetto" (2000: 47). A similar ambiguity characterizes the domestic reception of Farma. Like Havel, the company is among the Czech Republic's most successful exports in the

field of culture. I would also argue, that if, as Dočolomanský insists, Farma's practice constitutes a practical political opinion, it does so in a distinctly Havelian way.

Farma's emphasis on individual responsibility, demonstrated by the company's dedication to development of its individual members, reflects Havel's belief, following Patočka, in the individual human subject's experience of the world as the basis for all knowledge. Farma's rejection of ideology, epitomized by Dočolomanský's unwillingness to codify a specific methodology, constitutes another parallel. Thirdly, and, perhaps most importantly, there is Farma's treatment of its audience "like a partner". The open dramaturgy of the productions demands the active participation of the spectator, who becomes responsible for his/her experience of the work. The narrative apprehended by a given spectator at a Farma production is thus highly personal, a result of direct contact between the individual and the content of the work, which itself embraces paradox and refuses to lock the past in a hermetically sealed cupboard. Farma's productions are located within a specific historical complexity and possess a worldview that aspires to the universal through the particular. It is little surprise, then, that, like Havel, the company has run afoul of the mainstream narratives dominating Czech culture.

Changes in Czech society since 1989 may have combined to create Farma's specific situation – indeed, the company, with its international composition, could not have existed prior to the Velvet Revolution. Nevertheless, the historically-constituted role of Czech theatre cannot be discounted, either. Narratives, such as that of Jarka M. Burian, which link the theatre's role in the Velvet Revolution to its earlier function as a justification, or buttress to the cause of Czech self-rule, risk obscuring the subtle differences in these roles. In the first instance, Czech theatre espoused the Enlightenment values of education and instruction for the betterment of society, benefiting further from a rising trend towards the

ethno-linguistic determination of nations. Theatre in this context was about gaining parity with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, demonstrating the nation's cultural capacity as a means to a specific end. The role of theatre under communism turned subversive, but also inward. No longer was the spectacle staged, however tacitly, for a third party. Rather, theatre emerged as a substitute political sphere, meaningful for a domestic audience.

In the post-1989 world, the Czech theatre is again on the world stage. Again there is a third party watching – this time an international scene of festivals and critics. *Farma v jeskyni*, while physically based on Czech soil, also calls this broader context home. It speaks from an increasingly postnational reality that does not need to code-switch to communicate between foreign and domestic audiences. It both is and is not a sensibility born of the post-Velvet Revolution and Divorce era. It is an expression of the Czech Republic's achievements that it exists at all. That it exists in such unfavourable circumstances is an expression of a journey still to come.

Conclusion

This research has taken as its central concern the mapping of the current conditions of production, or topography, of contemporary Czech theatre practice, with particular attention paid to the faction of the field designated by the term *nové divadlo*. At the outset of this project, the contours of that faction – its international orientation, artistic fluidity, and concentration in a network of key venues and festivals – were already visible and served as points of demarcation that gave this study its focus and direction. As the research progressed, within the framework of the sociology of theatre, it became clear that the topography of the *nové divadlo* was strongly inflected by its interactions with the bedrock of Czech theatre practice, and its historically-constituted biases, hierarchies and assumptions. This is true of any attempt to map the contemporary articulation of any municipal or “national” theatre scene (if such can be done at all in a world increasingly less bound by borders of any kind). Still, the Czech case in particular, by virtue of the theatre’s persistent social function, and the extent to which the field has both exhibited political activism and suffered ideological appropriation, demands that particular care be taken in the excavation of the contemporary theatre’s underlying terrain. This is essential for the study of current practice, as the theatre’s post-1989 existential crisis, together with the rapid ascent of neo-liberal meta-narratives, meant that field had barely caught its breath before communist rhetoric was replaced by the logic of the market. Accordingly, this research has sought to identify and unpack the ideological, political and social narratives implicated in the practice and reception of Czech theatre.

From the eighteenth century onwards, Czech theatre practice has evolved in conjunction within this duality of activism and appropriation. Stanley Buchholz Kimball reminds us that the movement for a Czech national theatre “was launched long before there

were sufficient native plays to justify its existence” and the preceding chapters have explored the ways in which socio-political aims originating outside the field of theatre have sought, at different times, to prescribe its artistic development, rewrite its history or harness its communicative function. The national revival’s emphasis on the development of a serious national dramatic literature over the nurturing of hybrid forms constitutes an example of such a dynamic, while the imposed dictates of socialist realism in the 1950s and, again, after 1968 provides another. Still, the Czech theatre possesses a second socio-political dimension. Like the first, it is responsive to the society of which it is a part, yet this practical politics emerges from the field of practice itself, a phenomenon which suggests the extent to which theatre artists have internalized a social imperative. This dimension of the work represents a subtler understanding of the socio-political function of theatre, one predicated on an understanding of theatre-going and spectating as an active event. Unlike the didactic function of theatre prescribed by the revivalists and socialist realism, the work of the interwar avant-garde, *malé*, *autorské* and *nové divadlo* movements privileges open dramaturgy and co-seeking undertaken by complicit audiences and theatre artists. It is inherently dialogical, resists ideology and confronts complexity.

In its various iterations, this faction of Czech theatre practice, today expressed by the artists associated with the *nové divadlo* movement, and epitomised by the practical politics of *Farma v jeskyni*, has worked to combat the collapsing of variety, pluralism and the paradoxes of history into reductive narratives predicated on ideology. Such work took aim at the competing political ideologies of the twentieth century, subverting the claims of both fascism and communism. While the theatre of the national revival also sought to mediate between the Czech nation and an externally imposed or ideologically alienated state, it is the work of the smaller, hybrid theatres that has most consistently attended to the nation’s

needs, to the extent of creating a parallel space for the collective consideration of social and political alternatives denied conventional fields of play.

Since the Velvet Revolution, new ideologies and meta-narratives have emerged. Like their twentieth-century predecessors, they promote totalizing and reductive world views, yet they now occur within a system of governance in which the Czech nation and state are no longer alienated from one another. In this figuration, the persistent seeking of the small theatre forms, particularly if misunderstood, is transformed from an act of preservation and regeneration to one of self-annihilation, as reflected in the critical reception of Havel's *Odcházení*, or in Czech responses to Farma v jeskyni's work. At the same time, post-communist meta-narratives emphasizing the Czech Republic's central European heritage or natural democratic and capitalist tendencies are contributing to the re-writing of Czech theatre history. This process is neither transparent nor objective and serves to privilege dramatic texts over the hybrid forms present in Czech theatre practice from its earliest incarnation. Such narratives, as evidenced by Jana Machalická's assessment of Czech political theatre in the twenty-first century, tend to elide or underplay the contributions of practitioners working in small, hybrid forms, whilst valorising dramatic playtexts, even those, like Havel's, whose projects resonate most strongly with the interests and objectives of the former.

Indeed, such narratives contribute to a tendency, highlighted by Michelle Woods and confirmed by my attendance at numerous symposia discussing the legacy of Havel, towards reductive, readings of Havel's plays that limit their political resonance to their initial conditions of production, or dismisses his writing for the theatre as less significant than his subsequent essays. As its contribution to critical appraisals of Havel's writings and legacy, this research has sought points of convergence between the plays and essays, emphasizing

values common to both, including ideas drawn from the philosophy of Jan Patočka, a dimension largely absent from Anglophone analyses of Havel's dramaturgy.

At the outset of this project, I hypothesized a direct correlation between international recognition and domestic consecration, expecting to discover that companies like Farma and Krepsko consciously cultivated an international character in order to take advantage of international performance opportunities that would subsequently consolidate their position domestically. Instead, the research revealed a further level of complexity contributed by the existence, particularly since 1989, of a vibrant global market for performance. Constituting a distinct sphere of production, international festivals and producers favour productions that are not limited by language; accordingly, its preferences and values must be understood in direct opposition to conservative narratives seeking to maintain the dramatic play's position atop a hierarchy of production elements. The interaction of these two competing narratives problematizes the reception of companies such as Farma, as it effectively alienates (liberates?) them from the Czech discourse. As of this writing, the Czech theatre scene feels fragmentary. Borrowing language from Urry and Elliot, it is comprised of those who stand still and those who are moving around, the former represented by a largely conservative, "national" theatre sector, heavily reliant on dramatic texts and knowledge of the Czech language, and the latter by a second field of internationally-oriented practitioners making productions that are less reliant on language as a primary carrier of meaning.

While, as in Krepsko's *Ukradené ovace*, the relationship between these fields can feel antagonistic, particularly in the context of competition for limited resources, they need not be mutually exclusive, as evidenced by collaborative relationships spanning both (Farma v jeskyni's collaboration with Švandovo divadlo, for example). Yet the overwhelming sense is of these companies as untethered, existing, comfortably and organically, with a

postnational reality not yet reflected by nationally-orientated critical discourses or funding bodies. In this way, my research supports Dragan Klaić's analysis of the European national theatre, and, by extension, a traditional understanding of national theatre cultures as unsustainable without considerable reappraisal and engagement with diversifying domestic audiences, as well as a global network of festivals, producers and like-minded companies. Further development of this research would do well to consider theoretical writings on post- or transnational communities and subjects, drawing on Rosi Braidotti's *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006) or Martin J. Matušík's *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (1994).

This research states as one of its primary aims a desire to contribute to the limited existing scholarship on Czech theatre, particularly the work of companies that have emerged since 1989, yet the study of such work has aided in the identification of additional areas that would merit further research. These include the reception of Jerzy Grotowski's work in the Czech lands, beginning in the late 1950s, and Grotowski's influence on contemporary Czech practice, particularly the work of Czech companies supported or showcased by the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław, Poland, or framed as working in the post-Grotowski tradition, such as Divadlo Continuo or Spitfire Company. Starting from Jana Pilátová's *Hnízdo Grotowského: na prahu divadelní antropologie (Grotowski's nest: On the threshold of theatre anthropology)*, such a study would contribute a missing perspective to the international discussion of Grotowski's work and legacy.

Above all, it is my intention (as well as my hope) that the archaeological work of this thesis has been sufficient to serve as a starting point for on-going and fully contextualized research into the field of Czech theatre, the tenacity, vibrancy and vitality of which has

much to contribute to an international discussion of contemporary performance and its possibilities.

Appendix A: List of Acronyms

AMU	Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Akademie múzických umění)
AP	Action Programme, Prague Spring document outlining plans for the reform of Czech Communism
CCP	Conception of Cultural Policy of the Capital City of Prague (2006)
CE(E)	Central Europe or Central Eastern Europe
CPCz	Czechoslovak Communist Party
CSFR	Czechoslovak Federal Republic (1989-1991)
DAMU	Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Divadelní fakulta akademie múzických umění)
ELT	English Language Theatre
FAMU	Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Filmová a televizní fakulta akademie múzických umění)
HAMU	Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Hudební tanečení fakulty akademie múzických umění)
IDU	Arts and Theatre Institute (Institut umění - Divadelní ústav)
JAMU	Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno (Janáčková akademie múzických umění)
MI	Malá inventura (Small Inventory)
NCPCR	National Cultural Policy of the Czech Republic, 2009-2014
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OF	Civic Forum (Občanské fórum), political movement established in 1989

StB	State Security (Státní bezpečnost), Czechoslovak Secret Police under Communism
VONS	Committee for the Unjustly Persecuted (<i>Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných</i>)
VPN	Public Against Violence (<i>Verejnost' proti násiliu</i>), Slovak counterpart to OF, founded in 1989

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