

**Department of Theatre Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Masaryk University**

An International Symposium  
on Czech Structuralist Thought on Theatre and Drama



**Prague Semiotic Stage  
Revisited**

**Brno, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

## PROGRAMME

**S**unday 26<sup>th</sup> June      arrival of participants

**Symposium Venue:** building G (Gorkého 7 Street, Brno), Room G01

**M**onday 27<sup>th</sup> June

9.00            registration of participants

9.30            conference opening

block 1: theatre / structuralism in general contexts

9.50-10.30    Pavel Drábek: Launching a Structuralist Assembly: Convening the Scattered Structures

10.30-11.10   Fernando de Toro: The Legacy of the Prague Theatre Semioticians

*11.10-11.40 coffee break*

11.40-12.20   Patrice Pavis: Semiology after semiology or "que reste-t-il de nos amours?"

*12.20-14.00 lunch break*

14.00-14.40   Marco de Marinis: La sémiotique du théâtre 'in statu nascendi': la contribution de l'École de Prague à la théatologie contemporaine

14.40-15.20   Tomáš Hoskovec: Importance d'un atlas du structuralisme classique.

15.20-15.50   coffee break

15.50-16.30   Ernst Hess-Lüttich: The impact of Prague School Structuralism on other centres of textual analysis

*A Theatre Performance at the Místodržitelství palác*

*(Moravské náměstí 1a Square, Brno; behind the St Thomas Church):*

19.00            *Malé divadlo kjogenu / Little Theatre of Kyogen: Honekawa - Bōshibari*  
*(followed by an informal gathering)*

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Programme Version of 25 June 2011

Symposium Organizer Contact: David Drozd (drozd@jamu.cz), Tel. +420.775.113.471

## Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June

block 2: applications / particular issues

- 9.30-10.10 Veronika Ambros: Marionettes and Statues in the Writings of the Prague School  
10.10-10.50 Šárka Havlíčková: "Asian" theatre sign: potential and limits for the Czech structural theatre theory  
*10.50-11.20 coffee break*  
11.20-12.00 Barbora Příhodová: Material and Immaterial Sub-Components: Vladimír Jindra's Contribution to Theory of Scenography  
12.00-12.40 Andrés Pérez-Simón: Stage Figure and 'Anonymous Celebrities': A Look at a Contemporary Adaptation of Lorca's The House of Bernarda Alba  
*12.40-14.00 lunch break*  
14.00-14.40 Herta Schmid: The concepts of sign, sign of sign, their origin and influence on Mukarovsky's theory of drama/theatre theory  
14.40-15.20 Yana Meerzon: Concretization-transduction-adaptation. On Prague School Legacy in Theatre Studies Today  
*15.20-15.50 coffee break*  
15.50-16.30 Eva Šlaisová: Aktualisace in English Scholarly Literature: Interpretation, Ignorance, and Misunderstanding  
  
18.00 *conference dinner at the restaurant Muzejka*  
(corner of Lidická 1 Street and Moravské náměstí 15 Square)

## Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June

block 3: research project discussion

- 10.00-10.40 David Drozd: Prague Semiotic Stage Reader (presentation of possible concepts)  
10.40-11.20 Don Sparling / Tom Kačer: Translating structuralistic terminology  
*11.20-11.50 coffee break*  
11.50-12.30 Emil Volek: Theatrology an Zich, and Beyond: Notes Towards Metacritical Repositioning of Theory, Semiotics, Theater, and Aesthetics  
12.30-14.00 Concluding discussion  
14.00 End of Symposium

Symposium guests without scheduled presentations:

Eva Stehlíková  
Jarmila F. Veltrusky  
Manfred Pfister

# ABSTRACTS

Pavel Drábek

## Launching a Structuralist Assembly: Convening the Scattered Structures

- reconstructing the Babel of Structuralism; reassembling theorists and theory; clearing up confusion; eliminating uncertainties
  - introduction and presentation of the research project Czech Structuralist Thought on Theatre: context and potency (Faculty of Arts, Masaryk U, Brno, 2011-2015; funded by the Czech Grant Agency, grant no. GA409/11/1082), its objectives and hypotheses:
    - critical reassessment of original texts (including manuscript and unpublished texts)
    - reinterpretation of structuralist concepts and uncovering its interpretive potency
    - English anthology of the Czech structuralist thought on theatre (to be published 2014)
    - thematic fields to be covered by the research project:
      - A) structuralism and theatre criticism
      - B) structuralism and theory of acting
      - C) structuralism and theory of scenography
      - D) structuralism and theory of audience
      - E) structuralism and theory of drama
      - F) structuralism in the context of Czech cultural and national identity
      - G) structuralism and its waning in the context of post-WW2 politics
  - the importance of contexts for the study of structuralism, and the perennial (?) potency of the theories
  - contexts are gone, seemingly at least; potency is not, we believe
  - Theory vs. theory ~ Theory as Ideology vs. theory as a critical tool and whetting of the critical language
  - criticism without and with a political ambition (the difference between Eastern and Western structuralism)
  - Jakobson and his critique of "jazykové brusičství" (language cleansing) as racism
  - pragmatism vs. idealism; breaking away from idealistic taxonomy in favour of a pragmatic/realist/practice-based approach; the dual nature of structuralist terminology; balancing out the pragmatic and the idealist term
  - social awareness of theory; structuralist understanding of the arts as a force shaping community and society
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Fernando de Toro

## The Legacy of the Prague Theatre Semioticians

As Denis Bablet stated, in 1971, in a brief introduction to Jindrich Honzl's article "La mobilité du signe théâtral", that

*Des le numéro I de Travail Théâtral, nous exprimions notre désir de tenir compte des propositions de méthodes qui dans le passe avaient pu être lancées ici et la, de révéler des textes théoriques inconnus ou méconnus susceptibles de nous aider dans élaboration progressive d'un nouvel usage de la critique. La publi cation du texte de J. Honzl «La Mobilité du signe théâtral» constitue une première réponse à ce souci. (5)*

At that time was the only article know in translation about the Circle, and we will have to wait until the 1970s *Les theses du Cercle linguistique de Prague*, the 1970 Vodiča's translation of *Lingüística formal y crítica literaria*, the 1976 compilation by Matejka, Ladislav and Erwin R. Titunik's *Semiotics of Art. Prague School Contributions*, the translation, in 1990, into Spanish of *Drama como literatura* by Jiří Veltrusky, and the done by Eva Hajičová *et al* in 1999, to have a more solid knowledge of the Circle's contribution to semiotics. My contention is that the epistemological and methodological foundations of theatre semiotics was very much developed by the Prague School during the 1930s by scholars such as Petr Bogatyrev (1971, 1976, 1976a), Jindrich Honzl (1971, 1976, 1976a), Jiří Veltrusky (1976, 1976a,1976b, 1989, 1990) and indeed, later, by the seminal article by Tadeusz Kowzan (1968), that is, they introduced the paradigm (in the sense of Thomas Khun, 1970), and what followed in the early 1980s was normal science, that is, the development of those foundations, and that no important breakthrough came afterwards. They did the ground and seminal work, very much as the Russian Formalist did pertaining narrative and poetic analysis.

My intention in this paper is to underline this contribution and the importance that, without any doubt, the Circle would have had if their work could have been known before the advent of the so called School of Paris.

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Patrice Pavis

**Semiology after semiology, or : 'Que reste-t-il de nos amours ?'  
(what remains of our love stories ?')**

I WHY DID SEMIOLOGY MOVE AWAY ?

- 1) reasons for this disaffection
- 2) Historical gap for the study and reception of semiology
- 3) change in the conception and practice of mise en scène

II THE/MY ATTEMPTS TO FORGET SEMIOLOGY

- 1) interpreting mise en scène:
- 2) Energetic theatre (Lyotard)
- 3)Anthropology and the move toward cultural studies and performance studies

III MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

- 1)reasons for change:
- 2)missed meetings
- 3)incompatibility of d semiology with postdramatic –HTL- and with recycling scholars

(EFL)

IV COUNTERATTACKS : NEW CHALLENGES FOR SEMIOLOGY

- 1)performance studies

- 2)intercultural theatre
- 3)new fields and new studies
  - A.Cultural studies
  - B.Visual studies
  - C.Aural studies, sound studies
  - D.Corporal studies, cognitivism
  - E.Spectator

## CONCLUSIONS

- 1)survival of theatre in other fields
  - 2)redefining theatre
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Tomáš Hoskovec

### **Sur l'importance d'un atlas du structuralisme européen classique**

Structuralism is conceived of as a rather unstructured amount of large sets of scholarly works. A very important kind of set is a focus (foyer), a sum of texts which have been produced within and by an intellectual milieu. The texts from one focus are not supposed to use, all of them, one and the same notional apparatus (such a claim would be characteristic of a school, which is a much smaller set of scholarly texts; there may be several schools in one focus). The texts from one focus are supposed to know of one another, to react to one another, to share certain general goals with one another.

In this sense, Prague functional structuralism is a focus, not a school, and the first task of every scholar treating of any aspect of Prague structuralism is to conceive his object within the encompassing philological span, which makes Prague structuralism functionalist (and which allows Mathesius as well as Mukařovský and Havránek to regard linguistics and stylistics as the same scholarly activity, differentiated only by orientation).

Three foci of classical European structuralism are generally recognized: Prague, Copenhagen, Geneva (the last one being particularly interrelated with Paris); several kinds of «diffuse» structuralism may be added: the Netherlands, or Romania, for instance; some cases of individual structuralism should be accepted: Éric Buysens, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, and certainly, Roman Jakobson. A sharp look at each one of the foci and other entities of structuralism (all of them being viewed as sets of texts only) discovers surprising differences.

Take the dichotomy of language and speech. The Praguian functionalist approach leads to quite a different conception if compared with what is encountered in Geneva: instead of an anti-systemic parole as opposed to a fully-systemic langue, there are concrete texts/utterances as ultima ratio

for an inventory of goal-oriented means, which is the language; and although the Copenhagen glossematics calls itself functionalist, too, its opposing a paradigmatic sprog [language] to a syntagmatic tekst [beware of the singular!] has nothing to do with the Praguian, and only little to do with the Genevan conception.

It would be rather naïve to speak about structuralism as such, and very naïve in deed to ask about structurality of structuralism.

Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich  
**The Impact of Prague School Structuralism  
on other Centres of Textual Analysis**

The paper is devoted to an important aspect of the history of science in the field of linguistics and literary studies. It presents a brief survey of some of the structuralist approaches to textual analysis in the main linguistic schools influenced by the Prague School in the 20th century. The 'city tour' starts in Prague and goes on to Copenhagen (Hjelmslev), Paris (Greimas, Todorov, Genette), London (Firth, Halliday), New York (Bloomfield, Chomsky), Lüttich / Liège / Luik (Dubois).

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Veronika Ambros  
**Marionettes and Statues in the Writings of the Prague School**

At the beginning of the twentieth century theatre practitioners like Craig, Maeterlinck, Jarry, Blok, Marinetti, Schlemmer and the Čapek brothers questioned the mimetic, realistic, and naturalistic tradition of theatre by presenting diverse effigies and puppets.

Some of these experiments inspired theorists of the Prague School most prominently Honzl (*Dynamics of Sign in the Theater, The Hierarchy of Dramatic Devices*, 1976), Veltruský (*Man and Object in the Theater*, 1964:83-91), Bogatyrev, Zich and Mukařovský (1978) to several groundbreaking studies, which as I wish to discuss in my contribution served as sources of inspiration for contemporary practice and analysis of theater.

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Andrés Pérez-Simón  
**Stage Figure and 'Anonymous Celebrities'.  
A Look at a Contemporary Adaptation of Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba***

This paper proposes a theoretical and a practical approach to the concept of stage figure (*herecká postava*, literally "figure of the actor"). The first, theoretical section analyzes three historical phases of its development: the first one is Jiri Veltruský's systematization of the concept in Prague, in the early 1940s, revising the term originally coined by Otakar Zich in 1931; the second is Veltruský's late contributions from Paris, approximately from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s; and finally, the third stage I refer to is Michael Quinn's writings from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. After a historical review of the concept, I will devote special attention to Quinn's reflections on how the celebrity status of the actors can determine the production and reception of theatrical art. If, following Veltruský and Quinn, we accept the correlation between Karl Bühler's linguistic functions (expressive, referential, appellative) and the triple nature of the acting sign (actor, stage figure, dramatic character), then what occurs when celebrities are at work is that the expressive function becomes dominant over the referential function, which is usually the main operator in theatrical productions. As Quinn puts it, "The personal, individual qualities of the performer always resist, to some degree, the transformation of the actor into the stage figure required for the communication of a particular fiction."

Taking into account the particular way in which the work of celebrity actors is perceived by their audience, I propose a look at a recent production of Federico García Lorca's *The House of Ber-*

*Bernarda Alba* by the Seville-based theatre group TNT. First premiered in Seville in 2009, and touring Spain with enormous commercial and critical success until today, this new production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* has received the institutional support – via subsidies and artistic prizes – both from the regional government of Andalucía and the Spanish ministry of Culture, as well as from different offices of the European Union. After examining dozens of the press reviews of this TNT production, a recurrent idea seems central to most, if not all, of the reviews of this production. This is the notion that TNT's *Bernarda Alba* is the "real" *Bernarda Alba* that was "dreamed by Lorca," as if Lorca's female characters had finally found their author after seventy years of worldwide adaptations. What singularizes this particular production is the fact that eight of the nine actresses in the play are gipsy women from a marginal area in Seville, women with no artistic experience whatsoever and who, in at least four cases, are illiterate – they cannot read Lorca's text. To explain the unanimous praise of the "authenticity" of this theatrical production, I have coined the term "anonymous celebrity," for it entails what I perceive as a paradox operating behind this TNT production. On the one hand, the women brought to the stage represent anonymous people condemned to living in the margins of society – no apparent risk of celebrities conditioning the authorial or directorial plans at all. On the other hand, however, in this production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* the movement from actress to stage figure is frequently blocked by numerous elements of pragmatic (and therefore, extratextual) nature. Three of these aspects are the constant improvisation, something due to the lack of acting training and, in some cases, the absence of a written text to declaim; the presence of pseudo-spontaneous singing and dancing in detriment of the dramatic action; and the fact that the plot of Lorca's play is perfectly known by the Spanish spectators, who thus focus their attention on the part of 'reality' of the actresses (from accents and mispronunciation of words to their bodies and clothes) instead of interpreting their work as the path towards a successful construction of a fictional character.

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Yana Meerzon, Ph.D.

**Concretization-transduction-adaptation. On Prague School Legacy in Theatre Studies Today**

In his 1963 article "The Translation of Verbal Art", Jiří Levý engages with the task to theorize the mechanisms of translation as they exist in verbal art. Levý stresses the complex task of translator as a receiver of the original document and as a creator of its new textual concretization (the text of a translation) in another language. He underlines the importance of the primary activity of a translator as a receiver of the original text and only then as an artist/translator; an adaptor of the original text to the needs of its new linguistic environment and thus its new target audiences. Levý constructs his theory of translation in dialogue with Felix Vodička's study "The Concretization of the Literary Work". Similarly to Vodička, Levý proposes to take the concept of concretization as the active involvement of the perceiver-reader or the perceiver-artist in the act of reading, interpretation and creative engagement with the original, but he opts to "operate with a more limited definition of the concept" than that of Vodička. Levý proposes to "define a theatrical performance as the realization of a dramatic text through the medium of the theater; a translation as a realization of a work in a new language; and a critical evaluation as an interpretation" (222). Following this analogy, I propose to define the process of adaptation – another form of concretization of the material – as a realization of an original work either within the new performative medium: *intermedial adaptation*, or within the same performative medium: *in-tramedial adaptation*, as a realization (actualization or concretization) of an original work within



the same media and the new artistic, linguistic and socio-cultural circumstances of the target audience, the audience of the adaptation. This presentation, therefore, proposes to begin the process of refocusing adaptation studies from its emphasis on the Original Text versus Adaptation TEXT binary to more dynamic formula *Original = adaptor/receiver activity = adaptation*. It aims to study the figure of the adaptor/receiver and his/her cognitive and artistic activities, as well as to re-examine the methodological and artistic mechanisms found in the adaptation as the process of concretization.

This presentation, therefore, will investigate whether the term "concretization" (as an umbrella concept) can be used to identify the methodological issues of adaptation as textual mutation, an example of one particular process of adaptation – text-to-text, play-to-play – marking the artistic search in today's dramatic writing?

It will unfold in three sections: 1) intramedial adaptation – concretization as the activity of playwrights/adaptors of the original texts, creating new dramatic texts based on the original texts; 2) intermedial adaptation (only in application to theatre practices) – concretization as the activity of the directors, dramaturges and actors, as various practices of collective creation that uses literary works as the point of departure to create their own narratives); 3) audience reception - concretization as the process of reception that unfolds within the minds of the spectators.

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Eva Šlaisová

**Aktualisace in English Scholarly Literature: Interpretation, Ignorance,  
and Misunderstanding**

*Aktualisace*, one of the key terms of the Prague Structuralists, has received varying levels of attention and appreciation in contemporary English scholarly literature. It has tended to be overshadowed by its more famous "brothers," *ostranenie* and *Verfremdung*, and some scholars have failed to take notice of it at all. However, for a growing number of scholars, *aktualisace* has become a popular concept and a central notion in contemporary literary theory and related disciplines. Since 1932, the term has moved from its original field of linguistics to the fields of literature, film, theatre, pedagogy, and psychology, to name a few, and from the Czech context to an international one. During this journey, the understanding of the original concept has changed. This presentation will focus on the problems which have arisen over the course of this journey in terms of its origin and meaning, translation of the term, and its relation to *ostranenie* and *Verfremdung*.

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**Materials for working discussions:**

Samples of English translations of Czech Structuralistic Theory

Three versions of structure of *Prague Semiotic Stage Reader*

Paper on Czech (Theatre) Structuralism

Walter Pucher: Czech Theatre Semiotics as starting point for theatre theory in the 20th century, in: Ad honorem Eva Stehlíková, Filosofický ústav AVČR, Prague 2011

## LITTLE THEATRE OF KYOGEN

(web <http://mdk.webgarden.cz/>)

is one of the few theatrical groups who decided to present the traditional Japanese farces – kyogen – to a non-Japanese audience. Their motto, taken from Zeami Motokijo, is “to surprise the eyes, please the ears, and touch the soul”. In the original, “kyogen” means “foolish words”; it used to be an intermezzo in the Nô performance, a humorous, satiric, farce-like short story with a strong punchline. The oldest farces date back to the 13th century, their boom then came in the middle of 14th cent.

Kyogen is a stylized, anti-illusionary form of theatre, set in an empty space with the use of a few props (the most frequent and multifunctional being the fan). Its acting technique is characteristic of a set of (strict) rules; only a slight change of gesture and sound means the difference between laugh and cry. Thus, the actors frequently call for the audience’s fantasy to assign the correct meaning to its sign.

**Little Theatre of Kyogen** was established 2001 due to Hubert Krejčí (playwright, director, and mime), master Shigeyama Shime (the leading representative of Kyoto school Okura), and Ondřej Hýbl (translator, actor, and producer). At the moment, the group is formed by ten (male) performers.

During the summer, either the Czech performers travel to Japan or the Japanese actors from the Shime family visit the Czech Republic to rehearse one new kyogen (in the form of an open workshop). Each text is translated from Japanese by Ondřej Hýbl and edited by the performers; only the onomatopoeia (and songs) are kept in the original language, the rest is in Czech. The groups offers seven kyogens and one stage adaptation of a Chinese fairytale (performed in the Nô style).

Brief summary of the kyogens you are going to see:

### Bō Shibari (Tied to a Stick)

Shite	Tarō Kaja
Ado	Master
Koado	Jirō Kaja

Tarō Kaja and Jirō Kaja are great saké lovers and their Master has heard that they always steal his *saké* and get drunk when he is away from the house. He has hit upon a plan to prevent their getting to the *saké* this time. He calls Jirō Kaja and asks for his cooperation in tricking Tarō Kaja and tying him to a pole. Jirō Kaja reluctantly agrees and they call Tarō Kaja and ask him to demonstrate the use of the pole in self-defense. He is very proud of his ability in this art and while he is completely absorbed in his demonstration, they catch his hands and tie them to the pole across the back of his neck. Jirō Kaja is enjoying Tarō Kaja’s plight when the Master sneaks up behind him and ties his



hands behind his back. He goes out on some business or other.

The two servants immediately guess the reason why they have been tricked. Tied up in this manner, they find they are even thirstier than usual, and decide to go to the *saké* cellar and at least smell the *saké*. This makes them still thirstier. Tarō Kaja hits upon an idea, gets a huge saké cup and ladles some saké out, tries to drink it, but since he can't get it to his mouth, holds it for Jirō Kaja to drink. When it comes Tarō Kaja's turn to drink, he ladles the *saké*, then puts the full cup in Jirō Kaja's hands (which are tied behind his back), gets down on his knees and drinks.

They get very drunk and are singing and dancing when the Master comes home. He comes up behind them and they see his reflection in the saké cup on the floor between them. Thinking it is a hallucination, they make up an insulting song about the Master.

The Master chases Tarō Kaja off in a rage, then threatens to beat Jirō Kaja, but Jirō Kaja gets loose and chases the Master off with his stick.

### Hone Kawa (Bones and Skin)

Shite	Acolyte
Ado	Head Priest
Koado	Man I
Third Ado	Man II
Fourth Ado	Man III

The Head Priest calls the Acolyte and informs him that beginning today he will be the new head priest. The Head Priest himself will retire, but will stay in the temple and will be happy to give advice at any time. The Acolyte is very happy about his promotion, and is very anxious to make a good impression.



Before long a Man comes asking to borrow an umbrella. The Acolyte loans him the best umbrella in the temple. He goes to tell the Head Priest what he has done, expecting to be praised, but instead is scolded. The Head Priest tells him that next time someone comes borrowing such things, he should tell them that the old priest had taken it out in the rain, and it was blown to pieces, the skin torn from the bones, so that they tied it together and hung it up in the loft, therefore it is now quite useless.

Next a Man comes asking to borrow a horse to which the Acolyte replies exactly as he has been told. That is, the horse was taken out in the rain where it was blown to pieces by the wind, skin from bones, so they tied it together and strung it up in the loft. The Acolyte tells the Head Priest what he has done and this time he is told that he should have said that they had put it out to pasture where it went crazy and lost the use of its legs, so they tied it in the corner of the stable.

Next a Man comes asking the Acolyte and the Head Priest to come to dinner at his house the next day. The Acolyte replies that he will gladly accept the invitation, but that the old Head Priest was put out to pasture where he went crazy and lost the use of his legs, so they tied him in the corner of the stable.

He again goes to tell the Head Priest what he has done. The Head Priest gets very angry, throws him down, beats him, and chases him off.