

Chapter 10

The 'Change in the Spirit of the Times' and the Decline of the Old World: A Czech Point of View*

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A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien . . .

Guillaume Apollinaire

If it were not for Central Europe, we would have to make it up.

1. Imaginary Space

The topic of this symposium is changes of regions, in particular in reference to the space called Central Europe (East Central Europe, *Ostmitteleuropa*, etc.). A description of its transformations takes us back to the moments of discontinuity, to the ruptures in time which open at discursive thresholds. In the situations of merging and pervasion of discourses, we analyse events in which utterances of various kinds meet: the intellectual space which we are entering is heterogeneous, disconnected and changing in time. Rather than a specific geographical

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place, Central Europe has been referred to as an imaginary space,¹ a space of variable area.² In the period between the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this space was revisited as a space of tension between the old world of the nineteenth century and the presence shaped by the experience of different temporality—or by the declared presence of a new time-form. At the same time it is the period in which the history of the concept of Central Europe intersects the paths of the so-called long modernity.³ Both questions, that is the temporal, when defining modernity by means of its radical focus on the present, and the spatial, related to the specificity and social-historical localisation of the modernist project, found a response before the Great War. This was later more or less realised during the twentieth century, including the extremes: on the one hand, there was the Avant-garde program of the end of art (specification, narrowing down of the function of art replacing the pan-aestheticism of the *fin-de-siècle*), and, on the other, the substitution of the old centre of the Habsburg Monarchy with its integrative role by the new urban centres of surrounding nation states. The period around 1910 witnessed a radical change in the experience of time lived, of the public space in which this change takes place and also of the agent reflecting this change.

In contrast to the history of art, architecture, music and general history from the 1980s,⁴ for Czech literary historiography neither the history of long modernity, nor the history of the concept of Central Europe seems to have created a substantial context.⁵ Causes of this are

¹ Cf. a comparative history of modern Central European architecture by Ákos Moravánszky (1998) that references Péter Hanák's concept of Central Europe.

² 'Ein Raum mit variablen Ausdehnungen' (Le Rider 1994: 7).

³ For the history of the category of Central Europe, see, for example, J. Le Rider's study (1994); for the literary historical conception of long modernity, see works by Silvio Vietta (1992; also Vietta and Kemper 1998) and H. R. Jauß (1990 *a, b*).

⁴ Cf. the studies by Otto Urban, Jiří Kořalka, Miroslav Hroch and Jan Křen—most recently his synthetic history of Central Europe (Křen 2005).

⁵ Also for the reason that—if we leave aside methodological, ideological, political, etc. reasons—the problem of the relationship between Czech and German literature in the Czech lands has yet to interest *Czech* historians of Czech literature. In this respect, Růžena Grebeníčková's articles are exceptional. She analyzed some problems of Czech literature consequently within the context of Central European literature (for example changes of *fin-de-siècle* novel—Viktor Dyk's novel *Konec Hackenschmidův* [Hackenschmid's End] or genre characterisation of Jaroslav Hašek's novel *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* [The Fortunes of the Good Soldier Švejk in the World War]). However, referencing Pavel Trost's linguistic analysis, she paid major attention to general questions of, for

rooted in the tradition of Czech literary historiography with its dominant frame of reference in the national culture. However, this aspect may be secondary, derived from a more important historical moment, that is, from the foundations and forming of the modernist debate in Czech culture of the nineteenth century, in short, from its specificity. It is at the same time crucial what period of intellectual history is discussed—some period landmarks become meaningful only in reference to longer periods or more general concepts.⁶ The second half of this paper uses several examples to exemplify a change which took place in Czech literature around 1910 as well as elsewhere in Europe. It is possible to characterise this change as a transformation of modernist time and space following a re-evaluation of relationships between the local culture in its national conception to its contexts. First, however, the specificity of this transformation within the situation of contemporary Central European modernism is discussed.

2. The Transformation of Modern Space

The above-mentioned transformation was anticipated by the famous scene of Eduard Munch's *Skrik* [The Scream] (1893)—more specifically, however, by the motto of Franz Kafka's *Beschreibung eines Kampfes* [Description of a Struggle], which most likely found its inspiration at Munch's Prague 1905 exhibition: 'Und die Menschen gehn in Kleidern / Schwankend auf dem Kies spazieren / Unter diesem großen Himmel, / Der von Hügeln in der Ferne / sich zu fernen Hügeln breitet.'⁷ At the time, perhaps in the same year when the special theory of relativity was presented, Kafka's five-line verse opens up an immense sky under which promenading people bend down as if plodding through sand. The expressivity of coloured planes in Munch's diagonal composition executes a metamorphosis of romantic-symbolist topics of the nothingness of the

example, narratology, genology or literary theory as such. Questions of literary history are in her work more or less glossed.

⁶ Cf. Dirk Kemper's article 'Ästhetische Moderne als Makroepoche' (Vietta and Kemper 1998: 97–126), in which Kemper uses Fernand Braudel's works about the periodisation of French social history (definition of 'temps court', 'conjoncture' and 'longue durée'—see Braudel 1977).

⁷ Mark Anderson offers a new, precise, English translation: 'And people stroll about in clothes / Swaying on the gravel pathways / Under this enormous sky / Stretching out from hills to hills / Far in the distance' (Anderson 1992: 37).

self, of the terrified outcry of the individual facing the enormity of nature, of the mad fear of life and dying as a convulsive infernal forerunning of global disaster (Hofmann 1991: 155) into a metaphorical expression of unmotivated anxiety.⁸ In a compatible fashion Kafka's verses, in a lilting allusion to Hofmannsthal's lyricism, thematise, by a freeing up of objectivity, the nausea—the anxiety of human flux in the system of traffic (*Verkehr*) under the infinite sky (Anderson 1992: 37). A man, characterised by the traffic of social space, loses firm ground under his feet; he is seasick on land, shattered, paradoxically speaking, in the opening rupture between a narrowing-down space of consciousness and the realm of a psychopathological dream (of an alternate reality).

In the first decade of the twentieth century the space of the old world collapsed—the space represented by Newtonian physics and also the social space guided by *sensus communis*, scholarship, Euclidean geometry (logic), classical perspective: 'Euclidean and perspectivist space have disappeared as systems of reference, along with other former "commonplaces" such as the town, history, paternity, the tonal system in music, traditional morality, and so forth' (Lefébvre 1991: 25).⁹ The young Hermann Broch, in notes from the years 1908–9, captured the culturally pessimistic view of this moment:

Diese Kultur hat eine geographische Mission gehabt, und die ist nun erfüllt. Sie mußte, um diesen Endzweck zu erreichen, die ganze Ökonomie des Naturgeschehens anwenden, nur das Parallele zur Entfaltung bringen und alles Überflüssige unterdrücken. . . . Der Geist dieser Kultur hat sich seit ihrer Mündigkeit nicht vertieft . . . , doch der Fortschritt an räumlicher

⁸ The journal of Czech decadence, *Moderní revue* [The Modern Review] (vol. 5, 1896/97, p. 165), reproduced in the mid-1890s a lithograph of *Skrik* [The Scream] together with Munch's commentary: 'I stopped, leaned against the balustrade, tired to death. Over the blue-black fiord, clouds were hanging, red as blood and fiery tongues. My friends moved on, and I, alone, trembling in anxiety, realised a great, infinite scream of nature.'

⁹ Scott Spector makes reference to this 'annihilation' of the old concept of space in his analysis of the territorial situatedness (territory in the wide sense of the localisation of cultural and linguistics concepts of self-definition) of writers of the so-called Prague circle determining their subversive strategy of evasion across the contemporary competing cultural identities (above all Czech and German nationalism, Zionism etc., cf. Spector 2000). At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, however, even in the upcoming generation of Czech modernists we note an effort to disrupt or subvert the frames of cultural identity as it was—although controversially—still maintained by the preceding generation.

weißer Zivilisation ist ein ungeheurer gewesen. Wir stehen im Zeitalter des Verkehrs; das ist die Climax. Die Pole sind entdeckt. Das ist der Schlußpunkt. Und da die Natur keine Ecken und Spitzen kennt, ist auch dieser Gipfel zwiefach und durch Zweifel unser (Broch 1977a: 11).

In this view we have only to devote our attention to the details between both poles. Transportation and traffic—for contemporaries a sign of a new era—the memoirist Stefan Zweig characterised *Die Welt von Gestern* [The World of Yesterday] as a world of certainty that contrasted sharply with the situation brought on by the Great War. In the old world it was possible to travel around Europe comfortably and without difficulty, without having to face the impediments of border. It was an 'ordered world, clearly stratified, with only moderate transitions, an unhurried world. The rhythm of new speeds—cars, phones, radios, planes—had not affected man; time and the age had a different dimension' (Zweig [1942] 1994: 30). At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the world was opened wide: distances shortened, the public space of exchange, traffic-flow and transportation shaped new actors.

French and Italian Avant-garde movements radically renounced the old world and in an almost revolutionary manner dashed into the contingent simultaneous reality of the city, transforming it into an aesthetic cityscape, 'resurrected' every day in the loud singing of boulevards, prospects, posters, and catalogues. Its prosaic counterpart is represented by newspapers, cheap paperbacks, and by images of always new stars. In contrast to Baudelaire's Paris (the capital city of the nineteenth century, in which alienation as well as Spleen are evocative of an artificial Paradise), Apollinaire's kaleidoscopic and dialectic image of the city, by means of dialogically constructed aesthetic object, opens the way to a return of the overthrown world not so much as history but rather as myth (exile from paradise, the Tower of Babylon, prophecy, Lazar, etc.): 'Das unbegründbare neue Vertrauen auf Schönheit und Glück einer erst anhebenden, modernen Welt scheint im orphischen Dichtermýthos Apollinaires zu gründen . . .' (Jauß 1990b: 219). The new model of the flâneur offsets the experience of the fragmentation of the self in time and space through the euphoric feeling of existence in an anonymous crowd (ibid.: 220).

In the modernist movements in Vienna and Prague, despite their continued aesthetic orientation toward Parisian centre, also different

aspects of the changing perception of reality are emphasised at the start of the twentieth century: its constructed nature, its conditional character, its localisation, its contingency. In the protagonists of his two plays from 1911 (*Das Weite Land* [The Vast Domain]) and 1912 (*Professor Bernhardt*), Arthur Schnitzler created two opposite poles illustrating the possibilities for engagement in the new public environment: a monstrous man-function who dominates and controls his surroundings, manipulates social space as an extension of his abilities (Hofreither in *Das Weite Land*), as opposed to a man for whom these surroundings make it impossible to submit to general opinions and friendly advice, whose self is—in an unreflected way—always ill at ease and out of touch with his surroundings, which destroy the self and its achievements (Professor Bernhardt). Kafka's *Betrachtung* [Contemplation] (1912) realises the metamorphosis of the flâneur into a traveller for whom time has stopped amidst the flow of the city's movement *Der Fahrgast* [The Passenger]; his passive and 'indefensible' viewpoint characterises a feeling of superfluosity: 'In this world of flux the only support for the indifferent narrator may be the Schlinge, an instrument of suicide' (Anderson 1992: 36). At the end of the war Hermann Broch used the results of the fragmentation of empirical experience and awareness of its re-invention in his 'philosophy of values', in his criticism of modern conditionality of social and individual existence based on a shared truth-value determining the possibilities of action. He demonstrated his theses in the relationship of the modern to visual representation that leads, through the 'dissolution of the object', to the creation of a purely visual, autonomous reality:

Die Moderne hat das Ding aufgelöst. Ihre Wertwirklichkeit kennt das Ding nicht als Objekt. Nichtsdestoweniger ist es vorhanden. Ist biologisch vorhanden in den seienden Menschenkörpern, ist biologisch und sozial vorhanden im Dasein seiner natürlichen und zivilisierten Umwelt. Aus dieser Antinomie ergibt sich die Leistung und der Fluch der Moderne (Broch 1977b: 76–7).

In his 1923 essay *Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom* [The German Man As Symptom], which is a critical summing up of the spirit of European civilisation (the crisis of nascent pluralism), Robert Musil postulates theorems of the so-called formlessness (shapelessness—*Gestaltslosigkeit*) and of a profaned religiosity, which were later used in *Der Mann ohne*

Eigenschaften [Man Without Qualities]. In ironic glosses on the concept of the fall of European history (Spengler), he makes reference to the constructedness of historical and anthropological categories, and he attempts to establish a frame for knowledge of transpersonal forms of social engagements: 'Was sich geändert hat und als Unterschied der Zeiten zu Bewußtsein kommt, scheinen also weniger die Menschen zu sein als die unpersönlichsten (oder überpersönlichsten) Produkte ihres gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens . . .' (Musil 1967: 20). He compares positivistic historical causalities that consider man to be determined by racial crossbreeding or a unique example of epochs and cultures to the national principle of old Austria, that is, to the 'extended perfunctoriness' (*das Fortwursteln*). He illustrates his concept of historical processes on the basis of two spatial-kinetic comparisons:

. . . der Weg der Geschichte ist eben nicht der eines Billiardballs, der abgestoßen, eine bestimmte Bahn durchläuft, sondern er ähnelt dem Weg der Wolken, der zwar auch nach Gesetzen der Physik verläuft, aber ebenso sehr als durch diese beeinflusst wird von etwa, das man wohl nur ein Zusammentreffen von Tatsachen nennen kann . . . ; denn überall bläst der Wind von Ost nach West, weil im Osten ein Maximum, im Westen ein Minimum des Luftdrucks sich findet, aber daß ein Ort zwischen beiden liegt, daß kein Bergstock in der Nähe die richtung umlenkt oder sonst konkurrierende Einflüsse sich geltend machen, alle diese Umstände, welche das Wetter bilden, selbst wenn sie sich berechnen lassen, sind in ihrem Zusammentreffen ja eigentlich tatsachen und nicht Gesetze . . . Ebenso ist es, wenn ein Mensch durch Gassen streicht, und hier vom Schatten, dort von einer Gruppe, weiterhin von einer seltsamen Verschneidung der Fronten angezogen wird, wenn ein anderer Mensch 'zufällig' seinen Weg kreuzt und ihm etwas mitteilt, was ihn sich für einen bestimmten Weg entscheiden läßt—und er findet sich schließlich an einem Punkt, den er weder kennt, noch erreichen wollte, so geschieht auch jeder Schritt dieses Wegs mit Notwendigkeit, aber die Aufeinanderfolge dieser Einzelnotwendigkeit ist ohne Zusammenhang. Daß ich plötzlich da stehe, wo ich bin, ist eine Tatsache, ein Ergebnis und wenn man es notwendig nennt, weil schließlich alles seine Ursachen hat, so trägt dies den Charakter einer Verwahrung im namen der Kausalität, aber sie ist recht unnütz, weil wir sie niemals einlesen werden (Musil 1967: 22–3).

According to Musil, the modern European question is not 'who am I' but 'where am I?' It is also not a matter of a phase in a process

conforming to certain laws, nor a question of fate, but rather of situation and situatedness—true laws then cannot be changed, but the situations in this sense can. One could then consider the polarity of Schnitzler's *dramatis personae* as some sort of duality of shapelessness (Schnitzler speaks of a 'man without a core').¹⁰

The question of situatedness in a more narrow sense had been raised in parallel and already long before in the context of a debate about the uniqueness of space in the Habsburg Monarchy. The characterisation here was not in terms of a world of certainty, as S. Zweig remembered, but a world under threat, precariously balanced, in tension, before the fall. Already during the first decade of the twentieth century, Hermann Bahr initiated a debate about the transformation of space in the Danube monarchy and its future prospects by asserting the inability to maintain the situation at the time in the monarchy which was being held together only by the inertia of a centralised bureaucracy. Long before there began a discussion the concept of *Mitteleuropa* (in connection with Friedrich Naumann's 1915 suggested Pan-German proposal for a definition of war aims), Bahr advocated a new democratising role for Central European space that would derive from the coexistence of national groupings in the monarchy. In the preface to the Czech edition of his 1912 book *Austriaca*, he suggests a search for a 'higher form of democracy' by recognising the constitutional demands of individual national groups: 'Whoever considers Austria from the outside must believe that this random mix of nationalities will rip itself apart at the first strong shock. And the Austrian nations act as if they also believed this' (Bahr 1912: 1). Bahr turns to the Czechs, affirming their claims as well as the claims of the South Slavs. In an attempt to gain support for the idea of a nationally proportional democracy for a future of the 'United States of Europe', he declares resolutely that Austria is a Slavonic Empire, a fact that 'the Germans from the Austrian Alps accepted long ago' (ibid.: 43). He claims 'We must learn to want Austria. We must learn to achieve common agreement' (ibid.: 21). Just as in an earlier reflection on the possible future cultural

¹⁰ We can relate to the concept of 'Gestaltslosigkeit' and its Austrian (that is Central European) assumptions also Jaroslav Hašek's hero as a foil of situations of a novel as a digressive system (*The Fortunes of the Good Soldier Švejk in the World War*), as well as the grotesque deconstruction of the categories of power, competence and authority that Ladislav Klíma carried out in *Utrpení knížete Sternenhocha* [The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch].

role of Vienna in a situation where 'Prague and Pest hold the floor', he links this future with the future of an Austria that is not governed by one 'group of families', that has a universal electoral system, that has the 'soul' of a democracy (Bahr 1911: 88).¹¹ It must be added here that, despite all the criticism of Austrian bureaucracy and the dualist principle, most educated Czechs (including, for example, O. Theer, who will be discussed in fuller detail later) before the war supported the idea of the Austrian multinational monarchy as a guarantee of the European balance of power—evidence of this is found in the failure of the radical constitutional party in the 1912 elections to the imperial assembly.

3. Prague and the Explosion in the Garden of Knowledge

During the first decade of the twentieth century and before World War I, the relations between Czech modernists and the closest modernist centre, Vienna, also began to change. However much the early modern period of the end of the nineteenth century tried to free itself—in literature and in art—from criteria defined by Czech nationalist ideology, it was just this framing of demands for authenticity in the sense of Czechness that frequently stirred up the endless polemical battles between the old and the

¹¹ Bahr's book about Vienna was, characteristically, dedicated to Josef Redlich, a prominent member of the parliament and the main ally of T. G. Masaryk in his political struggle after he entered Austrian politics the second time, who in the same fashion understood the importance of constitutional recognition of the nations in the monarchy.

During the war and in the 1920s, Central European thought was intensively studied by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. He developed the idea of a German-speaking Central European empire linking the nations along the Danube—for him, the Habsburg monarchy was, thanks to its links with Italy and the Mediterranean, the direct heir of the Roman Empire. It played a key role as a middleman in the center of Europe and a counterweight against Russia: the Austrian idea founded on the concept of balance and mediation between Latin-German and Slavonic civilisations, which was dismissed by Europeans in the years 1848–1918, is an idea based on reconciliation, synthesis, and the overcoming of conflicts. Between 1914 and 1919, Hofmannsthal pleaded for an Austrian identity in portrait studies of Maria Theresia and Prince Eugene, Grillparzer, and the Viennese dramatic tradition and in essays about Europe, for example 'Boykott fremder Sprachen?' [Boykott of Foreign Languages] (1914) and 'Die Idee Europa' [The Idea of Europe] (1917). In contrast to T. Mann, who turned away from British and French civilisation in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* [Reflections of an Unpolitical Man], Hofmannsthal expressed a growing antipathy toward Germany in his resistance to militaristic conformism and chauvinism. Cf. Le Rider (1994: 60–1).

young, the radicals and the moderates. The radical experiment of the symbolist-decadent current in Czech modernism was inspired, just as elsewhere in Europe, by the French model—Vienna was, in the 1890s, renounced as a centre mostly for political reasons given the atmosphere of growing tensions between Czech and the ever-stronger pan-Germanic nationalism.¹²

In the 1890s, the national question—co-determinate with the problem of the identity of the modern individual—was being formulated as a question of the non-self-evidence of the identification of the modern creator with the whole, with its historicising ideology. Just as in Vienna,¹³ the modern self-identity was ‘dissolved’ (Ernst Mach; in Bahr’s interpretation ‘das unrettbare Ich’) in sense impressions on the one hand, in social and psychological constructs on the other. The decadent experiment presenting the Protean, always changing face of a stylised Self found its referent in the national question: ‘No Czech Decadent has cures, not even for his self-searching, and he might well find the reasons for his particularly strong awareness of the surrounding decay in his Czechness’ (Pynsent 1994: 147). Czechness is represented by futility, a lost way (of the Spirit), by inter-status—a typical ‘temporary’ (transitional) state; it is a symbol of fading, unfulfilled unity. Nonetheless, it is an important enough referential frame that it mediates, as if incidentally, the ironic reaction of Czech modernists to the creation of Viennese modernism: F. X. Šalda, the

¹² Cultural relations with Vienna were mostly determined by contacts in the older generation that were mediated by Eduard Albert, a prominent doctor, a professor at the University of Vienna, a politician, and a translator of Czech literature. In the 1890s, when J. S. Machar published a collection of social and political poetry with the significant title *Tristium Windobona I–XX* (1893), Hermann Bahr, with Masaryk’s help, attempted in *Die Zeit* to initiate systematic collaboration with the Prague modern school and asked F. V. Krejčí, as a representative of the young generation of critics to become a regular contributor. The battles of Czech modernism thus found their way into the context of international modernist workshop (*The Modern Review*, in a similar way, collaborated with Stanisław Przybyszewski). In the nineteenth century, the relationship of Czech writers residing in Vienna to the city was determined by a feeling of extinction, rootlessness, insecurity of existence, longing for home lost. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century this started to change among the debuting generation of writers, who ‘already felt themselves here at home, no longer felt the lack of “native ground under their feet”, and, subsequently, emancipated themselves from a self-pitying distance toward the hateful “malicious” or “unkind” city’ (Černý 2004: 486).

¹³ Cf. Pynsent’s comparison of the situation described in Schorske’s *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* and Prague (Pynsent 1994: 102).

leading figure of Czech criticism, condemned, polemically and sarcastically, Schnitzler's Anatol with reference to its mediocrity, philistinism, and the author's temporal and spatial limitedness: 'It has nothing but that local Viennese character' (Šalda 1951: 84–5). In contrast, a nuanced ironic reception of the Anatolian theme and Hofmannsthal's (Loris') preface to the novel (1892) characterised some motifs of Karel Hlaváček's *Mstivá kantiléna* [The Vengeful Cantilena] (1898).¹⁴

C. E. Schorske described the transformation of the 'garden of knowledge' as a development of the concept of *Bildung* (culture—cultivatedness, rather than education) during the second half of the nineteenth century in Austrian literature, culminating in Hofmannsthal's, Schnitzler's and Andrian's stylised utopia of a split narcissistic image of subjective and objective reality. Referencing Schorske's thesis, it is possible to claim that the nonintersecting activity or indifferent parallelism of Czech modernism in relation to its Viennese contemporaries is tied to the founding of the modernist project in Czech culture.

The actualisation of modernism in Czech society and culture is connected with Tomáš G. Masaryk's initiative in the 1880s: the introduction of the problem of a general spiritual crisis, an analysis of it and a proposal for resolving it in a historicising understanding of humanity. This is the same as his systematic re-examination of contemporary Czech education (*Bildung*) and his ideas for reforming it. Both were reactions to questions being discussed in all of Europe, and both strive for reflection in the foundations of the nineteenth century as formulated in the Enlightenment, which enabled Czech society to see its limitations: here freedom and the indispensability of knowledge represent moral necessity. Masaryk's launching of the modernist debate profiled first, its polemical nature breaking through the status quo. This was a new type of criticism that aimed to verify and re-evaluate the horizon of the immediate present, that is, even of any competing modernity; a corrective to any radical, polemical criticism directed at the present moment was a creatively understood historicism in the sense of a historically grounded and scientific re-investigation of tradition. Additionally, he examined its political nature, which included four questions—religious, national, social, and the women's question (a struggle for social, political and cultural

¹⁴ Cf. Pynsent (1994: 127).

/self /recognition of women and a reevaluation of gendered roles in modern society); no further activity that manifested itself as modern could avoid them. These arise in mutual correlation, in the frame of which individual components are differently profiled. From the 1880s, as this framework transformed, various types of aestheticism took shape. Although aestheticism constitutes the meaning of art as a dominating principle of *Bildung*, it does not dismiss any of the accessory referents. On the contrary, it aestheticizes them.

It is possible to say that the modernist intellectual movement in the Czech lands lived and, around 1910, transformed itself together with the original ideas:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Czech culture created an alternative to nationalist politics. Albeit in a modified, assimilated form, Masaryk's 'ideals for mankind' had taken root. With the increasing influence of culture in daily life, militant nationalism gradually faded almost completely away in the face of the desire to ensure active Czech participation in the construction of the modern world in Europe (Wittlich 1999: 20).

Discussion of modern art, the growing permeability of Czech and world art (roughly in the sense of Šalda's thesis: be world-class and the Czechness will take care of itself) also made possible a new exchange of art and ideas in the confines of Austria-Hungary: 'Modern Czech artists were able to appreciate Viennese art, which had been the object of sharp prejudice during the nineteenth century' (ibid.: 22). Given the so-called pax Koerberiana and the quieting of the political tension between Prague and Vienna,¹⁵ developing contacts between Czech and Viennese *Art Nouveau* (Jan Kotěra and his students, S. V. U. Mánes), special issues of Viennese journal *Der Merker* devoted to Czech art and music, the lively reception of Karl Kraus' and Richard Dehmel's appearances in Prague, Mahler's and Brod's initiative to bring Czech music to Vienna, etc., all meant that the tension between Prague and Vienna, escalating at the end of the century after the December riots of 1897, ceased, in the new

¹⁵ The beginning of the century brought, in addition to the naming of Jaroslav Vrchlický and Antonín Dvořák to the Upper House, Masaryk's second entry into politics as imperial politics and his engagement in the Austrian questions (the experience of the Hilsner affair was useful for him in the Zagreb show trial).

century (which in Austrian politics after the 1908 elections shifted to the Social Democrats), its old role.

The *Bildung* project of Czech modernism, whose target in Masaryk's criticism and politics was fundamentally Central European, was reinforced by the aesthetic idea of the growth of an individualised (i.e. differentiated) cultural unit, and therefore amplified the efforts of Palacký (and in this sense it is also possible in the Czech context to speak of 'long modernity'). It began clearly, in the 1900s, to be permeated with Central European modernism. At the same time, it came into contact with a pluralistic expression of the new consciousness of an open world in both senses (see the second part of this chapter), represented on the one hand by the French and Italian avant-gardes and on the other by an alternative modernism oriented towards expressionism. This process, which Carl E. Schorske described as an 'explosion in the garden', can be demonstrated in Czech literature in the works of the so-called generation of the *Almanach na rok 1914* [Almanac for the Year 1914]. I have selected two examples: *Krakonošova zahrada* [The Garden of Krakonoš] by the brothers Čapek; and the transformation of reflexive perspective in the lyrics of Otakar Theer, where the change I have described—the struggle and tension between the old and new world—can clearly be seen.¹⁶

4. New Forms of Reality—A Change in the Conditions of Modernity

In 1912, in the second year of the journal *Umělecký měsíčník* [Artistic Monthly], founded by an original faction of the young artists from the Mánes group which had broken away and taken the name 'Skupina výtvarných umělců' [Group of Graphic Artists], the young philosopher Rudolf Procházka began to publish the article whose title is paraphrased in the title of the present paper (Procházka 1912/14).¹⁷ It included a

¹⁶ A consideration of these contexts also offers an alternative to the dominant interpretation of the Czech pre-war literary generation as the 'birth of modernism', inspired by civilism and Bergsonian vitalism (Strohsová 1963), or at least supplements that interpretation.

¹⁷ Procházka was an interpreter of the philosophy of H. Bergson and of contemporary German neo-idealist currents in the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*). A short time later, in basic agreement with the majority opinion of German and French intellectuals, he tended towards the conception of the war as an exit from the crisis of decadent civilisation, like an instinctive purification and an influx of 'everything young and strong' (in the text

thematization of one of the fundamental bases of philosophy throughout the period of early modernism: *Lebensphilosophie* and its central motive of the tension or discord in life.¹⁸ Procházka sets out from an interpretation of contemporary philosophy and psychology and builds up an analytical starting point, permeated by a rejection of the positive natural-scientific model of cognition,¹⁹ all the more radical when considering, only a few years earlier, the currents of Symbolism and Decadence at the start of the century had done no more than to put the question ironically, pointing to the inadequacies and doubtfulness of the instruments of modern knowledge. At the same time, the emphasis is placed here on the optimistic qualities of the contemporary situation, when looked at in the long term: ‘The world cannot be interpreted according to a single principle, or a single mechanism. Experience does not show us only connectedness and unity, but also disconnectedness and disunity. The world is not yet ready, it is not closed, dead’ (Procházka 1912/14: 212). Apart from the thematization of the elements of heterogeneity and discontinuity, the framework of Procházka’s essay is formed by his pointing to the concept of life as the bearer of all values, the interpenetration of diverse contemporary philosophies—pragmatism, Bergsonian metaphysics, neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*. Procházka emphasises the difference between the position of modern philosophy and of artistic efforts (understanding and control of a ‘life of modernity’ on the one hand, its expression on the other). At the same time, however, he singles out the route of neo-idealistic interpretation of Kant’s philosophy, which he views as providing a way towards the idea of

‘Ideologie války’ [Ideology of the War] (Procházka 1915)). For a more detailed discussion, showing the context of Procházka’s essay from the point of view of graphic art, see the study by art historian Vojtěch Lahoda (1995).

¹⁸ This motif runs through the entire complex of contemporary philosophical impulses, and both artists and critics from the turn of the century often took their interpretative framework from the works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Dilthey, as well as Bergson and others.

¹⁹ ‘These days the richness and might of expression, the infinite diversity and heterogeneity of experience, the new feeling of youth and growth, defiance and courage, all deny any short-sighted and small-minded clinging to mere sensory experience, to the methods of investigation inspired by lifeless nature, and the attempt to master all of life with the limited judgments of the intellect subordinated to the pressure of matter’ (Procházka 1912/14: 213).

growth and a new arrangement of cultural forms and epochs,²⁰ whose value is eternal, timeless, the most promising noetic possibility for the path to 'the soul's self-knowing':

The vitalistic radicalism of both new, untraditional philosophies [i.e. Bergsonism and pragmatism] receives a corrective at the point when the brutal break in tradition represents barbarism. The modern struggle for a new expression of the new life [i.e. way of living] must be none other than the battle for a new form, a new law of creation in the sense of an eternal cultural objective' (ibid.: 315).

Although Procházka's essay seeks to correct the parallel efforts of avant-garde currents—to break their links to the past (or the modernism of yesterday), and to replace everything 'which is inconsistent with the breakneck speed of the actions of the present, as caught by the cinema' (Procházka 1912/14: 312) with a doctrine and realisation of new forms of reality—he indicates in his analytical passages a change in the concept of the modern age, which matches the new modernistic tendencies developing since about 1908. The preceding generation had taken life to be a symbolic centre, a synonym for lifestyle subordinated to aesthetic and artistic criteria, the artistic creation of life and its stylisation. Now, however, the question was to award art and aesthetics their due places, their function in capturing new phenomena of life. Alongside religion, philosophy, science and technology, the situation of art was also changing: it was no longer a question of the search for a symbol for the lived unity, but rather of the experience and expression of its forms.

The very title of Otakar Theer's third collection of poetry, *Úzkosti a naděje* [Anguishes and Hopes] (1911), suggests the duality from whose tension grows the theme of the shock suffered upon examination of the intelligible world as it becomes empty, its phantom quality, and the dramatic expression of the battle for supra-individual values. Theer had published two collections of poetry at the turn of the century, which resonated with contemporary decadent aestheticism, then turned in the first decade of the century primarily to literary and drama criticism. Apart from the fact that Theer's return to poetry represented an exit from the

²⁰ These are the so called 'rational entities', judgment systems. Their spatial qualities are, as in Bergson, accorded only secondary significance: 'Everything which is material in them belongs, after all, to reality, space and time' (Procházka 1912/14: 314).

dilemmas of subjectivist idealism of the end of the nineteenth century, it worked by introducing a sensibility of a new type, emphasised by a dynamic rhythmic structure (enumeration), which stands in sharp contrast to the nuanced and fleeting world of the moods of the *fin-de-siècle*.

[There are] stormy, effervescent, destructive scenes, in which Theer's sensibility is intoxicated by the bustle, din and lust of the crowd in a moving train, in the view of a seething harbour, the departure of ships, the roar of the docks, the stormy excitement which overwhelms him in the surge of the elements and the magnificent atmosphere of great mountains, and the dark irritation to which he submits with every nerve in the course of a promenade (Píša 1933: 63).

The new poetic expression, which in this collection consists of the dynamic modification of the most varied verse forms, and which would later become a relaxed *vers-libre* of a new type (*vers libre*, rather than simply *vers libéré*), grows out of the inner conflict between minds and things (empirical objects), from their interpenetration and their mutual reanimation. The swings between contemplative concentration on the inner drama of 'will and idea', with its anguished states, and the fundamentally intersubjective dynamic sensibility of the new feeling of life accompanied by almost expressionist imagery ('from morning to night to be burning and murky / by your hundred tongues, torn, kneaded, enflamed'—'Oheň' [Fire]), the dualism of 'spirit and senses' is also present in the collection *Všemu navzdory* [In Defiance of Everything] (1915), poems written from 1912. One of its most important poems is 'V neděli v restauraci' [On Sunday in a restaurant], which is sometimes interpreted as an echo of the aestheticism of the *fin-de-siècle* (Píša 1933). It is, however rather, a variation on the motif of 'the traffic of clothes', a reflection of the currents of social 'exchange' (*Verkehr*). The animated subjects are set in motion by the observing eye: 'The round table of white marble / become occupied, become alive. / The doors do not even come together, and so in flows the Sunday / crowd / dressed up, ironed, brushed down . . .'. From the neutral scenery spills out the destructive, wild, mechanical, multiple reality of the food chain. 'All are now eating, men and women. They are a single / pair of jaws, / well set, with hungry teeth. / . . . smoke winds, smoke slides, smoke wanders. Everyone is / fine, / all the faces are ruddy, all the eyes / ablaze.' The direct designation, evoking

a modern social space with its machineries and technologies, contrasts with the metaphorisation of the poet's interior, which, in this dualism, becomes mentally strengthened 'in defiance of' the pressure of the new time and space and its mechanisms. The ambivalence of the changing and mobile space allows Theer's actor—just like Kafka's passenger—to be placed in the middle of the din, even if later the poet would attempt to unify his dualism by seeking an anchor in the super-individual metaphysical order of a metamorphosed tragedy of ancient heroism (in his drama *Faëthon*).

Krakonošova zahrada [The Garden of Krakonoš], a joint edition of the juvenilia of the brothers Čapek (mainly works of prose from 1909–10), refers in its 'autobiographical' preface to the landscape of childhood.²¹ The short prose forms— anecdotes, aphorisms, paradoxes, poems in prose—originally published in periodicals, now serve as an example of Sezession literature in the sense of stylisation thematised—the masking, manipulation and ornamentation of created reality. Apart from the influences generally shared by the whole of modernism (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, La Rochefoucauld, Lichtenberg, Wiled), these forms were also initiated decisively by the reception of the literary works of Young Vienna: K. Kraus, A. Schnitzler, and particularly Peter Altenberg, with his 'extracts from life' and his 'one-minute novels' (cf. Opelík 1980: 37). What is significant for us is the spatial idea of the garden, which draws for example on Leopold Andrian's *Garten der Erkenntnis* [Garden of Knowledge]:

Here you will meet black, erratic boulders resembling idols and the Permian soil is red like blood . . . Is there not a most peculiar and beautiful cave with thin stalactites, which you have discovered? And what of the crystals and sparkling pyrites, what of the prints of primeval herbs on the coal-slate? Were you not attracted by the dark of the abyss? Did you not dare to crawl into the long-abandoned mine, from which continually flows a spring of rusty water? And I do not even recall things which were even more astounding and quite unbelievable; but you know that it is true (Čapek 1982: 10).

²¹ I.e. to the Krkonoše and the Broumov region in North Bohemia. Krakonoš was the fairy-tale ruler of the Krkonoše mountains.

Unlike Andrian's garden, in which a dying aesthete hopes 'that a dream might give him what life had failed to provide: contact with "the other"' (Schorske 1981: 310), it was as if the garden of the brothers Čapek had been created afresh after an 'explosion'.²² The dream of the harmony of the paternal garden is disturbed by the 'working machines' of the textile factories—the landscape of memory is violently expanded by the invasion of big-city business. The crystallisation of the form in the extract cited above as a metaphor of unity in diversity indeed points to the Sezession principle of stylisation, but is also introduced into a 'paradise on earth'. This is not the artificial paradise of a decadent dream—it is a kingdom evoked by an ironic gesture of designation, which pretends to be tentative. The return to the garden of Krakonoš signifies a return to the beginning of play, liberating humour, but also to the *variété* and to *commedia dell'arte*. In Sezession stylisation, eroticism, exoticism, illusiveness, refinement, and staginess, the Čapeks show their affiliation to the dominant, mainly Viennese, expression of contemporary Sezession modernism. However, what also appear are both elements of the dissolution of the object (the antipsychological abstraction of masks which was later to result in Cubist prose) and an act of observation which once and for all disrupts the equilibrium of the adventure experienced in the garden of miracles:

We ride down the street and stumble against means and vehicles; we inherit them, we sit on them, we do not know about them, there are many more of them in the world than there are things; we live on the cultural deposits of methods. But it is an unsure ground upon which we live. All means and vehicles move, change their places and produce young, even if they do not care for them (Čapek 1982: 93–4).

This statement points to the unsure, tense, changeable, crumbling world of Kafka's five-liner.

H. G. Schauer, the key personality of Czech modernism of the 1880s, characterised the nature of the 'spiritual crisis' of his days by the dilemma of choice between Schopenhauer and Hegel. In a programmatic article for *Čas* he connected to his polemic with contemporary nationalist ideology which he formulated in *Our Two Questions* (1886). Following Masaryk's intentions, he considered it to be the duty of every Czech writer to

²² Cf. 'Explosion in the Garden: Kokoschka and Schoenberg' in Schorske (1981: 322 ff.).

'introduce to his nation the broadest and most elevated (sublime) world view and ideas since we can survive only if our consciousness and action will follow the niveau of our time' (Schauer 1886/7: 107). Unlike Schauer, the Procházka's essay no longer describes the contemporary situation as a 'crisis', but as a change of conditions. In contrast to the critics of the preceding generation, Procházka has no other interest than to cooperate with the artists in order to clarify these conditions. It is possible to say that around 1910, modern Czech literature also permeated through the opening space of (Central) Europe and, at the same time, started to abandon the *Bildung*-framework of its founding in order to participate in the new recognition and creation of this space.

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