THE MAKROPULOS CASE AS A SEMIOTIC EXPERIENCE[1]

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Abstract: ***In recent decades ethnomusicology has focused on, among other things, the role of the listener and on comprehension of the function and/or the importance that music has for him/her. For this it uses linguistic and, especially, semiotic methods. Turino (1999, 2008) returns to the Peirce concepts of the icon, the index, the symbol, the*** *rheme* ***and the*** *dicent*, ***snowballing and chaining in order to explain the effects of music.***

This article arises from two contrasting perceptions of the same musical event: Janáček's opera The Makropulos Case. It analyzes both listeners' experience on three levels in accordance with Peirce's three types of signs: as opera in the National Theater, Janáček's music and the concrete 2008 production of The Makropulos Case. A semiotic analysis of the inner reaction to the concrete musical rendition enables us to reconstruct the ontogenetic musical development and explains a certain universality of the effect of the opera despite different musical histories.

Keywords: ***semiotics; Peirce; The Makropulos Case***

Introduction

For more than a century of its existence[2] almost every aspect of ethnomusicology has been transformed: its name (from comparative musicology to ethnomusicology and musical anthropology or anthropology of music), subject

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2 Most often the moment of the birth of the discipline is considered to be an article by Guido Adler (1885). In the context of this paper, however, it would be more suitable to consider Erich Moritz von Hornbolstel's "Die Probleme der vergleichenden Musikwissenschaft" of 1905 as the beginning of this discipline.

of study (from the search for general laws of "musically beautiful"[3] to music of those others[4] to the study of all kinds of music) and understandably also methods. Despite all of the changeability,[5] though, one feature seems constant: the attempt to more than just describe (possibly in musically analytic categories) musical sound itself; an attempt to come to why that musical structure has the particular shape that it has. Authors look for the answer to that "Why?" in different directions, understandably most frequently in the area of a music-producing culture (therefore ETHNOmusicology or anthropology of music). Sometimes the answer is a whole configuration of culture (Lomax 1968, Merriam 1964). Sometimes the function of that concrete musical genre (Seeger 1987)... What seems in the ethnomusicology of the last decades to be almost indubitable is the postulate about listeners as the main creators of musical production. In that case, then, the question asked above of why indeed has that concrete musical structure that shape could be: What does that music mean to the listeners? What does it bring them and how does it satisfy them? Why do they need it just the way it is?

Some ethnomusical schools, emphasizing the communicative nature of music, use for their study processes which are close to linguistics, inspired by linguistics or dealing with the relation of music and language or the reflection of music in language (Stone 2008, Feld – Fox 1994). One of those schools is semiotics, and that mainly in the concept of Charles Sanders Peirce. The application of his complicated system was proposed for use in the study of music by Thomas Turino.

Music as Language[6]

The Peirce-Turino concept of semiotics enables a more detailed analysis of our perception of music. Thus we can approach the understanding of WHY music actually affects us. It thus opens to us the possibility of understanding what

3 Hornbostel 1905.

4 Jaap Kunst 1950.

5 Because the discipline has been gradually and more or less continually transformed, and also because the scientific community more or less concur on the continuity of the field, we consider German-Austrian comparative musicology as the beginning of the broad field which today we most often call ethnomusicology.

6 Let it be said that we do not advocate Peirce's view of human spiritual life as stimulated solely by signs, nor do we share the concept of music as only a collection of signs; in this text we draw attention to the semiotic point of view.

is usually veiled by expressions such as "indescribable in words," etc. In the semiotic analysis of music, though, emphasis on the *difference* between intentionality and the semantic-referential character of language on one hand and the (predominant) unintentionality of music on the other hand is of basic importance; different ways of functioning come from this difference.

While one school of semiotics represented, for example, by the well-known Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure considered only in the dichotomy the sign-object (and Saussure's followers, e.g., Noam Chomsky in other dichotomies), the other one called triadic and most often represented by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (and their most famous work *The Meaning of Meaning*, 1923) think about a three-part scheme: object, sign and image of this sign in our consciousness (Doubravová 2008: 41). Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) also belongs to this triadic tradition. Peirce described the relation among a designating/sign, a designated/object, and a perceiver/listener as trichotomic: it is partly a *sign* that represents in human thought *an object* which the sign points out (Peirce used the word "object": whether it is a material thing, an idea or, for example, a natural phenomenon). As a third component, Peirce introduced the word *interpretant*; this word expresses the relation between an object and a sign, and mainly the effect of this relation. Thus: a concrete object is, as we perceive it, represented by a concrete sign whose relation to the object and importance are determined by the interpretant.

Types of Signs and Sign-Object-Interpretant Relations

From the complicated and comprehensive system and difficult-to-understand formulations of Peirce, Turino used in his application the terms which he considered relevant to music. For this article we used only some of them. We avoided the explanation and use of three basic abstract categories – Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which are certainly useful for a more detailed understanding of which types of stimuli they evoke as responses (viz Turino 1999), but for our text seem to be dispensible.

1. Types of Signs

According to his trichotomic concept, Peirce spoke about three types of signs. He called the first the *qualisign*: pure quality, embedded in a sign (Turino 1999: 224) (redness, magnificence...). The second type of sign – the *sinsign* – is the actual, specific realization of that quality (red color, perception via concrete red

things...). The third type of sign – the *legisign* – classifies a concrete sign into a wider context (the color red belongs among other colors...). However close the first and third categories may seem, there is a different intellectual understanding of reality: thanks to the first category (the qualisign) we are capable of understanding/realizing reality (the sinsign), while the third (the legisign) reflects our perception of the world (e.g., the formation of the general "color" category).

2. Types of Relations between Sign and Object

The first type of connection between sign and object is the relation of resemblance: a photograph means to us a concrete person, while looking at a picture of an unknown château we imagine a noble residence, and perhaps we perceive it as a reference to a concrete historic period or area. Peirce calls this type of sign an *icon*. The basis of the iconic process, that is, the connecting of similar objects and signs, is a classification of phenomena on the basis of resemblance of some aspects: physical appearance and also perhaps a style of clothing or a way of using one's voice: as soon as we hear on the radio high, characteristically cultivated female singing accompanied by an orchestra, we evidently classify it according to color, singing technique and accompaniment as opera, although we do not understand a word and we do not see the stage.

An iconic type of connection can partly be used intentionally by a composer or a creator of music: in many places in Smetana's *My Country* – two flutes imitating the sound of flowing water at the beginning of the *Vltava,* or the harp imitating some sort of mythical accompanying instrument of a mythical bard in *Vyšehrad* – are based on it. Secondly, however, the iconic process also provides space for the listener's own imagination, mainly in music with its free connection to physical objects.

The second type of connection between sign and object is based on co-occurrence: smoke accompanies fire; the wind enables the unfurling of a flag... and both smoke and a flag are signs for us of those "objects," which are intimately bound to our experience. Peirce calls this type of sign an *index*. An important quality for the use of indices mainly in music is the fact that with that very sign we can meet in various situations and thus – according to momentary circumstances – evoke various associations (this feature is usually called semantic snowballing). For example, the majority of listeners to western classical music connect three eighth Gs followed by one E-flat (and, perhaps, followed by a descending transposition of the same motif) with the beginning

of Beethoven's Fifth (Destiny) Symphony and thus emotionally with the image of the genius pursued by destiny or, more generally, with fatality. Those who in the Czech lands experienced anguish during the war and, at the same time, hope through the broadcasts of forbidden London radio, broadcasts which used as their theme tune the first notes of Beethoven's Fifth, clearly recall partly the more common feeling of fatefulness and, more concretely, their own war memories.

Like signs of the iconic type, indices also provide space to the listeners for interjecting their own connotations. In contrast with previous icons which lead people rather to the field of imagination, indices aim toward experiences.

The third type of relation between sign and object is, according to Peirce, the *symbol*. It is the type of relation that arises on the basis of an agreement, e.g., between the author and the listeners (Peirce speaks about "language limitation"). The most typical and widespread symbol is words. In the musical context, the most common type of musical symbols are national anthems, theme songs of sport clubs, etc., but also so-called leitmotifs, used in classical music of the 19th century: melodies with which the composer denotes (accompanies) a certain character or situation. Leitmotifs do, to a certain extent, affect the listener with their own musical quality (the listener can project his own experience or ideas into their color or individual melodic phrase, but their prevailing intentionality limits just what is typical and valuable: the connection with personal experience or ideas). Therefore symbols in music are used less than both of the preceding types.

3. Types of Sign-Interpretant Relations (That Is, How Is Sign Perceived)

Of the three possibilities of relations between sign and the resulting interpretant, introduced by Turino in concordance with Peirce, let us discuss two or, precisely, two quantities of such a relation in more detail. The first of these qualities – *rheme* – denotes the perception of the sign as representing an object on the plane of the possible: a melody imitating a shepherd's song, that is, representing "some sort of shepherd's song," should evoke a bucolic mood. Similarly we perceive the earlier-mentioned picture of a château as "possible" or a reference to the time when similar châteaux were "possible" – common.

The quality of a *dicent,* on the contrary, is understood as "real": if a weather vane turns in a certain direction, we are convinced that we know the direction of the wind (and we do not admit that the weather vane could get

rusty). The first quality, that is, allows our own (at least inner) creativity; the second, on the other hand, the understanding of sense and importance. The third quality – argument – has a symbolic character and is based on language premises; Turino (1999: 230) considers it irrelevant for the analysis of musical signs.

How Does Music Actually Work?

Every musical event, whether it be listening to songs on the radio or the complex experience of attending an opera (and, even more, performing in a musical event) offers an enormously rich palette of stimuli. Any note at all, any fragment of a melody, a rhythm or tone color, any word or movement of a performer, and also the place where we hear music and people who listen to it or perform with us can become a sign – a catalyst of psychic response. If we encounter that same phenomenon repeatedly, various meanings snowball in our consciousness (= semantic snowballing) – according to the new situation and a sign resonates in us multilevelly.

The second type of reaction is – besides semantic snowballing – the chaining of our inner reactions: the interpretant itself, caused by a stimulus, immediately becomes a sign and leads our response further – in a similar or in a rather different direction.

In regard to the number of stimuli/signs of various qualities simultaneously memories and ideas, emotions and rational echoes resonate in me; my past (in memories) connects with my present (in an immediate experience) and my future (in ideas). And not only that. The social experience of listening, but, even more, the social performance of music create a strong feeling of belonging: while we can speak in words ABOUT belonging to each other, social music making produces the reality OF belonging to each other.

The Makropulos Case as a Semiotic Experience

After long discussions about semiotics we wanted to test its application as an analytical tool at a concrete musical event. A performance of Janáček's opera The Makropulos Case *at the National Theater seemed opportune: Pavla saw it a few days ago – March 23, 2010; I saw the same production somewhat earlier, at its premiere. It affected both of us strongly. At the same time, our personal histories are as different as they could possibly be.*

An operatic performance evokes an enormous number of emotional and intellectual reactions (besides, is there such a great difference between them?) from the general framing of the performance to feelings we experience during individual musical phrases, colors of sound or gestures – the number of which exceeds the possibility of dealing with them within the frame of an article. In addition, we reflected on the performance only ex post. For both of these reasons we limited ourselves to three basic fields, or, as we are presenting it here, layers, here described from the most ordinary – opera at the National Theater – to a concrete performance of The Makropulos Case.

First we each wrote our texts individually, and only after the first versions were written did we discuss them. Our primary attempt was to capture perception of/reactions to the performance. In order for our communication to be understandable, it was necessary to place it into the context of our personal histories, our thinking, etc.; we definitely did not intend to write an exhaustive commentary on the topic. Therefore for the purposes of this text we did not study any new facts concerning Janáček, The Makropulos Case *or any other below-mentioned topics; we only looked for texts which readers could clearly understand. Once again, we did not write primarily about Janáček, his opera, or the production of this opera at the National Theater; our main purpose was to test the suitability of semiotics as an analytical tool.*

ZJ: While attempting to capture how the performance of Janáček's *The Makropulos Case* in the National Theater affected me, I become aware of several layers. The deepest, most general is a feeling of **opera in the National Theater** that lightly runs through me at every mention of it, but I am generally aware of it at the moment I find myself in that enormous velvet auditorium with its golden chandelier which, it always occurs to me, would deprive Prague of a fourth of its opera fans if it fell. I actually came to music when I was about thirteen through opera; I mainly came to the National Theater, where, at that time, standing room tickets cost a few crowns. I became totally enchanted with that illusionary genre – and world. I knew the whole repertoire of the time and who would be singing in every performance; I knew the librettos of some of the operas by heart and the fate of their heroes touched me personally. Of course I had my favorite singers...

A few years later, however, I was bewitched by Janáček; I discovered that there were other musical genres one could listen to, and that way I came to music of the 20th century. When I began to study the history and theory of

music at the age of 19, I already perceived the world of opera as something difficult to take: cheap and full of pretending, somehow connected to my naive beginnings. In the following decades I went to the opera occasionally (with my husband, an opera buff, my children...), but mostly without much enthusiasm and experience. Only a few years ago did I begin to go to the opera (and to the National Theater) more often... I can stand it pretty well; I'm a bit more indulgent. I no longer consider it as something "real," but rather as a momentary game of illusion, a game I can accept.

And all of that resonates within me in various ways in the auditorium of the National Theater.

PJ: Opera in the National Theater? During my high school years in the late 1970s a lethal combination of coloratura "falsehood" in the "devil's den," as the National became the place where the best Czech artists were forced to condemn Charter 77. (This stain was elegantly wiped out when the *Plastic People of the Universe* accepted the invitation of director Ivan Rajmont to perform there in Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll*, 2008.) Moreover, there was a bit of a specific type of commodity fetishism connected with Trade Union opera tickets extended to both the working class and the working class intelligentsia. Thank God for the solace of "another" music, authentic and true: Etc., Švehlík, Merta, Janota, Třešňák and so on. That music was played in smoky pubs, flats and on river boats for long-hair boys and girls with shining eyes. That was genuine free culture, reacting to the situation of an occupied country. In the 1970s that type of music was the most important expression of all, an amplified protest Zeitgeist of guitars and drums.

I eventually got mine with the opera in the National, though. I am 45 years old, taking my students to see Smetana's *Kiss* – and suddenly the whole National Theater opera thing hits me. The libretto, the relationship of Smetana and Krásnohorská, the unpretentiousness of the piece, the smugglers, as well as the intensity of the sound (eighth row) penetrating into my bloodstream through my skin, pressing me down into my red velvet seat. Shortly after my *Kiss* initiation I took the plunge and started to frequent the National. I took a liking to each and every piece, from the *Bartered Bride* to the *Grey Mouse Opera*. So far the deepest impact has been felt in *Jenufa*.

My reality has been radically extended by opera dimensions, both historical and contemporary, as the penultimate music form. Even if I have never witnessed anything close to the sparkling eyes conspiracy and barriers

The Makropulos Case, The National Theatre, Prague. Photo by Hana Smejkalová

dissolving as often happens at a genuine rock concert, I was forced to admit that sold-out screenings of world opera live transmissions in the Světozor and Aero do not necessarily testify that Czechs are incurable snobs.

The seats and the whole theater, including the muse-guarded terrace towards the Prague Castle, have become a part of my world, something that belongs to me, a luxury we all need and deserve. This is the right mythical space to celebrate with champagne rituals after surviving in music battlefields of festival mud, defunct factory halls and stinking rock-club cellars. I pity the Parisians in their burnt out Bouffes du nord. Long live the Czech National!

ZJ: The second layer is **Janáček**. Opera pulled me into the WORLD of music, that is, to that whole complex of events and relations surrounding musical occurrences on the stage. Janáček, concretely his opera *Jenufa* (understandably at the National Theater), showed me the EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING: to how music can pierce the soul – like a shard in a bare heel. I could never get enough of the intensity of that experience. I think I saw *Katya Kabanova* thirty-six times, the *Glagolitic Mass* at almost every reprise in Prague (and, of course,

I have several recordings of it); I wore out vinyl records of his string quartets... By the way, the oddly intensive, stabbing experience of *Jenufa* is one of my arguments against Peirce's concept of a spiritual life as a continuous chaining of references. I knew nothing of Janáček or his music and also, during my first hearing, nothing earlier came to my mind. The music simply affected me itself. That moment was the starting point. From it endless chaining begins. My permanent enchantment is very understandable in the frame of the Peirce-Turino concept. The basic role is played on one hand by my age at the time – when my individual personality was forming – and on the other hand by Janáček's specific musical language. Approximately starting from *Jenufa* Janáček's musical language was based on so-called real motifs,[7] melodic-rhythmic figures, closely and admittedly coming from "speech melodies." Janáček was engaged in collecting speech melodies, that is, musical notations of people's speech for decades and he attributed great weight to them because he considered them to be the maximally true picture of man's internal state of mind.[8] Real motifs are not exact quotations of speech melodies, but they are easily distinguishable within them. In vocal-instrumental works the motifs are also heard in instrumental renditions, but primarily they are sung – and thus work as some sort of excitation – "the way someone really spoke, but even more strongly." In Peirce-Turino terminology they are thus motifs with typical examples of *dicent indices:* this refers to a phenomenon (a word as it would usually be said in a certain emotional situation) on the basis of resemblance, and we perceive it (at least I perceived it that way) as real: yes, this is really true.

Janáček, his music and all available information – I soaked it up from approximately my fifteenth to my nineteenth year, at a time that is usually considered basic for the formation (not only musical) of identity. I do not know about teenagers today, but for me at that time the question of "truth" or maximum integrity was crucial. That is why Janáček's music so easily became one of the cornerstones of my musical identity.

Then for a long time I wandered everywhere possible with music – and in a certain sense I am still wandering to this day. But as soon as I hear a piece of this special, excited, and at the same time as it were, broken Janáček melody,

7 Janáček himself speaks of them in the article "Váha reálních motivů" (Weight of real motifs) (Janáček 2007: 429-433). About their use, viz Štědroň 1986: 90.

8 Most famous and truly heartbreaking are his notations of the last words of his dying daughter Olga; in an emotional article he again introduces and analyzes a few musical motifs of the speech of Jaroslav Vrchlický in Brno 1898. He also discusses them in other texts (Janáček 2003).

so different from the lucid musical phrases of the classics and the unending Wagner melodies, and so close to how I would say those same words myself, I realize: I am finally home again.

PJ: When I think of Janáček, I see a unique and uncompromising man with a lust for life. Strolling through his morphogenetic field I hear sčasovkas, tensions between tonality and atonality, I perceive the psychology of the speech melodies and devotion to Kamila Štösslová. I see a man who transcended borders of his genre as inspiration for the rock super group Emerson Lake and Palmer on their first album in 1970. As a "sampling" pioneer he started to capture bird singing, doors closing, the melody of the dying words of his daughter, thus enlarging the concept of music before John Cage and "all that noise."

In the early 1990s Czech TV screened a Swedish production of *Cunning Little Vixen*, in Lachian dialect with English and Swedish subtitles, which made me realize that that opera was loved by the whole world. What was behind it? What is that frog that jumps into the Gamekeeper's lap at the beginning and at the end a symbol of? Milan Kundera in his essay *My Janáček* (2004) protests any apotheosis in the last "quack." The Cunning Vixen herself is *dicentic* Kamila as well as *rheme* of all free spirited women. This is the same as when Marcel Duchamp renamed himself Rose Sélavy: Eros is life.

I mentioned *Jenufa* as the strongest impression. I relieved the pain shared with friends who were left as babies in orphanages, the cruelty of stigma of some single mothers – even if today's baby box would have made the situation of Kostelnička Buryjovka and Jenufa simpler. Psychoanalytically speaking I read the phantasm of a child loss, represented through the social topic of Gabriela Preissová. Their collaboration brings into mind the creative union of Czech composers with women librettists. On another level, behind the curtain, I saw Kostelnička Eva Urbanová and her parallel story of a diva, the most powerful among women, who is getting old and losing her power. So much to be amazed about.

Another peculiar issue about Janáček is his perseverance, the delayed acknowledgement, and a world one at that. How many people I have met abroad with whom I struck up an instantaneous friendship just uttering his name. In San Francisco, Paris, London, he made people love Czech culture, as if he were a key to its door. Some of them just happened to see a screening of the *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and Janáček's music reached them, forced them to come to the Czech Lands and discover what it was about us Bohemians.

ZJ: And now concretely to *The Makropulos Case*. In my mind I feel special tension connected to Čapek's philosophical theme (on the whole, coolly rational, as I feel it), the theme of the loss of happiness for the price of immortality, with Janáček's strongly emotional elaboration. In the music I hear exactly what Janáček once wrote, that he "felt sorry for that three-hundred-year-old beauty." My first reaction is primarily rational (how curiously it fits together), but at the same time I feel an empathy toward Elina similar to that of Janáček's.

For this particular performance, that central theme had one more special significance. I was there with my closest friend or, more precisely, closest in many ways, including the amount of time we spend together and how harmonious that time is. But at the same time my friend is painfully distant in our basic feeling about the world. I move about in my world more or less confidently and thus (or, on the contrary, because?) I consider the transient nature of things, even the most beautiful of them, as the other side of the coin of their beauty. In a world where I feel safe I can rely on the fact that the next event will again be – uniquely – beautiful. The world of my friend is unfathomable and unreliable and therefore every beautiful event is not only a source of pleasure, but also of a certain sadness as something disappearing, never to return. And now from the stage, with its authoritative essence, with the authority now reinforced by the distinguished Čapek and my adored Janáček my world speaks. *The Makropulos Case* brings us together (my friend loves this opera) – and argues to my advantage. Janáček is on my side.

PJ: The immediate reading of *The Makropulos Case* led to the topic of immortality as a homage to Kamila Štösslová, a way to be with a beloved person when one cannot live with her. It seems that, when Janáček saw Čapek's play, he must have rejoiced at the iconicity of the femme fatale aspect of Elina. The Zeitgeist of immortalizing the beloved was there: in 1928 Virginia Woolf published her love letter to Vita Sackville-West in the form of a novel about Orlando, who receives the gift of eternal youth from Queen Elisabeth and then travels through centuries changed into a woman, Vita. The semiosis continues with the film version of the story by Sally Potter from 1991, which ends in a contemporary London park. Orlando is sitting under a tree with a book she has written with a hovering angel consoling her, while her daughter is filming it all on a camera. The message is a positive one – "I am the same as I was in Elizabethan times, noble and compassionate." The chain of immortality takes me then to Kundera's novel of the same name, which presents the relationship of

The Makropulos Case, The National Theatre, Prague. Photo by Petra Hajská.

Goethe and young Bettina with the sinister tone of the greed of a parasitical eternal life. Max Brod stopped Janáček from public declaration of his passion for Kamila, thus keeping their relationship on the sublimation level. Kamila gained through Janáček the best kind of immortality, hidden, iconic. True, Janáček had no mercy for the "lethal feminine" aspect, surpassing Čapek by killing Elina right on the stage in front of us, as if saying, I live my passion here and now. The theater program mentions Čapek fearing what the senior Maestro would do with his topic (Blachut 2008: 40), but he was not in a position to protest. Judging from today's view, it is as if Janáček produced a magnificent music video of Čapek's piece, which served them both well.

The second thing that hit me with *The Makropulos Case* was the presentation of Bohemia as a spiritual battlefield of world history. This is in connection with the alchemic project as a philosophical quest that ended in 1621 (in spite of Comenius' attempts to revive it). Ripellino hints at the project, but it took the US psychedelic researcher, ethno-botanist Terence McKenna, to arrive in Prague in 1996 and shoot a documentary on the visit of John Dee, the English

alchemist, known for communication with angels[9], to present it fully. The same acknowledgement was provided by the Czech surrealists who by their participation in the monumental exhibition Rudolphine Prague of 1997 embraced alchemy as their own in the psychoanalytical transmutation of the inner self into "gold."

The question of immortality has acquired a new face today since computer alchemists arrived with their formula named the Internet. Kamila Stösslová multiplied her immortality in the form of a Wikipedia entry.

Both Čapek and Janáček react to the alchemic attempts to approach God negatively. Čapek introduces his play with a polemic with the work of G. B. Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, also published in 1922, saying the "...thesis of Shaw will be used as a classical case of optimism and the thesis of this book as a hopeless case of pessimism..." (Blachut 2008: 34). Thus, following the semiotic reaction of the archetype of the immortal femme fatale in English and Czech modernists, EM (by these letters I do not mean ethnomusicology, but Elina Makropulos) is a cold zombie, unable to utilize the experience of alchemic transmutation for any purpose, remaining without agency in the same way as when her father used her as a laboratory rat for Rudolph II. The power, which in a feminine form is necessarily represented in the form of an opera diva, follows only her Narcissistic goals. That is unusual for modernism, which as a project aimed at social change. This points out the specific position of both Čapek and Janáček. Čapek's play, however, includes a scene where the men around Elina try to get hold of the longevity recipe for the "good of humanity," only to reveal the greedy interests of all present. That power-drive part of the plot was obliterated by Janáček as superfluous. It is worth noting, though, that Čapek saw his "pessimism" as a public responsibility, as a celebration of the small relative goodness in life, otherwise full of diseases, poverty and drudgery (Blachut 2008: 34). This might sound like a step down from the "world spiritual battlefield," but still ranks the opera as a contribution to the never-ending immortality debate.

9 DVD, The Alchemical Dream, San Francisco: Mystic Fire Production, 2008.

Conclusion

The attempt at this semantic analysis was started by our amazement at how it was possible that two distinctively different personalities – with different temperaments, experience and preferences – were powerfully affected by the same event.

At first we became aware of the *qualisign*: the quality of "opera in the National Theater" with its pertinent attributes – red velvet, grandeur of the building and illusiveness of the setting. Even that abstract sign called out a rich layer of response.

The particular event – a production of Janáček's opera *The Makropulos Case* directed by American Christopher Allen and conducted by Tomáš Hanus[10] (*sinsign*) made Pavla realize the "obvious (in the sense of Kundera – 1967 and Bělohradský – 2010) world repute" (Zuzana experienced it earlier); international production, Prague and her stories, in this instance the alchemical story of longevity, as well as Janáček's music, have become a part of global culture (*legisign*), which is edifying for those of us who were born in this place.

In the areas where we both have long experience (opera in the National Theater), both of us experience snowballing (even understandably with a different content: with Zuzana for instance the change of perception of the sign from the quality of *dicent* to *rheme)*. In places where our lengths of experience differ (especially in relation to Janáček's music), in the case of Zuzana it is snowballing again (understandably: there are things to snowball), whereas with Pavla it is predominantly chaining; moreover in the case of Pavla it is rather chaining of signs, understood in the quality of *rheme* (how she imagines what), whereas Zuzana perceives more the quality of *dicent* (especially in relation to Janáček). This would seem obvious to everyone who knows us: Pavla might be marked as more imaginative and Zuzana as more precise. In the resonance of the topic of immortality we differ even more in regard to our temperaments and views.

There is no doubt that music, resonating on a thousand levels, stimulates a powerful emotional arch. This becomes a catalyst of reactions to what we have experienced as well as what we "only" imagine, a reaction proportionate to who we are. This integrates in us emotion and reason, the possible and the

[10] The production was a co-production with the English National Opera in London, premieres December 18 and 19, 2008.

actual, the past and present, as well as the imaginative future. Moreover, we are connected (at least to a certain degree) with other opera fans: Pavla with her fear of commodity fetishism, Zuzana with the inhabitants of that "cheap world full of pretense." And, more loosely of course, with all lovers of Janáček as well as with those who in some way deal with (im)mortality.

The analysis with the help of Peirce-Turino semiotic tools has also shown us our own perception of music. However, we do not doubt that, even if we had used finer instruments, there would still remain a lot that is unknown and unexpressed. Possibly unknowable and inexpressible.

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