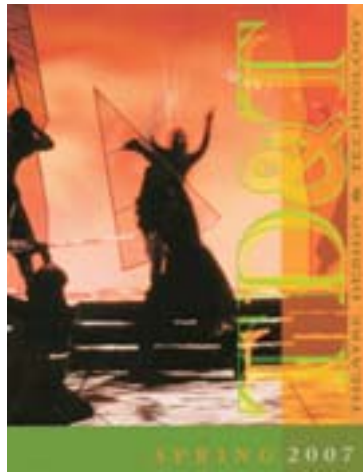




Designing Hamlet with Screens and Panels By Jarka Burian

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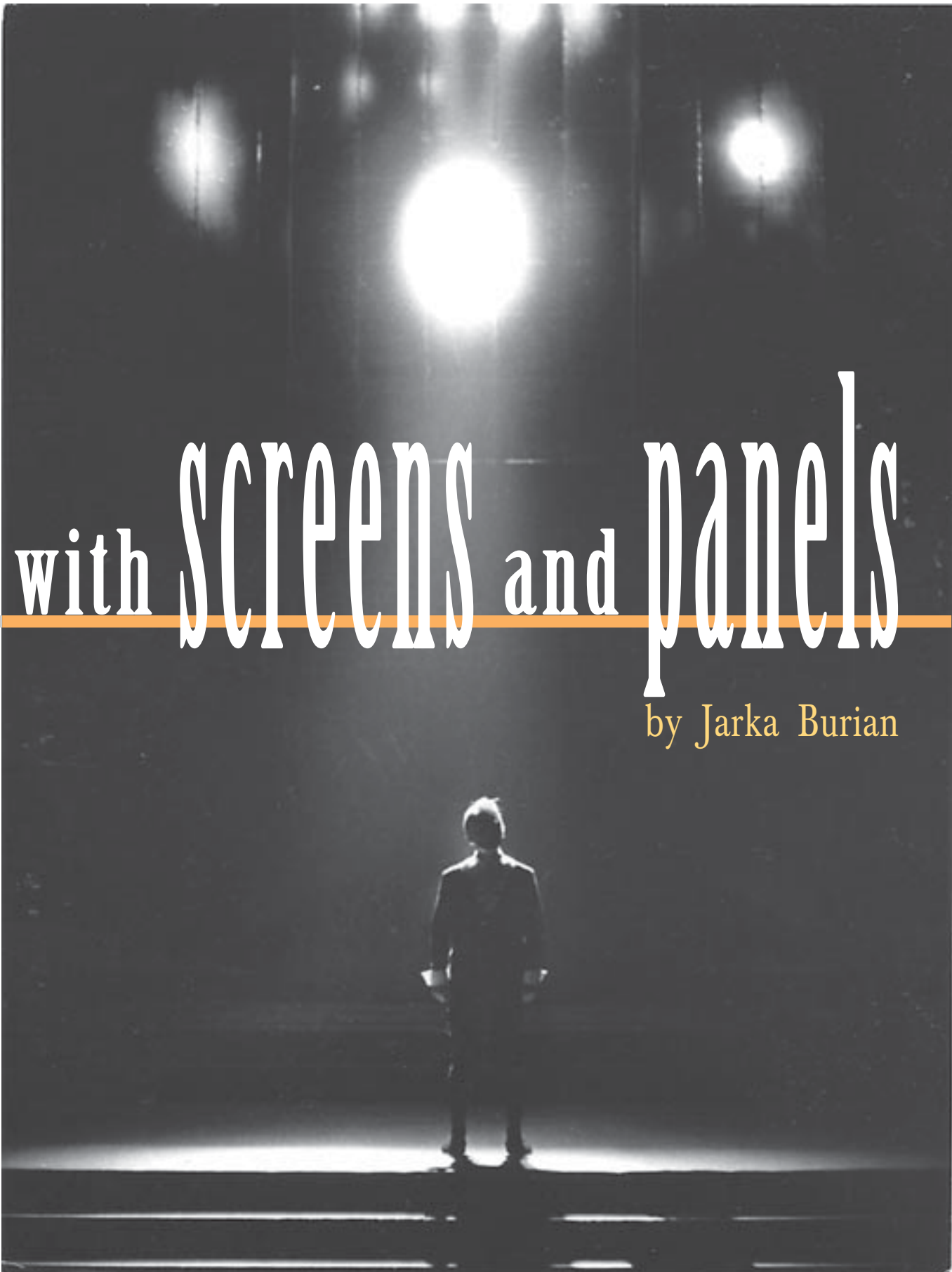
HAMLET

Of the countless twentieth-century productions of *Hamlet* in Europe, three have been of interest to me not only for their underlying concepts, which varied in many ways, but also for their use of panels or screens as a scenic device. The best known of these was the 1912 Craig-Stanislavsky production in Moscow. The other two were Czech: the Hilar-Hofman production (1926) and the Pleskot-Svoboda production (1959), both in Prague's National Theatre. The use of panels in the two Czech productions in relation to their use in the Moscow *Hamlet* production has of course been noted before, by such scholars as Denis Bablet (Bablet 1970, 139) and Vera Ptáčková (Ptáčková 1986, 31), but I am not aware of accounts that go into much detail about the screens and panels, or that compare the contexts of the screens or panels in these productions. What I should like to do is to sketch in some additional perspectives on these three distinctive twentieth century variations of *Hamlet's* stage world.

It is difficult to think of a twentieth century theatre collaboration more celebrated and provocative for the many issues it raised than the one between Konstantin Stanislavsky and Gordon Craig in staging Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Moscow Art Theatre in January 1912, in a world that now seems remote and innocent. Czarist Russia, Edwardian England, Europe at peace, and European theatre striving to catch up with current movements in other art forms. What sort of production would result from two artists so different in aesthetic orientation as Craig

and Stanislavsky? Despite their common dedication to lofty concepts of theatre, could they bridge their differences in language, temperament, and cultural heritage?

The essential story of their collaboration is worth recapitulating.¹ In 1908 Stanislavsky was already celebrated for his directing and acting in Chekhov and was intently working on the early stages of what came to be known as his acting "method," all the while fully engaged in the operations of the Moscow Art Theatre (MCHAT) as producer, director, and actor. At this time, Isadora Duncan visited Moscow and brought Craig to Stanislavsky's attention. By 1908 Craig had a background in acting, directing, and designing, as well as a growing reputation based on his writing *The Art of the Theatre*, which challenged many traditional premises and practices of contemporary theatre, as did his later, confusingly titled publication *On the Art of the Theatre*. In 1908, Craig was a free-lance artist living in Florence, intermittently negotiating with theatre companies on the continent and in England, launching his theatre magazine *The Mask*, and working on a new form of stage scenery involving screens or panels. Duncan suggested to Stanislavsky that Craig might be just the one to help Stanislavsky extend the range of MCHAT productions beyond their mastery of realistic forms. Stanislavsky had sought a similar goal in working with his own former colleague Meyerhold several years earlier and found the results unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, after some preliminary negotiations, he invited Craig to come to Moscow with a view to



with screens and panels

by Jarka Burian

PHOTO: JAROMIR SVOBODA

Hamlet by William Shakespeare, National Theatre, Prague, 1959. directed by Jaromir Pleskot; designed by Josef Svoboda.

directing several productions there.

From Craig's arrival in Moscow in November of 1908 until the premiere of *Hamlet* in January 1912, his encounter with the Moscow Art Theatre and the resultant production process of the play had elements of melodrama and farce, good fellowship and thorough misunderstandings, mutual respect and intense resentments, frequent swings from elation to frustration, and finally a production that received mixed critical reactions but achieved fame as a milestone in boldly rejecting decades of Shakespearian productions based on historically accurate, realistically detailed settings of painted scenery. This production presented a startling architectonic setting of monochromatic, folding screens, which were to be moved in view of the audience during the transition from scene to scene. They were all the same height (twenty-eight feet, or nine meters) but with different widths, and hinged in such a way as to create walls (sometimes even curving walls, depending on the narrowness of the vertical members), columns, corners, and passages abstractly indicating either indoor or outdoor locations. Although Craig in theory would allow for limited graphic indications of locale on the screens (as in Greek *periaktoi*), this option was not exercised for *Hamlet*; the screens remained blank, visually modified only by the stage lighting.

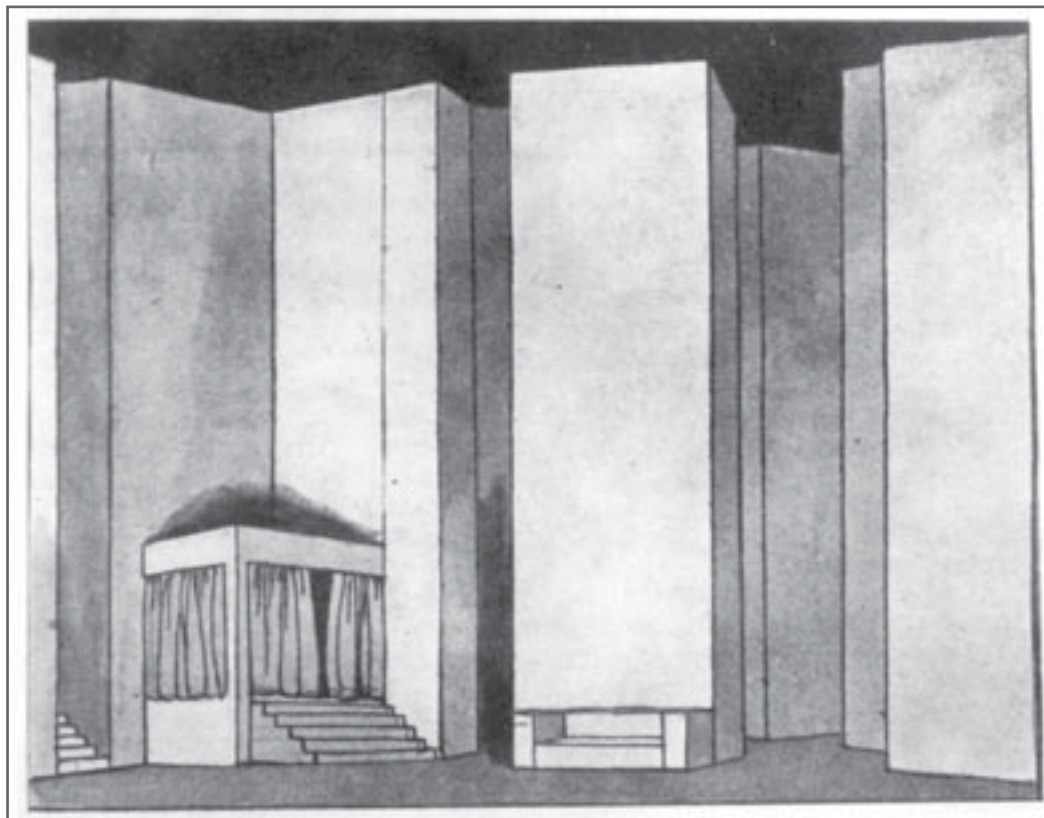
Because of the many obstacles it encountered, it is a wonder that the production ever materialized at all. The two prime creators communicated in pidgin German or French, or through translators. Countless misunderstandings or disagreements occurred regarding Craig's salary and other contractual

obligations. One of Stanislavsky's chief assistants, Leopold Sulzerzhitsky, who knew some English, nearly had several nervous breakdowns attempting to moderate between the two great artists during the nearly four-year preparation process. More importantly, Craig's function seemed never clearly defined; at various times he was designated director, but at other times designer, or simply consultant on physical aspects of production. In fact, even the choice of *Hamlet* as a production was not settled until after Craig's first visit, and then it was Stanislavsky who cast and began to rehearse the play before Craig returned for his second of four visits. Craig was never in sustained residency; even while ostensibly the director, he left Stanislavsky to work with the actors and absented himself for months at a time to work on other projects.²

It is true that Craig and Stanislavsky spent hours and days in extensive dialogue. These sessions mainly consisted of Craig describing his vision of the play, its action, characters, and specifics about blocking, while Stanislavsky listened and responded. In fact, Craig urgently but futilely pressed Stanislavsky to take on the role of Hamlet himself. Then, in 1910, the entire production process virtually came to a halt for over six months during one of Craig's absences and Stanislavsky's bout with typhoid fever. Constantly adding stress to the production were changes in the cast, as well as the theatre's repertory obligations of producing other plays even while *Hamlet* was being rehearsed.

One of the many ironies of the production process was that Craig, even more than Stanislavsky, was dedicated to the

Sketch by A. Lyubimov
of the Queen's closet
scene in *Hamlet*. Moscow
Art Theatre; designed by
Gordon Craig. (From *Teatr
i Iskusstvo*, 1912)



PHOTOS: COURTESY LAURENCE SENELICK COLLECTION

ideal of a single Artist of the Theatre controlling all aspects of production, yet here were both men trying to share creative control of a production, neither one wishing to offend the other. Faute de mieux, the *modus operandi* came to be Stanislavsky attempting to execute many of Craig's visionary concepts while not betraying his own deep commitment to a theatre grounded in psychological realism.

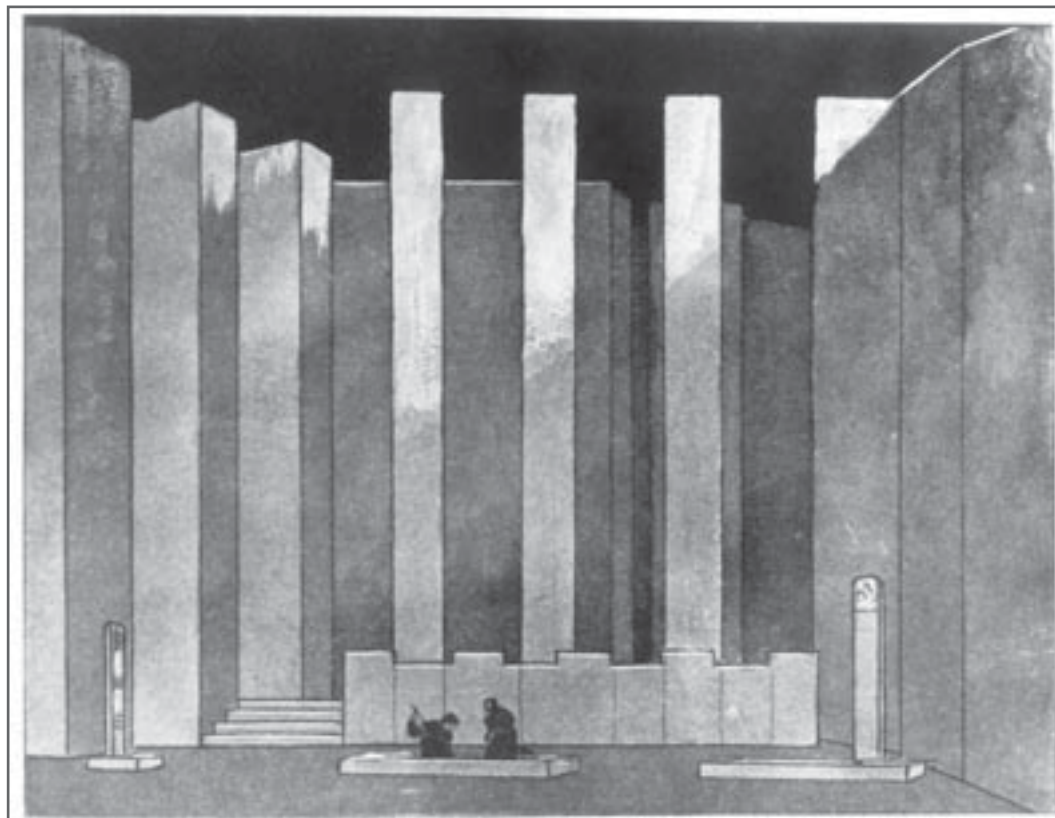
Nine years younger than Stanislavsky, Craig was a person of impulse, brilliant but erratic, one might say a greatly gifted dilettante. By temperament and conviction a Romantic idealist, he was deeply influenced by the mystical poet William Blake as well as the later Symbolist movement, and he consistently argued for a theatre of convention, not illusion; conscious stylization, not realism. Whereas Stanislavsky saw theatre as an art with social and moral obligations, Craig saw it as a temple for Art with the power of revealing ultimate truths transcending society and morality. For Craig, Hamlet was Soul surrounded by corrupt Matter, a Symbolist vision that in practice led to his wishing to introduce symbolic characters like Death as a mute onstage female companion or alter ego of Hamlet. Other ideas proposed by Craig were *Hamlet* as a monodrama, presenting the characters and action strictly as viewed by Hamlet. When Stanislavsky tentatively agreed but asked how this was to be done when Hamlet was not on stage, Craig proposed having Hamlet constantly on stage as a silent observer and witness.

Earlier, Craig's vision of the production had even involved eliminating the text and having the actors silently move to the accompaniment of music and changes of light on his specially

designed scenery, which would be moved by gray-clad personnel in view of the audience, thus conveying a sense of conscious theatricality. Similarly, Craig envisioned having Ophelia's mad scene played with everyone in masks. Stanislavsky's usually diplomatic response to such extreme visions was that MCHAT's audiences—and actors—were not ready for them, or that Craig's vision would result in a play other than *Hamlet*.

Craig's very subjective view of Hamlet was that he was a seeker of beauty, an idealized mixture of Christ and Dionysus. Vasily Kachalov, who portrayed Hamlet, was an experienced actor at his best in contemplative, lyrical roles. Like Sulerzhitsky, he experienced great stress in trying to reconcile Craig's vision with Stanislavsky's approach to the role.

What of the scenery, the screens themselves? What was their source? In 1903 and 1904, inspired by certain technical drawings by Sebastiano Serlio, Craig developed—on paper and in model form—a system of square, piston-like columns that could rise from stage level or sink beneath it, or lower from a ceiling above the stage, and be controllable by an artist from a master console. The kinetic columns, accompanied by artful light striking their changing configurations, would become a form of spatial music. Underlying this architectonic system were Craig's partly religious, partly poetic and mystical ideas about pure Movement equating with pure Imagination and possessing powers of Revelation. Here was Craig's vision of a new art, which “transcends the Theatre,” (Bablet 1966, 121) not requiring words, plays, or actors. He eventually called this visionary project simply “Scene,” and in 1923 published a series



Sketch by A. Lyubimov of the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*. Moscow Art Theatre; designed by Gordon Craig. (From *Teatr i Iskustvo*, 1912)

of black and white etchings depicting the columns in various configurations and under varied lighting conditions.

In the meantime, however, by 1907 or 1908 Craig had developed a modest off-shoot of the Scene project and had it patented in 1910. This was the system of folding screens, described above, which were intended not as a self-sufficient new art but for use in the theatre, and they came to be used for the settings in the Moscow *Hamlet*. In fact, these screens had already been available as early as 1908 when Craig gave a set to his mother, Ellen Terry, for her production of *The Merchant of Venice*, but they were never used. Their first actual use on stage occurred in 1911 for the production of some one-act plays directed by the poet William Butler Yeats in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The only difference from those in the 1912 Moscow production was in their height, those in Moscow being twenty-eight feet tall, ten feet higher than those used in Dublin. Yeats was extremely pleased by the neutral, abstract screens, finding them perfect for his poetic plays.

In practice, the screens in the Moscow *Hamlet* evolved through experiments with metal and wooden surfaces (both were far too heavy to manipulate) before settling on traditional stage flats of wooden frames and canvas stretched over them, except when gilt paper was applied over the canvas to create a symbolic golden environment for the Court scenes. Otherwise, the canvas screens were generally described as gray, but assumed different hues from on the lights cast on them.

The technical staff at the theatre had a chronic problem in handling the screens, which were difficult to keep upright and stable. A culminating frustration and near disaster occurred during the day of the premiere, when the screens collapsed after being set up for the opening scene. Desperate stage hands managed to salvage the situation in the hours remaining before the curtain was to go up, but the screens could no longer be moved in view of the audience and scene changes had to take place behind a closed curtain, which meant that Craig's ideal of kinetic scenery in view of the audience was not fulfilled.

The production created a great stir, but critic's responses were divided between those for whom the screens were an alien distraction, and those for whom they represented an exciting breakthrough to new ways of producing classic, poetic works. Probably the most insightful critical comment was made by the critic Valery Bryusov, who was sensitive to the conflicting styles of Stanislavsky and Craig: "A conventionalized staging requires conventionalized acting; the Art Theatre failed to understand this." (Bablet 1966, 180) Both Stanislavsky and Craig themselves certainly had mixed feelings about their collaboration, but put the best face on it, for the most part. Host Stanislavsky, in fact, blamed himself and MCHAT for the production's shortcomings: "There was no noble simplicity, no grand assurance...no sonorous voices and beautiful speech, harmonic movement and plastics." (Stanislavsky 1956, 522) Guest artist Craig could not mask his disappointment and re-

sentment entirely. He considered the use of the screens in *Hamlet* a mistake, and late in his life said, a bit ungraciously, "the whole project [was] like 'taking God Almighty into a music-hall.'" (Senelick 1982, 189) The production stayed in the repertoire for three seasons, with a total of forty-seven performances.

Fourteen years and a world war after the Moscow premiere, another *Hamlet* opened in Prague's National Theatre, in the early years of Czechoslovakia's newly acquired statehood. This production was directed by Karel Hugo Hilar and designed by Vlastislav Hofman, who, unlike Stanislavsky and Craig, shared a common language and cultural background and had already worked together on numerous productions for years. Both knew of Craig and his work,³ but I did not find evidence of Hilar or Hofman making specific reference to the Moscow *Hamlet* or its screens, which is not to say that they were ignorant of them.

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In any case, in the Prague production, as in the Moscow one, special panels were once again a significant scenographic element, although not as crucial as they were for Craig in Moscow. Moreover, the screens in Prague were of a different sort, and they were more successfully orchestrated with other production elements in conveying Hilar's special vision of a *Hamlet* for the postwar era.

Hilar entered a new phase of his creativity at the time of staging *Hamlet*. Known previously for his dynamic, sometimes extravagant expressionistic productions, he responded to the relative normalcy of the postwar era and to his own failing health (he had had a stroke) with a tamer, perhaps more sober approach to his art. In writing of his production of *Hamlet*, he referred to the war having made heightened emotions and grand gestures distasteful, and went on to say, "Negative reaction toward pathos as a way of stylization leads us to view Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a drama which touches the audience on a personal and intimate level; allows the overpowering romantic gesture to relax into quiet and discrete exchange of emotions from which the tragedy of Hamlet newly shines and touches our hearts." (Hilar 2002, 363)

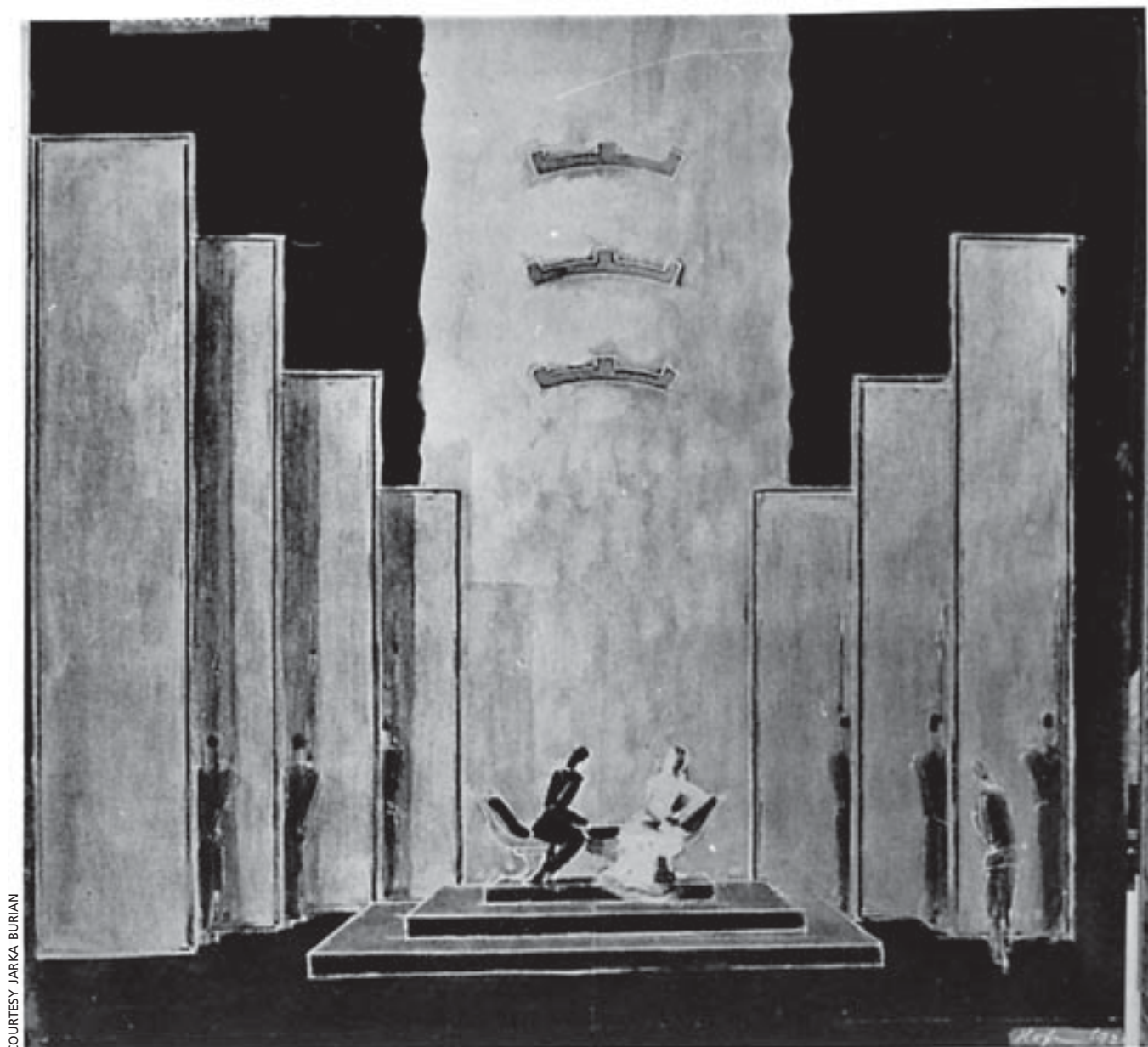
Hilar's view of *Hamlet* was that of a vulnerable, sensitive, lyrically inclined youth at a loss in dealing with the sordid realities of his world. He becomes a very human figure, more readily accessible to the feelings of postwar audiences, and very different from the last great Czech Hamlet, Eduard Vojan,

a mature figure of imposing presence and strength of purpose. As Eduard Kohout, the new Hamlet, described his and Hilar's sense of the role: "Hamlet is neither a philosopher nor a shy skeptic; he is a young man with a sensitive mind and a wounded heart." (Kohout 1975, 96) Hilar's *Hamlet* differed from the Vojan *Hamlet* in one other important way: all the major characters were given importance rather than being subordinated to Hamlet and the great actor who played him.

One other interesting note about Hilar's particular slant toward this production derives from his comments in his essay, "Revue Či Hamlet," in which he points out the virtues of the revue form with its brisk tempo, relatively short numbers, and variety of entertainment, suggesting many contemporary works would benefit from such treatment, and that Shakespeare him-

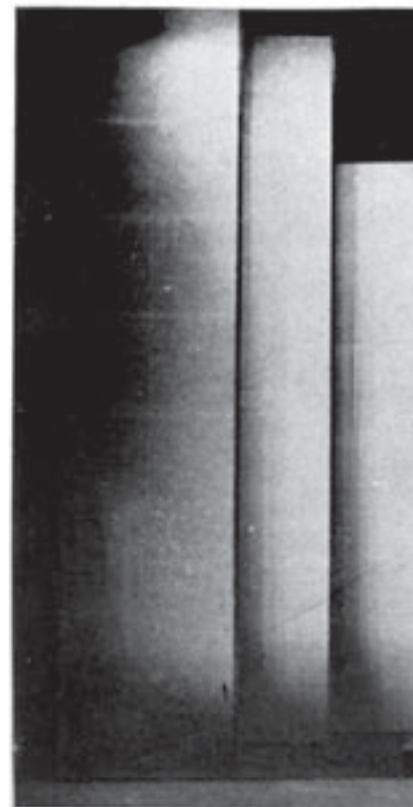
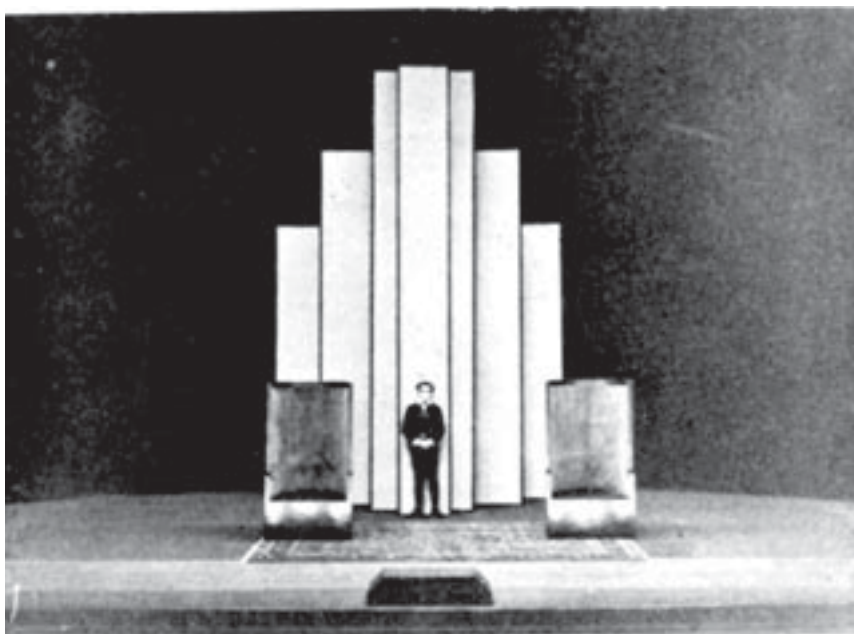
self practiced the revue form even in such a work as *Hamlet*: "It is impossible to miss the similarity between this highly spiritual dramatic text and the currently developing and fascinating form of revue." (Hilar 2002, 354) Hilar's production was also less austere and monumental in its scenography, with more varied and colorful scenic elements, a quicker tempo in its enactment, and a blend of period and contemporary elements. Hofman noted how the vertical elements of the setting derived from the Romanesque style, while the costumes and furniture conveyed a sense of the present (Hofman 1927, 162).

As to the panels themselves, there were fewer of them (illustrations show a maximum of seven rectangular ones at one time); they had varying shapes and dimensions (the tallest was at least eight feet shorter than Craig's twenty-eight foot



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One of Vlastislav Hofman's many renderings for Hilar's *Hamlet*. National Theatre, 1926.



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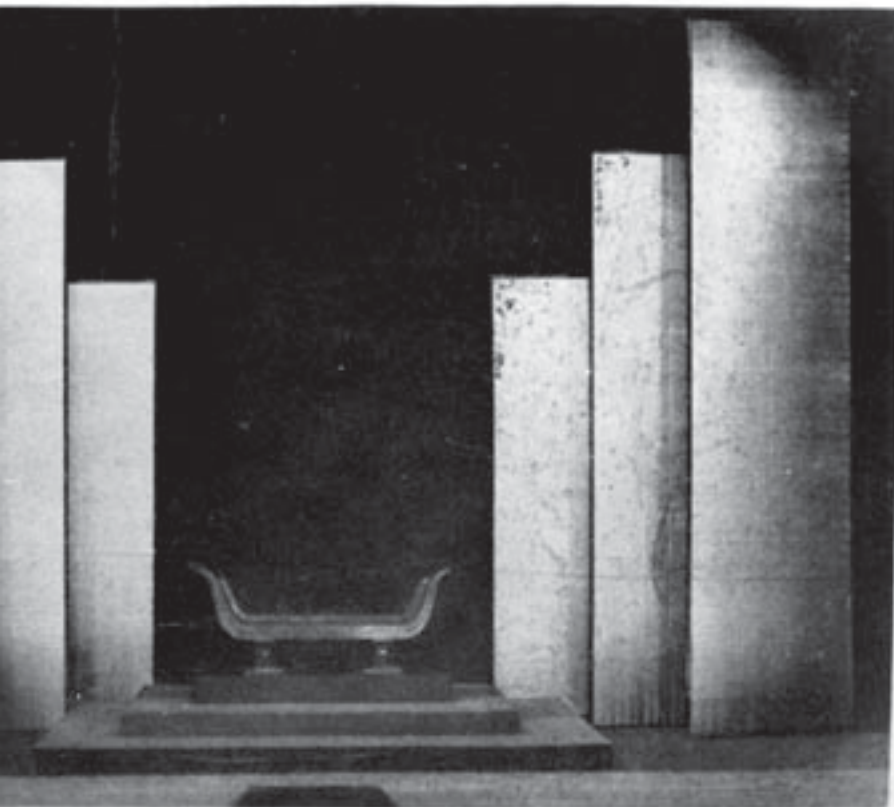
Production photos from the 1926 Hilar-Hofman *Hamlet*. Photos are unmarked, but are likely (clockwise) the "To be or not to be" scene, the queen's chamber, and the graveyard scene.

screens), and their silver gray cloth surfaces sometimes had other things attached to them, such as portraits in the Queen's chamber. Unlike Craig's screens, Hofman's panels were not intended to be moved once they were in position for each scene; that is, they were not at all kinetic. Also unlike Craig's screens, the Prague panels did not fill or dominate stage space, but accented it as they appeared selectively in various configurations for different scenes.

Hofman even designed special mutations of conventional panels in the form of a truncated conical section (in *Hamlet*'s confrontation with the Ghost), or thin vertical slats that sloped in height and could be curved to form special spatial dividers in several scenes, such as in the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia after his "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Designer Hofman also referred to a special function of the on-stage panels in hid-

ing performers, who could then make quick entrances rather than longer ones from the wings (Hofman 1951, 23).

Many other scenic elements were also used, sometimes in conjunction with the panels, such as drapes, a low central platform in center stage, some larger-than-life furniture and props, a two-tiered platform in the *Mousetrap* scene to accommodate the royal family and Ophelia, and a large exterior wall unit during the graveyard scene, when no panels at all appeared. All of these scenic elements, including the panels, were used sparingly, as suggestive architectonic indications [náznaky] of a site rather than a realistically detailed illusion of reality. Most often they formed a rather sharply illuminated island at center stage in the midst of darkened space enclosed by black drapes. The lighting in general was highly selective and focused rather than diffuse. It reflected Hilar's great concern with all aspects



of scenography, and was an example of what Hofman meant when he spoke of Hilar as a master of lighting, adding that “Hilar was very interested in scenery; perhaps more interested in scenery than in directing.” (Hofman 1936, 285) Still another evidence of Hilar’s acute sensitivity to matters of staging was his concern with sound and silence, one instance of which was his having the actors in special footgear: “The actors wore slippers with sound absorbing felt soles; everything took place in silence, like in a dream.” (Hofman 1951, 23)

All in all, Hilar and Hofman’s *Hamlet* was human centered and modest in scale when compared to the *Hamlet* of Craig and Stanislavsky with its towering screens reducing the stature of the characters before them. On the other hand, the staging of the Prague *Hamlet* had much more variety and nimbleness in its scenography, costuming, and total mise-en-scene. Undoubtedly, this more lively and yet more nuanced staging of the Prague *Hamlet* owed much of its successful synthesis of elements to the unified efforts of its director and designer and actors, in contrast to the misunderstandings and cross-purposes that plagued the creators of the Moscow *Hamlet*. Symptomatic of the difference, I believe, were the more flexibly functional and expressive panels of Prague in relation to the intimidating austerity and scale of the Moscow screens.

Although not a unanimous hit, the 1926 Prague production was hailed by most critics as the work of a creatively mature director and designer. Miroslav Rutte said that the production “is considered not only one of Hilar’s best scenic designs but also one of the most influential achievements of Czech Theatre.” (Hilar 2002, 110) The production was performed

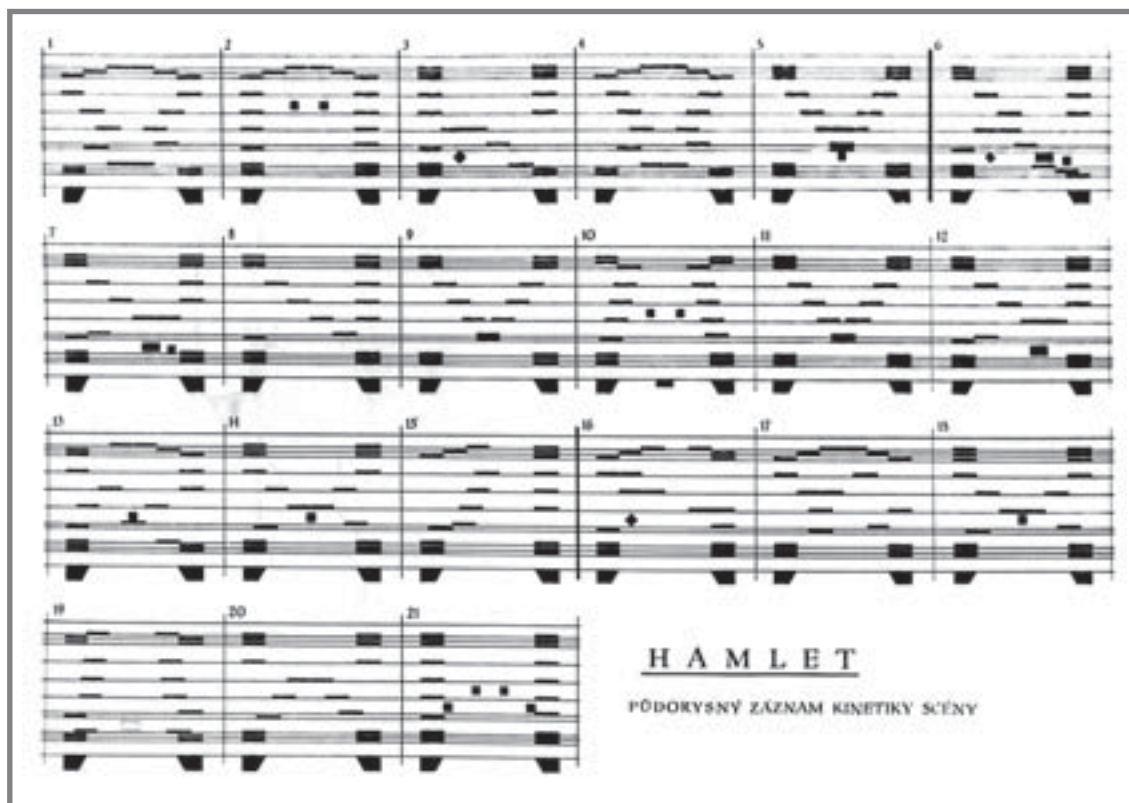
forty-five times in a repertory context, giving its final performance in November 1931.

Forty-seven years after the MCHAT production, and thirty-three years after the Hilar-Hofman version, another notable *Hamlet* had its premiere in Prague’s National Theatre, on 27 November 1959. A second World War had taken place, the Czechoslovak Republic had become the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and, by 1959, Czech theatre was experiencing a greater degree of freedom of expression than had been possible during the previous ten years, when dogmatic Socialist Realism had been an official guideline.

The 1959 National Theatre *Hamlet* was directed by Jiří Pleskot and designed by Josef Svoboda. They had previously worked on two productions together, the most recent being *Death of a Salesman* a few months earlier. Their *Hamlet*, which was to be performed 174 times between 1959 and 1966, presented still another form of panels in its staging; in fact, more than in either of the previous *Hamlets*, panels became the only tangible scenic element except for a few chairs. Moreover, these panels and their usage differed strikingly from their earlier counterparts in several ways, and embodied part of the “statement” being made by the production. While both Pleskot and Svoboda were undoubtedly aware of the Craig and Hilar productions, it is unclear to what degree they might have been influenced by that awareness, especially Svoboda. I am not aware of any earlier use of similar panels by Svoboda, but I believe that his use of laterally moving curtains in Osborne’s *Komik* in 1957 had similarities to the later *Hamlet* panels.

Director Pleskot succinctly communicated his concept of the production to Radovan Lukavský (Hamlet): “Hamlet should be a play for everyone—Hamlet without mystery, Hamlet as a human being, a thinker among the ones who act... a play for the masses.” (Lukavský 1965, 8) The implicit emphasis on an indirect critique of a socio-political system seems evident, as does Lukavský’s subsequent remark: “the most touching parts of the play are the ones reminding us of our current situation; parts which we would love to speak out loud.” (Lukavský 1965, 8) Even apart from its political overtones, Pleskot’s concept of Hamlet’s character clearly indicates contrasts to the two previous *Hamlets* of this study: “...acting style based in simplicity: dynamic yet not forced, strong but not overpowering, with sweeping motion yet balanced; internally complex but simple in its form, truthful but not boring... modern and sincere!” (Lukavský 1965, 19) Reinforcing the concept of Hamlet and his line of action was the new translation by Zdeněk Urbánek, which stressed ease of delivery and intelligibility, even if at the expense of eloquent poetry: “Text by itself ... simple and unusual at the same time; easily spoken, immediately understandable.” (Lukavský 1965, 8) In essence, the production was to present a clear, unromantic, purposeful, and morally driven action of discovering and eliminating the evils of a community.

A vigorous, brisk pace became part of the recipe for the production. Recollection of the production almost fifty years later, Pleskot wrote, “I asked Svoboda to create a set capable



Schematic groundplans for the 1959 production showing the choreographic movement of the screens for each of the play's twenty-one scenes.

of constant dynamic motion without clumsy stage mechanics. My vision of Hamlet was a 'scenic tempest.'" (Pleskot 2004) Svoboda's solution was a marvel of technical design that was at once both neutral and evocative, suggesting an engineered world or system that was ominous and restrictive, yet elegant and strangely attractive in its impersonal power.

The set consisted of twenty identical, unadorned panels measuring twenty-seven by nine feet, arranged in eleven parallel planes separated at varying distances while running upstage from the curtain line. Each plane was some seven inches higher than the one below it; nine of the eleven planes had two panels each; the remaining two planes (the fourth and fifth from the curtain line) had one panel each. The overall architectonic effect was that of a broad series of shallow stairs in stark contrast to the vertical elements of the panels in various configurations above them. Svoboda's comment on the symbolic overtones of the horizontal and vertical elements reveals another dimension to their significance: the horizontal suggested the human, folk, medieval element against the vertical allusions to the soul, spirit, philosophy, Renaissance element (Svoboda 1969). The stair motif extended to the stairs leading down into the orchestra pit, stairs which Hamlet ascended for his first entrance, almost as if from the audience, perhaps suggesting a bond between Hamlet and the spectators.

The panels were kinetic but restricted to moving laterally in their respective planes, *in view of the audience* during scene changes to form a different configuration of stage space for each of the twenty-one scenes of the production. As in the



1912 Moscow production, the panels at first were to have a metal surface, but because the resulting weight would have demanded stage machinery to make them move, Svoboda switched to panel surfaces of a lightweight plastic material, black and reflective, which gave an impression of gleaming, inhuman menace, and set up vivid visual contrasts with red and white lights that occasionally played on their surfaces. The lighter weight of the panels also meant that the movement of the panels did not require any mechanical assistance, as Pleskot noted: "There was a stage hand moving each panel from one position to the next in time to the music." (Pleskot 2004)

The reflectivity of the panels became particularly significant because it provided effective mirrored images of selected moments of the play, and it also doubled the lighting effects available to Svoboda, such as being able to cast light onto places otherwise not reachable by lighting instruments in standard positions. The reflectivity of the panels also created an especially dramatic effect during Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost on the battlements: the reflection of the rays of two lighting instruments on the upper section of a panel gave the impression of two spectral eyes, while the Ghost's pre-recorded, disembodied speeches were heard as a voice-over in the dialogue with Hamlet. (The voice was actually that of Lukavský himself.)

Pleskot's recollections cite one other important lighting

effect, which came to be one of Svoboda's trademark contributions to international scenography: "I believe we were first to introduce the ramp used for strong back-lighting effect. The first one we made in a somewhat amateur way out of car headlights. Fortinbras ordered four captains to carry the dead body of Hamlet into this light." (Pleskot 2004)

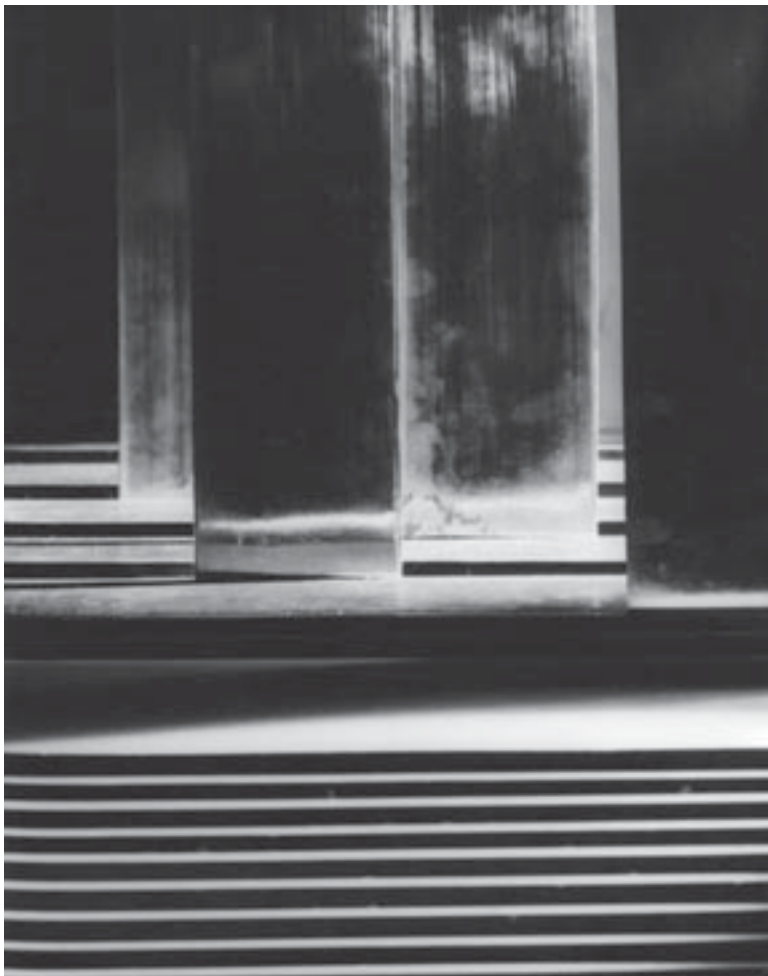
The distinctiveness of these panels becomes more apparent when contrasted to those of the earlier productions. Although the 1959 panels were the same height as those of the Craig production, in other respects the differences were striking. Unlike the panels in both earlier productions, Svoboda's were of one size and shape and color, and they were reflective. Unlike Craig's screens, which were hinged and could therefore fold and unfold in various forms, Svoboda's never altered their shape or size. Unlike Hofman's smaller panels, Svoboda's never had attachments and never were used in conjunction with other elements, such as drapes or occasionally added platforms. Also unique were the movements of the panels in fixed planes, as well as the fact that they were all on stage at the same time, even though not all of them may have been visible in various scenes. In a larger sense, Svoboda's panels were virtually entirely abstract, in no way illusional, whereas those of Craig and Hofman, stylized though they were, were meant to suggest certain types of locales for certain scenes.

Denis Bablet, who wrote extensively on Craig and Svoboda, noted their relationship in regard to the principle of movement or kinetics in scenography: "Svoboda who didn't know Craig very well, unconsciously and instinctively realized his dream, but at the same time surpassed it and gave kinetic scenography a variety and an expressive strength it had never known." (Bablet 1970, 105)

I believe that Bablet's praise of Svoboda is understandable if we realize that in this citation he is not referring only to Svoboda's 1959 *Hamlet*, but to his other kinetic scenography as well, up to 1970, which would include such productions as the 1963 Prague *Romeo and Juliet* and the 1965 *Hamlet* in Brussels, both of which employed more complex kinetic scenography that clearly does surpass [depasser] what Craig envisioned. In Svoboda's 1959 *Hamlet*, the panels certainly functioned more effectively than Craig's in practice, but the potentials of Craig's were perhaps greater. Moreover, Craig probably deserves credit for the *concept* of kinetic scenery. (I say "probably" because further research would probably reveal some lesser known figure who had thought of it before Craig.)

What must ultimately be considered about these varied *Hamlets* is the dramatic, aesthetic appropriateness of each type of panel or screen for its respective production. It seems to me that the panels in both the Czech productions were more organically suited to the concepts of their directors than was true in the Craig-Stanislavsky production, where a major problem was a confused, inconsistent concept resulting from the misunderstandings between Craig and Stanislavsky, who obviously operated on different wavelengths as individuals and as artists. The productions of the Czechs had a unity and

Below: production photos. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, National Theatre, Prague, 1959; directed by Jaromir Pleskot; designed by Josef Svoboda.



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coherence lacking in the MCHAT production; they functioned more efficiently and expressively in their total staging, in which panels played a key role, whereas the panels in the Moscow production proved to be more of a problem than an advantage. ❖

Jarka Burian was a long-time friend and contributing editor of TD&T who wrote dozens of articles and book reviews. His specialty and passion were Czech theatre and in particular the work of Josef Svoboda.

Special thanks to Grayce Burian for offering this previously unpublished article to TD&T following Jarka's death in August 2005. Thanks also to Marketa Fantova and Rita Hazlett for translating some quotes that Jarka, being the international scholar that he was, had left in their original Czech and French.

END NOTES

1. Among valuable accounts of the production process are (Bablet 1966, 133-160), (Craig 1968, 244-275), (Innes 1983, 149-175), and (Senelick 1982). I have drawn on all of these sources in this essay. Senelick's book has by far the most thorough account of the production, including transcripts of the discussions between Stanislavsky and Craig.
2. Craig paid four visits to Russia related to the production: October–November 1908, April–June 1909, February–April 1910, and December–January 1911–12. (The Gregorian calendar is used when referring to dates.)
3. Hilar wrote favorably of Craig's unhappiness with the inartistic contrast of static scenery and dynamic dramatic action, and Craig's sensitivity to the psychological effects of lighting on scenery, in (Hilar 2002, 186)

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