

PART III



Multiplicity in Unity:  
The 1930s



## CHAPTER 5



# Functions of the Aesthetic: *Ars Una* and the Five Senses

In 1891, F. X. Šalda — a figure who dominated Czech cultural discourse on literary and visual arts in the decades to either side of 1900 and beyond, whom Teige identified as ‘the founder of Czech modernism’, and who is still widely regarded as the initiator of modern Czech literary criticism — published a short story.<sup>1</sup> The story was entitled ‘Analysis’ and featured a character who suffered from the ‘illness’ of compulsive analysis. As if himself undertaking to cure this peculiarly modern illness, Šalda published a few months later his first substantive work of cultural-aesthetic theory and titled it ‘Synthetism in the New Art’.<sup>2</sup> In this major study Šalda presented the culture of the nineteenth century as haunted by a fundamental rift: between the analytical function of rationality on the one hand, aiming to secure truth yet at the cost of circumscribing its area of operation to precisely delimited objects of investigation; and the synthetizing ambition of art on the other hand, aiming to encompass the world as a whole yet confronting seemingly unavoidable limits on what could be known. But Šalda understood the art of his time as uniquely positioned to overcome the limitations on knowledge that these analytical and synthesizing cognitive drives each contained within themselves.

Šalda was thus a major transmitter to Czech cultural discourse of the impulse that David Roberts has described as underlying the ideal of the ‘total work of art’: the ‘quest for synthesis’.<sup>3</sup> Šalda’s particular version of this quest for synthesis, however,

1 Karel Teige, ‘Vůdce české moderny’ [Leaders of Czech Modernism, 1927], in *Výbor*, 1, 243–49 (p. 248).

2 See F. X. Šalda, ‘Analýza’, in *Soubor díla F. X. Šaldy*, ed. by Jan Mukařovský, Václav Černý, Felix Vodička, Jiří Pistorius, et al., 23 vols (Prague: Melantrich, Československý spisovatel, Torst, and Institut pro studium literatury: 1948–2017), III, 193–207; and ‘Synthetism v novém umění’, x, 11–54. Šalda’s study is also significant in the Czech context for the strikingly wide, comparative range of sources it draws upon, from German Idealist philosophy to French Symbolism and Naturalism to Herbert Spencer’s conception of the Unknowable.

3 David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 1. On Šalda and synthesis, see Jiří Brabec, ‘Integrační tendence v Šaldově kritickém díle’, *Česká literatura*, 15.6 (1967), 453–68 (esp. pp. 461–67). On the synthetic ideal in Czech Symbolism, see Daniel Vojtěch, *Vášeň a ideál: Na křižovatkách moderny* (Prague: Academia, 2008), pp. 61–64; and Luboš Merhaut, ‘Hledání nové syntézy: Koncepční výkony českého literárního symbolismu’, in *Symbolizmus v kontextoch a súvislostiach*, ed. by Eva Maliti (Bratislava: ÚSL SAV, 1999), pp. 210–16. As Jan Wiendl has pointed out, Šalda’s synthetist ideal meant that he could at times show

united totalizing rhetoric with proto-Constructivist language, portraying the ideal of clear functional purpose as essential to identifying the cohesive and coherent historical identity underlying the culture of the present. He wrote:

Only today have we gradually worked through to the understanding that art has no meaning in and for itself, that it has its purpose [účel] and meaning in life itself [...]. Only our age attempts to understand what those happier ages in the past understood, what they lived and breathed: that style is cultural *unity*, and wherever the individual arts, puffed up and belligerent, pursue their own, isolated goals, the result can only be chaos. [...] [Artists of those happier ages] aimed the full strength and stress of their passionate souls towards *purpose* [účel] as the foundation of the artistic work, and they sanctified internal rhythm and logic as the greatest criteria for artistic creativity. From *derivative* forms, drawn from mere fantasy or convention, we are returning towards forms that are *fundamental, simple, and purposeful*; from delusion and trickery we are returning to honesty and integrity [jadrmosti], from false decoration to structure and skeleton, from the subordinate to what is central and primary.<sup>4</sup>

Through this linkage of holistic ideal with proto-functionalist rhetoric, Šalda bequeathed to Teige a *materialist* version of ‘the synthesizing, religious-redemptive, mystic or socially utopian intentions’ Roberts describes.<sup>5</sup> We have seen how Teige was influenced by Šalda’s dictum that ‘the new beauty is above all the beauty of purpose, inner law, logic and structure’, but we have also seen the dead ends Teige encountered when he attempted to embody Šalda’s dictum through the dual programme of Constructivism and Poetism.<sup>6</sup> Towards the end of the 1920s, therefore, Teige recalibrated his thinking and attempted to formulate his materialist holism in a new way. Rather than positing underlying unity within an explicitly dualist programme, Teige developed a conception of *Ars Una*, the product of a fundamental human creative drive, as the force unifying the manifold activities of the avant-garde. Echoing Šalda’s idea of ‘synthetism’ and ‘cultural unity’ from decades earlier, Teige’s *Ars Una* recast the implicit holism of the Constructivism–Poetism platform of the mid-1920s into the form of medial holism: the conviction that the various artistic media and disciplines — rather than pursuing ‘their own, isolated goals’ — represented different facets of a single, integrated avant-gardist project, and expressed a fundamental human creative drive. This recasting ultimately allowed Teige in the mid-1930s to treat Functionalism and Surrealism not as contradictory yet complementary principles, whose paradoxical relation required subtle and inventive articulation (as had been the case with the Constructivism–

sympathy towards both communism and fascism; see Jan Wiendl, *Vizionáři a vyznavači: K otázce sepětí řádu umění a života v české poezii první poloviny 20. století* (Prague: Dauphin, 2007), p. 135.

4 F. X. Šalda, ‘Ethika dnešní obrody aplikovaného umění’ [The Ethics of the Contemporary Rebirth of the Applied Arts], in idem, *Boje o zítřek: Meditace a rapsodie, 1898–1904* (1905), in *Soubor díla*, I, 84–110 (pp. 112–13, emphases in original). It should be noted that Šalda’s proto-functionalist still admits of ‘authentic’ forms of ornament that are expressive of inner structure — a position that Teige did not follow.

5 Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, p. 144.

6 F. X. Šalda, ‘Nová krása: Její geneze a charakter’ [The New Beauty: Its Genesis and Character], in Šalda, *Boje o zítřek*, pp. 84–110 (pp. 97–98).

Poetism dualism), but simply as equivalent entrance points to a shared *Ars Una*.

This conceptual recasting is the second major shift in Teige's thought, following on from the transition from Proletarian Art to the Constructivism–Poetism paradigm in 1922–23. As with that earlier transition, Teige did not elaborate much upon this shift explicitly, instead largely pursuing the new conceptual logic as if it were a natural extension of what had come before. But also as with that earlier shift, the change in thinking was accompanied by significant realignments in personal relations and group dynamics: the move away from Proletarian Art had required the break with Neumann and the honing of Devětsil's identity as an ally of more sharply avant-gardist developments, and the move towards *Ars Una* reflected many of the tensions that would erupt in both the Generational Discussion that shook Devětsil at the end of the 1920s as well as the Mundaneum polemic with Le Corbusier. This chapter will focus on two major outcomes that the *Ars Una* paradigm initiated: the first is a shift in how Teige conceived of functionalism, a shift from the model of *monofunctionalism* to that of *polyfunctionalism*; and the second is a shift from the ideal of the *integration of art and life* to that of *aesthetic autonomy* and the 'emancipation' of purified aesthetic forms and of the productive drive. Each of these shifts is drastic enough that they could easily feed the narratives of inconsistency and inner contradiction many of Teige's critics have levelled at his thought (narratives that certainly contain a degree of validity). But the shifts appear less jarring when contextualized through one of the other most important developments in Czechoslovak aesthetic theory in the 1930s: Jan Mukařovský's Structuralist aesthetics. If Šalda was the main domestic inspirational force for Teige during much of the 1920s, Mukařovský (1891–1975) was his intellectual ally for much of the 1930s. For the most part Teige and Mukařovský did not explicitly present their theories as interrelated, but the mutually reinforcing influences between their thinking were direct and personal, and it is impossible to understand the full implications of Teige's notion of *Ars Una* without some account of Mukařovský's notion of the aesthetic function.

### One Art, Five Senses: The Turn to Polyfunctionalism

The emergence of *Ars Una* as a controlling concept is best observed in one of Teige's most significant theoretical texts from the end of the 1920s: 'Poesie pro pět smyslů, čili druhý manifest poetismu' [*Poesie for the Five Senses, or the Second Manifesto of Poetism*]. Teige often recycled and reworked material in different formats for different outlets (including, confusingly, titles), so the rather convoluted bibliographic context here calls for some explication. 'Poesie pro pět smyslů' forms the conclusory chapter of Teige's book *Svět, který voní* [*The Sweetly Scented World*, 1931], a book that constitutes one of the most fascinating theoretical documents of the interwar central European avant-garde. In that conclusory chapter Teige combined in slightly modified form two texts he had earlier published as free-standing articles, 'Manifest poetismu' [*Manifesto of Poetism*, 1928] and 'Báseň,

svět, člověk' [Poem, World, Human Being, 1930].<sup>7</sup> *Svět, který voní*, in turn, is only one volume of a 'diptych' entitled *O humoru, clownech, and dadaistech* [On Humour, Clowns, and Dadaists], of which the first volume was Teige's book *Svět, který se směje* [The Laughing World, 1928]. Teige characterized this diptych as the gradual working out and development of ideas dating back to 1924, and the two volumes collect, order, and partially revise texts that were published in scattered outlets over the mid- to later 1920s, thus documenting a gradual change in Teige's thinking over a period of six years.<sup>8</sup> The cycle shows a shift in attention from Dada (which Teige regarded as progressive in its humour and 'felicology' but regressive in its nihilism) towards Surrealism (which Teige regarded as regressive in its early 'mysticist' phase but increasingly progressive as it solidified its Marxist commitment). This mounting interest in Surrealism notwithstanding, even the conclusory chapter of the entire diptych, 'Poesie pro pět smyslů', remains firmly committed to the paradigm of Poetism in its synthetic dualism with Constructivism. Nowhere is this clearer than in Teige's summarizing comment in the final pages of the book: 'Therefore: Poetism as the overcoming of the antagonism between poem and world, a new synthesis of poem and world, a synthesis of construction and poem [*stavby a básně*].'<sup>9</sup> But the route towards Teige's future conciliation with Surrealism is also clearly visible, in particular in the linkage of Poetism with libidinal drives and the concomitant interest in Freudian psychoanalysis. (One commentator has even claimed that 'for a while, Freud became as important to [Teige and Nezval] as Marx'.)<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the second part of 'Poesie pro pět smyslů' had originally been published in *Zvěrokruh* [Zodiac, 1930], a quasi-Surrealist publication that Nezval had edited and that (in its second issue, also 1930) contained the Czech translation of Breton's Second Surrealist Manifesto. And in the Afterword to *Svět, který voní* (dated January 1931) Teige noted a certain alliance between the two approaches: 'Despite the deep differences that

7 These individual articles are contained, respectively, in *Výbor*, 1, 323–59 and 487–500. In the discussion that follows I will give page references both to the revised version in *Svět, který voní* and to the earlier versions in *Výbor*.

8 In the Afterword to *Svět, který se směje* Teige pointed out that the title of the diptych (and part of the contents of that first volume) originates from an article he published in 1924, linking the origins of this cycle firmly to the period of the 1924 manifesto 'Poetism', whose implications it elaborates and develops; see Karel Teige, *Svět, který se směje* (Prague: Odeon, 1928), p. 90; and the 1924 article, Karel Teige, 'O humoru, klaunech, a dadaistech', in *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*, ed. by Štěpán Vlašín, 3 vols (Prague: Svoboda, 1971), 1, 571–86. Muddying the waters yet further is that in 1925 Teige published an article that also bore the title 'Poesie pro pět smyslů: Z knihy O humoru, clownech [*síc*], a dadaistech' [*Poesie for the Five Senses: From the book On Humour, Clowns, and Dadaists*], some of which fed into the later 'Manifest poetismu' but which should not be confused with the book chapter 'Poesie pro pět smyslů, čili druhý manifest poetismu' in *Svět, který voní*. See Karel Teige, 'Poesie pro pět smyslů', in *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*, 11, 191–96; originally published in *Pásmo*, 2.2 (1925), 23–24, with the subtitle and with *poesie* spelled with an 's'.

9 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 236. *Stavba a básně* [Building (or more broadly, 'construction') and Poem] was the title of Teige's major collection of theoretical statements from the early to mid-1920s, published in 1927 (see Fig. 1.9).

10 Karel Srp, 'Karel Teige During the Thirties: Projecting Dialectics', in *Karel Teige, 1900–1951: L'Enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde*, ed. by Eric Dluhosch and Rostislav Švácha (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 256–91 (p. 261).

remain between Poetism and Surrealism, these two approaches share a fate: they are summarily and comprehensively condemned by pseudointellectual revolutionaries and revolutionary pseudointellectuals as spiritualist games, as bourgeois pastimes, as blossoms of decadence [...].<sup>11</sup> So 'Poesie pro pět smyslů' provides a long-exposure picture of Teige's thought in transition: with one foot it remains on the ground of the Constructivism–Poetism dualism of the 1920s, with the other it steps towards the new territory that Surrealism and Functionalism opened for him in the 1930s.

'Poesie pro pět smyslů' presents a developmental account of art and its relation to the notion of function. Teige writes:

The history of the human spirit, illuminated through psychoanalytic research, has shown how human affective needs were originally intertwined with material and utilitarian needs, and how the satisfaction of the latter simultaneously brought the satisfaction of the former. Aesthetic activity first inclines towards utilitarian functions and serves practical life (cave paintings, medieval artisanal arts, folklore) and later becomes independent.<sup>12</sup>

Teige describes the development away from this originary state as the increasing separation of aesthetic activity from such utilitarian needs and functions, and as a centuries-long 'emancipatory struggle, a struggle for the freedom and independence of non-utilitarian, aesthetic values'.<sup>13</sup> He states as a fundamental principle of contemporary aesthetic activity that it 'demand first and foremost the absolute purity of *poesie* and not allow that it be applied to any extra-aesthetic purposes', and that it instead pursue a function and purpose of its own: an *aesthetic* function, which aims 'not at rational comprehensibility but rather at maximal emotional effect'.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, for example, in the medieval period painting had served a didactic function and stood under 'the strict constraints of church doctrine', which required not only that art must 'transmit the literary content of [hagiographic] legends' and Biblical stories, but also that use of colour and composition follow set regulations (the colour of the Virgin Mary's cloak, for example, must always be blue). As aesthetic activity emancipated itself from such utilitarian functions and regulatory restrictions, art both shed its role as communicator of specific discursive content, doctrine, or propaganda and gained the freedom to use colour and composition as best befitted the emotional intensity the artist wished to convey. Thus when in a seventeenth-century Dutch still life the composition required a field of dark red the artist placed, say, a beetroot, and so on, demonstrating that, while still remaining faithful to a realistically conceived depiction of the outer world, the actual content being depicted was becoming indifferent, chosen not for itself but for its particular optical qualities and emotional valence. In Teige's account Romanticism (and then especially the lyric poetry of Baudelaire) played a key role in this development

11 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 239.

12 Ibid, pp. 204–05; *Výbor*, I, 339. See also Karel Teige, 'K teorii konstruktivismu' [Towards a Theory of Constructivism, 1928], in *Výbor*, I, 360–70 (361–62).

13 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 205; *Výbor*, I, 340.

14 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 203; *Výbor*, I, 338. Teige does not explicitly use the term 'aesthetic function', though it is implicit in his conception of *poesie* emancipated from all extra-aesthetic purposes.

because it ‘liberates form and returns *poesie* to its natural born, specific function’.<sup>15</sup> The development of both visual and verbal art into the twentieth century showed the ever deepening commitment to such purely formal, emotional and, as Teige described them, ‘non-literary’ criteria (that is, not communicating through *ratio*), to the point where in Cubism the connection to a depiction of external reality snaps entirely.<sup>16</sup>

Underlying this developmental scheme was the shift from a monofunctional to a polyfunctional conception of aesthetic production. Teige did not himself use this terminology — it was Mukařovský who developed the mono-/polyfunctional distinction a few years later — but it is implicit in Teige’s notion of an ‘emancipation’ of the emotional or aesthetic function of art away from the rational and utilitarian functions with which art had so long been linked.<sup>17</sup> The admission of a multiplicity of different functions, including an aesthetic function, in place of ‘functionality’ as such represents a fundamental shift from the functionalist rhetoric Teige had invoked from the early to the mid-1920s. Constructivism, recognizing only ‘functionality’ versus a ‘nonfunctionality’ conceived as superfluous ornament, had presupposed the fundamental integration of the utilitarian function and aesthetic efficacy: Teige had vehemently maintained that the latter was only achieved when the former was granted sole legitimacy. In 1925 he had written that ‘we cannot say that architecture begins where construction ends because in *the very moment when we achieve an all-round, functional perfection, we achieve beauty simultaneously and automatically*’.<sup>18</sup> Even as late as the Mundaneum polemic (which was basically contemporaneous with ‘Manifest poetism’) Teige had berated Le Corbusier precisely for positing a ‘beauty function’ separate from, and to be ‘added on’ to, the ‘utility function’ in order to transform a mere building into true architecture. So what was going on with Teige’s admission of an emancipated aesthetic function? Was he being manifestly inconsistent, not to say unfair, in reproaching Le Corbusier for a conceptual position that Teige himself seemed to presume in other statements from roughly the same period?

Partially, yes. As discussed, this period is one of conceptual transition for Teige, and there is at times a degree of uneasy co-existence in his writings towards the end of the 1920s between positions that are not always easy to reconcile. But equally, no: Teige *does* have a point against Le Corbusier, even in the context of his increasing adoption of a polyfunctional position that admits independent utilitarian (or practical) and aesthetic functions. The difference between Le Corbusier’s model of a beauty function added on to the utility function and Teige’s model of the

15 Karel Teige, ‘Charles Baudelaire’ (1927), in *Výbor*, I, 168–219 (p. 168).

16 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, pp. 205–06; *Výbor*, I, 340–41.

17 See Irina Wutsdorff, ‘Aesthetic Function and Functionalism’, in *A Glossary of Catchwords of the Czech Avant-Garde: Conceptions of Aesthetics and the Changing Faces of Art, 1908–1958*, ed. by Petr A. Bílek, Josef Vojvodík and Jan Wiendl, trans. by David Short (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2011), pp. 71–83.

18 Karel Teige, ‘Constructivism and the Liquidation of “Art”’, in Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, trans. by Irena Žantovská-Murray and David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2000), pp. 331–40 (p. 338); Teige, ‘Konstruktivismus a likvidace “umění”’, in Teige, *Výbor*, I, 129–43 (p. 140). Emphasis in original.



emancipation of the aesthetic function from the utilitarian lay in the distinction between mixing these functions together — Le Corbusier's 'addition' of beauty onto utility — as opposed to their increasing separateness: what Teige described as the 'purification' of these independent functions. He writes of the 'increasing tendency [tendence] towards the purification of poe<sup>s</sup>ie, the thoroughgoing elimination of foreign elements [cizorodých prvků] (morals, ideology, history, etc.).'<sup>19</sup> So when an object served an aesthetic function (as in the case of, say, a Cubist painting) it must be purified of all non-aesthetic demands — it must not aim to communicate a story or political message (that is, 'literary criteria') but must focus solely on the evocation of emotional intensity. Equally, when an object served a utilitarian purpose then it must be subject solely to the dictates of the utilitarian function. This also applied to architecture, even though the result would be aesthetically effective due to the 'purity' of the utilitarian solution.<sup>20</sup>

Teige's polyfunctionalism was thus indeed something different from Le Corbusier's model of 'utility plus beauty' functions. Each of Teige's emancipated functions strives towards purity, in other words, an *integral form* in which it is purely itself. This polyfunctional model thus remains in many ways consistent with Teige's anti-ornamental rhetoric from his monofunctionalist texts: each of the purified functions sheds everything external or foreign to its purified form. In the case of visual art, this meant that any narrative, communicative, and ultimately any depictive function was abandoned to allow emotional intensity to emerge in its purist possible form.<sup>21</sup> In the case of literature, this likewise meant the culmination of a development towards emotion and affect that began with Romanticism, which 'released poe<sup>s</sup>ie from foreign elements and functions [cizorodých prvků a funkcí] and turned attention away from ideology and anecdote towards form'.<sup>22</sup> A central aspect of such purified forms was that they bypassed the intellect and appealed directly and immediately to the emotions and the human sensorium. Teige goes on to celebrate 'Poe<sup>s</sup>ie which is a form of music, as it speaks not to the intellect but to the senses. [...] Poe<sup>s</sup>ie that operates solely through sound and melody, poe<sup>s</sup>ie that is neither rhetoric nor tractatus but pure writing [...] Poe<sup>s</sup>ie unshackled from literature, liberated from rhetoric, logic, and everything that stands between the poet, poe<sup>s</sup>ie, and their pleasures'.<sup>23</sup>

19 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 202; *Výbor*, I, 330. Emphasis in original.

20 See, e.g., Teige, 'K teorii konstruktivismu', p. 367. This text is particularly marked by the tension between Teige's monofunctionalist model, seeing 'beauty' only in the strict fulfilment of utilitarian purpose, and the polyfunctionalist model admitting a 'purified', independent aesthetic function.

21 Tomáš Jirsa writes that the 'anti-ornamental tendency in — not only — Czech avant-garde art is closely linked to an awareness of the crisis in imaging augured by Cubism, distrust of representation and designation typical of the beginnings of Modernism'; Tomáš Jirsa, 'Anti-Ornament', in *A Glossary*, ed. by Bílek, Vojvodík and Wiendl, pp. 99–111 (p. 102). Teige, to be sure, conceives this 'crisis in imaging' in positive terms as the 'emancipation' from extra-aesthetic demands.

22 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 13. This quotation is from the first chapter, 'Od romantismu k dadaismu', and is not contained in *Výbor*.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24, emphasis in original. See also his paean to the 'pure verbal art' developed in poetry from Gautier through Rimbaud and Mallarmé to Marinetti: 'words, words, words, a verbal

The polyfunctionalist paradigm did not merely separate out the utilitarian from the aesthetic function: the aesthetic function further separated into different variants for different media. In search of their purified forms, different media followed distinct functional dynamics corresponding to their material and the specific human senses those media primarily addressed. Painting as an optical medium becomes, as we have seen, a search for pure colour composition. Poetry as a linguistic medium loses its 'utilitarian' function as communicative language and becomes an exploration of the materiality of the word, which Teige at times cast as its auditory aspect but at other times as its character as sign. He wrote:

Words delude. They are the garb of our illusions, seeming to designate reality. They are symbols certifying centuries-old superstitions, counterfeit banknotes of the gold standard of reality. We cannot know how and whether words correspond to truth and reality. The relation between an object and its name is inexact. We cannot know what lies underneath a word other than its canonized meaning. The nomenclatorial work of Adam in Paradise needs urgent scientific review. For the poet the word cannot be an image and replacement for a reality that would thereby lose colour, shape, essentiality; for the poet the word is material; it must become its own definite reality, as real as brick or marble. Its validity lies not in the problematic relation to reality but in its capacity to evoke associations, in its form, sound, movement, its capacity for play: for it is not the precise designation of an object but rather only its general casing, connecting the object with the most distant images. The new poetry will thus be its own reality, born from the misalliance of words.<sup>24</sup>

By embracing *poesie*, therefore, literature becomes 'non-literary' in Teige's derogatory sense of the literary as mere communication of messages, narratives, or tendentious or didactic content. Music, similarly, becomes pure manipulation of sound and noise, the exploration of the emotional and psychological valences they evoke. But Teige goes far beyond the usual media identified as vehicles for artistic practice and identifies the potential for an olfactory art (creating 'symphonies of sweet scents' [*symfonie vůní*]) that could summon the sort of powerful experiences lovers know so well), a tactile art (made from 'delicate, smooth, rough, hot or cold fabrics, from silk, velour, brushes, mildly electrified wires etc.' that would 'train our capacity for tactile emotion'), and not surprisingly an art of taste and gastronomy.<sup>25</sup> Art, in other words, involves exploration of the creative potential of a palette of materials that in principle is unlimited: anything that can be registered by any of the five senses comes into consideration.

The polyfunctionalist model thus took its place at the confluence of several of Teige's longstanding thematic priorities, linking them into a single conceptual stream and offering new ways to articulate their intermixing. The first was the *materiality* of artistic practice, the conviction that what the different artistic media do is explore the nature and possibilities of the material with which they work, whether that be

ballet without *sujet*, without anecdote, without *fabula* or tendentiousness'; Karel Teige, 'Poezie románu' (1926), in *Výbor*, I, 163–67 (p. 163).

<sup>24</sup> Teige, *Svět, který voní*, pp. 94–95. This quotation is from the chapter 'Slova, slova, slova' [Words, Words, Words, originally 1926], Teige's most extensive discussion of the linguistic medium in the book. It is not contained in *Výbor*.

<sup>25</sup> Teige, *Svět, který voní*, pp. 220–21; *Výbor*, I, 355–56.

colour, form, language, sound, scent, taste etc. This focus on materiality offered a way to recast artistic practice in a manner that brought it closer to political conviction, making it a form of engagement and potential transformation of the physical world. The second was the involvement of the full range of *human senses*, the conviction that the traditionally privileged senses of sight and hearing were not the only organs through which meaningful aesthetic experience could be transmitted. This focus on the five senses offered an anthropological perspective that cast art (with the usual caveat recalling Teige's critique of the traditional notion of what constitutes art) as exercise or expansion of the human sensorium, fostering an integrated, '*total human being*'.<sup>26</sup> And the third was *technology* and the new possibilities it opened for aesthetic experience. Teige breathlessly catalogued new genres and media that technological advancements would allow: 'pure' cinematography, bringing a 'photogenic *poesie*, the dynamic image, [...] a grandiose and chronospatial poem'; radiogenic *poesie*, 'as a new art of sound and music, as distant from literature and recitation as from music'; optophonetic *poesie*, in which beams of light projected onto a screen would be 'translated' by induction mechanisms into sound, allowing one to hear, so to speak, a square or a triangle and to 'combine chords of geometrical forms of light'; and so on. Exploiting the potential for aesthetic experience that new technologies offered, Poetism brought 'proposals for a new *poesie* that aims to make the universe poetic through all the means that contemporary science and industry provide'.<sup>27</sup>

Many of these proposals now sound decidedly idealistic. In some cases these genres seem more like gimmicks than revolutionary new media, and it is difficult to avoid thinking that watching an optophonetic poem translating the play of geometric shapes into sound might quickly become dull, rather than being the exciting experience Teige posits. This point is not merely frivolous. Teige's excitement about these new possibilities rested on the claim that by cutting out the detour through the *ratio* they functioned as 'direct inductors of the emotions'.<sup>28</sup> They appealed *directly* to our sensory organs and such unmediated sensory appeal, Teige maintained, is not only immediate but irresistible. In this sense he invoked the same 'logic of spontaneity' as he had done since the early 1920s, when he defended mass culture — Chaplin films, adventure novels, and the like — as a progressive force (as we saw in Chapter Three). The logic back then drew support from the undeniable fact that mass culture was — it is indeed a tautology to note — widely popular. But one need only imagine a worker going to relax at the cinema after a gruelling shift at the factory and choosing between a Buster Keaton film or the latest optophonetic poem to see how far Teige's logic has led him. The criteria of immediacy and spontaneity have drifted away from the 'everyday world' and the humble joys of 'the people' into a realm of esoteric experiment.<sup>29</sup>

26 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 232; *Výbor*, I, 494.

27 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, pp. 217–19; *Výbor*, I, 351–54. Rea Michalová points out that some of what Teige anticipates here would later be described as *musique concrète*, see Rea Michalová, *Karel Teige: Captain of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Daniel Morgan and Stephan von Pohl (Prague: KANT, 2018), p. 190.

28 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 203; *Výbor*, I, 338.

29 One of the major differences between the two volumes of *O humoru, clownech a dadaistech* is that *Svět, který se směje* maintains the focus on mass cultural forms that Teige emphasized in the early

A second critical point one might raise is that the proliferation of new technological media and the corresponding expansion of sensory experiences they initiated sounds very close to what Šalda had decried a quarter-century earlier when he stated that if ‘the individual arts, puffed up and belligerent, pursue their own, isolated goals, the result can only be chaos’. Has polyfunctionalism — embracing an enormous range of ‘purified’ forms of aesthetic production — not led away from the ideal of synthesis? How does polyfunctionalism square with the increasingly important postulate of *Ars Una*? Teige’s response was that while each of these media may answer to particular functional requirements in accordance with their material, all of them represent facets of the aesthetic function. And the focus of the aesthetic function is *poesie*: the word repeats like a regular drumbeat in all of the chapters of *Svět, který voní*; it reappears relentlessly as the endpoint and sole justification for aesthetic activity of any kind: visual, verbal, acoustic, dramatic. Teige described *Ars Una* as the intuition of underlying *correspondences* (the reference to Baudelaire is explicit) between different media:

The current epoch of our civilization represents a phase when the individual forms and fields of art have shed the purposes they served in the past, when aesthetic activity has unshackled itself from the utilitarian character of previous artisan crafts so as to live independently, and when these emancipated artistic fields draw closer and merge together so that it will no longer be possible to divide and distinguish them using the categories of previous aesthetic systems. This era when new scientific and technological capacities lead to new aesthetic fields and configurations has ignited the *notion of the correspondence and unity of artistic emotion*.<sup>30</sup>

This shared foundation in immediate, affective, emotional power — the ‘*idea of correspondences* between the sensations of individual senses and the perception of hidden analogies among the individual fields of art’ — means that *poesie* for the five senses reveals a new *Ars Una*: Poetism realizes the ‘possibility of a holistic [*totální*] *poesie* calling for the *active cooperation of all the senses*’ and ‘declares a new synthesis, absolute, universal *poesie* for all the senses, a new *Ars Una*, united and multifaceted’.<sup>31</sup> Precisely the emancipation and ensuing purification of various fields of aesthetic activity revealed the common ground from which they all sprung.

### The Laboratory of the World: The Turn to Aesthetic Autonomy

The gradual separation of functions and the ever greater emancipation of *poesie* and the aesthetic function was not the only historical tale that ‘*Poesie pro pět smyslů*’ had to tell. The other historical narrative structuring Teige’s account here involved *the end or decline of art* (*zánik umění*). More precisely, since he was aware that ‘the decline of art has been proclaimed many times’ from Hegel through Dada, Teige

1920s, while *Svět, který voní* turns attention more to ‘high’ modernism (Baudelaire, Symbolism, Cubism) and technologically experimental new forms.

30 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, pp. 208–09 (emphasis in original); *Výbor*, I, 343–44.

31 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 202 and 215 (emphases in original); *Výbor*, I, 349–50 (slightly different version).

presented what he considered a more historically and materially grounded narrative about the gradual ‘extinction and progressive degeneration of the individual artistic disciplines’, that is, of the traditional forms and media of art such as painting, sculpture, literature, and so on.<sup>32</sup> We have seen that in the early and mid-1920s Teige felt that the dominant feature of art in the nineteenth century was its deepening separation from society as a whole: ‘The parting of art from society and the public, beginning in the last century with the end of the *Empire* style that had emerged from the French Revolution, continued with ever accelerating pace over recent decades, and today is an undeniable fact. *Art for art’s sake*, that slogan and goal from years back [...] has now become reality, and this reality is a curse.’<sup>33</sup> Cut off from ‘life’, the arts withered: ‘The previous forms of art — painting, sculpture, dramatic and verbal art — are stored away for good next to obsolete systems of instruction, defunct philosophies, insalubrious morals, washed out metaphysics, mythologies and religions in the archives of history and the collections of museums, only to exist henceforth as objects of historical research and archaeological interest’.<sup>34</sup> The hiding away of traditional art in museums, galleries, ateliers and similar spaces was the tangible manifestation of art’s autonomy, of its lack of any genuine connection with contemporary life.

Thus far Teige’s account is fairly standard avant-gardist dogma: traditional art is execrated for its affiliation with lifeless history, stuffy museums, snobbish art galleries, and dusty archaeological collections. But Teige developed an increasingly nuanced view on the autonomy of art. Even in the mid-twenties he was aware that not all aesthetic autonomy was baleful. In 1924 he wrote:

The misunderstandings produced by the enormous isolating distance that social developments have placed between art and society gave rise to the seductive yet delusive slogan: ‘art for art’s sake’. *L’art pour l’art* represents a badly conceived autonomy of art. Art, after all, has no meaning in and of itself, it only has purpose and meaning in connection with life; and just as a machine is only a machine when it is doing work, so art is only art when it is performing its function.<sup>35</sup>

If aesthetic autonomy can be ‘badly conceived’, that implies that it can also be properly conceived. While in the mid-1920s Teige was still mostly focused on the bad conception — on how ‘art became an internal affair of ateliers’<sup>36</sup> — he was well aware that this situation was not merely the result of bourgeois artists allowing themselves to become corrupted by market forces or misguided by commodity

32 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 222; *Výbor*, I, 487. This theme of the ‘systematic liquidation of previous artistic forms in order to inaugurate the reign of pure *poesie*, sparkling in countless forms, multifarious like fire and love’, was announced as early as 1924: see Karel Teige, ‘Poetismus’, in *Výbor*, I, 121–28 (p. 126).

33 Karel Teige, ‘Umění dnes a zítra’ [Art Today and Tomorrow, 1922], in *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*, I, 365–81 (p. 366).

34 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 224; *Výbor*, I, 487–88.

35 Karel Teige, ‘Moderní umění a společnost’ [Modern Art and Society, 1924], in *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*, I, 505–13 (p. 505).

36 Loc. cit.

fetishism. Those factors certainly existed, but aesthetic autonomy under capitalism was unavoidable even for genuinely talented and progressive artists. For the separation of art from society stemmed from the nature of capitalist society: on the one hand these social dynamics led the great majority of artists to passively accept corrupted, commodified ideals, but on the other they caused true artistic talent to actively recoil. Teige wrote: 'While this ideological and academic art, hatefully rebuking free modern creative work, grapples for prizes, recognition in competitions, and awards in salons, or for government subventions and donations from the bourgeoisie, the true and pure modern artists were forced by the circumstances to sever radically *art from the state and from society*, and they proclaimed their autonomy'.<sup>37</sup> This, presumably, was aesthetic autonomy properly conceived: a protest against the corrosive dynamics of bourgeois capitalist society and its commodification of art. Aesthetic autonomy was thus inherent in the structure of this society, not the result of the failure of individuals; strong artists embraced it as well as weak ones, albeit for different reasons.

Within a few years Teige was emphasizing such 'properly conceived' autonomy ever more forcefully. He described a dialectical shift from the debilitating aesthetic autonomy imposed by bourgeois capitalism, which had caused the traditional art forms to languish and wither due to their separation from and irrelevance to life and society, towards an aesthetic autonomy that progressive artists had carved out as a space for free artistic experiment. He wrote:

The gradual extinction of the old forms of art through their isolation from production processes and social life prepared the ground and opened up paths to entirely new forms and to the creation of a new synthesis of poem and world [*bázně a světa*]. The evolution of artistic forms, which in the period of late capitalist industry were excluded from the process of production and thus ultimately from the world itself, took them to the edge, to an extreme, and to decline. In this condition of isolation from the world and from social life, however, the conditions were simultaneously created to overcome just that isolation through new and different forms. [...] One must admit that it is precisely in art — a field quite distant from productive and social life and as a result a field of greater freedom, less burdened by the concerns of the ruling class — that inklings, glimpses, hints appeared very early on of new forms and new social transformations, and that the 'community of artists', that 'aristocracy of the nerves', that republic of *déclassé* individuals, people *in extremis* [...] showed a range of points of contact with revolutionary social forces.<sup>38</sup>

Certain forms of late nineteenth-century autonomous art, therefore, despite having no overt progressive political commitment, anticipated or contributed (perhaps indirectly, perhaps unknowingly) to new social transformations, which Teige, not surprisingly, implicitly understood as movement towards communism. This represents a further extension of his critique of tendentious art from the early 1920s: whereas earlier Teige had opposed tendentious art to the Poetist ideal of

37 Karel Teige, 'Doba a umění' [Art and the Age, 1923], in Teige, *Stavba a báseň: Umění dnes a zítra* (Prague: Vaněk & Votava, 1927), pp. 24–52 (p. 38). Emphasis in original.

38 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 224; *Výbor*, 1, 488.



a non-utilitarian art fully integrated with ‘life’ and its everyday joys and humble manifestations, now he opposed it to an autonomous art (‘properly conceived’, of course) that carried out its adventurous experiments in splendid isolation from the surrounding society.

To a degree this new scheme constituted an admission that the necessary social transformations had not yet fully taken hold: progressive art must still imagine a future by studying what lies immanent yet insufficiently developed in the present.<sup>39</sup> The condition of autonomy had allowed the emergence of new artistic forms, but the reconnection with life had been pushed off into the future:

The isolation of art from life, from society, from production, gave rise to the elements of the new *poesie* and withered the old artistic forms. This isolation, which gave to art an *atelier- and laboratory-like purity* [*atelierovou a laboratorní čistotu*] by stripping it of any social or utilitarian function, which meant the complete loss of contact between art and people, crystallized a new *poesie* capable of realization, which can shine, live, and achieve victory only by regaining that contact. This will not happen by returning to the old conditions but by achieving a connection and integration [*splynutí*] with the world and society on a *higher developmental level of poem and society* [*básně a společnosti*].<sup>40</sup>

Teige’s appeal to an ‘*atelier- and laboratory-like purity*’ stands in striking contrast to his earlier pejorative use of such images, and this passage makes clear how radical a shift his thinking underwent in the later 1920s. When compared to how stubbornly the scholarly literature has focused on the alleged contradictions and paradoxes of the Constructivism–Poetism dualism in the 1920s, it is striking that this later shift — which appears an even more fundamental contradiction, a complete reversal from the position of ‘integration of art and life’ to the embrace of aesthetic autonomy — has not received more attention. The shift meant that ‘only by concentrating on its own functionality, that is, by focussing on its own particular internal laws, can art contribute in its own specific way to the far-reaching liberation of man; only as autonomous can art fulfil its emancipatory function’.<sup>41</sup> Teige’s monofunctionalist position of the early 1920s, which presented Poetism as *purposeless* and thus radically anti-utilitarian (Poetism ‘is a signpost of a path that does not lead from anywhere to anywhere, but which revolves in a resplendent fragrant park’), shifted towards a polyfunctionalist position casting the aesthetic function as the abdication of any aim towards external utility while yet retaining the *form of purposiveness* — that is, towards something resembling the Kantian dictum of ‘purposiveness without purpose’ (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*).<sup>42</sup> The further Teige moved towards his eventual rapprochement with Surrealism, the more he emphasized this image of the

39 In many respects this represents the re-emergence of the notion of a ‘fore-image’ (*předobraz*) that Teige had described as early as 1921 (at a time when he was still committed to the ideal of *lidovost*). See Karel Teige, ‘Obrazy a předobrazy’ [Images and Fore-Images], in *Výbor*, 1, 25–32.

40 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 226; *Výbor*, 1, 489. Emphases in original.

41 Wutsdorff, ‘Aesthetic Function and Functionalism’, p. 74.

42 Karel Teige, ‘Poetism’, trans. by Ian Finlay, in *From Laughter to Forgetting: A Sourcebook of Czech Interwar Avant-Garde Discourses*, ed. by Zuzana Říhová (Prague: Karolinum, 2023), pp. 149–54 (p. 151); Teige, ‘Poetismus’, p. 123.

‘laboratory’ of the aesthetic: a space of aesthetic autonomy where creative activity, emancipated from the fetters and deforming dynamics of a commodified world, could pursue its own purified forms.<sup>43</sup>

To make sense of this shift requires looking once more at the notion of an independent aesthetic function: the ‘laboratory’ of aesthetic autonomy was the testing ground for the aesthetic function, the place where its particular dynamics and coordinates could be measured, developed, and perfected. On the level of rhetoric Teige attempted to balance out the isolation implicit in aesthetic autonomy precisely by casting it as a function, and thus in some way comparable in nature to the more practical or utilitarian functions familiar from Constructivism. Indeed in ‘Poesie pro pět smyslů’ he adopts at times a vocabulary that might be criticized as naively pseudo-scientific, for example when he declares that ‘the methods of this *poesie* are corroborated through thoroughgoing laboratory work. The exacting results of physiology, optics, chemistry, acoustics, etc. have provided the foundation for a new theory of art’.<sup>44</sup> Here Teige’s enthusiasm sounds nearly as breathless as had his listing of the new artistic media that modern technology made possible. More plausible, however, was his linkage of *poesie*, whose potential powers artists explored in their ‘laboratories’, with an emotional and physiological human drive (*pud*). The language of laboratories and the aesthetic function thus connected with Freudian terminology that was becoming ever more important to Teige’s thinking in the late 1920s. Teige responded to the question of the meaning or function of art with ‘the *hypothesis of a unified human productive drive*’, and the ultimate source of this drive was for him clear:

If we acknowledge the unified creative drive of the human being/producer [člověka-výrobce], operating through its typical mode of function, we again find only *Ars Una* in which the activities of all the senses, body and spirit, hand and brain, merge into a higher synthesis. This creative drive [...] is a form of energy inhabiting the border region between the physical and spiritual, and the roots of this instinct are to be found in that fundamental, vital, creative drive par excellence, that is, the sexual drive.<sup>45</sup>

Identifying a unified productive drive linking aesthetic or artistic creation with sexual excitation was not to be understood as a crude reduction of ‘spiritual’ activity to physical instinct: rather it identified a point of connection between spirit and instinct, allowing a totalized image of human activity that neither rejected the aesthetic as inessential nor stigmatized sexuality as base physicality. This conception of unified spirit and instinct was analogous to Teige’s overriding images of synthesis between ‘poem and world’ (*báseň a svět*) or ‘construction and poem’ (*stavba a báseň*) during the Constructivism–Poetism period. But it also allowed a more precise

43 On the wider use of such rhetoric see Jindřich Toman, ‘A Marvellous Chemical Laboratory ... and Its Deeper Meaning: Notes on Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-Garde Between the Two Wars’, in *Language, Poetry, and Poetics: The Generation of the 1890s: Jakobson, Trubetskoy, Majakovskij*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska, Elżbieta Chodakowska, Hugh McLean, and Brent Vine (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 313–46.

44 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 227; *Výbor*, I, 490.

45 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 228; *Výbor*, I, 490–91.



definition of the aesthetic function, which Teige claimed operated ‘*through a systematic, irradiating culture of the senses and sensibility to cultivate, harmonize, and socialize those vital human powers, which older societies had crippled, clamped and suppressed through their moralities, religions and economic conditions*’.<sup>46</sup> This formulation presented the aesthetic function not simply in negative terms — as what was left once one emancipated art from all utilitarian functions — but as a force bringing about a determinate positive effect: human happiness, harmony, and wholeness. The aesthetic function, therefore, performed several necessary tasks: first was the historically specific task to rectify the deformations that the repressive social and economic structures of high capitalism had imposed; and the second was a more fundamental, as it were timeless anthropological task, that is, to satisfy humanity’s ‘burning thirst for lyricism’.<sup>47</sup> This need to assuage the creative drive was no less basic than the sexual drive, and the aesthetic function answered that need. Even in the early 1920s, when his monofunctional model did not expressly admit of an independent aesthetic function, Teige would at times describe Poetism as a form of ‘spiritual hygiene’ and even wrote of ‘physiological’ or ‘instinctual’ purposes (*pudové účely*) that Poetism addressed.<sup>48</sup> The way that Teige’s later conception of the autonomous aesthetic function circled back from its autonomy to serve what were presented as necessary tasks or *practical* needs thus made explicit a tension that had long lain implicit in his attempts to reconcile the monofunctionalist ideal of practical purpose and the polyfunctionalist ideal of emancipation from purpose. Teige wavered between understanding the aesthetic in utilitarian terms as the semi-biologicistic satiation of instinctual needs and restoration of anthropological ‘harmony’, and understanding the aesthetic as the Kantian ‘purposefulness without purpose’ that the notions of aesthetic autonomy and the aesthetic function presupposed. In short, Teige posited the identity of what, for Kant at least, were opposites — serving or not serving an external end — and he never fully worked through this tension. But another thinker close to Teige in the 1930s made this tension the central feature of his model of the aesthetic function.

46 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 229; *Výbor*, 1, 491. Emphasis in original.

47 Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 227; *Výbor*, 1, 490.

48 See, e.g., Teige, ‘Doba a umění’, pp. 45 and 47. The rhetoric of hygiene and instinct resonates to an uncomfortable degree with fascist *topoi*, though ultimately these led Teige in a very different direction, that is, Surrealism.

### The Aesthetic Function Among the Other Functions: Mukařovský's Structuralist Aesthetics

Jan Mukařovský is — together with the Russian linguist and literary scholar Roman Jakobson and the Russian linguist Nikolai Trubetsky — perhaps the best-known figure from the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC), often referred to as the 'Prague School'. The PLC was established on 6 October 1926 by a small group of scholars led by the linguist Vilém Mathesius (who also established the Department of English Philology at Prague university), though it had existed in the form of irregular meetings of scholars for about a year and a half before that and indeed remained a fairly loose organization until its formal registration in 1930. Both Mukařovský and Jakobson were active members from early on, and both embody one of the prominent features of the PLC: attention to both general theory of linguistics or aesthetics and detailed analysis of individual works of literature, art, architecture, film, drama, and to a lesser extent music. Members of the PLC developed the conceptual models of 'system', semiotics and functionalism into a characteristic, if never definitively fixed, body of thought that has come to be known as 'Prague Structuralism'. Prague Structuralism, in turn, is often portrayed as a developmental outgrowth of the Russian Formalist School and an anticipation of both post-war French Structuralism and German reception theory. Such characterization by reference to earlier and later intellectual currents, however, does little to communicate the internal significance and international influence of the PLC in the interwar years. Fuller awareness of that significance has not been made easier by the degree to which many members of the PLC — Mukařovský prominently among them — articulated their theoretical claims through analysis of particular works from Czech and Slovak culture, works that remain widely unfamiliar.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, one of those 'local' cultural orientation points that was most prominent for both Mukařovský and Jakobson was precisely the Czechoslovak avant-garde as practised by members of Devětsil. Underlying this situation were personal friendships. Jakobson, for example, became friends with Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert early on in his stay in Prague. In a 1950 letter to the Italian scholar of Czech literature Angelo Maria Ripellino he wrote:

I came to Prague in 1920 and made the acquaintance of Seifert in 1921. A little later, but still in the early twenties began my friendship with [Konstantin] Biebl and especially with Nezval. I brought to Czechoslovakia the first information

49 For some basic bibliography on the PLC see Chapter 1, notes 71 and 74. Before coming to Prague in 1920 Jakobson had been involved with the Moscow Linguistic circle and OPOJAZ in St Petersburg, and had close connections with Russian and Ukrainian avant-garde artists and writers such as Kazimir Malevich and Velimir Xlebnikov; see Jindřich Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzky, and the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1995), Chapter 2. During the War Jakobson was at the École libre des hautes études in New York City, where he had direct influence on the emerging Structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, also teaching there at the time. On PLC influence on Hans Robert Jauss and reception theory, see Jurij Stryedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

about Xlebnikov and Majakovskij. Even their names were completely unknown before I came. Often I spoke with the Devětsil people about the above-mentioned Russian poets and about the current problems of Russian poetry at that time. Some of these slogans influenced the 'poeticism' [Poetism] in birth, but the influence of modern Russian poetry as such was rather weak, much weaker than that of the French.<sup>50</sup>

Jakobson occasionally published in Devětsil journals, most prominently an article in *Pásmo* where, dominating the front page, he joined on Devětsil's side in the polemic against S. K. Neumann and his ideal of agitational art and poetry (see Fig. 5.1).<sup>51</sup> Nezval, for his part, became friends with Mukařovský as well, and opened his 1932 volume of poetry *Pět prstů* [Five Fingers] with an enthusiastic dedication to 'my dear friend, Jan Mukařovský'.<sup>52</sup> Teige also belonged to this circle of friends (see Fig. 5.2). The relationships were intellectual as well as collegial, and gave rise to mutual inspiration: Karel Srp has stated that 'Teige found personal companionship and theoretical inspiration in Mukařovský during the latter half of the thirties, although not entirely agreeing with all the tenets of his structuralism and semantics'; and Robert Kalivoda has stated that 'without doubt Teige in many respects directly inspired Mukařovský'.<sup>53</sup> Teige's engagement with the work of Prague Structuralists went back to the mid-1920s, however: see, for example, his reference (in a text originally published in 1926) to Roman Jakobson's distinction between communicative and poetic language.<sup>54</sup> Mukařovský wrote not only on figures and topics dear to Teige and Devětsil (such as Charlie Chaplin and film more generally) but also directly on the work of Devětsil authors such as Nezval and Vladislav Vančura and painters such as Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen.<sup>55</sup> In short, two of the most significant trends in interwar Prague culture, Devětsil and the PLC, were in close contact and felt themselves to be pursuing parallel aims.<sup>56</sup>

50 Cited from Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language*, p. 219. See chapter 11 of Toman's study for fuller context.

51 Roman Jakobson, 'Konec básnického umprumáctví a živnostnictví', *Pásmo*, 13–14 (1925), 1–2.

52 Vítězslav Nezval, *Pět prstů* (Brno: B. Killian, 1932), p. 3. Nezval addresses Mukařovský with the informal form of 'you' (Ty).

53 Srp, 'Karel Teige During the Thirties', p. 282; Robert Kalivoda, *Moderní duchovní skutečnost a marxismus* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1970), p. 15.

54 Karel Teige, *Svět, který voní*, p. 102. See also the discussion in Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language*, pp. 224–28.

55 See, e.g., Jan Mukařovský, 'Dvě studie o Vítězslavu Nezvalovi', 'Dvě studie o Vladislavu Vančurovi', 'K noetice a poetice surrealismu v malířství', 'Toyen za války', and 'Jindřich Štyrský', in Jan Mukařovský, *Studie z estetiky*, ed. by Květoslav Chvatík (Prague: Odeon, 1966), pp. 269–85; 286–95; 309–11; 312–14; and 315–17; as well as 'Několik poznámek k novému románu Vl. Vančury' and 'Vančurovská prolegomena', in Jan Mukařovský, *Studie*, ed. by Miroslav Červenka and Milan Jankovič, 2 vols (Brno: Host, 2007), 1, 481–89 and 503–53.

56 This parallel continued in unhappy form after the Communist takeover in February 1948: both the interwar avant-garde and Structuralism were swiftly banished from public and scholarly discourse. Mukařovský himself played a depressing role in this, as his 'gradual surrender to the [Communist] party dogma' (Jiří Veltruský, 'Jan Mukařovský's Structural Poetics and Aesthetics', in *Poetics Today*, 2.1b (Winter, 1980–81), 117–57 (p. 119)) was accompanied by his formal denunciation of his own Structuralist work from the 1930s and '40s and was rewarded by his appointment as Rector of the Charles University from 1949 to 1953. Then in the mid-1960s a gradual rehabilitation of both







FIG. 5.2. Clockwise from top: Teige, Jakobson, Nezval. Private collection

As noted earlier, Teige himself did not explicitly use the terms monofunctionalism, polyfunctionalism, or even aesthetic function, though they were all implicit in his evolving conception of a *poesie* that had over time become ‘emancipated’ from all ‘extra-aesthetic functions’. Mukařovský, by contrast, made the exploration of the aesthetic function and its relation to other functions the central question of his Structuralist aesthetics. His primary aim was to depict the aesthetic function as an integral and important part of life rather than as an addendum, a luxury, or an ornament to the practical functions. He made this aim clear in the laconic opening sentence to one of his longest and most significant essays: ‘The aesthetic function has an important place in the life of individuals and of society as a whole’.<sup>57</sup> Pursuing this aim required that he conceive of the aesthetic function in a manner that captured its unique character without locking it into the pernicious model of autonomy. How could one define the aesthetic function in a way that was not merely privative, that is, not merely as something emancipated from all utilitarian functions and thus as something inevitably isolated from ‘real life’? And how might one legitimately identify and discuss operations of the aesthetic outside the confines of the autonomous work of art?

The first part of his answer lay in the adoption of the language of functions itself. Traditional aesthetics, Mukařovský argued, centred on the question of *the Beautiful*, and this inevitably became mired in metaphysical questions about the relation of the Beautiful to the Good, the True, and so on. Further, this metaphysical standpoint could only conceive ‘the aesthetic outside of art’ as the beauty of nature, and thus inevitably confronted the question how one was to evaluate artistic beauty in relation to natural beauty, forcing the adoption of one or another hierarchy between these two phenomena. Either one privileged natural over artistic beauty, in which case art could never be more than pale imitation of the natural world (a Platonic conception); or one privileged artistic over natural beauty, in which case art humanized and perfected the natural world (a Neoplatonic conception); or finally, one declared their complete equality, independence, and autonomy from each other. All three responses, however, presupposed ‘a sharp, rarely passable dividing line between nature and human creation, and especially between nature and art’.<sup>58</sup> Adopting the vocabulary of functions, however, shifted aesthetic inquiry from static metaphysical questions to questions of dynamics that were fundamentally anthropological in nature:

interwar legacies could be undertaken, and groundbreaking editions of both Teige’s work (*Výbor*, vol. 1) and Mukařovský’s (*Studie z estetiky*) appeared in 1966 with a degree of overlap in the editing teams (in particular Květoslav Chvatík). Both Chvatík and another of Teige’s editors, Robert Kalivoda, wrote studies in this period that drew explicitly on this parallel legacy; see Květoslav Chvatík, *Smysl moderního umění* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1965) and *Strukturalismus a avantgarda* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1970); and Robert Kalivoda, *Moderní duchovní skutečnost a marxismus* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1970).

<sup>57</sup> Jan Mukařovský, ‘Estetická funkce, norma, a hodnota jako sociální fakty’ (1936), in Mukařovský, *Studie*, 1, 81–148 (p. 84).

<sup>58</sup> Jan Mukařovský, ‘The Place of the Aesthetic Function Among the Other Functions’ (1942), in Jan Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*, ed. and trans. by John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 31–48 (p. 33). Czech original: ‘Místo estetické funkce mezi ostatními’, in Mukařovský, *Studie*, 1, 169–84 (p. 171).

Today we are not interested in studying whether the aesthetic clings to things, but in discovering to what extent it is present in human nature itself. We are not concerned with the aesthetic as a static property of things, but with the aesthetic as an energetic component of human activity. For this reason we are not interested in the relation of the aesthetic to other metaphysical principles, such as the true and the good, but in its relation to other motives and goals of human activity and creation.

All of this, of course, entails a considerable shift in the methods and material of thought. The notion of function replaces the notion of beauty as the basic methodological premise.<sup>59</sup>

The aesthetic as an *energetic* component of human activity, this ‘dynamic conception of the aesthetic not as a “thing”, as *ergon*, but “*energeia*”’,<sup>60</sup> opened a completely different view onto the question of the aesthetic outside of the field of art proper: rather than taking the form of natural beauty, whose relation to artistic beauty had to be conceived in the form of a hierarchy, the aesthetic outside of art became a matter of anthropological intention and application; rather than inhering in the *object* it became an operation of the perceiving *subject*.<sup>61</sup> Mukařovský drew the following consequence from this shift: ‘Whereas in the preceding case the two spheres (i.e., the aesthetic outside of art and art) seemed to be separated by a chasm that had to be crossed, now the interrelation of the aesthetic outside of art and the aesthetic within art will appear so close that the two domains will merge at countless points, and the difficulty will be to distinguish them rather than to seek a connection between them; and he concludes that ‘we shall find no sphere in which the aesthetic function is essentially absent; potentially it is always present’.<sup>62</sup> For Mukařovský, then, the conception of an aesthetic function *eliminated* the premise of aesthetic autonomy, rather than presupposing such autonomy as it had for Teige. Rather than conceiving aesthetic activity as taking place in a laboratory and defining the aesthetic function in privative fashion — as the emancipation from all utilitarian functions — Mukařovský envisioned ‘the aesthetic outside of art’ as an attitude of the perceiving subject, and thus as an omnipresent field where the aesthetic function comes into incessant contact and dynamic interaction with the other functions.

This distinction from Teige was made possible by the particular way Mukařovský understood polyfunctionality. As we have seen, Teige framed this as the result of a gradual historical development whereby the originary embeddedness of the aesthetic function within utilitarian functions gave way to the increasing independence of the former. We have also seen that Teige never explicitly distinguished his later embrace of aesthetic autonomy from his earlier monofunctionalist identification of beauty with perfected fulfilment of practical purpose. Mukařovský, by contrast,

59 Mukařovský, ‘The Place of the Aesthetic Function’, pp. 32–33; ‘Místo estetické funkce’, pp. 170–71.

60 Květoslav Chvatík, *Strukturální estetika* (Brno: Host, 2001), p. 65.

61 Mukařovský wrote: ‘Functions must not be one-sidedly projected onto an object but must be considered primarily with a subject as their live source’; Mukařovský, ‘The Place of the Aesthetic Function’, p. 38; ‘Místo estetické funkce’, p. 175.

62 Mukařovský, ‘The Place of the Aesthetic Function’, pp. 34 and 35; ‘Místo estetické funkce’, pp. 171–72 and 173.

reflected explicitly on the difference between mono- and polyfunctionalism and what the consequences were for a conception of the aesthetic function.

Mukařovský began where Teige had also begun: with functionalist architecture. Mukařovský's most direct analysis of the question of functions in architecture was published in *Stavba*, the architecture journal where Teige had been an editor from 1923 till 1934 (and editor in chief from 1924 till 1927) and where Teige had published his critique of Le Corbusier's Mundaneum project eight years earlier.<sup>63</sup> That Mukařovský was well aware of this background is indicated by a somewhat gratuitously favourable reference to Teige as well as several implicitly critical references to Le Corbusier. But such gestures of alliance aside, Mukařovský's essay in fact reveals how his understanding of polyfunctionality and the aesthetic function differs from Teige's.

Mukařovský presupposed a historical account similar to Teige's, tracing the development from an originary interconnection between various functions, in particular utility and aesthetic functions (evident in phenomena such as archaic forms of magic or ritual aspects of folklore) to a modern state of 'the maximal autonomy of functions', a condition brought about by the development of technology and ever more powerful and monofunctionally conceived machines.<sup>64</sup> Further, he regarded the monofunctionalist precepts of functionalist architecture as one of the major expressions of this modern attitude. But he treated this modern monofunctionalist attitude with scepticism. In particular he took issue with the monofunctionalist understanding of architecture: 'The comparison of an architectural creation with a machine (Corbusier) is an extreme expression of the tendency of a period toward the least ambiguous functionality in architecture, but in no way is it a supratemporal characteristic'.<sup>65</sup> That Mukařovský took Le Corbusier to task for being excessively monofunctionalist is ironic, given that the core of the Mundaneum polemic was Le Corbusier's defence of the need to 'add' the beauty function to architectural utility against Teige's monofunctionalist critique. This becomes even more ironic when Mukařovský then criticizes Le Corbusier once again (without naming him, though for loyal readers of *Stavba* the context would have been clear) for precisely the 'utility plus beauty' formulation Teige had criticized eight years earlier: 'The aesthetic function appears in architecture as something added, something coming from outside. It tends to be found on the surface of a building (cf. the ornament; it even used to be proclaimed that architecture begins where construction ends)'.<sup>66</sup> So Mukařovský occupied a position somewhere in between the stakes of the Mundaneum debate: between the monofunctionalist doctrine Teige had brought to the debate and the 'utility plus beauty' version of polyfunctionalism with which Le Corbusier had responded.

63 Jan Mukařovský, 'K problému funkcí v architektuře', in Mukařovský, *Studie z estetiky*, pp. 196–203; 'On the Problem of Functions in Architecture', in Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign and Function*, pp. 236–50. Originally published in *Stavba*, 14 (1937–38), 5–12.

64 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', p. 238; 'K problému funkcí', p. 197.

65 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', p. 240; 'K problému funkcí', p. 198.

66 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', p. 246; 'K problému funkcí', p. 201.



Mukařovský's interest in architecture focused on the fact that it is the cultural field where the modern drive towards monofunctionalism became both most starkly evident and obviously insufficient. A few years later he again singled out Le Corbusier (rather than Teige) for criticism in this regard:

Here we find ourselves at the point where we disagree, especially as regards the theory, with original functionalism, whose principles were expressed with crystal clarity in architectural functionalism. Architectural functionalism proceeds from the premise that a building has a single, precisely delimited function given by the purpose for which it is built. Hence Le Corbusier's well-known comparison of a building to a machine, a typically unambiguous product from a functional point of view. Functionalism was thus an unusually fruitful notion as a developmental stage of architecture, and it was also theoretically justified as a polemic against the preceding historicizing period, which delighted in assuming a purpose other than the one for which a building had been constructed. Nevertheless, its weakness soon became apparent. A building, especially a residence, cannot be limited to a single function, because it is a setting for human life, and human life is heteromorphous.<sup>67</sup>

A building never serves a single function: 'There is no unambiguous functionality here'.<sup>68</sup> Aside from the obvious fact that even specialized building-types inevitably house various activities with at times conflicting functional requirements, and the fact that buildings are commonly repurposed to new uses (a stock-exchange might become a university building, for example), Mukařovský pointed out that the term 'function' itself contains four 'horizons': beyond the immediate function privileged by the monofunctionalist attitude there were historical, social, and individual functional horizons, each with its own set of criteria.<sup>69</sup> One of these horizons usually dominated at a particular moment, but a building could never perfectly fulfil all of them simultaneously and always had to be regarded as the agglomeration of such functional horizons — and, moreover, as an agglomeration in a process of perpetual readjustment and change. If a decommissioned power station is transformed into an art museum, for example, the vast interior spaces that originally served a utility function to house enormous generators take on an aesthetic function as their new dominant. Far from being the cultural practice where the identification of a practical function is clearest (a fundamental tenet of functionalist architecture), architecture for Mukařovský provides the clearest demonstration that 'in essence all the functions are potentially present in every human act insofar as they are at all compatible with the given act'.<sup>70</sup>

But architecture — because of the stridency with which monofunctionalist claims had so recently been made for it — was only a particularly instructive example of a broader truth: *all* human activity was polyfunctional. Monofunctionalism may have

67 Mukařovský 'The Place of the Aesthetic Function', p. 37; 'Místo estetické funkce', p. 174.

68 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', p. 243; 'K problému funkcí', p. 199.

69 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', pp. 241–43; 'K problému funkcí', p. 199.

70 Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions', pp. 240–41; 'K problému funkcí', p. 198. Elsewhere Mukařovský wrote of 'the basic polyfunctionality of human activity and the omnipresence of functions'; 'The Place of the Aesthetic Function', p. 37; 'Místo estetické funkce', p. 174.

become a dominant modern attitude because of the extraordinary development of machines, but it was a misguided attitude. The aim of Structuralism was to correct this through observation and analysis of the complex interactions among functions. The idea that various, often conflicting functions are always ‘bundled’, and that the hierarchy of the dominant function to the other functions is always potentially in flux, is at the core of Mukařovský’s conception of polyfunctionalism. In his important essay ‘Místo estetické funkce mezi ostatními’ [The Place of the Aesthetic Function Among the Other Functions, 1942] the notion of four ‘functional horizons’ in his earlier essay on architecture received more sophisticated form. Here he presented a typology whereby functions were divided between those that directly affected the outer world (the immediate functions) and those that did so in mediated fashion (the semiotic functions). These two groups were further divided into those orientated towards the object and those orientated towards the subject, giving rise to a final typology with four fields: the practical functions (immediate and object-orientated), the theoretical function (immediate and subject-orientated), the symbolic function (semiotic and object-orientated), and the aesthetic function (semiotic and subject-orientated).<sup>71</sup> The productive subtleties generated by this framing of functionalist rhetoric within semiotic and anthropological claims cannot concern us here, but what is important is the way that for Mukařovský the aesthetic function was firmly embedded within a wider structure that did not separate but rather *connected* it to the wider world and to practical activity. In this way Mukařovský’s Structuralist model resisted notions of aesthetic autonomy while also according a fundamental anthropological role to art and to aesthetic activity.

Here we also see the main difference from Teige’s polyfunctionalism. For Teige the shift to a polyfunctional model brought an emphasis on the independence and separation of the various functions, with the consequent postulate of an autonomous, ‘purified’ aesthetic function. But Mukařovský’s polyfunctionalism emphasized the interconnections among the functions, the contacts and competition, the jostling for dominance within the structural whole. In the architecture essay Mukařovský criticized excessive emphasis on understanding aesthetic activity through the criterion of emancipation and autonomy, on regarding art as

the realm of free lyricism unlimited by extra-artistic consideration — in other words, the realm of the predominant aesthetic function. [...] If we view art in all its temporal, spatial, and social breadth, it appears that the tendency toward the domination of the aesthetic function over the others is in no art any more than just a tendency that remains not completely realized, even in the most extreme cases. [...] The historical development of every art is accompanied by a constant alternation of ebbs and flows of extra-aesthetic functions, and even in the purest artistic creation [*ani v esteticky nejčistším uměleckém výtvoru*] these function are not eliminated but are only re-organized.<sup>72</sup>

71 Mukařovský ‘The Place of the Aesthetic Function’, pp. 40–42; ‘Místo estetické funkce’, pp. 177–79. Mukařovský specified that in contrast to the other components of his typology it was necessary to speak of the practical functions in the plural, as the close integration with the heterogeneity of the real world resulted in greater diversity.

72 Mukařovský, ‘On the Problem of Functions’, pp. 247–48; ‘K problému funkcí’, pp. 201–02.

Again, Mukařovský has been too polite to name Teige. But he could have. If his repeated association of a misguided architectural monofunctionalism with Le Corbusier was a diplomatic way to avoid noting Teige's earnest commitment to this position in the 1920s, here he implicitly (yet equally diplomatically) criticized the particular version of polyfunctionalism that Teige adopted in the 1930s. As we have seen, 'purity' (*čistota*) was one of Teige's central terms for describing the emancipated aesthetic function. Teige's emphasis on the purity of the aesthetic function resulted in part from the terms with which he had criticized Le Corbusier's 'utility plus beauty' model during the Mundaneum debate: it responded to what Mukařovský glossed as the mistaken conception of the aesthetic function 'as something added, something coming from outside'. But comparison with Mukařovský's understanding of polyfunctionality reveals how Teige's conception of a pure aesthetic function carried over fundamental 'anti-ornament' priorities and convictions from his monofunctionalist period into his polyfunctionalist phase. As a result, *Ars Una* may have provided a common space to house the various activities that had been separated by the dualism of the Constructivism–Poetism period, but it never quite found a home in the world.

