The Avant-Garde Aesthetic of Vojtěch Mašek

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Vojtěch Mašek is one of the most experimental comics artists, both in terms of his stylistic expression and his range of cultural references, to emerge from the "Generation Zero" (post-2000) Czech comics scene. A graduate of the prestigious Prague film school FAMU, Mašek did not come to the medium from the Czech comics tradition. But his trilogy, *Monstrkabaret Freda Brunolda uvádí* [Fred Brunold's Monster-Cabaret presents] (2004-2008), coauthored with Džian Baban, created a sensation for its dark, unconventional collage style and entangled plotlines. His work has expanded intermedially to encompass related films, theatrical productions, and further comics projects (Foret 306). Building upon the success of the first book, *Sloni v Marienbadu* [Elephants in Marienbad] (2004), a sly reference to the French film *L'année dernier a Marienbad* [Last Year in Marienbad] and the protagonist's trunk-like nose, the authors staged performances of Fred Brunold's Cabaret at Prague's Nablízko theater.[1] One of the subplots of the original story, *Hovory z Rezidence Schlechtfreund* [Conversations from the Residence of Hermann Schlechtfreund] (2005), was turned into a comic strip and then adapted for theater as *JožkaLipnikjebožíčlověkaneumílhát* [JozkaLipnikisasaintandcannotlie], and *Pandemonium aneb dějiny sousedství* [Pandemonium, or, the History of the neighborhood] (2008), features some of the same characters in the original trilogy. Mašek and Baban won five Muriel prizes in Prague's international Komiksfest—two for *Hovory z Rezidence Schlechtfreund* in 2007 and 2008, one for the script of the second book in the series, *Za vším hledej doktora Ženu* [Cherchez Dr. Ženu] (2007), as well as two additional prizes in 2009 for *Poslední chobotango* [The Last Trunktango], the third book in the trilogy, and *Pandemonium*.[2]

In addition to his fantastical and satirical stories, Mašek has explored non-fiction narratives on documentary subjects addressing social or historical issues in collaboration with other artists, historians, and anthropologists. As part of *Ašta Šmé*, a group of social scientists and artists who produce documentary comics about

minorities, cultural identity, and social inequality, he was the artist and scriptwriter for the non-fiction trilogy *O přibjehi* [Stories] (2010). With anthropologists Markéta Hajská and Máša Bořkovcová, Mašek produced graphic narratives—*Albína*, *Keva* and *Ferko* (2010)—that recount the experiences of Roma struggling to get by in the contemporary Czech Republic where they face significant barriers of discrimination (Alaniz). Mašek also ventured into historical fiction, creating the artwork to accompany historian Pavel Kosatík's script for the graphic narrative *1952: Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského* [1952: How Gottwald Murdered Slánský], (2014), which concerns the dramatic betrayals and injustices of the Stalinist show trials. Continuing his work with *Ašta Šmé,* he wrote the script for a biography of a Roma boy titled *Silnější než někdo* [Stronger than Anyone] (2015), with art by Marek Pokorný, for another series, *Nejisté domovy* [Precarious Homes]. In collaboration with Marek Šindelka, he co-wrote the script for *Svatá Barbora* [Saint Barbara] (2018), about the strange child abuse scandal involving a young woman named Barbara Škrlová that erupted in the town of Kuřim in 2007.[3] There is a considerable self-reflexive component in these non-fiction works as Mašek represents himself in conversation with the protagonists of the stories and often alludes to the constructed nature of the narrative.

Whether working with fiction or in a more documentary vein, however, what makes Mašek's work unusual is the way that he revives and recuperates an avant-garde sensibility in his graphic narrative. As this overview of his comics production amply demonstrates, Mašek is drawn to stories about monstrosity—whether figurative, like Fred Brunold's "melancholic freakshow" (Foret), or literal, in the case of mistreated minorities and dark episodes in Czech history. This fascination with cruelty and the absurd is expressed through his use of repetition, reframing, collage, and unconventional page layouts, all of which renders his work highly unusual and experimental. For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in how he develops his avant-garde aesthetic in the Monster Cabaret series, which is primarily fictional but reflects historical realities, and compare this to his later work *1952: Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského*, (2014), which is historical in focus but elaborated with fictional details.

The Melancholic Freakshow

From the beginning, *Sloni v Marienbadu*, the first book in the Monster Cabaret series, is profoundly influenced by the works of Franz Kafka. The story concerns the absurd and tragic fate of the main character Damian Trunk (Chobot), an office worker in the tradition of Kafkaesque bureaucrats who is abducted and undergoes an operation at the hands of Dr. Žena, the acolyte of the Russian surgeon General Trunkov (Chobotov). A great deal of wordplay and absurd twists of fate are woven into a complex, multilayered story in which Damian, with his nose surgically extended into a "trunk," plays the role of the antihero who must save the world from the evil

Trunkov. Fred Brunold's Monster Cabaret frames this story, inviting spectators to watch the Damian sections in tandem with other subplots presented as separate acts. Another subplot—or "act"—within this performance is a series of conversations between Hermann Schlechtfreund ["bad friend" in German], an obstreperous editor, and the aspiring yet obsequious writer, Jožef Lipnik. The homage to Kafka is centrally placed in a series of exchanges titled Metamorphosis I, II, III, and IV. When Lipnik brings Schlechtfreund his work, the grumpy editor suggests that he begin his story with the opening sentence of Metamorphosis. It is deliberately left unclear whether he is playing with Lipnik or just being obtuse; as readers, we are, in effect, in Lipnik's position.

Mašek and Baban's references extend beyond Kafka, however—a knowledgeable reader will notice that the text is replete with literary and artistic allusions. Because Mašek is working with old photographs and film stills, some of them from the early 20th century, the atmosphere of the story harkens back to the historical avant-gardes—Surrealism and Dada most prominently. Commenting on Fred Brunold's antics on stage, one of the audience members remarks, "Cute Dada!" Schlechtfreund, who is described as a former member of a Surrealist group, brags that he wrote the forward to André Breton's *Nadja*, and attempts to pass off an old essay he wrote for a book about Salvador Dali to his protégé Lipnik as the foreword to his book. In a more general sense, Mašek's dark aesthetic, which combines humans and animals into strange hybrid forms, is indebted to Czech Surrealist Jan Švankmajer's animated films. Švankmajer's representation of individuals as infinitely pliable claymation characters, as in *Možnosti dialogu* [Dimensions of Dialog] (1982), resonates in the surgical procedure of "trunkification," where people's noses are pulled and extended into ridiculous trunks. The Monster Cabaret series also contains an echo of the darkly surreal films of David Lynch, director of the *Elephant Man* (1980), whom Mašek acknowledges as a formative influence, along with Czech new wave directors such as Pavel Juráček and Jan Němec.[4]

Another experimental aspect of Monster Cabaret is how the authors manipulate levels of fiction and reality within their imaginary story world, and seek to involve the reader through self-referential gestures. At the beginning of *Sloni v marienbadu*, the director informs the audience that they may participate in the performance by entering in a contest for the best story at the end of the show. An audience member named Josef Huber comes forward towards the end of the book, and recounts a rather obscure short story by Arthur Schnitzler titled *Ich* [I.][5] Huber, also the main character of Schnitzler's story, is a comfortable, bourgeois father and businessman, but his grasp on reality begins to slip when he takes a walk in the park and notices an innocuous sign that somehow triggers a mental breakdown, and he begins to think that words do not correspond to the objects they designate. It's as if the signifier has come loose from the signified, precipitating the main character's identity crisis—a theme that

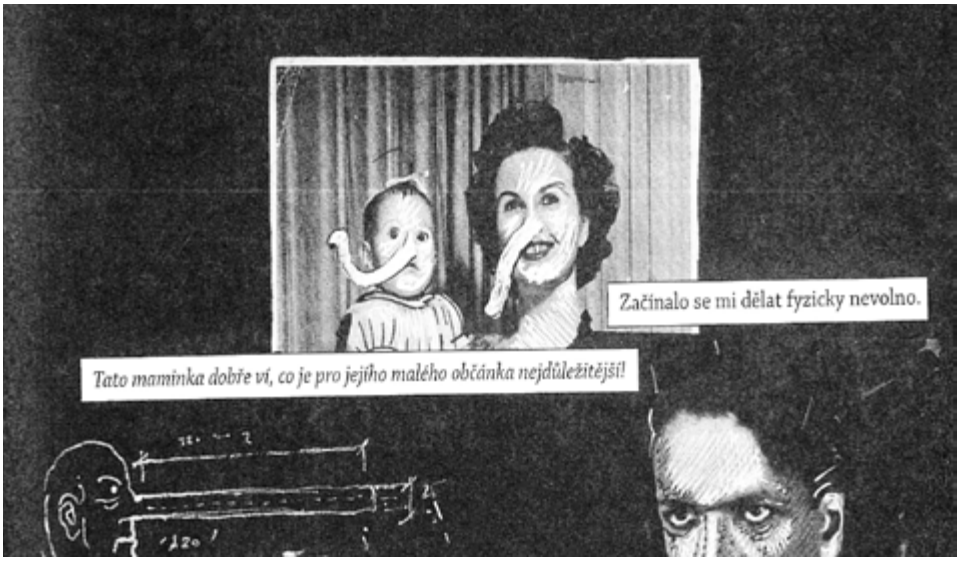

Fig. 1. The authors satirize the citizen induction ceremony in *Sloni v Marienbadu.* © Mašek and Baban 2004.

fits with the Damian trunk story of metamorphosis as well. This notion is taken to yet another level when Brunold, at the close of the story, mocks the audience and tells them that they are nothing but imaginary characters in a picture book, much to their chagrin, "My všichni jsme jenom ...vymyšlený postavičky" [We are all just...fictional characters]. At every turn, Baban and Mašek play with readers, undermining their assumptions and switching between levels of fiction and reality.

History and Metaphor

Despite the avant-garde references, the trilogy is set in the 1990s, and manages to satirize both the communist and post-communist period. At the beginning of the first book, the hapless Damian is taken to a movie theater and forced to watch newsreels from the 1950s that laud agricultural harvests and social progress, which gradually segues into propaganda for the merits of "trunkification." In a sly gesture of détournement, Mašek alters a photo of a smiling mother and her baby with hand-drawn trunks, which bears the following caption, satirically referencing the citizen induction ceremonies that replaced baptisms during the communist era, "Tato maminka dobře ví, co je pro jejího malého občanka nějdůležitější!" [This mother knows well what's best for her little citizen] (Fig. 1).

But when the propaganda film insists that "trunkification" is necessary for progress on both sides of the Iron Curtain, Damian objects, "For god's sake, what Iron Curtain? Didn't it already fall?" Even so, the monstrous transformation of

Damian into an elephant-man resembles a surreal extended metaphor for cold-war paranoia and life under communism. The authors didn't intend the book to be a parodic glance at Czech history, but Mašek concedes that there is something to this interpretation, explaining that "we were born during normalization and we remember the end of communism. We have memories in common. As kids we noticed that there was something strange…[there were] these characters that we half feared and half ridiculed."[6] Mašek conveys this sense of the uncanny and the grotesque throughout the comic by altering black and white photographs with his own surreal paintings and drawings.

The post-communist period is not presented as the sunny road to progress, either. In the third volume, *Poslední chobotango* [The Last Trunktango] the utterly bland smiley-faced Jan Štulec, a credulous twenty-year old economics major, becomes the tool of General Trunkov in his scheme to annihilate the world by silencing it. Štulec, the founder of the company Idejedlík 90 [idea-eater], gives seminars on how to "eat ideas," and thus gain control over other people. By posing Štulec with Václav Klaus, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic in the 1990s, Baban and Mašek's work can be understood as implicitly critical of the free market policies that preached business as the solution to the nation's problems. They also subvert the reader's expectations regarding monstrosity, since Damian's accursed trunk becomes the weapon that ultimately defeats his nemesis General Trunkov. As Baban states, [Damian] is "kind of an anti-superhero compared to the American comic book tradition…[an] Eastern Bloc superhero, [since] his trunk has 'super powers.'" Freaks, misfits and "monsters"—Fred Brunold's ragtag company—are sympathetic characters in the story. And Damian's wife Olga, who comes to save him in the end, voluntarily undergoes surgery to get her own trunk in order to resemble her beloved husband. Their story closes with Damian and his wife fleeing to Scandinavia, where they start a family and run an organic farm, while Štulec's blank face hangs ominously over Prague. Whether this is a "happy ending" or a more pessimistic one remains deliberately open-ended, allowing the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.[7]

From Monster Cabaret to the Monstrous Trials of the 1950s

In his essay "Somewhere behind," Milan Kundera remarks that "there are periods of modern history when life resembles the novels of Kafka" (105). Czechoslovakia in the 1950s was one of those times, and thus Mašek's surreal and grotesque aesthetic of Monster Cabaret found its ideal subject in the tragic execution of Rudolf Slánský, a high communist party functionary forced into false confessions and ultimately executed for treason. In fact, in Czech, the term "monstrproces" [monstrous trial] is used to describe these show trials.[8] *1952: Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského* [1952: How

Fig. 2. Slánský is metaphorically linked to a "scapegoat" in *Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského.* © Vojtěch Mašek 2015.

Gottwald Murdered Slánský], (2014), is a graphic narrative published in conjunction with a nine-part television series on Czech history, *České století* [Czech Century], by historian Pavel Kosatík. Although the editor's remarks appear to distance the work from a strictly historical text,[9] he nonetheless makes a powerful bid to provoke the reader's conscience: "The aim is not to reconstruct or recount history; instead, [the authors] offer a striking glimpse into certain isolated conversations, into the thoughts of individual actors and their moments of doubt, conflict, opinions, and the different decisions they made." In this respect, the series echoes a larger trend in Czech popular culture, as a new generation comes to grips with its troubling history. Notably, the *Alois Nebel* trilogy by Jaroslav Rudiš and Jaromír 99 (collected in a single volume in 2006), also subsequently adapted into a film, deals with the traumas of WWII and the Communist period and stands out as the most famous example of a new post-1989 aesthetic in Czech comics. Similarly, *Ještě jsme ve válce* [We are Still at War] (2011) a project organized by the Center for Totalitarian Studies, represents the testimony of survivors of communism and WWII in comics form thanks to the collaboration of a number of Czech cartoonists. Thus, Kosatík's *České století*, which is comprised of nine books including the Gottwald-Slánský episode, already builds upon an increasing interest in bringing historical events to a broader public through the medium of comics. Each artist was free to invent their own visual interpretation independent of the original television serial.[10]

My aim in analyzing Mašek's work is not to evaluate the verisimilitude of the content—that is, Slánský and President Klement Gottwald's actual friendship and Slánský's execution—but rather to ask how he uses the comic to represent this story in a unique way. What is gained, aesthetically, by adapting what was originally a television script into a graphic narrative through Mašek's distinctive surrealist lens? In discussing Mašek's work, Kosatík praised Mašek's ability to evoke the atmosphere of what he calls the "temná poetika padesátech let" [dark poetics of the 1950s],[11] which he had already begun to develop in the fictional world of Monster Cabaret. I would like to consider Kosatík's mention of "poetics" in order to invoke Scott McCloud's concept of the visual metaphor, a literal representation of something more abstract and figurative. Describing David Mazzucchelli and Paul Karasik's comics adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, McCloud argues that "the mere use of visual metaphors doesn't automatically draw out the subtext in fiction, but when those symbols echo one another and relate directly to the story's central themes, the results can be mesmerizing" (34)—an assertion particularly suited to Mašek's surreal aesthetic.

For *Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského*, Mašek applies familiar devices from Monster Cabaret but his artistic embellishments assume a more sinister gravity when anchored in the specific historical circumstances surrounding these two communist officials. Beginning with the execution of Milada Horáková, the text corresponds to the actual transcript of her last words.[12] After this point, however, Mašek

Fig. 3. Tendrils and wires reveal surveillance networks in Kosatík and Mašek's *Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského.* © Vojtěch Mašek 2015.

follows Kosatík's script of the imagined private conversations that take place between Gottwald and Slánský as we witness how their friendship progressively deteriorates. Under pressure from Soviet advisors to find a traitor in their midst, the two officials argue about who might be at fault. Slánský wants to eliminate all of the Spanish agents under suspicion for spying because he believes that it is "better to arrest an innocent than let a guilty man go free." Gottwald accuses him of calling for a "pogrom," but Slánský stays firm. Mašek portrays Slánský in a highly unusual way; I want to pause here to consider a page in which this transformation first appears. The background is black, consistent with his Monster Cabaret books, contributing to the sinister atmosphere. In the top two panels, Slánský is depicted in profile and from the front, most likely on the basis of official photographs. This is Mašek's process—he alters images by drawing and painting over reproductions of pictures, which in this context is especially meaningful given the history of the falsification of photos under communism.[13] Below these panels are two longer, rectangular fragments containing a gargoyle from St. Vitus Cathedral, a reference to the opening scene of the script (not

portrayed in the graphic novel version). The last and largest panel depicts a bleating goat or ram; the juxtaposition of the character with this image establishes the central visual metaphor of Slánský as a "scapegoat" or "sacrificial lamb" (Fig. 2).

At this stage, Slánský's role is somewhat ambiguous—one reviewer comments that [his] "dark curly hair changes into horns, and the character looks like something between a sacrificial lamb and Satan, which corresponds to his role as killer and victim" (Segi). Later in the narrative, the image of the gargoyle is paired with Slánský a second time at his official 50th birthday party. And here Mašek adds a scene not present in the original: a crowd of people throws him up into air, yelling "hip hip hooray" in celebration, but he drifts mysteriously upward, out of the panel. When his wife remarks, "I was scared for you, Rudy...at such a height... what if people didn't catch you," the irony of his answer is chilling: "You must trust people." As the reader well knows, his friend Gottwald will ultimately betray him and hand him over to his Soviet executioners.

Another crucial aspect of Mašek's dark poetics is the prevalence of twisting and intersecting lines throughout the narrative. Paranoid connections and suspicions are rendered visible through curling tendrils and red strands, which could be telephone wires, entrails, or both. These designs proliferate in the end papers and in the pages that separate different scenes within the book, literally and figuratively serving as the connective tissue that holds the story together. In a page that describes the planning of Slánský's arrest, tangled lines snake between nightmarishly surreal images of faces and figures implicated in Slánský's downfall: Gottwald, Alexej Čepička (his son-in-law), Stb (státní bezpečnost, secret police), and the outline of Slánský's head, fractured and opened to reveal an empty shell with curling tendrils of wire inside. The last image in particular recalls Salvador Dali's paintings of deconstructed faces, or even the hand in Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* (1929) that opens to reveal a mass of swarming ants (Fig.3).

This page also demonstrates the way in which Mašek constructs his style out of overlapping layers; rather than operating with a static black-on-white grid, he collages together small paintings which function as panels, making it occasionally difficult to trace fragments of text to their corresponding source. On other pages, hands are drawn at the bottom of what appear as surveillance transcripts, which adds to the three-dimensional quality of the story while also cleverly involving and implicating the reader.

Discussing Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (1999), Mašek describes how there are many "techniques that are not possible in film or literature—through the distortion of time, and the use of layering, [comics] communicate through text and image, and thus create a third meaning, a new perspective on reality,"[14] but he could just as easily be referring to his own work. Slánský's impending doom is represented and foreshadowed in multiple forms in the graphic narrative. When representing Slánský's execution, Mašek brings together the literal and the figurative, image and text, to

produce a startling and disturbing image. The faces of the Soviet advisors, whose visages have an eerie plastic quality as if they were made of clay, stretch into monstrous beaks that spear their victim Slánský while labeling him a "traitor." The malleable and distorted features of these characters recall Švankmajer's clay animations, but here the rather ridiculous and embarrassing "trunks" from Monster Cabaret transform into swords that pierce the victim's body. A more realistic portrayal of his hanging is also represented, paralleling Milada Horáková's execution at the beginning, although Mašek's surreal invention is much more horrific.

What is at stake in depicting Slánský's betrayal and execution using surreal and avant-garde inventions? Hillary Chute and Kate Polak, scholars who analyze the representation of history and trauma in graphic narratives, have embraced the subjective, idiosyncratic expressive possibilities of comics in this arena. Chute, in particular, argues that we need not turn away from trauma as "unrepresentable," but rather explore how a cartoonist's drawing style "materializes"—renders the invisible, visible—historical trauma. In visual studies, photography has already been debunked as an objective art form (since it can be manipulated), opening the path to other mediums of expression more affective, more creative, as a response to trauma (*Disaster Drawn* 25-35). Writing about Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Chute asserts that "Spiegelman's characters are clearly humans overlaid with a visual metaphor—[which] provides a crucial layer of abstraction that creates a compelling tension with the book's deeply researched specificity" (*Why Comics* 61). In *Ethics in the Gutter*, Polak notes that all of the attention directed to autographics and documentary comics has overlooked a crucial subset of graphic narrative that is based in historical reality, but is nonetheless fictional. Referencing Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, Polak argues that we need a similar term for comics, and thus she proposes "historio-metagraphics" as a means of designating "works that deal with real-world events in fictional ways so as to comment on the way in which we shape narratives, receive them, and reframe them" (28).

Of the nine graphic narrative volumes of Czech Century, Mašek's *Jak Gottwald zavraždil Slánského* goes furthest in Polak's direction by not only illustrating historical events and people but also by employing visual metaphor to materialize connections and sinister connotations. As a work of historio-metagraphics, the book alludes to the way readers receive and reframe narratives, consistent with Polak's assertion. Readers are drawn into the narrative through the hands depicted on fake interrogation transcripts, alluding to the audience's participation and complicity in this history.[15] In Pavel Kořínek's typology of adaptations, [16] Mašek's work would fall into the third category, which does not only illustrate or seek to resurrect forgotten works, but changes the form of the comic to create an original interpretation of a work (164). Precisely because Mašek does not come out of a comics tradition, he freely experiments and breaks standard conventions.

Return of the Avant-garde

One of Mašek's later projects—*Recykliteratura* [Recycleliterature] (2015, with Baban) —is yet another creative revolution in the development of his avant-garde aesthetic. This time his work focuses on humor rather than horror, and both the text and image are "found" objects from old magazines; a surrealist aesthetic emerges through the singular juxtaposition of these two elements. He originally got the idea from creating the *Monstrkabaret* books using old photos and film stills, which he then painted and altered to fit his story. In this case, he decided to democratize the process and make it into a game that anyone could participate in through a series of public workshops in Prague. The rules of the game called for a more constrained method of composition than the *Monstrkabaret* series: participants could not draw on the photos or alter the texts, nor could they collage the pictures together. What results is an amusing, sometimes hilarious, mash-up of discarded images from another era. Literary critic Dominik Melichar compares this work to early twentieth century Dadaism and to the experimental literature of Devětsil, a Czech avant-garde movement from the interwar period. Melichar also traces these odd text-image combinations to the tradition of the theater of the absurd as practiced by Alfred Jarry, Eugene Ionesco, and Václav Havel. In this case, the resulting artwork is not the result of a single artist or author, but rather the product of a collective author. Mašek and Baban, as the architects of the project, successfully combined old and new media to create this piece: funds for publication of the book were crowd-sourced, with participants recruited through Facebook.

Although Mašek's style and approach seem unique in the context of the Czech comics, I would concur with Melichar and place his work within the avant-garde tradition. The imaginative world of Brunold's cabaret in *Monstrkabaret* series evokes interwar provocations of Berlin Dada and French Surrealism, as well as the Czech variants of these movements in Devětsil and Czech surrealism (Jindřich Štyrský and Karel Teige in particular). Formally speaking, Mašek has embraced collage as a medium through which he can juxtapose complex and multivalent narrative strands. But Mašek's aesthetic is both more playful and deliberately constructed than André Breton's original exhortation that surrealism should consist of "automatic writing" and "unconscious" processes. In addition to cutting and pasting disparate photos and film stills, he uses overpainting (a technique originally developed by surrealist Max Ernst); that is, the application of gouache and ink drawings to an image. This combination of collage and overpainting gives Mašek additional expressive possibilities such that he can add painterly effects and fantastic elaborations to the source image.[17] And these effects often function in ideologically subversive ways: a propaganda image becomes an object of ridicule; a party official is painted to appear grotesque and sinister; an arrogant business consultant has a blank smiling face.

In her discussion of surrealist collage in the work of Max Ernst, art historian Elsa Adamowitz develops a definition that provides insight into Mašek's work:

> As a pragmatic act, collage encompasses various complementary or conflictual functions—critical, poetic, and political—which cohabit throughout the 1920s and 30s. As a technique, collage is a material mode of cutting and pasting distant elements [...] As a subversive act, it is an instrument of *détournement*...(13)

Mašek uses his method of collage and painting as a form of *détournement* to debunk and expose mendacity before *and* after 1989. Moreover, he continually "draw[s] attention to the intertextual process itself," by revealing his own graphic narrative as a formal construction (15). Adamowitz also highlights "the recurrent motif of the pointing hand, the frame within the frame, the theater set or podium" [...] (15) within Ernst's collages. Her observations effectively describe the structure of the *Monstrkabaret* series as well, since we must switch between Damian's story and the dialog between Schlectfreund and Jožef, and decide if both are simply acts in Brunold's spectacle, or if one can be subsumed within the other. As readers of Mašek's work, we are like the audience in the *Monstrkabaret,* invited to participate in the game when we attempt to disentangle dream from reality through multiple narrative levels. But the game has a purpose that is fundamentally subversive, for he is continually challenging our assumptions about identity—who is the "freak" and what is "normal"?—as one character unpredictably transforms into another.

Notes

1 This is a particularly clever title in Czech, because "Last Year in Marienbad" is translated as "Loni v marienbadu," which is close to "Sloni v marienbadu" [Elephants in Marienbad].

2 Information regarding Muriel awards can be found at http://komiksfest.cz/vysledky-cen-muriel-2009/ (with a reference to the relevant year). All told, Mašek has won ten Muriels for his work on Monstrkabaret as well as other projects.

3 For a review of this work, see Tomáš Stejskal, "Komiks Svatá Barbora je vrchol české tvorby. Z kuřimské kauzy činí thriller i úvahu o pravdě a lži," Aktuálně.cz, 3/13/18, https://magazin.aktualne.cz/kultura/komiks-svata-barbora-je-vrchol-ceske-tvorby-zkurimske-kauzy/r~b29b90a826a911e8b8efac1f6b220ee8/. Accessed 4/19/18.

4 Correspondence with the author, July 15, 2017. "Jan Švankmajer je mým velkým vzorem, jeho rafinovaný surrealismus a kombinování snu a syrové reality mě zřejmě velmi ovlivnilo. Svým způsobem cítím i vliv filmu Pavla Juráčka či Jana Němce

ze šedesátych let, ve kterých se podařilo zkombinovat skutečnou absurditu doby s metaforickou rovinou fantaskního podobenství. Také je mi blízká poetika a svět režiséra Davida Lynche." [Jan Švankmajer is an important model for me. His refined surrealism and combination of dream and reality was a major influence. Similarly, I'm inspired by [film directors] Pavel Jurack and Jan Němec from the 1960s, in which they managed to merge the real absurdity of the time with a fantastic, metaphorical level. [My aesthetic] is also akin to the poetics of director David Lynch.]

5 To date, this story is not translated into English, and I have relied on Marek Přibil's Czech translation (2004) included in *Sloni v marienbadu*.

6 See his interview with Klára Kolářová, https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/339048-scenarista-a-vytvarnik-vojtech-Mašek-komiks-umi-veci-ktere-literatura-ne.html

7 See Baban and Mašek's interview with Jan Velinger: "We like and always liked open endings, so this trilogy ends a bit open. There is always a shadow of evil that remains but you can still be happy... even if you are an anti-hero... with a trunk! So this is the message." http://www.radio.cz/en/section/arts/dzian-baban-vojtech-masek-creators-of-an-unusual-czech-graphic-novel-about-a-man-with-a-trunk

8 See Václav Cihla, "Politické procesy v 50. letech," Diplomová práce, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2013. He uses the term "monstrproces" several times when describing Slánský's trial.

9 David Pazdera is identified as the "odpovědný redaktor" [authorized editor] of the volume on the back page.

10 Mašek deliberately did not watch the televised version before he created his comics adaptation. Correspondence with the author.

11 See the interview on Czech television where Kosatík discusses the graphic narrative adaptations (10/31/2013): http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/kultura/1068013-podivejte-se-vznik-a-pad-ceskoslovenska-v-komiksu

12 See David Mrnka's film *Milada,* a Czech/American production, Loaded Vision Entertainment, 2017.

13 See David King's *The Commissar Vanishes: the falsification of art and photos in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997). For an example, see pages 40-41 for a photo of Lenin and Trotsky in 1919, and then again in a 1967 version of the photo in which Trotsky is excluded.

14 See his interview with Klára Kolářová: https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/339048-scenarista-a-vytvarnik-vojtech-Mašek-komiks-umi-veci-ktere-literatura-ne.html

15 This device has been used in other graphic narratives, most notably in Speigelman's *Maus* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2007).

16 Kořínek identifies three types of adaptation: the first category concerns transmedial adaptations, in which the function of the comic is primarily to *illustrovat* [illustrate]; the second is primarily about bringing canonical works into comics form in order to *připomenout* (resurrect or recuperate) them; and the third type goes furthest in altering the comics form—*stvořit*—through adaptation and thus creates a new, parallel artistic work.

17 See Rosalind Krauss's description of Max Ernst's overpainting technique in "The Master's Bedroom," *Representations*, No. 28 (Fall 1989) 62-64.

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