

ON “JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE POEM”*

(The genesis of the polemical value
of imaginative expression in the work
of Vratislav Effenberger)

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In his theoretical essay “Journey to the Center of the Poem,” Vratislav Effenberger engages with the semantic character and dynamic of the artistic work whose nature we could designate as unreal, irrational, or absurd.¹ The text contains, in a nascent stage, many of the concepts that Effenberger was to develop into a more conceptually concrete and systematic form in his later theoretical works. In a relatively clear-cut manner, Effenberger outlines in the essay a perspective on the basis of which the author will later

* Translated from the Czech original by Greg Evans.

¹ To be consistent with the terminology of Karel Teige, we shall also utilize the term “poetry” (*poesie*) for the imaginative artistic production. The identification of all types of imaginative (and not just literary) expression with poetry is not something we consider to be an avant-garde provocation but rather the result of an insight into the underlying principles of the work. For that matter, in the text we generally approach visual and literary creative expression on an abstract level. For our purposes, the specifics of varying modes of expression are not important.

analyze psychological and psychosocial problematics, above all with regard to human imaginative activity (dreams, inspiration, artistic creation, and so on) and its functions.

Effenberger's peculiar style – in which the line of reasoning isn't always clear and the very construction of the sentence is sometimes in conflict with the logical sequence of the argument, which nonetheless features forceful metaphors and imaginative observations – may succeed in opening up the reader's consciousness to various creative associations and feelings, but nevertheless strongly complicates the reader's ability to orient him or herself in the text.² The essay nevertheless progresses rather unambiguously from (1) the standard interpretation of poetic expression and its dynamic, towards (2) the delineation of a theoretical model of poetic inspiration, followed by (3) a description of the transformations of poetic expression during Effenberger's own time leading up to (4) an attempt to grasp the semantics of absurdity and its relationship to reality and, finally, (5) to an outline of the semiotic structure of imaginative poetry (*poesie*). Throughout, Effenberger repeatedly emphasizes the meaning of the conscious, reflexive components of the poetic creative and interpretive process, as well as the (polemical) relationship of the artistic work to reality. According to Effenberger, it is by way of these coordinates that the "Journey to the Center of the Poem" proceeds.

The author composed the article in June of 1966. Its contents, however, are made up of material that he had already written in 1961. Effenberger formulated "Journey to the Center of the Poem" as his contribution to an international anthology that was being put together on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of Roman Jakobson. For the purposes of the article he made use of an older, extensive work (more than a hundred pages long), titled *Pohyby symbolů* (*The Movements of Symbols*),³ selecting some passages from it that he slightly revised in a few places and then assembled into a new text. He did not write any additional material for the article. In a letter dated January 15, 1966, addressed to Peter de Ridder, who had approached Effenberger in the matter, he explains the meaning of the work and the reason he had just chosen it for the anthology:

² One factor in this was no doubt the fact that Effenberger became accustomed to writing most of his texts for the so-called "drawer" (i.e., due to potential censorship, they were not likely to be published in the proper sense of the word), so that the reader was usually only a secondary consideration.

³ This work remains unpublished to the present day; it has been however extensively cited and commented upon by František Dryje in his afterword to the second volume of Effenberger's *Básně* (*Poems*): František Dryje, "Útěk do reality" [Escape into reality], in Vratislav Effenberger, *Básně 2* (Prague: Torst, 2007), pp. 827–878. Tomáš Glanc has also addressed *Pohyby symbolů* in his article "Gramatický versus imaginativní dynamismus (Effenbergerova transgrese strukturalismu)" [Grammatical versus imaginative dynamism (Effenberger's structuralist transgressions)], in Ivan Landa and Jan Mervart (eds.), *Imaginace a forma: Mezi estetickým formalismem a filosofií emancipace: Studie Josefu Zumrovi* (Prague: Filosofia, 2018), pp. 119–130.

It seems to me, that from the work on which I am now concentrating, it would be most appropriate to select a theoretical article on internal and external symbols in poetry, painting, and life, for this most closely approaches Professor Jakobson's interests, and scholarly work.

In additional correspondence that touches on the publication of "Journey to the Center of the Poem," we also find references to the possibility of the future publication of an English translation of Effenberger's book – then in the process of preparation for publication – *Realita a poesie (Reality and Poetry)*. This never came about, but the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" was published in the aforementioned anthology.⁴ We do not know with certainty who attended to its translation, but according to the information available to us it would appear that Effenberger himself prepared the first version of the translation, after which it was then extensively worked over by Lawrence Newman together with Svatava Jakobson.⁵

Although the work is dedicated to Roman Jakobson, in the background lies a polemic with surrealist views on the substance and function of the artistic work, principally as their views took shape in the interwar years (which is the period when Jakobson worked closely with the Czech surrealists). The text is conceived polemically even in those passages where Effenberger doesn't explicitly discuss surrealism. Although the author deals with the entirety of surrealist theory, his deliberations are above all a response to the ideas of Karel Teige, the leading theoretician of the Czech avant-garde and, in the 1930s, of the Surrealist Group. Effenberger was Teige's most significant successor. Of course, the theoretical methods and the general approach to the issues discussed in "Journey to the Center of the Poem" are also markedly influenced by the functional structuralism of the Prague School.⁶ Effenberger's decision to publish the piece in a work dedicated to Roman Jakobson was not then out of place. Nevertheless, Effenberger was above all influenced by the theoretical concepts of Teige. In spite of the fact that he implicitly argued with Teige and criticized him root and branch, he didn't abandon Teige's *method* of approaching artistic work and social issues related to it. To the contrary, Effenberger acknowledged, developed, and worked through Teige's conclusions in light of new artistic and psychosocial conditions. We can therefore conclude

⁴ Vratislav Effenberger, "Journey to the Center of a Poem," in *To honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, 11 October 1966*, Vol. 1 (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 615–629.

⁵ The translation published in this issue of *Contradictions* (pp. 173–189) was additionally revised by Greg Evans.

⁶ Effenberger studied aesthetics under Felix Vodička (who had studied under Jan Mukařovský and became the best-known of his students) from 1945 to 1948.

that his critique of the surrealist worldview remained surrealist. It was not a matter of destroying surrealism but of reappraising it and developing it further.

So that we can more deeply grasp the meaning of Effenberger's article, we must discuss at least some of Karel Teige's theorems regarding creation of an artistic work, its functions, and its semiotics. We will purposely set aside the development of Teige's thought and the transformations that took place within it, only engaging with those of his ideas that we consider to be most fundamental from the point of view of "Journey to the Center of the Poem."

Teige, very much in harmony with the foundational views of surrealism, believed that an artistic work was the most direct expression of the unconscious (repressed) tendencies contained in the psychic life of a human being.⁷ Nonetheless, the information that a modern work of art should communicate isn't of the same nature as the rational meaning that flows from a classical work of art. When Teige develops his concept of the semantics of the imaginative work, he emphasizes the way this imaginative work evolutionarily differentiates itself from the primarily realistically- or rationalistically-oriented works of art of previous eras. In the sphere of the transfer of information, Teige distinguishes rational *comprehension* (*rozumění*) from irrational, inspirational *communication* (*sdělení*) or *sharing* (*sdílení*). *Comprehension* can be achieved by means of the traditional art work. The meaning of such works relies on the existence of an external idea or on conventional symbolism of the allegorical type.

Communication or *sharing* does not, however, function the same way as to *comprehension*. The subject matter of *communication* is irrational information, which should be produced by unconscious tendencies. Such a message does not differ from the rational, conceptual one only because it has this different, irrational content. It is not a transfer of unconscious content from one consciousness to another. Such a message is different *essentially*.⁸ Its meaning has a potential and dynamic nature:

We must see the artistic work and the viewer in a dialectical relationship; we must view the work and the contemplation of it as dialectical antitheses, and we

⁷ "[The modern artistic work should be] a direct expression of the mental life of the work's author, an expression of his unconscious lyricism." Karel Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství [Introduction to modern painting]," in Karel Teige, *Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby: Studie z třicátých let* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969), pp. 253–267, here 264.

⁸ We will leave aside the plausible and legitimate criticism that it is not possible to lay down such a direct and radical opposition between the semantic formations of classical and modern art as the differentiation between "comprehension" and "sharing" forces upon us. Teige's deliberations are here historically conditioned and restricted by the influence of avant-garde radicalism. This fact does not, however, call into question the basis of his thinking. We believe, in addition, that in the later phases of Teige's theoretical system it would be possible to confront such an objection with, e.g., his thesis about the trans-historical existence of "fantastic art."

must seek the proper, true living poem in the synthesis of the two antitheses. If it is said that a poem, even if it goes unread, remains a poem, it is necessary to fulfill this potentiality with the Mallarméan edict that that the poem is only made complete and fully poetic in the reader's mind.⁹

What, it might be asked, is *communicated* in this way? And how is the possibility of such *communicability* guaranteed? We already indicated that, in the classical painting, the guarantor was the existence of an exterior theme. In the imaginative work, the guarantor is the communicability founded on the existence of unconscious individual and collective complexes. Even individuals who are not directly affected by such complexes have a predisposition to them.

To the question as to how it is possible for an artistic work to be communicable even outside of the sphere of universal primitive complexes and their universal allegories, and how it is possible for the viewer to react to the artists' individual, private complexes, we respond by saying that in art it is not about individual trauma but about the propensities from which the trauma is born, and these propensities are shared by a great number of people, perhaps even the majority them (Jean Frois-Wittman, "L'Art [sic!] et le principe du plaisir," *Minotaure*).¹⁰ The stronger the sense in an artistic work of the secret, the latent, and the instinctive, the stronger will be the viewer's emotions.¹¹

Note that Teige is not saying here that these complexes themselves or the tendencies towards them are the subject-matter of communication! Unconscious tendencies and complexes are only *that which is common*, which assures the possibility of irrational communication, and which intensifies it. To the contrary, the viewer or reader draws the concrete "content" of the transmission directly from their own subjectivity in a dialectical relationship with the work (see above). In Teige's concept, the semantic dialectic of the subjective and the objective formally duplicates the dialectic of the particular and the universal.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁰ Teige misquotes the title of the article, which should read "L'Art moderne et le principe du plaisir," *Minotaure* 1 (1933), no. 3-4, pp. 79-80.

¹¹ Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství," p. 271.

¹² Here, of course, we can open up the possibility of a comparison between Teige's models and the structuralist differentiation between *langue* and *parole* and with the corresponding, rich philosophical implications and development of those concepts. This opportunity we must regrettably leave aside for the time being.

The particular concrete and abstract images, which might in each receptive viewer awaken personal, subjective ideas, feelings, or memories, are generally and therefore “objectively” effective, forming a common ground of communication between the reader and the poet, a terrain where even the reader feels at home in his own lyricism of ideas, memories, and inner life. Certain images, forms, metaphors, words, and objects act in an appealing way on the imagination of both poets and readers, both viewers and painters, *without their being universal symbols* as they are understood by psychoanalysis.¹³

In this way the irrational, imaginative meanings of the modern artistic work are *shared*. Their message isn't primarily discursive, but emotional. It would however be a mistake to suppose that their value lacks a social function. For Teige, the principal meaning and value of art rests precisely in its social impact. Karel Teige was one of the most important interwar Czech Marxist theorists. He saw society in its historical and economic concreteness as deeply unjust due to the influence of capitalist exploitation. Contrary to many of his contemporaries, he emphasized that the poverty caused by capitalism isn't only economic, but broadly human; it is a poverty at the expense of the richness of humanity's relation to the world.¹⁴

Teige's communist modernism of the 1930s assumed that, in the future, a classless society would mean the *integral* freedom of man. Humanity will not only rid itself of economic misfortune, but it will also become possible for it to fully utilize its own abilities, to engage in a rich intercourse both with the world and with itself. This integral modernist idea, which posits a homology between psychological and social freedom, represents the horizon of Teige's thinking about the value and social functions of poetry.

It is from philosophy that we receive the most basic criterion [for attaining scholarly knowledge of the value of an artistic work]: freedom. Hegel conceived of the history of humanity as a pathway to freedom. Marx sketched out the upward, serpentine path from the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom.” And Šalda¹⁵ showed that the totality of the evolution of art made freedom larger and higher! Freedom in the conception and choice of a theme, freedom in the creative methods, the freedom of fantasy and imagination. What is necessary is to [...] ascertain whether a certain work or artistic movement fulfills a progressive mission in the sense laid out by the pathway to the *realm of freedom!* [...] Face to face with

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

¹⁴ Teige came to this conclusion before the publication in 1932 of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which he naturally began making use of in his own theories as soon as he became familiar with them.

¹⁵ František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937), often considered the leading Czech literary critic of his day.

the artistic work, we shall ask how to effectively make the path to that freedom ever broader and higher. How to free ourselves from inherited conventions and how to free the mind of the artist and reader. We shall ask whether in a given work we can find out – and it will scarcely ever be an unequivocal matter – if it is governed by a progressive or a regressive tendency and function. How and if this work points to the liberation of the human mind, not forgetting that the general precondition of the freedom of the mind is, on the sociological-economic plane, the social emancipation of the human being. At this point the critique transcends the boundaries of art and crosses over into the critique of life.¹⁶

He describes in an uncommonly vivid way the force and diversity of the psychological freedom that the making of a surrealist work brings to bear:

Surrealist pictures and poems demand that the viewer and reader perceive them as though they too were poets; during the quiet contemplation when we hear the agitations of the unconscious, the images reverberate in the viewer like the strings of a musical instrument whose music, in daily life, has been forgotten or renounced; the images loosen the interplay of memories and associations; they are born from the glimmerings that emanate from imagination and fantasy, whether they be tender or cruel, tranquil or frenzied, illogical or destructive, awakening imaginative currents in the reader's imagination.¹⁷

In the sense, discussed above, of the homology of psychological and social freedom operating under the assumption of the integral freedom that would prevail in a classless society – which still, in the 1930s, seemed a real historical possibility¹⁸ – Teige's theory of the surrealist revival of emotionality could appear as an authentic, socially subversive act. And not only subversive, but also as a literally *revolutionary* act that is concrete to the extent that concrete future freedom is assumed in the communist revolutionary project.

Imagination and fantasy evidently play a subversive role in surrealism, putting into effect the most improbable things without it being possible to deny them: the miracles of fantasy are an effective indictment of desolate societal reality, and

¹⁶ Karel Teige, "K aktuálním otázkám kulturního života," in Karel Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie: Studie ze čtyřicátých let* (Prague: Aurora 1994), pp. 138–139.

¹⁷ Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství," p. 274.

¹⁸ In the post-war phase of his thinking, Teige moved from the concept of "freedom" (*svoboda*) to the more dynamic concept of "becoming free" or "liberation" (*osvobozování*). He nevertheless maintained the assumption of a homology between social and psychological freedom. Cf. Karel Teige, "K českému překladu Prokletých básníků [On the Czech translation of the *poètes maudits*]," in Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie*, pp. 140–148.

their revolutionary character resides in the fact that they render institutions and the realities of the social order deeply suspect, for they supply a person with the suspicion that in the imaginary world there resides a freedom that has been driven out from our despotic social reality, and that it is necessary by way of revolutionary transformation to also make the real world into a *realm* of this *freedom*.¹⁹

In Effenberger's "Journey to the Center of a Poem," the word "freedom" – used in this sense – is not to be found anywhere. A fundamental shift takes place between Effenberger's and Teige's views in regard to the purpose of imaginative creation. While in Teige's conception freedom is the specific, ultimate meaning of art, and the artistic work is in this way a means of liberation, Effenberger's formulation in this context refers to an epistemological function – that is, to attaining knowledge of reality, penetrating into "raw reality" ("It is necessary...that subjective deformation become a means of realization" [p. 183]; "[...] suddenly capable of perceiving the precise and astonishing relations surrounding the most innocent stimulus, which leads – in the discharges of black humor – to a more profound orientation within that which is designed to drown the spirit" [p. 185]; "[...] poetic mystification is one of the most effective ways by which, within the human intellect and imagination, the sense of reality, that irreplaceable motor of life and poetry, is sharpened and strengthened,"²⁰ and so on). The element of freedom and liberation is of course a part of the polemical function of the artistic work, but it is a freedom mostly realized by way of cognition.²¹ It naturally does not have any sort of discursive quality but is rather a special type of signal for consciousness:

After the great hope for a symbiosis of the revolutionary forces of reconstruction in art and in society, disillusion had to set in for us to realize that artistic creation had the same signal function in social life as does a high fever in the human organism, and that consequently it is incapable of taking over any tasks which ensue from any organized effort whatsoever. All systems of the association of imaginative ideas, in so far as they can be considered authentic, are subjected to a signal function which is both provoked and provocative, through which the imagination claims its social significance. (P. 184)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 269–270.

²⁰ This passage was omitted from the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" that Effenberger prepared for publication. The original passage appears in the Czech/Slovak part of *Contradictions* 2018, p. 141.

²¹ For Effenberger's later views on the possibility of human freedom, see František Dryje and Šimon Svěrák, "Zpověď dítěte svého vzteku [The confession of a child of anger]," in Vratislav Effenberger, *Republiku a varlata* (Prague: Torst, 2012), pp. 271–320, especially 307–319.

It is just this "disillusion" that is a source of the transformation of artistic creation after the Second World War; it was also one of Effenberger's motivations for reassessing surrealist conceptions, including those of Teige. This disillusion led indirectly both to a greater emphasis on the conscious element of the creative process and to a reworking of the relationship of art to reality .

When Effenberger observes that "[p]oetic value is not identical with emotionality, for it is of a more active, more imperative nature" (p. 176), he implicitly turns against Teige. The "active" and "imperative" nature resides in the fact that the poem transforms our perception of reality. It is not only a matter of more fully and more authentically experiencing reality, as was the case with Teige, but also of semantically rearranging reality and reassessing it (the poem "conquers the world in order to lend it new meanings" [*ibid.*]). Further on in the text Effenberger will write in this regard about the "polemic stimuli" contained in the work (*ibid.*)²² and precisely there, in them, he will find the meaning that is specific to poetic expression.

The true value and meaning of the artistic work does not reside in some specific qualities of external or internal models, nor even in the authenticity of the expression itself, but rather in the way the work polemicizes with its era.²³

We showed that for Teige the assumption of the homology between psychological and social freedom secured a direct connection between the authenticity of expression (the work as a "direct expression of the mental life of the author") and its subversive, revolutionary tendencies. The homology he presented was mediated by the eschatological understanding of communistic, classless society as a space of absolute, integral freedom. For Teige, each *true* liberation must be liberation in the sense of the realization of socialism because, according to him, only under communism will true freedom be achieved. The prospect of a future, just society, socially concretizing psychological authenticity, opens an artistic semiosis in the direction of the politically unambiguous liberation of the human mind.

In Teige's interpretation, the semantic stabilization of the imaginative artistic object was implicitly mediated by a Marxist worldview, which was heteronomous to the artistic work.

²² In his later writings, Effenberger adopts the terminological designation "the critical function of concrete irrationality" for all of these "stimuli."

²³ This passage too was omitted from the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" that Effenberger prepared for publication. The original passage appears in the Czech/Slovak part of *Contradictions* 2018, p. 141.

Although Effenberger didn't give up on an underlying Marxist point of view,²⁴ the failure of communism in the Soviet Union, the experience of the Second World War, and also his later experience with the real functioning of the politics of the Eastern and Western Blocs, absolutely discredited all of Marxism's eschatological and utopian dimensions – as reported above, “disillusion” set in. The idea of a truly historically attainable integral freedom was gone, and with it were the prerequisites for postulating a direct connection between psychological authenticity and the creation of a societal space for the maximum self-realization of the individual and humanity.

Just as artistic work changed in reaction to this situation, so did theoretical models reflecting to the genesis and interpretation of this work. Effenberger's model from “Journey to the Center of the Poem” shifts the social, subversive aspects of art from a sphere heteronomous to the creative process into the very structure of this process. For Effenberger, a poetic manifestation in the sense of an imaginative expression founded in unconscious, that is, repressed, tendencies (Teige's concept, and also the traditional surrealist concept), only represents the background or one pole of the process of the semantic formation of an artistic work. The second pole is mediated by a critical consciousness of social reality, that is, by human discontent with that which is to the detriment of what could be. According to Effenberger, the seemingly unbound images racing through our consciousness function as a means thanks to which we can concretize our discontent with the world, a discontent which would otherwise remain unexpressed and so outside of awareness. It is conscious, but it lacks language, a code, speech – it is too indistinct for us to become aware of it other than through the language of the imagination.

The emotional and consequently also the social efficacy of the symbol does not result from a free automatic movement of the imagination. It results from a determined, more or less conscious critical eliminative effort by which a polemic relationship is realized between the artist and social reality, a relationship which activates not only the mental attitude but also the very life orientation of man. [...] [P]erceptual material which invites every psychologically active person to project into it his own contemplative, even if poetically conceived, impulses, or to project them from it elsewhere. Every real creation is conscious to the extent to which its inspiration is a protest against a concrete evil, even when it intends to be nothing more than a confession. (P. 181)

²⁴ Effenberger continually reassessed his position on Marxism throughout the whole of his life. As he approached the end of it, a decidedly reserved approach held sway (cf. Effenberger, *Republiku a varlata*). From today's perspective we would conclude that, in light of the evolution of Marxism in the Western Bloc (which, due to the political circumstances of the time, Effenberger had little possibility of interacting with), in the whole of his work Effenberger never in any substantive way broke with Marxism.

The revolutionary function of art in Teige's thinking becomes, for Effenberger, a polemical function. That is to say that polemic, as opposed to the revolutionary endeavor, need not be conscious of its final purpose. The polemic may arise from disputes or inhospitable situations, to which it reacts without offering an explicit, alternative solution. In Effenberger's theoretical conception, its entrance into the creative process concretizes the work of art to such a degree that its effect is no longer described as only being "emotional"; rather – as we already mentioned – Effenberger attempts to comprehend it with the concepts "imperative" and "active." For Teige, writes Effenberger, this imperative resided outside of the work (in the heteronomous sphere of Marxist ideology). The viewer or the reader would see the discrepancy between the fullness of the world and the human relationship to it being expressed in a poem or painting and the shabby, daily reality of capitalist society. In "Journey to the Center of the Poem," Effenberger argues that this discrepancy should already be contained in the semantic structure of the work itself.

These fundamental shifts in the semantic shaping of artistic work – brought about by the "disillusion" from the actual possibility of fulfilling revolutionary hopes and achieving integral freedom and, at the same time, motivated by the continued need to react to social reality – are not of course without influence on the general relationship of artistic work to reality. Effenberger noticed that when a work is affected by a conscious, polemical tendency, its absurdity exhibits a special type of logic, a certain inner order; it reaches closer to reality, it closely resembles reality's conventional form so that the work, as a certain form of *poetic mystification*, can recognize and discredit this conventional reality. Such a poetic mystification should "lend its subject the appearance of objectivity, adjust reality such that it appears as little deformed as possible."²⁵ Its own sense then rests in being "one of the most effective ways by which, within the human intellect and imagination, the sense of reality, that irreplaceable motor of life and poetry, is sharpened and strengthened." The poetic expression as mystification does not want to abandon the significant features of reality. Reality there then looks rational and absurd at the same time.

The semantics of the imaginative work is understood in this model of Effenberger's to be socially and historically determined. Effenberger also follows Teige in his attempt to capture the work's general semiotic structure. He cites Teige's study on Toyen's graphic series *Střelnice* (The shooting gallery) and further elaborates his theory of the symbol. Worth noting here is that Effenberger describes the dynamic meaning in the artwork as an "impulse" which does not convey the meaning as such but, in the reader's or viewer's mind, creates "*very conductive tensions* into which even mutually contrastive

²⁵ This passage and the one that immediately follows it were, again, omitted from the English version of Effenberger's article. The original passages appear in *Contradictions* 2 (2018), no. 1, pp. 140-141.

symbolizing meanings can be introduced” (p. 189, emphasis mine). Here then we are very much in the realm of Teige’s *sharing*, placed opposite *comprehending*. In “Journey to Center of the Poem,” however, *sharing* is internally worked out by the polemical moments of poetry.

In this stage of the development of his theoretical system, that is, when he wrote *Pohyby symbolů* (1961), Effenberger considered the emphasis he was placing on the role of consciousness in the creative process to be incompatible with surrealism as such. He only considered surrealism to be a point of departure for his deliberations, as a phenomenon that had been historically surpassed was still in the process of being surpassed, but which opened up a certain new problematic. By the time he condensed his study into the form of the article being discussed here, in 1966, he once again considered himself to be a surrealist. He did not however change any of the theoretical models described in *Pohyby symbolů*. He only weakened some of the formulations that had been aimed against surrealism.²⁶ It was not a capricious change of heart, but rather an intensive five-year period during which Effenberger came to the conclusion that “the refurbishment of imaginative expression is feasible in its [surrealism’s] own structure or, more precisely, by its own structure.”²⁷

In “Journey to the Center of the Poem,” the author develops the meaning of the concept of consciousness quite freely and poetically, and it isn’t quite clear what exactly should be included within it. It is, however, apparent that the polemical moments of artistic creation originate from it. From the context of Effenberger’s deliberations we can surmise that “consciousness” does not so much represent the reflected moments of a mental life as it does the mental contents that are somehow reflectable (probably with the help of the imagination) and that have most likely a predominately concep-

²⁶ For example, let us take the following sentence in *Pohyby symbolů* (1961): “If, in his definition, Nezval identifies poetic image with symbol – ‘the free movement of the imagination is nothing but a movement of symbols directed by the subconscious’ – we have no doubt that there Nezval is paying for the *faith* that surrealists of *that era* placed in the omnipotence of chance and of the subconscious.” In “Journey to the Center of the Poem” (1966), Effenberger changes this to: “If in his definition he identifies in his definition poetic image and symbol – ‘the free movement of the imagination is nothing but a movement of symbols directed by the unconscious’ – we have no doubt that there Nezval is paying for his *much too mechanical* surrealist *trust* in the omnipotence of chance and of the subconscious.” (This issue of *Contradictions*, p. 181, in both citations the emphasis is mine.)

²⁷ “‘Opustíš-li mě, zahyneš’ přestává být v surrealismu tupým bonmotem (rozhovor Martina Stejskala s Vratislavem Effenbergerem) [In surrealism, ‘If you abandon me, you will die’ ceases to be an empty phrase (interview with Vratislav Effenberger by Martin Stejskal)],” *Analogon* 16 (2004), no. 41–42, pp. 62–65, here 65. My extensive essay on Vratislav Effenberger in *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism*, edited by Michael Richards, et al. (forthcoming), addresses in more detail the problematic of Effenberger’s assessment of the continuity of surrealism.

tual nature. This surmise is to a certain extent confirmed by the further evolution of Effenberger's system.²⁸

This radical emphasis on consciousness represents an extreme theoretical attitude in the framework of the evolution of surrealist views. Effenberger will progressively work through and dialecticize the role of consciousness in relation to the imagination and its manifestations.²⁹ Somewhat in conflict with the Teigean point of departure, "Journey to the Center of the Poem" denies the unconscious a more substantial, meaning-generating capacity. Its irrational manifestations are understood as mere "material" that enables us to formulate, on the boundary between the conceptual and the imaginative,³⁰ our own polemical point of view regarding the world. As we have seen, Effenberger's greater emphasis on the conscious component was brought about by the need to reflect on the transformation of the subversive meanings of the imaginative work in its historical and social situation, when it could no longer simply rely on a modernist-conceived Marxist historical perspective, as was the case with Karel Teige. We are convinced that these ideas of Effenberger's have a wider validity and are of use beyond the boundaries of the surrealist worldview, especially in that area of the theory of art that builds on dialectical principles and for which the art work is, above all, considered to be of interest for its social and political functions.

²⁸ Cf., e.g., Vratislav Effenberger, *Realita a poesie* [Reality and poetry] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1969); see, above all, the concluding section of the book, also titled "Realita a poesie," pp. 275–351.

²⁹ Cf. Šimon Svěrák, "Strukturalistická inspirace v surrealistické (psycho)ideologii Vratislava Effenbergera [Structuralist inspiration in the surrealist (psycho)ideology of Vratislav Effenberger]," in Landa and Mervart (eds.), *Imaginace a forma*, pp. 131–150.

³⁰ We should remember here that the opposition imaginative – conceptual does not, of course, map onto the opposition unconscious – conscious or irrational – rational. All three areas mutually overlap.