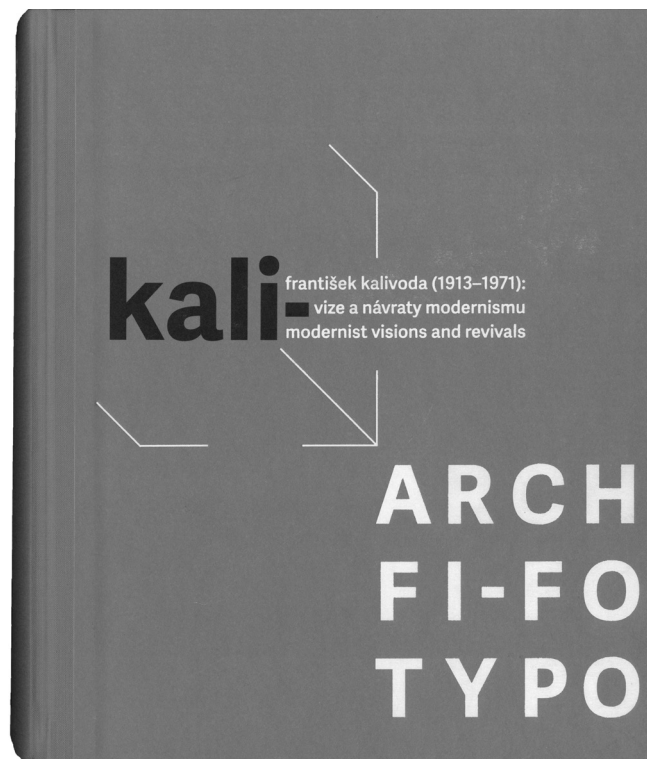


# A Melange of Resolution

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kali- / ARCH- / FI-FO / TYPO.  
František Kalivoda (1913–1971):  
vize a návraty modernismu, 2023  
*Chatrný, Jindřich and  
Svobodová, Markéta (eds.)*

Brno: Brno City Museum and  
the Institute of Art History of  
the Czech Academy of Sciences  
ISBN 978-80-86549-32-3

It is often the case that the work of those creative individuals dedicated to cultural education, or to use the German term *Kulturträger*, fails to receive the same attention as the work of those artists focused exclusively on their oeuvre. František Kalivoda, a multi-talented personality in the Brno cultural scene, has been deservedly brought into the spotlight with his monograph KALI / ARCH / FI-FO / TYPO. František Kalivoda (1913–1971): modernist visions and revivals, thus questioning this stereotype.

The publication was created as a collaboration between the Brno City Museum and the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Its authors draw upon a rich legacy of documents, correspondence, and other archival materials. The diverse visual material makes reading not only interesting but also indirectly highlights the wide range of Kalivoda's activities. The monograph is structured into thematic chapters each addressing a specific area of Kalivoda's activity (whether practical or theoretical) – editorial work, graphic design, promotion, photography, cooperation with the School of Applied Arts in Bratislava, congress organisation, architectural design, and film. “From the very beginning of his professional career, he understood the mission of an architect in a broad context as a creative, organisational, promotional, and social activity” (p. 30). The monograph also includes an extensive timeline. At the end, readers can also examine a selection of accompanying texts, generally presented in the “raw” form of reproductions of their historical typescripts – a book introduction, an opening speech, and various professional articles.

Photography, for Kalivoda, was evidently understood not only as an artistic medium but also as an effective tool for addressing social problems, recalling the saying of environmental activist Paul Watson that the most powerful weapon in the world is a camera<sup>1</sup>. Despite his many activities in the field of so-called social photography, documenting oppression and poverty, Kalivoda did not condemn non-representative forms of photography such as photomontage or other experimental techniques. In this way, he took a stand against many totalitarian policies of the following half-century, which considered artistic abstraction either “degenerate” or “bourgeois”. He also showed a similar interest in filmmaking, characterised by his assertion that “avant-garde film should not feature ballerinas dancing but a beam of light, in which the human eye should not shed tears, but human misery” (p. 482).

Kalivoda appreciated the importance of professional journals as reflections of current knowledge, and his frequent involvement with several such publications cannot be understood otherwise. Whether as editor, contributor, or graphic designer, the echoes of this work resonated in Czechoslovakia long after the specific publication ended.

To cite one example, the importance of architectural journals did not fully emerge until the post-war

period under Communist rule, when these periodicals represented an important channel for communication with international activities in the professional community. However, the graphic design of Czechoslovak magazines such as *Projekt* or *Architektura ČSR* clearly drew inspiration from the publications of the interwar avant-garde.

Such characteristic features include the use of sans-serif fonts of the grotesque type, the use of colour accents, and, naturally, the strong representation of the photographic medium. Graphic design, typography, and photography thus formed a harmonious, balanced relationship. The question remains whether Kalivoda's visual progressiveness should not have been reflected in an equally progressive graphic design of the monograph appropriate for the year 2024; compared to Kalivoda's graphic-typographic work, the design is clear but also relatively conventional.

No less impressive are Kalivoda's personal contacts with several leading figures of the European avant-garde: among others, Le Corbusier, László Moholy-Nagy, Hannah Höch, Siegfried Gideon, and Philip Morton Shand. He was also the only Czechoslovak participant in the legendary fourth CIAM congress, which resulted in the Athens Charter, one of the groundbreaking urban planning documents of the 20th century. Beyond ordinary, friendly correspondence, these exchanges resulted in several exhibitions, lectures, and published articles that greatly enriched the cultural exchange of the time. This approach can be an inspiration for today's Central European academic environment, where one can sometimes get the impression that the Iron Curtain still exists. Kalivoda was also extensively involved in political circles, being a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Left Front association. In this context, a more pronounced attempt at political analysis of Kalivoda's leftist positions might be welcome, in comparison with the attitudes of his avant-garde friends and comrades at home and abroad, as the political stances of these artists were usually equally progressive as their artistic works. However, this topic might best be postponed for the future, perhaps for the next generation of academics unburdened by personal negative experiences with the past regime.

The chapter on Kalivoda's collaboration with the Bratislava School of Applied Art, prevented from fully developing due to the Nazi-induced dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, is chillingly relevant even today. Despite (or perhaps because of) its international reputation, the school was abolished within a few weeks of the establishment of the fascist Slovak State. As its director, Jozef Vydra, put it, “And that's the end of a beautiful international school” (p. 358). This serves as a warning sign for the present, as it recalls the recurring situation in Slovak institutions: many people in leadership positions are often fired after a change of government without any proper reason given. A lesson can be learned from the so-called Paradox of Tolerance by

the Austrian-born philosopher Karl Popper, who argued that a society, in order to preserve its tolerance, must not tolerate the intolerant.<sup>2</sup>

During the Second World War, Kalivoda was involved in the resistance, yet after the war he was accused of collaboration by his colleague Jiří Kroha, citing in justification his architectural work for the authorities in the form of various zoning plans and housing studies. The prevalent attitude towards architecture from this period is well illustrated by the critical reflection of the renovation of the residential colony in Prostějov - Drozdovice from 1942: quite simply, a two-page spread showing photographs of the construction and use of this residential street from the 1940s and, in contrast, current photographs taken after the buildings have been insulated. Without a single word, this comparison underlines the fragility of the values of functionalist architecture lost after such insensitive interventions. Numerous examples from both domestic and foreign environments show the opposite, and demonstrate that in the name of energy efficiency, it is not necessary to sacrifice all the valuable features of interwar facades. Their delicacy, for example, is well readable in the architect's pen-and-ink drawings of the villa of Vlasta and Radomír Růžička in Prostějov from 1939.

Perhaps Kalivoda's greatest success, and one amply reflected in the monograph, came at the end of his career. Together with Grete Tugendhat, who visited Brno in 1967 after 29 years, he initiated a project to save the Tugendhat Villa, which became a National Cultural Monument in 1963. Kalivoda did not plan to make it a museum, as it is today, but instead a "living exhibit of modern architecture" to serve as a "centre for visits by scientists and artists" (p. 106). The initiative was accompanied by an exhibition of the work of the villa's architect, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (20 December 1968–26 January 1969) and a one-day international conference (17 January 1969). Today, the "happy end" of this international icon of functionalism may seem obvious to us, but recalling the sad fate of many exceptional pre-war or post-war buildings, all too often the decisive factor is the exceptiona enthusiasm of one or more individuals willing to fight for it.

The team of authors has made a noteworthy scholarly contribution in their presentation of a historic figure who understood art as an emancipatory tool for moving society forward. His legacy is all the more relevant today, when society's facing the climate crisis – and others also needs its own avant-garde movement that could again transform the architectural profession in a quantum leap. Vladimír Dedeček (1929–2020) characterised the educational work of Kalivoda's contemporary, architect and teacher Martin Kusý (1916–1989), as "he placed a board on his head and had everyone lie on it, so that they could feel the sun."<sup>3</sup> In the same way, we can still sunbathe in the diverse work of the cultural promoter Ferdinand Kalivoda.

1 SEA SHEPHERD. 2021. *Making Waves in 2021: Sea Shepherd in the News* [online]. Available at: <https://www.seashepherd.org.au/latest-news/in-the-news-2021/> (Accessed: 10 April 2024).

2 USJ. 2020. *Should we tolerate intolerance? Reading Karl Popper and John Rawls* [online]. Available at: <https://www.usj.edu.lb/news.php?id=9643> (Accessed: 10 April 2024).

3 MITÁŠOVÁ, Monika. 2017. *Stávanie sa architektom*. Bratislava: Slovart, p. 130.