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FILM MONTAGE AND THE MONTAGE PRINCIPLE OUTSIDE CINEMATOGRAPHY: JIŘÍ KOLÁŘ'S EARLY COLLAGES AS A CASE STUDY

TOMÁŠ POSPISZYL

I.

What is the relationship of non-cinematic artworks, the structure of which is reminiscent of the principles of film montage, to films themselves? Is there a link between certain types of collage being created in the middle of the twentieth century and the theory and practice of film at that time? Can we show that such inspiration was conscious, and, if so, what might this tell us of the crossovers that existed at that time between different artistic media? These are the questions I found myself asking when studying the collages that Jiří Kolář produced between 1947 and 1953.¹ This large corpus of work features simple compositions made up of picture cut-outs from popular magazines that are arranged on a sheet of paper. They mostly involve two, three or more images featuring diverse content, usually organised around horizontal or vertical axes. The cut-outs do not overlap, but are placed alongside one another. They come from various sources and times. They do not form a unified visual space but rather a sequence of scenes.

The book *Roky ve dnech* (*Years in Days*) by Marie Klimešová offers an interpretative framework for interpreting these works by Kolář.² Klimešová painstakingly reveals the links between what Kolář called

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See Tomáš POSPISZYL, "Koláže mezi generacemi: Jiří Kolář jako svědek modernosti a jeho současný pokračovatel", in: *Asociativní dějepis umění*, Prague: tranzit.cz 2014, pp. 14–50.

2

See Marie KLIMEŠOVÁ, *Roky ve dnech: České umění 1945–1957*, Řevnice: Arbor vitae 2010, pp. 300–320 and elsewhere.



Jiří KOLÁŘ, *Doba ledová* (Ice Age), 1952, confrontage, cardboard, 30 × 21.2 cm, private collection © Jiří Kolář – heirs 2017. Published with the kind permission of the copyright holders.



104



Japanische Filme

Films japonais

Japanese Films

105



220 AUCH Paris

Le vrai Paris

Paris as she is



AUCH Paris

Le vrai Paris

Paris as she is

221



V ruských vesnicích jsou primitivní pece z cihel a uplácené hlíny, kde ženy pekou chléb pro celou rodinu.



BYRD se chystá na výpravu k jižní pólě a zkouší zatím pohotovost a odolnost svého letadla na zamrzlém jezeře Caribou v Quebecu.



MODELLE
klobočku od
Jane Blanchat
v Paříži na Sca-
pelerovské vodo-
vě figurě, kte-
rá je sama o
sobě výtvarem
chy i věčně
mouchen-
lupí, ne-
satoral-
naturalistické
figuríny, a nás
tak obličej.



Skok
v výšce
10 metrů.
Palmistická
sl. Trüppelova
vítězí v berlinských
skokoch.



MC. GOLDRICKOVÁ, populární ukližečka
amsterdamského divadla (tato byla po dlou-
hou dobu hlavním pořadkem a zároveň dobi-
žela na řadě všech divadelních „hvězd“) pos-
tupně směřuje a pánem Dillinghamem, jenž
ji znovu získal na pět let.

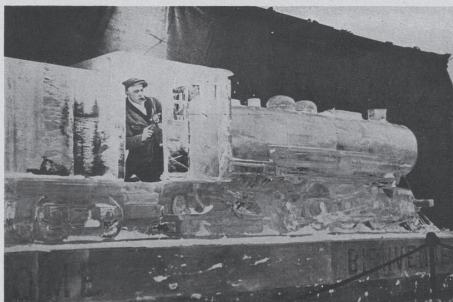
JAK TŘEBA ŽIT TANEČNÍ PÁR, KTE-
RÝ CHCE UTANCOVAT DESET KLO-
METRŮ V REKORDNÍM ČA-
SE. Taneční závody chlopgských
studentů a studentek.



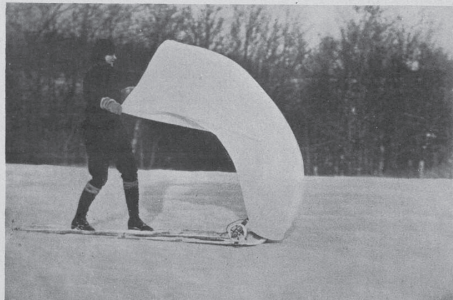
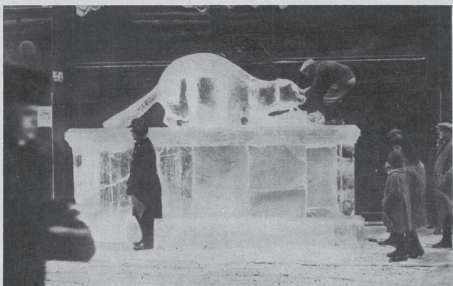
V JARDIN DE PLAN-
TES, zoologická zahra-
da v Paříži, mají nový
přírůstek dvou náro-
ných pelikánů.

TURECKÁ METAŘ-
KA dříve zaznamenala
všechny obilky turecké
turecké ženy.





*Zimní pomníky: Sochař Carbone v Quebecu modeluje z ledu pomník železnice.
Dole: Ledový pomník bobra v Quebecu.*



Lyžařský yachting, jak jej pěstují v Americe.

246 SVĚTOZOR



Ledový pomník Champlainů v Quebecu.



*Ze zimních zábav ve Sv. Mořici:
Na lyžích ke kostýmnímu plesu.*

“confrontage” and the principles of narrative figuration and serial painting, as well as the work of Western European and American pop artists. She notes that we perceive Kolář’s collages in two stages. “Firstly, there is the experience of appreciating the individual building blocks, and secondly, the search to decipher the meaning of the whole.”³ She also draws attention to the formal principles of the arrangement of cut-outs, which she maintains anticipate minimalism and conceptual art. This particular series of works by Kolář can be seen as one example of the search underway at that time for new approaches to the language of fine art. It is surprising just how many other artists were working in the same spirit, mostly independently of each other, both in Czechoslovakia and abroad.⁴

It is clear that one cannot view the techniques employed by Kolář simply as precursors of what was to become minimalism or conceptual art. The more I studied these collages, the more compelled I felt to answer the questions outlined in the introduction. The meaning of Kolář’s visual series is by no means simply equal to the sum of the individual images, but, as Klimešová writes, is the result of mutual interaction and confrontation. Similar procedures are characteristic of the language of film. I began to suspect that finding a parallel with film editing, in which individual sequences are placed side by side in such a way as to form cascading levels of meaning, would represent a more comprehensive way of viewing these works than merely comparing them with the compositional principles of fine art. I became convinced that Kolář was far more interested in finding new ways of creating content than in the formal aspect of what, at the time they were created, were virtually unclassifiable works.

These days Kolář is regarded as a key figure of Czech modern culture, and rightly so. However, back then these collages were viewed as a risky enterprise that not even the artist was entirely satisfied with.⁵ Though we find in them echoes of certain surrealist methods (*cadavre exquis*, automatism, *découpage*, etc.), they are difficult to grasp as independent artworks or a fully formed series of visual poems. Since they clearly deviate from the traditions of fine art and literature and their main goal is to experiment with the creation of meaning through sequential arrangement, should we not perhaps turn to another artistic medium, namely film? To what extent can a comparison be made and justified between Kolář’s collages and the techniques of

film editing? Yet even if direct links are not found, does not such a comparison offer an insight into the way the image was perceived and the expressive possibilities opened up by sequential arrangement at that time?

From the very outset one should point out that not all of Kolář's works from that time feature sequential arrangements of images. In several instances that the artist called "found collages", there is but a single image placed on the sheet of paper. In this isolated image we are witness to a scene that encompasses incompatible elements within itself: a real and a wax head, a person and a mechanical being, a city and the backdrop to a city, etc. In other words, the artist did not necessarily require a visual sequence reminiscent of film shots in order to effect the confrontation of elements leading to a higher level of meaning. A good example of Kolář's work in which there is a link with film montage is the undated and untitled collage from 1948–1952.⁶ Eight cut-outs of identical size are laid out in two columns so that each image is bordered by blank

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Ibid., p. 306.

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This includes artists associated with many different trends, from Dadaism and modernism to pop art, who were using cut-outs in a similar way. One could include the Czechs Zbyněk Sekal and Vladimír Fuka, Hannah Höch from Germany, Eduardo Paolozzi from the UK, the Austrians Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener, Gerhard Richter from Germany, and many others.



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This opinion is lent extra credence by the fact that Kolář chose never to exhibit this large set of works on its own, even in the more relaxed atmosphere of post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia. After 1954, the principle of visual sequential narrative features only rarely in his work. In addition, certain collages from 1948–1952 give the impression of being incomplete, either simply sketches or the preparatory material for work to follow.

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Marie Klimešová gives the work the title *Doba ledová (Ice Age)* and claims it was created in 1952. In comparison with Kolář's other collages of this period it contains an unusually large number of separate photographs organised geometrically as a matrix. For this reason it is reminiscent of a storyboard or photographic comic. Lack of space prevents me from examining the connection between Kolář's collages and comics, i.e. a related cultural form based on sequences of images, which between 1938–1948 were very popular in Czechoslovakia.

paper. The motif of winter is present in all but one image. Two images contain reproductions of historical artworks: part of a Dutch renaissance painting and a detail from a religious image featuring a woman looking upwards piously. Three images depict outdoor winter sports activities: one shows a snowy landscape with a stream, and the other an improvised forest altar. One picture is of a London policeman directing traffic during reduced visibility.⁷ Instinctively we read this collection of panels as we would a text, i.e. from left to right and from top to bottom. We fill in the gaps between the individual images with our own connections and correlations. Though the images are taken from different publications and contexts, they are assembled into a single dream content from a winter world in which unusual, contrasting, and even apocalyptic events take place that culminate in a vision of piety. Kolář's seemingly mechanical, non-aesthetic way of organising the pictures is capable of provoking an emotional response and creating new, composite, albeit enigmatic, meanings. The whole does not create a single, unambiguous narrative, and different viewers may interpret the series of photographs in different ways. However, they would agree on one thing, namely that the individual components of the collage cannot be viewed separately but only in their mutual interconnectedness. Of course, we find examples of meanings being constructed from the individual parts of an artwork throughout history. However, in the case of a collage constructed from a geometric sequence of photographs, it is easy to perceive the whole as a paraphrase of film language or even as a film montage.

Kolář himself does not mention films or film montage as being a source of inspiration. He refers to literary collage as it appeared in the work of T. S. Eliot, above all in the latter's *The Waste Land*. In his memoirs, Zdeněk Urbánek claims to have invented a specific type of collage on the Czech art scene at the end of the forties. Spontaneously, without any links to film, he began to experiment with groups of two or more pictures in such a way that contrasting associations emerged between the scenes depicted. Urbánek maintains these methods were taken up by others and even became group activities.⁸ Suffice it to say that, whoever initiated these techniques, the several hundred extant collages by Kolář represent a fascinating collection, the semantics of which beg to be compared to film.

II.

During the 1920s, a group of Soviet film directors began to use the term “montage” to describe a method of cinematic narration using techniques from the film editing suite.⁹ Using differently composed sequences they expressed complex ideas transcending the scope of individual shots. As well as refining these techniques in their films, they analysed and debated them in writing. This resulted in a deeper, though far from systematic or unified, theory of montage. While on the whole fine artists used collage or photomontage instinctively or within the context of traditional disciplines, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov and above all Sergei Eisenstein created a specific theory of film montage that is still in place today.¹⁰ And while individual Soviet film theorists may have disagreed on some points, they all agreed that editing was the key means of expression. This conviction was based on hands-on practice. At the end of the 1910s and on into the twenties, Lev Kuleshov was exploring the ambiguous character of a camera shot. He concluded that, even though every individual shot captured the filmed reality photochemically, its meaning emerged only at the editing stage, i.e. through its combination with other shots. This gave

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It has been suggested in the case of the last image that the photograph is somehow related to the Great Smog that afflicted London in December 1952, which would allow us to date the work as being created in winter 1952–1953, i.e. by the end of the period during which Kolář was experimenting with a similar type of collage.

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Zdeněk URBÁNEK, *Ztracená země*, Prague: Nakladatelství Franze Kafky 1992, pp. 481–482.

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We find a description of the elements of film montage ten years prior to that of the Soviet directors by one of the pioneers of film, Georges Méliès, and even in the proto-cinematic apparatuses of Thomas A. Edison.

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In this country, for instance, the classic manual on editing by Jan KUČERA, *Střihová skladba ve filmu a televizi*, 3rd ed., Prague: NAMU 2016, attempts to review and revise many of the approaches taken by the Soviet school, though much of it is based on the work of that school.



rise to what was known as the Kuleshov effect. Kuleshov edited a short film in which a shot of the expressionless face of Tsarist matinee idol Ivan Mozzhukhin was alternated with various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl in a coffin, a woman on a divan). The film was shown to an audience, who believed that the expression on Mozzhukhin's face was different each time he appeared depending on whether he was "looking" at the plate of soup, the girl in the coffin, or the woman on the divan.**11**

According to Dziga Vertov, montage is able to transcend the space and time of its individual components. If shots showing waving workers filmed at a certain time in a certain place are spliced with shots of other waving workers taken somewhere else at a different time, we can make it seem that the two groups are greeting each other, even though this was not and could not have been the case.**12** But this is not all. The two groups of people are perhaps not simply greeting each other but represent an expression of the global solidarity of the working class that transcends all barriers. Montage has the potential to evoke strong emotions and communicate complex ideas. Soviet montagists viewed editing not simply as an artistic technique but as a mechanism for enhancing human cognitive ability. Vsevolod Pudovkin writes: "If we define montage in its most general form as the unveiling of internal connections, we create an equation between montage and any process of thinking in any sphere whatsoever."**13** Film art becomes the collective act of cognising reality and revealing its internal relationships.

Sergei Eisenstein wrote that the principle of montage was that "two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition".**14** In an equally important addition to this famous quote, Eisenstein said: "However, this is by no means restricted to film but is a phenomenon we encounter whenever we compare two facts, scenes or subjects."**15** The revolutionary principle of montage in art, then, resides in its unprecedented universality. In the twentieth century, we can indeed observe how the term montage was applied to words, sounds, images and objects, i.e. media traditionally associated with a variety of art forms. And yet suddenly these diverse media are subject to the same treatment, and the construction of the whole to the same rules, regardless of the character of the individual components. Pudovkin too believes that the principles and techniques of film montage can be applied to any artform or way of thinking.**16**

Similarly sweeping conclusions were not the sole preserve of Soviet revolutionary filmmakers and can still be encountered today. Film and the formal procedures that surround it are perceived not only in connection with the evolution of a specific audiovisual technology, but have become synonymous with a wide range of phenomena. Perhaps the very word montage, adopted from the French and originally referring to the process of assembly or connection, is responsible. During the course of the twentieth century, the term migrates from the sphere of industrial production into the realm of cultural production and even, as we shall see, theoretical considerations. Elements of montage are attributed not only to film, but literature, music, graphic design and art. Literary montage is associated with Guillaume Apollinaire and T. S. Eliot, montage-like effects can be found in the music of Claude Debussy and Leoš Janáček, and Emil František Burian describes his own work as stage montage. During the 1930s, avant-garde figures mainly from the Soviet Union and Germany spoke candidly of the links between their work in collage and photomontage and film montage,¹⁷ which not only

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This film, which Kuleshov put together from the remains of pre-revolutionary films, has not been preserved, and so its first screening has the character of an orally transmitted legend.

Sadly we only have access to later reconstructions of the experiment.

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See Dziga VERTOV, "Revoluce Kinoků", in: Antonín NAVRÁTIL, *Dziga Vertov: Revolucionář dokumentárního filmu*, Prague: Československý filmový ústav 1974, p. 181.

13

Vsevolod PUDOVKIN, "O montáži", in: Jaroslav BROŽ – Ljubomír OLIVA (eds.), *Film je umění: Sborník statí*, Prague: Orbis 1963, p. 90.

14

Sergej EJZENŠTEJN, "Montáž" (1938), in: *Kamerou, tužkou, perem*, Prague: Orbis 1961, p. 328.

15

Ibid.

16

PUDOVKIN, "O montáži", p. 96.

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Maud LAVIN, "Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity", in: Matthew TEITELBAUM (ed.), *Montage and Modern Life: 1919–1942*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press – Boston: ICA 1992, p. 54.



for artists, but aestheticians and the general public, became the symbol of modern times.

An example of the identification of film montage with modernity as a whole can be found in *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur* (*The Social History of Art*) by the art historian Arnold Hauser, first published in 1951 (i.e. at the same time that Jiří Kolář was creating his collages in Prague). In this book, Hauser attempts an ambitious overview of the relationship between society and art from prehistory to the present. He calls the first half of the twentieth century The Film Age and examines the dramatic transformations that impacted not only modern theatre, literature and painting, but even philosophy and the very way we perceive time and space. Thanks to film, the world of modern man appears like a discontinuous kaleidoscopic image, and art reacts by working more and more with the technique of montage.¹⁸ According to Hauser, montage quickly became the basic means of expression and had a huge influence on the culture of its time. Film effects (match cuts, temporal discontinuity, etc.) can be found in the novels of Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in avant-garde art, and elsewhere.

Similar thoughts, general in nature but rarely penetrating more deeply, were expressed not only during the fifties. At millennium end, the art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh weighs in. His analysis of the utilisation of montage over the previous century, with particular regard to the work of the German artist Gerhard Richter, even makes reference to the spread of the principle into the social sciences. He reminds us that Walter Benjamin likened his *Arcades Project* to montage, and claims that the art historian Aby Warburg was employing montage at the end of the twenties. The latter's *Mnemosyne Atlas* is a series of variable constellations of heterogeneous visual material, cut-outs of classical art, the art of tribal societies, archaeological artefacts, modern art and pop culture. Warburg set out to construct models of the continuity of historical memory using these visual sequences. Buchloh also references montage in relation to the Annales School. According to this group of historians, history is not a chain of interlinked, clearly defined events, but rather a decentralised historical system, which Buchloh claims qualifies the school for entry into the montage club.¹⁹ No less a figure than the curator of the film collection of the Centre Pompidou, Philippe-Alain Michaud, is, in my view somewhat perfunctorily, persuaded by the links between the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and film montage.²⁰

As we see, the principle of montage has been and still is applied to a wide range of phenomena unrelated to film. However, I cannot help but feel that the more the concept is applied outside the realm of film, the less useful it becomes. The broad definition of montage we find in the work of Eisenstein or Vertov undoubtedly possessed a useful function at that time: film production is conceived of as the most progressive art form, which is not simply a subjective reflection of the world but participates in revealing its internal connections and is an integral part of a new world. Montage is the application of the principles of dialectical materialism to film.²¹ It would be difficult to find a similar ideological base, whether it was meant genuinely or simply as obligatory obeisance, outside the sphere of the leftist avant-garde. Use of the term outside the sphere of film also began to seem problematic to me. Too easily it can become simply a comparison with or loose reference to a particular cultural practice. I was especially persuaded of this in connection with the main object of my interest, i.e. Kolář's early collages. Simply comparing them to film techniques is woefully inadequate, yet I was unable to detect closer links. These collages are not typical artistic or literary works. However, they remain tangible visual artefacts very remote from the character of film. The image plays an important role in film. However, it is an audiovisual temporal art with specific effects. The creation of a new idea by means of the confrontation of two film shots and two photographs is, despite appearances to the contrary, a very dissimilar process. It began to look as though I had reached an impasse.

Luckily, a concept recently used by the art historian Walter Grasskamp when analysing André Malraux's *Imaginary Museum* came to my aid. At the start of the 1950s, Malraux attempted to recount the story of world sculpture with the aid of a book of full-page photographic

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Arnold HAUSER, *The Social History of Art*, vol. 4. *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age*, London: Routledge 1999, pp. 226, 240–244.

19

See Benjamin H. D. BUCHLOH, "Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive", *October*, 1999, no. 88, pp. 117–145.

20

Philippe-Alain MICHAUD, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, New York: Zone Books 2007, pp. 282–287.



reproductions. For his utilisation of a photographic sequence, Malraux would be a shoo-in for membership of the montage club. Moreover, Grasskamp reminds us that, according to the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, while working with these reproductions Malraux was influenced by film aesthetics as he had become acquainted with them in Eisenstein's work. However, he adds an important rider:

At the same time, one wonders whether the design of the *musée imaginaire* in fact needs to be explained at all in terms of the genealogy of film aesthetics or montage, and whether the short tradition of illustrated art books was not in itself quite sufficient as a source for the aesthetics of Malraux's books.**22**

Grasskamp believes that the interlacing of visual works and film montage leapfrogs over an important source, i.e. the printed image to be found in books and magazines, and complicates matters unnecessarily by forcing visual art and film into a more intimate relationship than they are perhaps yet ready for. Grasskamp goes on to show in virtuosic fashion which book design models Malraux drew on and what direction they took him in.

III.

Exploring the influence of the language of film on other, mainly printed, media is a relatively new research field answering calls for a more interdisciplinary approach to culture.**23** This is all very well, but an interdisciplinary approach must remain sensitive to the specificities of the media it is comparing. The spread of film technology has had a huge influence on the whole of Western culture, including newspapers and magazines, the format of which has been transformed. Changes to the paradigm of print news bulletins appeared in France at almost exactly the same time as the first film presentations. While the more traditional illustrated magazines such as *L'Illustration* drew on the way that art is usually presented, and the pictures in its supplements regarded as mediating independent artworks, by the end of the nineteenth

century a new type of magazine had become popular, as represented by the weekly *La Vie illustrée*, which placed greater emphasis on the visual dimension than *L'Illustration*. There were up to twice as many images, often based on photographic templates, and above all they were linked on the page, which meant that photo-reportage recounted stories using sequential narration. This was also evident in the layout of the magazine. Instead of a single synthesising illustration, sequences were the order of the day. Events were seen from multiple angles and the magazine was more suited to being quickly leafed through than painstakingly read. This in turn evoked the heterogeneity of the first film presentations, in which political events alternated with sports reports, and scenes from the life of celebrities with visual curiosities. The French researcher Thierry Gervais makes a connection between these changes to layout and the form of the first newsreels (and uses the word montage to describe them).²⁴ The filmification of the print media culminated in the interwar period with magazines such as *Paris-Soir*, *Vu*, *Paris Match* and

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PUDOVKIN, "O montáži", p. 91.

22

Walter GRASSKAMP, *The Book on the Floor: André Malraux and the Imaginary Museum*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute 2016, p. 79.

23

An example of similar attempts is the book by David CAMPANY, *Photography and Cinema*, London: Reaktion Books 2008. The author examines examples in history of the mutual relationship between photography and film, represented, inter alia, by photomontage, the design of books of photographs, and contemporary photography and video. Another inspiring approach is taken by the film researchers François Albera and Maria Tortajada. They investigate historical *dispositifs*, i.e. the wider network of relationships that naturally transcend the boundaries of classical aesthetic and other categories. This methodology sees them arrive at productive insights into phenomena on the interface of art, science and technology, such as chronophotography, early film, and modernist literature.

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Gervais uses the term montage to describe a method of editing that existed before the term was introduced, and applies it to the entirety of the first film performances. See Thierry GERVAIS, "The Little Paper Cinema: The Transformations of Illustration in Belle Époque Periodicals", in: Laurent GUIDO – Olivier LUGON (eds.), *Between Still and Moving Images*, New Barnet: Libbey 2012, pp. 152, 159 and 164.



Life. The image, or more precisely series of images, now play the main role, and the way they are arranged is reminiscent of films. Using photo-reportage they work with temporal sequences, alternate broad overview with small detail for effect, and make full use of semantic contrast.

Similar transformations were taking place simultaneously or with a slight delay in the sphere of Czech pictorials, Kolář's main source of material. To begin with this involved older issues of magazines such as *Světobzor* or *Pestrý týden*. In the pre-war *Světobzor* we already find the dramatic rotation of photographic genres so typical of newsreels. At the end of the twenties and into the thirties, *Pestrý týden* pioneered a new concept of photojournalism and graphic design that placed an emphasis on visual news reports. The varied layout of what were dubbed the "photo-saturated" pages of *Pestrý týden* saw the publication both live up to its name (*pestrý týden* meaning "colourful week") while also referencing film. Jindřich Toman draws attention to the centrefold spread of the second issue of *Pestrý týden* that features a mashup of twenty-five images.²⁵ Politics, culture and celebrity gossip jostle with shots from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in what is a conscious reference to film montage. The covers and inside pages were created as visual sequences and the extensive photo-reportages are reminiscent of film. In interwar film and gossip magazines we find materials that used graphic design in order to refashion film works. Surprisingly, Kolář was not attracted by this type of magazine and did not imitate it in his works. The composition of his collages is far closer to the visuals of the more conservative *Světobzor*, especially the issues published in the first two decades of the twentieth century.²⁶ This usually involved a simple symmetrical arrangement of two, three or four photographs on a page that Kolář then used in his collages. He was less interested in film composition than the more traditional pictorial model of older magazines. In fact, inasmuch as film principles are to be found in Kolář's collages, he is often not their creator. The contrasts are already to be found in the individual source photographs. Kolář then presented these found "edits" as independent cut-outs or more complex collages. He was fascinated, for example, by a photograph of a huge advertising bottle in the middle of a square, the confrontation of mechanical humanoids with real people, a pair of compositionally identical photos of turtles on a beach, the movement of tanks through the landscape, and similar materials of which there was an abundance in magazines of that

time. When working with these cut-outs Kolář appropriated wholesale the edits already made by the magazine.

The first half of the twentieth century saw many attempts made to translate film into book form. In 1925, in the chapter “Dynamic of the Metropolis” of a book entitled *Painting, Photography, Film*, László Moholy-Nagy created an analogy of avant-garde film. In their book *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* (*Film Haters Today, Film Lovers Tomorrow*) of 1929, Hans Richter and Werner Gräff reconstructed the Kuleshov effect and instead of film used only photo sequences. El Lissitzky in his book *Japanese Film* from 1928 and Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko in *Soviet Film* from 1935 draw on films or film language. Similar attempts by avant-garde artists to create film using printed media are to be found in Czechoslovakia.²⁷ Kolář did not react to these radical experiments of the interwar period. Were we to look for a possible precursor of his collages from the forties and fifties, the closest we would get is in the typographically conservative *Film-Photos wie noch nie* (*Film Photographs as Never Seen Before*) from 1929.²⁸ This is a collection of 1,200 photographs illustrating various aspects of film. The films selected are introduced using simple sequences of photographs capturing the most important moments of the action. Other pages demonstrate film processes or the roles created by famous actors using photographic series. However, even this functional composition creates a tension between individual images and makes us think about the

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Jindřich TOMAN, *Foto/montáž tiskem*, Prague: Kant 2009, pp. 264 and 267.

26

However, we find a more conservative, “non-film” design in many issues of *Pestrý týden*, whose early iterations were particularly ambitious in terms of graphic design.

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Karel Císař draws attention to the cinematographic effects to be found in the book designs of Zdeněk Rossmann, Ladislav Sutnar and František Kalivoda, and shows how they related to the theories of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Karel Teige. See Karel CÍSAŘ, “Tenká červená linie: Typografie a instalace výstav v Rossmannově *Písmu a fotografii v reklamě*”, in: Marta SYLVESTROVÁ – Jindřich TOMAN (eds.), *Zdeněk Rossmann: Horizonty modernismu*, Brno: Moravská galerie v Brně 2015, pp. 151–157.

28

Edmund BUCHER – Albrecht KINDT (eds.), *Film-Photos wie noch nie*, Giessen: Kindt und Bucher 1929.



relationship between them. The practical layout of the book is reminiscent of Kolář's later techniques.

As regards books that seek consciously to refashion the formal procedures of film, the historian François Albera claims that the artist surrenders an element of control over the way the work is interpreted. She does not programme the totality of her vision, as in the case of cinema, but leaves the reader/viewer much greater latitude when it comes to consuming and reading the work.²⁹ A similar approach is to be found in Kolář's work at the end of the forties and into the fifties. In his poems and collages he is fascinated by citation. He believes the artist is simply an eyewitness and that it is for the viewer to decide what to do with the testimony provided, how to connect its individual parts, and what significance to grant it. Apart from the winter collage described in the introduction, most of Kolář's works are reminiscent of a card index, an archival system for the sorting and storing of visual information. Within the context of art at that time, the monotony and even randomness of most of Kolář's compositions problematise the very utilisation of the category of collage. At that time the collage was above all a visual work and not an aid to cognising reality, and when interpreting the work, the viewer was expected to engage their intellect, connect up the individual parts, and "read" the resulting whole. Kolář was not interested in creating an aesthetically pleasing scene, nor did he want simply to alternate and organise visual material. He did not set out to create an archive but to analyse the visual contents of modern news reports and reflect upon their function in modern society. He was not interested in evaluating the significance of the selected photographs and sequences thereof. On the contrary, he interrogated their messages and unveiled them for his viewers. This is borne out by the predominant themes of his work at that time: war, human brutality, a dumbing-down sensationalism, the capacity for photography to manipulate the viewer's unconscious, etc.

Kolář was less influenced by progressive film techniques and the theories surrounding them than the popular culture he found in pictorials, and only then by the methods of film composition that had found their way into these publications. We are now in a position to see that the questions I posed at the start of this text were too narrowly defined and too essentialist. They sought a causal relationship between the form of a specific series of artworks and montage as the stylising element of film language. At the same time, this relationship supposedly

took place in an environment that was itself saturated by references to film. I am convinced that Kolář was not expressing a secret ambition to be a filmmaker in his collages. He was not interested in the technicalities of film montage and had no need to refashion his found images into filmic form. He was attracted mainly by their ideological impact and function and by the possibility of a visual language for modern society. His early work is an artist's response to a world known through film magazines and pictorials and their evolving graphic formats. I believe that in this sense his work resembles that of other artists of the global neo-avant-garde who worked with a similar type of collage.

Kolář's collages between 1947 and 1953 were created alongside his literary output as part of his search for new resources in poetry at a time when the word was losing its original power. In this sense he prefigured the post-medium condition.³⁰ The artist arranges images on the page as the writer arranges text. She transposes visual or film procedures into a literary discourse and the outcome is an artwork. There is no direct connection with film in Kolář's early work, though there exists a broader field of view that encompasses both Kolář's collages and film montage. As one of the defining phenomena of modern times, film inscribed itself on the form of twentieth century culture. Film and techniques derived from it form the basis of the means of mass communication of that century. Kolář was fascinated by all of this and at the same time adopted a critical stance.³¹ We might perhaps regard Kolář's collages as part of a broader film *dispositif*: for viewers of the twenty-first century, Kolář interrogates filmic models of perception that entered into the mutual relations between the world, its representation, and its viewers.

29

François ALBERA, "From the Cinematic Book to the Film-Book", in: GUIDO-LUGON, *Between Still and Moving Images*, p. 198.

30

The term "post-medium condition" was used in 1999 by Rosalind KRAUSS in "A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition", New York: Thames & Hudson 1999. This book describes the situation of art during the 1970s, when the modernist concept of individual art forms as spheres defined by specific media was breaking apart.

31

These days the same could be said of the internet and its influence on the culture and life of society.

