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The editing of this special issue was supported by the grant EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00001 (“Complex improvement of research capacities and services at Eszterházy Károly University”) and the National Research Development and Innovation Office, project number: 116625.

Czech Interwar Photography between Art, Society and Politics¹

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ABSTRACT

Interwar Czech photography in the cultural spectre from the viewpoint of media and technology is related with penetration to various areas without intentionally directed nature of genres or styles. Viewed in a context with the phenomena of new mass media, industrialization, leisure time and general cultural and sociological relations in the spatio-temporal compression of modernity, photography plays a major role in forming modern culture in the 1920's and 1930's, in the “golden era of photography”. I have focused on the tendencies of photographic expression, influence and thinking after World War I. I considered it is important to point to reversed flow of ideas, i.e. from other fields of human activity towards photography, when this concerns tools where the development of new photographic was projected back to artistic and general social levels.

KEYWORDS: Czech photography, art, society, politics, 1920s and 1930s

ABSZTRAKT

Cseh fotográfia a két világháború között a művészet, társadalom és politika hármasa felől közelítve

A tanulmány a két világháború közötti cseh fotográfiára fókuszál a média és technika szemszögéből. A fotózás jelentős szerepet játszott a 1920-as és 1930-as években a modern kultúra kialakításában az újfajta tömegtájékoztató, az iparosítás, a megváltozott szabadidő és kulturális kapcsolatok révén. A tanulmány tehát a fotóművészetre mint gondolkodást befolyásoló tényezőre összpontosít. A tanulmányban fontos cél, hogy az eszmék fordított áramlását mutassa be, tehát azon dimenziók felől közelítsen a fotográfiához, amelyeket maga a fotóművészet ragad meg.

KULCSSZAVAK: cseh fotográfia, művészet, társadalom, politika, 1920-30-as évek

¹ The paper has been financially supported by National Museum Prague, Project (NAKI II) No. 18DG-045.

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Introduction

The photographic medium presents a major historical source of information about the transformation of society and related social phenomena in any given period. The outreach of the meaning and function of visual communication through photography is enormous, and it significantly changes the established perception spectrums of the photographic medium in artistic contexts. I will introduce communication patterns and functions of photography through the characteristics of interwar photography – professional (business), amateur and art photography, from the fading influences of pictorialism and art nouveau to the advent of new manifestations of photographic expression in avant-garde tendencies, in relation to the social transformation of lifestyle in the changing political situation in Czechoslovakia between the wars.

Interwar Czechoslovak photography has been examined by a large number of experts. Among Czech art historians, Jaroslav Anděl, Antonín Dufek and Vladimír Birgus are worthy of note. Key literature in this field includes, in particular, exhibition catalogues such as *Czech Photography 1918–1939*; *Art for All Senses*; *Interwar Avant-garde in Czechoslovakia*; *Czech Modernism 1900–1945*; *Czech Photography 1840–1950. Story of a Modern Medium*; *Czech Photographic Avant-garde*, and others. Yet I believe that it is important to open this issue again and, from a perspective of revision, subject the connections between its theory and critique, as well as the medium itself, to critical analysis. Previous approaches were frequently hampered by the idealization of the avant-garde or its politically unacceptable orientation. With the results of my research, I will place the existing information about Czech and Slovak social photography into broader relevant discourses that were characteristic of the period culture, using the intersecting international and national trends of the left-wing revolutionary movement as a background.

The research is based on the study of primary archive materials. Social, political and art groups affecting social photography in all its forms are documented, for example, in the registers of the Police Headquarters of the National Archive in Prague and the Moravian Provincial Archive in Brno. These registers have the character of correspondence and reports about establishing, dissolving, bans, restrictions and events of the groups and the extent of their activities on the basis of the statutes of the individual associations and clubs. In terms of photography and film, inventories of the Cultural and Educational Associations³ hold valuable information including that about the activities of the Prague and Brno *Devětsil* association⁴ and, in particular, the Left Front and its *Film-Foto* section, the prime mover of the events in interwar Czechoslovak social photography headed by Lubomír Linhart, Karel Teige

³ Moravian Provincial Archive in Brno, reg. B 26, III.

⁴ Moravian Provincial Archive in Brno, reg. B 26, III: 2545/1411.



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and František Kalivoda.⁵ When writing the study, I employed, apart from available literature, the daily press of the period and specialist journals, for example, *Bytová ultura*, *Horizont*, *Index*, *Měsíc*, *Pásmo*, *Salon* and *Telehor*, as well as *Fotografický obzor*, a photographic journals published in the 1920s and 1930s. The journal became a platform for the initiators of new photographic tendencies and artists advocating the pure photographic image with radical changes in chosen subjects, including the first theoretical and critical articles by Lubomír Linhart, Karel Teige, Jaromír Funke and others.

The study, created within a long-term project, is divided into two parts. The first part will introduce the function and approaches of photography after the First World War, and will outline the critical, theoretical and manipulative approaches and points of departure of Lubomír Linhart, Karel Teige and František Kalivoda in broader socio-cultural conditions. On the basis of their characterisation and placement in the period social and artistic context I will introduce the relations and connections between the photographic image and the social areas of human activities, including political practices of the interwar era.

1. Czech Photography after the First World War

Photography built up its position within the hierarchy of established art disciplines gradually. It pushed through due to its distinctive manner of representation, a search for aesthetic levels and limits between naturalism and illusion. Yet the importance of photography only grew after the First World War when new technologies emerged, as well as new social topics connected with changes in society and the first theoretical reflections on photographic communication. Nonetheless, the budding reproduction, documentary, reportage and information functions of the photographic image followed and employed the established categories of portrait, still life and landscape known from the visual language of painting and graphic art.

In the late 19th century, the photographic medium started to be divided into three categories: professional – business photography, amateur photography and art photography, with numerous overlaps and blending. Approaches rooted in painting traditions emerged, giving rise to photographic pictorialism and art nouveau with noble prints used to represent the beauty, symbolism and exceptionality of the subjects. These tendencies were gradually ousted by purist approaches experimenting with soft-focus lenses, capturing the near-impressionist atmosphere of motifs. The development of pictorialism was broken by the war, and in contrast, post-war photography tended towards the elements of naturalness, objectivity and new aesthetics of expression.

⁵ Moravian Provincial Archive in Brno, reg. B 26, III: 2549/1697.



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Immediately after the First World War the photographic medium became a major means of communication whose nature crystallized and evolved in close relation to changes in the urban milieu, and to the factor of modernity in new social conditions and connections. After the watershed year 1918, the newly-established Czechoslovak state saw political, economic, social and cultural flourishing, yet it also sought its own identity and witnessed a large number of heated debates over which direction the new state should take. Naturally, this radical change in the social situation boosted and inspired the creative potential of the young generation and their general views, and it was also strongly reflected in the field of the photographic image. In the course of the interwar period, professional – business photography moved from the originally prevailing studio portraiture to a more universal expression responding to new social needs. Photography was employed in film, theatre and sport, in advertising and fashion, reproductions of artworks and, in particular, in the booming journalism with a host of photographic and pictorial magazines and publications. However, photography in these areas only had a utilitarian function, it was an aid used at the expense of the photographers' personal expression. At the same time, it quickly became an instrument of criticism, a tool of promotion whipped up into manipulation and political propaganda. The main emphasis was laid on its historical and social meaning. The growing popularity of pictorial documents was associated with the compression of time and space, modernization and industrial progress.

The beginnings of the amateur movement in photography go back to the 1890s. In the early 20th century, expression tendencies were still dominated by the frequently used noble processes, especially bromoil print, oil print, charcoal print and gum print, in the vein of the art nouveau. Among subjects, atmospheric landscapes, portraits and symbolic compositions prevailed. Photography becomes a means of a personal statement. Under the influence of Josef Drahomír Růžička, leanings towards pure, non-manipulated photography achieved with soft-focus lenses came to the fore, including the play with lights and shadows and the principle of untouchability.

A milestone in amateur photography was the establishment of the Union of Czechoslovak Amateur Photographers in Prague in 1919. The union promoted and initiated the birth of a large number of photographic clubs outside Prague. Photography ceased to be a domain of the upper classes, and the circle of its adherents quickly expanded, supported by the political Left. Among the leading figures of the amateur photographers' movement, the activities of Jan Lauschmann, a Brno professor of chemistry⁶, are worthy of note. Lauschmann combined his profession

⁶ Jan Lauschmann studied in 1918–1924 at the College of Chemical Technology under professor Jaroslav Milbauer. In 1921 he joined the Czech Club of Amateur Photographers in Prague. He moved to Brno in 1925.



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and his scientific research in the Neobrom⁷ factory with his own photographic work rooted in the amateur environment. His photographs were distinctly informed by the knowledge of photographic chemistry, and create a parallel to the development of Czechoslovak interwar photography. Despite the soft-focus lens technique clearly inspired by Josef Drahomír Růžička, Lauschmann tended towards progressive pure photography and worked with the sharp drawing of the negative, experiment, play with details and shadow structures. The strong influence of the avant-garde and the leaders of the Left Front and its *Foto-Film* section initiated by Lubomír Linhart, Karel Teige and František Kalivoda is obvious here.

In the early 1920s there were also occasional displays of Czech and German amateur photographers' clubs. After the arrival of fascism in Germany, Jews were excluded from the German club in 1934 and the contact between the Czech and German clubs was broken. Apart from several documented exhibitions, such as the one in the Museum of Applied Arts in Brno in 1924 and an exhibition held in 1927 in the House of the Arts, Brno, and sporadic information about individual photographers, there is virtually no information about the activities of the German clubs.

The ambitious *Devětsil*, a left-wing movement with an original programme focused on poetism, was partially transformed, after a clash of opinions among its members and its dissolving, into the Left Front association.⁸ Although *Devětsil's* agenda involved photography, its photographers were few; the only photographer among its members was Jaroslav Rössler. Creative activities with artistic ambitions regarding the photographic medium only took place in the core of *Devětsil*. There was a distinct influence of Man Ray – his rayograms, specific compositions and technical elements of the photographic image working with coarse grain, blurring, the Sabatier effect⁹ and all sorts of experiments with light and image. The Bauhaus also played a crucial role; its multimedia character embracing architecture, painting, sculpture, photography, film, music, work with metal, wood and many other materials transformed the means of expression and aesthetic values into a distinctive creative and autonomous style (Anděl 1993, Dufek 1981a). Another strong impetus was provided by west-European as well as Russian culture and politics, and was

⁷ The establishment of Neobrom, the first Czechoslovak factory for the manufacture of photographic paper, is credited to the entrepreneur and industrialist Josef Lakomý. In 1908 Lakomý and his associate started the Beneš & Lakomý company. Owing to its prosperity, Lakomý got independent in 1913 and headed Neobrom on his own. It even operated, though with restrictions, during the First World War.

⁸ Regulations of Brno *Devětsil* of 15. 12. 1923 sent to the Police Directorate in Brno (MZA Brno, reg. B26: inv. 2545/1411).

⁹ Sabatier effect – a phenomenon in which the image recorded on a negative or on a photographic print is wholly or partially reversed in tone. Dark areas appear light or light areas appear dark.



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especially inspirational for the young generation in the field of art, theatre, literature, architecture, photography and film.

The change of vision in photography triggered theoretical and critical responses. Karel Teige's theoretical work *Foto kino film* (1925) influenced by Louis Delluc was important not only for Czechoslovak photography but also for film. In the context of image-building Teige tended towards the elements of poetism, constructivism and abstraction. Karel Teige granted photography and film the status of "new beauty". He blended documentary and reportage photography with poetism and photogenics, and accentuated Man Ray's experiments and photomontages. Yet in general terms, the art character was still denied to photography in the 1920s (Teige 1925). The origins of avant-garde photography of the 1920s are associated, above all, with Evžen Markalous and his poetic photographic collages. Some of them were published in the *Fronta* almanac in 1926. Evžen Markalous with photographer Bohumil Šťastný created a reportage from Prague hospitals for the *Pestrý týden* magazine. Several shots from the series entitled *4 Zerrspiegelaufnahmen* are listed in the catalogue of the exhibition *Film und Foto* held in Stuttgart. They are marked by a distinct influence of László Moholy-Nagy and the Bauhaus school. Apart from Šťastný and Markalous, Bohuslav Fuchs showcased at this international exhibition of avant-garde photography and film three photomontages of modern architecture in Brno and Luhačovice; a photomontage with the motif of the Eiffel Tower was presented by Josef Hausenblas. While Karel Teige displayed his illustrations for Vítězslav Nezval's *Abeceda* poetry book and Zdeněk Rossmann typographic designs employing photography combined with book design (Dufek 1993a, Birgus 1989). One of the members of *Devětsil*, and later the Left Front, was Zdeněk Rossmann, an architect and designer mostly active in the field of typography in the vein of functionalism. He specialized in photomontages and stage design. Zdeněk Rossmann and Marie Rossmannová studied at the Bauhaus school in 1930–1931,¹⁰ and Rossmann's work was also strongly influenced by László Moholy-Nagy. The somewhat limited account of photographic activities in the 1920s comprises photographic contributions by Marie Rossmannová published in the Brno *Rejpejrevue* journal in 1928 (Dufek 1993a). Photographer Jaromír Funke was associated with both *Devětsil* and the Left Front in the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹¹ Funke's oeuvre reflects the experiments with photogenics and compositions of light and shadows in the context of visual art.

In the 1930s, the importance of socially critical subjects and the phenomenon of masses in the context of the changing social model gained momentum, which was manifested in the more radical political direction of the let-wing avant-garde.

¹⁰ Marie Rossmannová (née Marie Doležalová), occasionally publishing as Mary Norová.

¹¹ He was active not only in his own and dominant photographic work but also contributed critiques and participated in organisational and pedagogical activities.



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The Prague *Film-Foto* section of the Left Front was initiated by Lubomír Linhart, while the Brno section was briefly led by E. F. Burian in collaboration with Otakar Vávra and František Pilát, František Kalivoda took over in 1931. The Brno section played a major part in this respect. After the ban of the Left Front, its activities were concealed within the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography. It should be noted that the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography was one of many organisations and associations of humanitarian nature that were exploited by radical systems anchored in ideologies. Their ordinary members, photographers and artists, had often no idea about this kind of background. It was an efficient propaganda tool that developed in the 1930s in relation to the activities of Willi Münzenberg, the ambitious founder of German workers' photography with a wide international impact. Beyond doubt, Lubomír Linhart, Karel Teige and František Kalivoda were in direct contact with the German and Soviet Left and its main protagonists. In order to hide the activities of the *Film-Foto* section of the Left Front from the Prague centre, the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography became a platform for scientific cinematography in Brno. The Brno avant-garde operated under the auspices of the *Film-Foto* section of the Left Front headed by František Kalivoda, with committee members Richard Fleischner, Bedřich Václavek, Marie Doležalová, Jaroslava Václavková, Jaroslav Král, E. F. Burian, František Píšek and Zdeněk Rossmann (Marhoulová 2004). On Bedřich Václavek's initiative, the Left Front also established its German branch, the *Linksfront* organisation of the German left-wing intelligentsia. *Linksfront* is another example of the ties between left-wing parties in the international context.¹² In the Left Front, only František Kalivoda, Zdeněk Rossmann and František Píšek directly related to photography. Nonetheless, their output was remarkable, chiefly due to František Kalivoda and Jaroslav Bouček, a professor of the Czech Technical College in Brno. Bouček was not a member of the Left Front but collaborated with the group closely. Its activities were not restricted to taking photographs; another important thing was the promotion of photography through lectures and exhibitions organised by Kalivoda and Bouček. Architect and amateur photographer Josef Ježek centred on social and avant-garde photography was active in Brno outside the Left Front. In the *Studentský časopis* journal he published in 1931 the article "Creative Photography", an angry response to the lack of interest in the avant-garde tendencies in photography (Dufek 1993a).

The programme of both the Prague and Brno Left Front is illustrated by *Exhibitions of Social Photography* in Prague and Brno in 1933 and 1934. By then,

¹² Members of the *Linksfront* association lecturing in Brno were Otto Lehmann-Russbüdt on the basic problems of pacifism (5. 10. 1932); Otto Heller with the lecture the Decline of Jewishness (6. 12. 1932), Egon Erwin Kisch with the Reportage from Manchuria (14. 12. 1932), Alfonz Goldschmidt on the Crisis of the Capital (16. 1. 1933) and others (Kogos1957: 40).



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social photography had been transformed into an autonomous means voicing opinions and attitudes. It came to the fore at exhibitions of photographs and projections of avant-garde films, at the *Exhibition of Proletarian Housing*, the *Exhibition of Social Photography* and numerous lectures. Prepared by Lubomír Linhart, the *First Exhibition of Social Photography* was held in Prague in 22. 4.–7. 5. 1933, accompanied by a catalogue and a programme declaration of the Film-Foto section of the Left Front, distancing itself from salon photography imitating painting techniques and motifs.¹³ The Brno reprise of the exhibition took place in 1–15 June 1933, again accompanied by a catalogue prepared by František Kalivoda (Kalivoda 1933d). Works by the Brno Photogroup of Five (f5; Josef Kamenický, Bohumil Němec, Jaroslav Nohel, František Povolný and Hugo Táborský) were plentifully represented at the exhibition.¹⁴ The Brno reprise was organised by František Kalivoda (Dufek 1981a, Linhart 1974). Their work is typified by a range of functionalism, surrealist leanings, imagination and social photography. The work of f5 was inspired by Emanuel Hrbek and, in particular, by El Lissitzky, L. Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray and Brno film projections. The group was formed in 1933, and as early as 1934 had an exhibition in the Krásná jizba gallery in Prague and a reprise in the Museum of Applied Arts, Brno. The exhibition was opened by poet Vítězslav Nezval. In 1933 and 1934 František Povolný photographed and documented the Exhibitions of Social Photography in Prague and Brno, and in 1935 Povolný designed and prepared the installation of the Second International Exhibition of Social Photography in the Metro Palace, Prague. The f5 group presented at the show completely new elements of experimental photography. The collaboration of its members ended in 1936.

The year 1936 saw the culmination of Czechoslovak left-wing avant-garde photography, with the International Exhibition of Photographs in the Mánes gallery, Prague that can be now characterized as a retrospective of leftist art and social photography. The following development of photography from the late 1930s onwards tended towards landscape photography, viewed as a “pictorial defence” of the country against Germany, as well as towards surrealism and styles of the arriving war and post-war generation. Among Brno photographers, Vilém Reichmann¹⁵ appears most prominent. Reichmann was most active during the war and in the

¹³ The catalogue published the programme declaration of the Left Front focusing on : “[...] debate evenings of the members, members’ and public walks, excursions and trips, internal competitions, exchange of photographs with artists from abroad, exhibitions, collective reviews of photographs and specialist literature, theoretical and practical education in film and photography, filmmaking, film projections, lectures by Czech and foreign associates, literary and visual collaboration with magazines, publishing of a film-photo library.”

¹⁴ Fellow students at the Brno School of Arts and Crafts, inspired and supported by professor Emanuel Hrbek.

¹⁵ Reichmann’s collaboration with Bedřich Václavěk on the editorial board of *Index* spanned the interwar period (Dufek 1981a).



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post-war years, and his photographic series *The Wounded City* ranks with the best in international photography (Dufek 1994). The leading figures of the post-war culture included Václav Zykmond, a multimedia artist, teacher, theorist and art historian. His experimental photographic documentation of body actions spanning the years 1933–1945 anticipated action art and body art. An interesting chapter in post-war photography was “rampage”, in which, apart from Zykmond, other members of the Ra group participated, such as Vilém Reichmann, Bohdan Lacina, Ludvík Kundera, Václav Tikal, Josef Istler, Zdeněk Lorenz and Miloš Koreček (Dufek 1988).

The development of photography in the late 1940s and early 1950s was marked by the onset of communist practices. Among photographers active in this period were for example Karel Hájek, Jan Beran, Jaroslav Vávra, Čeněk Chládek, Bohuslav Burian and Karel Otto Hrubý. In retrospect, it was the medium of photography that provides the most valuable testimony about this period of oppression.

2. Visual Statement of Photoprahy

During the cultural development, new values of the visual statement came to the fore. The image had an ability to represent, to convey, to symbolize and mark, to inform and to document, as well as to convince, manipulate, advertise and stimulate. Photography became an important instrument of commerce and documentation in the areas of travelling, entertainment and economy. The attractiveness, popularity and especially affordability of the photographic medium entered all categories of the technical and aesthetic representation, at all levels. Photography was no longer a mere tool of representation limited to art studios but confidently made its way to the urban environment in the form of communicating visuals such as advertisements, posters and notices, as well as the popular press and specialist journals, propaganda leaflets, etc.

In relation to the growing popularity of the photographic medium, not only among professional and business photographers but also among a large group of amateurs, photographic clubs organised many lectures and training courses in photography. Lectures for the public were organised by professionals such as Professor Jaroslav Bouček, Professor Vladimír Novák and Ing. Jan Lauschmann, as well as by the individual associations like *Devětsil* and later the Left Front, and the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography headed by Bedřich Václavek, František Kalivoda, Lubomír Linhart and Karel Teige, during which they promoted their political interests. These associations employed photography and film as instruments of power, for the popularization of their views and the expanding of their membership.

In the 1920s, photography and film in Brno were linked with the activities of *Devětsil* and its prime mover Bedřich Václavek. In the area of photography and



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film, Václavek's activities predominantly lay in publishing and organisation, in collaboration with Prague *Devětsil* led by Karel Teige. After the Prague exhibition Bazaar of Modern Art in November 1923 (Šmejkal 1986), Brno *Devětsil* staged a reprise of this show in the Barvič Gallery in January 1924. The exhibition presented photograms by Man Ray, photographic picture poems by Jindřich Štýrský and Karel Teige, film takes, shots from firework displays and photographs (Dufek 1981a). International activities of *Devětsil* and especially Artuš Černík are evidenced by a double issue of the *Pásmo* journal from May 1925 (nos. 13–14). The first page features an article about an assembly of Brno *Devětsil* where famous American actors Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Douglas Fairbanks were appointed its honorary members, “in recognition of their merit in the field of photographic art”. (Gajdošíková 2005: 68)

Numerous photographic exhibitions and projections of the film avant-garde organised by the Left Front were crowned, before its dissolving, by a “large” presentation of avant-garde films. The dramaturgy of the projection comprised László Moholy-Nagy's *Marseille, Black – Grey – White; Montparnasse* by Eugène Deslaw; *At Prague Castle* and *Purposeless Walk* by Alexander Hackenschmied; *Light Getting Through Darkness* by Otakar Vávra and František Pilát; *Burlesque* by Jan Kučera, and Karel Plicka's film *Over Mountains, Over Valleys*. František Kalivoda commented sharply on the public's response to this paramount event of the film avant-garde held on 29 January 1929 in Brno: “[...] the entire culture business in Brno characterises the artistic and cultural potential of the Brno intelligentsia. This also applies to the Brno press that, despite having been invited to a private journalistic and public presentation, left this event virtually unnoticed, except for brief notices in *Lidové noviny*, *Brněnská svoboda* and *Moravský deník*. And as it was silent before this presentation, so it is silent afterwards. Brno is turning into a total cultural wasteland without any stimuli and artistic interests, and this does not only regard the particular presentation of avant-garde films” (Kalivoda 1933b: 113–115).

The activities of the Left Front association were terminated in 1933 in connection with its frequent political propaganda activities that, according to the Police Directorate, clashed with the official statutes of the association. The Left Front then operated in secret, within the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography. The association's activities took on a special importance after its forced dissolving following the *Exhibition of Social Photography* initiated by the Left Front's section for mechanical art, film and photography. Exhibitions of Social Photography staged in Prague (22. 4.–7. 5. 1933) and Brno (2. 6.–15. 6. 1933) offered a joint display of avant-garde photographers, filmmakers, architects, artists and writers within the presentation of the social genre.

Many projections prepared by the Left Front or later by the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography in Brno with main organisers František Kalivoda and



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Jaroslav Bouček took place at Masaryk University and the Brno Technical College under police supervision. This regarded, in particular, the projections of Soviet avant-garde films by Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Alexander Dovzhenko and Dziga Vertov. The organisation of major exhibitions, film projections and lectures is conveyed by the correspondence of František Kalivoda and by the documents of the Society for Scientific Cinematography.¹⁶ Owing to the importance of social aspects in modern art, the shows linked the aesthetic and social level, reflecting completely different artistic tendencies of constructivism and surrealism, New Objectivity and the Bauhaus. Again, František Kalivoda critically commented on the manifestations of political provinciality (Anděl 1974, Kalivoda 1933b).

Further film projections, lectures and exhibitions were held under the patronage of the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography. There were projections of montage films by Albrecht Viktor Blum, a Brno-born avant-garde director living in Mexico. Jaroslav Bouček and the Amateur Photographers' Club in Brno organised a projection and lecture by Paul Schuitema, a professor of the State Art Academy in the Hague.¹⁷ With Paul Schuitema present, an evening of experimental films was held in the projection room in Kotlářská Street on 8 January 1936. The films included *Rain* (Joris Ivens), *Bridge* (Joris Ivens), *Montage Study* (Paul Schuitema), *Growing Crystals* (J. C. Mol) and *Borinage* (Joris Ivens and Henri Storck). The next day, the projection was followed by Schuitema's lecture on modern photography in Holland. Jaroslav Bouček supplemented the lecture with his slides. Hannah Höch exhibiting in the Masaryk Students' Home in Brno in 1934 had special ties with Brno. Her exhibition was opened by František Kalivoda who also delivered the lecture *Militant and Playful Photomontage*. These film projections testify to the period interest in photography and film. The projections were followed by specialist lectures and discussions with the filmmakers.

The Brno art scene was significantly influenced by László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946): his paintings, photographs, films, typography and experiments. Moholy-Nagy's films were first shown to the Brno audience on 29 January 1933 at the Large Presentation of Avant-garde Films. The films were *Marseille – vieux port* and *Black – Grey – White*. On 13 July 1933 František Kalivoda delivered a lecture entitled Current Problems of Modern Photography and Film dedicated to the work of Moholy-Nagy, at a summer camp for deprived and progressive students near Hoštejn, Moravia. Another lecture, Photo-film Outsider, took place on 5 March 1934 at Masaryk University in Brno, organised for the Czechoslovak Society for Scientific Cinematography and accompanied by the projection of the films *Marseille – vieux*

¹⁶ Brno City Museum, architecture department: coll. *Československá společnost pro vědeckou kinematografii*; Brno City Museum, architecture department: coll. František Kalivoda.

¹⁷ This is confirmed by František Kalivoda's contribution in: *Index* 6, 1934, 49.



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port, *Gypsies in the City*, *Black– Grey – White* and *Resounding Alphabet*. Kalivoda's third lecture called Photo-film Pioneer was held on 26 November 1934. In 1935 there was a Nagy retrospective in the Künstlerhaus¹⁸ displaying photographs, photograms, photomontages, light graphics, stage design, typography, oils on canvas, paintings, watercolours, drawings, montages and sculptures.

Film was inspired by photography in numerous means of expression at its onset, and in turn film helped photography develop its modern expression. The links between photography and film are particularly obvious in scientific photography, as well as in avant-garde and experimental photography. This was related to the shaping and changing of art movements, the development of the new media and the rejection of old principles and styles. It is illustrated by the mentioned shows, and by the organisational and ideological coexistence of, in particular, avant-garde film and photography. In the Brno context the connection between the two media is evident in the work of František Pilát and Otakar Vávra, as well as of the Photogroup of Five and at the scientific level, for example, with Jaroslav Bouček and Vladimír Úlehla.

Photography also played an important part in relation to architecture. Historical and architectural monuments present some of the earliest motifs of depicting reality in photography. The priority of a photographic record of architecture lies in an accurate reproduction and documentation. This approach was considerably disturbed by the arrival of modern post-war photography. The documentation nature was replaced by a play with meaning, attention to detail and different viewing angles: a personal approach, aesthetic and emotional values frequently overshadowing the informative aspect of the photographed subject prevailed. Young architects responded to this situation, and their attitudes reflected the atmosphere in society after the First World War, dominated by efforts at the severing of all ties with the German and Viennese influences, both legal and cultural. One major event was the forming of the architectural section of *Devětsil* with broad international contacts and impact, due to the arrival of constructivism, French purism and Dutch neoplasticism. After the Prague exhibition *Bazaar of Modern Art* in 1923, a similar show took place in Brno a year later, entitled the *Exhibition of New Art of the Devětsil* association. Both shows presented paintings, drawings, posters, architectural designs, photographs, photomontages, stage design and books. The architects connected with the art scene through lectures and journals subscribed to functionalism and constructivism. Walter Gropius, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier, Amédée Ozenfant, Adolf Loos, Theo van Doesburg, László Moholy Nagy and Hans Richter lectured in Prague and Brno on the invitation of *Devětsil*. Further important events included the reprise of an exhibition by Alexander Archipenko organised by Karel Teige in 1923, and the *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart where Bohuslav Fuchs showed his architectural designs (Birgus 1999, Sedlář 1993).

¹⁸ Today's Brno House of the Arts.



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Here, the links between the media are obvious; architecture was displayed alongside visual art, photography, posters and books, creating a continuity reflecting the new needs of the modern society. Apart from architecture, new architectural designs were also employed in furniture design, for example, in Jan Vaněk's collaboration with the Applied Arts Enterprises (*Uměleckoprůmyslové závody*, UP) in Brno and Třebíč. The large concentration of new buildings in Brno in the 1920s and 1930s in the form of office blocks, flats, house colonies, and especially the new exhibition centre, responded to the new urban conditions. The impetus for a more modern vision of urban architecture came from Jindřich Kumpošt, then the main Brno architect. On the basis of economical solutions introduced after the First World War, it incorporated social aspects, yet at the same time also completely new visual approaches to designs and constructions by architects Arnošt Wiesner,¹⁹ Bohuslav Fuchs,²⁰ Jan Víšek, Jaroslav Grunt, Valentin Hrdlička, Karel Kotas, Antonín Blažek, Emil Králík, Vladimír Karfík and others (Krčálová 1993, Chatrný – Kudělka 2000).

In 1928 Brno hosted the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic commemorated by the *Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Czechoslovakia*. An important role was played by architecture with the modern elements of constructivism and functionalism,²¹ combined with efforts to present together science, education and art. The new exhibition ground posed a challenge for a number of photographers, both in its exterior and interior. Many publications, magazines and postcards feature new, distinctive visions of photography by Rudolf de Sandalo, Hugo Tábořský, Vladimír Lehký, Zdeněk Minařík, Čeněk Chládek, as well as Jaromír Funke who worked outside Brno.²² Nonetheless, art photography was only scarcely represented at the exhibition (Dufek 1993a). Another exhibition with a strong impact was the *Exhibition of the Proletarian Housing* held in 1931, and especially the *Sociological Fragment of Housing* from 1932 by the professor of architecture Jiří Kroha which merged the architecture of functionalist exhibitions with social photography, reflecting upon housing issues in the country. The interest of the new generation also spread to interior design, design of furniture, glass and applied arts.

¹⁹ A. Wiesner – selected constructions: Guttman apartment block, Údolní Street (1919–20); building of the Moravian Life Insurance Company, Mozartova Street (1921–22); Union bank, Beethovenova Street (1923–25); Moravia Palace (cinema) (1926–29).

²⁰ B. Fuchs – selected constructions: Zeman Café (1925); Avion Hotel (1926–27); exhibition pavilions at the Brno Exhibition Centre (1928); Masaryk Students' Home (1922–23); Josef Zeman's café (1925); Municipal Baths in Zábřovice (1929–31); Eliška Machová Home, and the Vesna Vocational School for Girls (1929–30).

²¹ Designed by Emil Králík - plans of the Exhibition Centre, cinema and café; Josef Kalous and Jaroslav Valenta – Palace of Commerce and Industry; Bohuslav Fuchs – Brno City Pavilion; Jiří Kroha – Man and his Family pavilion; Bohumír František Antonín Čermák – Pavilion of Business and Commerce with a lookout tower; Vlastislav Chroust – Pavilion of Moravia; Jan Gočár – pavilion of the Academy of Fine Arts.

²² Some of the photographs are in the collections of the Brno City Museum.



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The wide range of journals specialising in architecture, applied arts and culture (*Bytová kultura, Salon, Horizont* and others) could not exist without photographic images. The majority of architects and designers themselves sought the publishing and promotion of their work and collaborated with leading designers, photographers and journalists. For example, Bohuslav Fuchs joined forces with Zdeňek Rossmann in the publishing of his monographs. Photographers working for Fuchs included Jaromír Funke, Rudolf de Sandalo, Jaroslav Bouček, Herbert Orth and Oldřich Staněk.²³ In contrast, the renowned architect Adolf Loos had completely different views on photography and novel approaches: “[...] Photography is to blame that people want to be merely furnished. Not to live well, but to live so that it would look nice. Photography deceives. [...] And why decorate a material perfectly beautiful in itself with ornaments? Or ‘improve’ noble mahogany by staining it purple? These are crimes. [...] I am against photographing interiors. The result is something completely different. There are architects who create designs not for people to live well but to produce nice photographs. [...] This is so-called drawn architecture whose mechanical composition of light and shadows is most suitable for a mechanical apparatus, i.e. the darkroom. [...] Photography dematerializes, but I want people in my rooms to feel matter around them, to be affected by it, to be aware of a closed space, to feel fabric, wood, to perceive with their sight, touch and other senses” (Loos 1924: 5–19).

The photographic image is specific in the fact that a photograph contains informative and meaning codes that are so strong that they make it independent of text. A. Dufek writes: “[...] The first photographic books originated for the sake of photography, not for the sake of text, and this state has basically lasted to this day. Seldom does photography play a part of a ‘mere’ illustration” (Dufek 1984: 67).

Photography’s superiority was rooted in its readiness, accuracy and technical simplicity, and it made an irreplaceable communicative component in the development of illustrated magazines and press. Conditions for the development of typography after the First World War create a parallel to the advance of modern photography. Photography’s property to destroy the continuities of time and space enables a reconstruction of time, provides a record about the changes of human existence. The connection between photography and press reproduction was confirmed in regard to the development of the new techniques of halftone reproduction and rotary printing, and they jointly entered the field of journalism and advertising. Picture poems and photomontages gained in popularity as well.

The *Devětsil* association headed by Karel Teige brought together avant-garde artists, writers and architects, and one of its main interests involved linking words with the photographic image. *Life - Almanac of New Beauty* from 1922 published picture poems by *Devětsil* artists and photograms by Man Ray. The graphic design

²³ See the catalogue of the exhibition Architectural Work of Bohuslav Fuchs in Brno (Kalivoda, 1970).



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was based on variety, communication between words and photographs and visual dynamics, and it also defied the stereotype of division into pages, outlining instead further possible directions in the visual culture of illustrated magazines.

Among the Devětsil production, the *Pásmo*²⁴ avant-garde monthly stands out, dynamically reflecting the association's views on interwar art and culture within the frame of poetism and constructivism and in an international context. Valuable contributions came from Theo van Doesburg, Walter Gropius, Hans Richter, László Moholy-Nagy and many others, accompanied by photographic experiments by Jaroslav Rössler and Man Ray (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999). Zdeněk Rossmann's typography in the spirit of constructivism combined word and picture aspects and worked with the frequent use of photography.

The avant-garde *Telehor*, an international journal for visual culture published by František Kalivoda on 28 February 1936, was also of immense importance, and still is. The issue dedicated to László Moholy-Nagy presents, apart from specialist contributions to photography and cinematography, František Kalivoda's own high-quality typography. Kalivoda's publishing feat was prompted and reinforced by his friendship with László Moholy-Nagy who was among the first to explore the coexistence of photography and typography. Moholy-Nagy presented typo-photo as a specific kind of communication through the optic image and word. He considered the knowledge of photography to be as important as the knowledge of type and writing. "The photographic apparatus opens new possibilities for poster and advertising. In the article *Die neue Typographie*, at the Bauhaus and in his Brno lecture in March 1925 Moholy-Nagy indicated how to achieve, with a proper use of the photographic apparatus, different photographic techniques, retouching, covering, copying of two or more plates onto one and enlarging a major, new diversity. Superb examples of his photographic advertisements are, for example, circus acrobats, and tyre adverts. He opposed static images and advocated dynamics. Through a view in the tyre he shows the hustle and bustle of the city life and achieves dynamics through type." (Svrček 1925: 20)

In 1929, Bedřich Václavek initiated the publishing of the first issue of the *Index* journal²⁵ devoted to literature, music, art, architecture, film and photography. In the field of photography *Index* published exhibition reviews, especially those of the *f5* group and the Olomouc Photogroup of Three, as well as articles by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, contributions and photographs by Brno writers and artists Otakar Lenhart, Jaroslav Nohel, Marie Rossmannová and the Brno studio of Rudolf de Sandalo, Karel

²⁴ *Pásmo* was published as a monthly in 1924–26. The Brno editorial board featured Artuš Černík, František Halas and Bedřich Václavek, while the Prague board included Karel Teige, Jaroslav Seifert and Jaromír Krejcar (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999).

²⁵ The birth of the *Index* monthly in 1928 was associated with Bedřich Václavek together with J. Král, J. Mahen, Z. Rossmann, J. L. Fischer, B. Fuchs, V. Helfert and others. It was published until June 1939.



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Kašpařík, Jaromír Funke, Eugen Wiškovský and Moholy-Nagy. *Index* featured a large number of photographs, and some of them came from František Kalivoda's private collection (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999). Typography was again the work of Zdeněk Rossmann with his trademark “[...] sober elegance, austere use of lower-case letters, graphically refined and utilitarian decoration of covers with plenty of photographs (influenced by the Bauhaus where Rossmann studied in the late 1920s), in a well-arranged and spatially economical layout of pages, effective combination of text and picture, bold headings, absence of extreme, fashionable elements imitating new decorativism such as uneven columns intersected by diagonals, etc” (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999: 73–74). Rossmann's typographical handwriting also marked other journals such as *Pásmo* and *Fronta*, books about *Index* and catalogues. He published and designed the monograph *Architect Bohuslav Fuchs* (Rossmann 1930) and the book *Type and Photography in Advertising* (Rossmann 1938).

Beyond journals of art groups and associations, there existed other, no less important periodicals. The independent monthly *Salon*²⁶ was dedicated to literature and art but it was also open to articles about sport. Although the typographical design of the first year was still in the traditional vein of decorativism with art nouveau ornaments, it gradually adopted modern trends. The individual issues are seen as a whole in which the cover, endpaper, headings, texts, photographs and illustrations complement one another. Functional typography is to accentuate the content of the texts, notably those considered essential by the editorial board. Colour bases emphasise selected art photographs and visually enhanced advertisements. In many issues, especially in the special supplements and double-spread pages, the colour base, the elegance of type and the representational character of the photographs contribute to an emotional visual effect (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999).

Copious studies on visual culture are supplemented with a wealth of illustrations and inserts with glued-in illustrations. Photography is given a substantial space: there is a portrait of Leoš Janáček by the Rafael studio and photos produced by the studios of Rudolf de Sandalo, Vladimír Lehký, Schlosser & Wenisch and Jindřich Vaněk. There are art photographs by František Drtikol, Ladislav Sitenský and László Moholy-Nagy, reportage photographs by Karel Hájek and Václav Jírů, as well as commercial advertising photographs by František Drtikol, Jan Vaněk and many others. On the whole, the periodical features a generous representation of the main photographic scene, from amateur, professional, documentary and reportage photography to shots with artistic value (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999).

²⁶ *Salon* was published in 1922–1943. Its original owner was Bohuslav Kilian (until 1931), the editorial board included Jan Hamáček, Josef Mrázek and Ondřej Sekora.



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A journal of comparable quality was *Měsíc*, a social and cultural review²⁷ centred on literary criticism and avant-garde movements. It published Vítězslav Nezval's introduction to the exhibition of the Photogroup of Five held in the Museum of Applied Arts in Brno in 1934,²⁸ as well as the output of the Brno studios of Rudolf de Sandalo, Evžen Petruj, and private archives of architects such as Bohuslav Fuchs, Arnošt Wiesner and Jindřich Kumpošt.²⁹ The journal also observed applied arts, namely the production of glass and furniture, with emphasis on functionality and the visual aspect. Designer companies Artěl, Družstevní práce and Jan Vaněk's UP factory were frequently represented, along with Josef Sudek's photographs documenting Ladislav Sutnar's porcelain design. In parallel with *Měsíc*, the owner Kilian launched the German version *Der Monat* of equally high quality (Gabrielová – Marčák 1999).

Horizont,³⁰ an avant-garde Brno monthly focused on modern architecture in the spirit of constructivism and functionalism, published the work of architects Josef Kroha, Bohuslav Fuchs, Arnošt Wiesner, Bohumír F. A. Čermák, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and others, with plentiful photographs. The *Bytová kultura*³¹ Brno journal specialising in Czech and European architecture, art and aesthetics often employed the photographic medium in the documentation of exhibition installations, furniture design and architecture. The rise of these journals spurred the forming of new photographic genres such as advertising, reportage and photo-journalism.

Photography and type became a sought-after form of applied graphics. Advertisements and advertising posters of all kinds entered theatres, cinemas, sports clubs, industry and commerce. The production of posters of both representational and commercial nature soared in relation to the Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno in 1928. One of the first graphic artists working with the photographic image was Emanuel Hrbek. His constructivist approach to posters, adverts, social graphics, ex libris and typography influenced the younger generation at the School of Arts and Crafts. In the 1920s and 1930s, the graphic style was completely changed by the arrival of constructivism. Avant-garde typography found a response with the architect Zdeněk Rossmann inspired by Russian constructivists and by his study stay at the Bauhaus. Apart from Rossmann's collaboration with avant-garde journals conveyed above, he made his mark in the areas of exhibition design, stage design,

²⁷ *Měsíc* published in 1931–1941 was founded by Bohuslav Kilian deliberately as competition of *Salon*. Collaborators included Václav Roštlapil and František Kalivoda in 1933.

²⁸ *Měsíc*, III, 1934, no. 8, pp. 10–11.

²⁹ Documentation of buildings for Brno architects was done by professor Jaroslav Bouček; many of them were published in interwar journals without Bouček's signature (Boučková 2005: interview).

³⁰ *Horizont*, a monthly for contemporary culture (1927–1932), led by Jiří Kroha and Roštlapil. The Brno editorial board was headed by Jaroslav B. Svrček.

³¹ *Bytová kultura* was published in Brno in 1924–1925, in Prague in 1935.



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advertising and poster design. He placed emphasis on functionality and informative potential, as well as on maximum attractiveness and visuality of the photographic image in combination with words. František Kalivoda employed an original approach to typography in his mentioned collaboration with Brno periodicals, while the photographer Evžen Markalous was associated with *Devětsil*. An important role for Brno artists in the field of graphic design and typography was played by Jan Tschichold staying in Brno in 1933. Tschichold published and lectured in Brno about his functionalist take on typography, rooted in the means of expression, and about photomontage. Brno artists inspired by Tschichold included Antonín Jero, exploring different forms of applied graphics, who centred on poster design in the 1930s. The highlights of Jero's design are exhibition posters from 1937 and posters for the Moravian Aeroclub (Nováková 1993). In the beginning, photography was subordinated to word, but it gradually carved itself a niche in textual communication. The number of illustrated magazines, advertisements and posters opened before the readers new horizons. This was due to the communication potential of the photographic image to transmit accurate information, at which photography arrived when it liberated itself from the one-dimensional aesthetic level.

Conclusion

In the socio-cultural spectrum of the interwar period, photography influenced a vast scale of human activities. It played a key part in the shaping of modern culture in the 1920s and 1930s, in the “golden age” of photography. In my article, I outlined the situation, nature and scale of the Czech interwar photographic scene in its complexity and multiplicity. I demonstrated interconnection with the other areas of human activities from scientific research to follow-up feedback due to the development of photographic technologies, techniques and image possibilities in artistic as well as in general social circles. In retrospective recapitulation, there is a clear shift from an amateur photography through the professional studio work towards commercial photography for advertising, pages of magazines and newspapers. In a relation to the compression of time-space of modernity it also touches upon the context of the phenomenon of the new mass culture, tool of industrialization, free time and general cultural and social contexts. Under these conditions photography represents a link, essential visual means of communication, information, mediation, comparison as well as confrontation. It is the reflection of life styles and its changes under the influence of manipulation.



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