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“BEZÚČELNÁ PROCHÁZKA”/“AIMLESS WALK” (1930):
ALEXANDER HACKENSCHMIED’S “FILM STUDY” OF A
TRAM RIDE TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF PRAGUE – LIBEŇ¹

The film “Bezúčelná procházka” does not have a conventional narrative – it is best described as a journey the viewer is taken on. The first shots do not contain any human figure. Instead, they show an urban landscape, images of tram rails, and a tram in motion. The first road we can identify is the street Na poříčí in Prague, followed by the Denisovo Station in Prague Těšnov, now demolished. At this point the protagonist is introduced, a man in a suit and hat who is traveling out of town. When he arrives at the bridge connecting the districts of Holešovice and Libeň, he jumps off the tram and walks down to the river Vltava. He roams around the Libeň peninsula and lies down to smoke. We are shown some landmarks and sights typical of this semi-industrial area: a chimney, factories, the Vltava, docks, shacks, workhorses, and workers. Later the man sits down on the grass. When he gets up again, the camera starts to pan slowly away from his walking figure back to the spot where he had been sitting. But the man we saw getting up and leaving is still sitting there. The camera cuts to the man walking and then back to the man sitting on the grass who watches as his doppelganger walks away. The walking man boards a tram towards Prague; his double remains in Libeň.

Although “Bezúčelná procházka” is only 8 minutes long, it is quite complex. In this article I examine it from three different perspectives. Firstly, I analyze it as a film about a city, thereby locating “Bezúčelná procházka” in the context of other city films before 1930, namely the “city symphonies”. Secondly, I discuss the complex construction of point of view in this film, connected to direction and movement. Finally, I examine the motif of the doppelganger.

This article is structured as follows. The first three sections locate the film in the context of the historical avant-garde. Then, in sections 4-12, I present a close viewing of the film as it proceeds, analyzing the aforementioned questions of film genre, camera, and editing techniques, and offering an interpretation of the film with reference to literary and film history. All of these questions are directly related to the emergence of filmic representations of Prague that were informed by the city portraits of the avant-garde. We will see that, as a visual study of Prague in the year 1930, “Bezúčelná procházka” not only creates something unprecedented in Czech cinema, but is also able to reflect and transcend international avantgarde poetics. I argue that the film is able to achieve this by doing justice to the profound cultural

¹ I would like to thank Tino Hammid, Martina Kudláček, and Erich Sargeant for their help and comments. – The research for this article was undertaken with the help of a Marie Curie Fellowship of the European Union at the Prague Film School FAMU (2006-2008).

topography of "Old Prague"² by ignoring it completely on the visible surface, but letting its dark legends ferment the "aimless walk" through the barren landscape of the city's (post-)industrial outskirts.

"Aimless Walk" in the Cinema Kotva in November 1930

From November 1930 to February 1931 a season of international avant-garde films was organized in the Kotva cinema in Prague by a young man, who at that time was known mainly as a photographer, film critic, and journalist. He had also worked as an assistant to a film director. His name was Alexandr Hackenschmied.³ Among the films screened in this program were "À propos de Nice" (1930, Jean Vigo), "Entr'acte" (1924, René Clair), "Caprelles et pantopodes" (1929, Jean Painlevé), "Cinq minutes de cinéma pur" (1925, Henri Chomette), "La petite cousine" (1930, unidentified direction), "Les Mystères du Château du Dé" (1929, Man Ray), "Dancing lines" Nr. 5 and Nr. 6 (1930, Oskar Fischinger), "Zemlia"/"Earth" (1930, Alexander Dovzhenko), "Rien que les heures" (1926, Alberto Cavalcanti), and "Vesnoi"/"Spring" (1929, Mikhail Kaufman).⁴ Czech films were also included in the film program: films from the early years of cinematography by Jan Kříženecký, the short "Světlo proniká tmou"/"Light Penetrates the Dark" (1930, František Pilát/Otakar Vávra), and "Bezúčelná procházka", the first film by the organizer Hackenschmied, made earlier in that same year. Some of the films shown were ones about city life, and "Bezúčelná procházka" was one of them. The context of this retrospective – some of the films shown were six years old – predetermined the reception of Hackenschmied's debut in the context of the avant-garde.⁵ Michael Omasta, for instance, calls "Bezúčelná procházka" the "first Czech avant-garde film of international significance."⁶

The opening of Alexandr Hackenschmied's "Bezúčelná procházka" seems to offer the viewer a local, that is to say, a Prague version of the then already fully developed

² On the "neo-romantic" cliché of "stará Praha" formed by literary texts, cf. Demetz, Peter: Die Legende vom magischen Prag. In: Demetz, Peter: Böhmisches Sonne, mährischer Mond. Essays und Erinnerungen. Wien 1996, 143-167.

³ On the life of Hackenschmied, who became Hammid following his emigration to the USA, cf. the biographical note at the end of this article.

⁴ Anděl, Jaroslav: Alexandr Hackenschmied. Praha 2000, 6. – Hackenschmied also wrote an article about the film season: Hackenschmied, Alexandr: "K prvnímu představení filmové avantgardy v Praze v kinu Kotva" [The first screening of avant-garde films in Prague at the Kotva Cinema]. In: Pestrý týden 47 (22.11.1930) 4. – This text was translated by I. Bergerová and Thomas E. Valasek for Film Culture, No. 67/68/69 n/a, 242-244). – In May 1931 Dovzhenko's "Arsenal" (1929) was screened. Štábla, Zdeněk: Data a fakta z dějin československé kinematografie 1896-1945. Vol. 3 (1929-1938) [Dates and Facts from the History of Czechoslovak Cinema (1929-1945)]. Praha 1990, 186-187. Reactions to these screenings can be found in Filmový kurýr 4 (1930) č. 48, 5; 5 (1931) č. 8, 4 and Český filmový zpravodaj 10 (1931) č. 46, 3.

⁵ It may well be that Hackenschmied was aware of this.

⁶ Omasta, Michael: The Quiet Man, Bemerkungen zur Biografie und zu Bildern von Alexander Hammid. In: Omasta, Michael: (ed.): Tribute to Sasha. Das filmische Werk von Alexander Hammid: Regie, Kamera, Schnitt und Kritiken. Wien 2002, 7-15, 9.

genre of the city symphony. These films usually portray a day in the life of one or several cities. The city symphony is a documentary film genre and dates back to films like "Manhatta" (Charles Sheeler/Paul Strand, USA 1921), one of the first films to realize the potential of the movie camera as an artistic instrument, and Dziga Vertov's earlier films, in particular "Kino-Glaz"/"Cinema-Eye" (1924), which promoted the concept that the camera's impartial objective could perceive and record reality better than the human eye. The first Prague city symphony film was an advertisement commissioned by a Prague electricity company. "Praha v září světél" ("Prague at Night", 1928, produced by Elekta-Journal) directed by Svatopluk Innemann registers images of the Czechoslovak capital, presenting the city's night-life in electric light.

However, the connection of Hackenschmied's first film to this genre is complex. The film neither presents the chronology of a city day from dawn to midnight nor adopts the metaphor of the city as a machine. Michal Bregant even dissociates "Bezúčelná procházka" from the obvious contemporary contexts of genre and style: "'Aimless Walk' is not simply a documentary about Prague, nor is it a Modernist vision of urban civilization."⁷

The reason we are led to believe at the beginning of the film that we are watching a city symphony lies in certain characteristics of the genre. It is the specific perspective of the self-conscious camera as "camera-eye" mounting a vehicle. "The camera and filmmaker is referred to in the third person as 'Kino-Eye' as though the medium of film itself is an individual."⁸ Omasta noted that Hackenschmied's "photographic and filmic work is full of images directing the eye not towards one but many points simultaneously: puddles, rain-covered window panes, half-open car windows, artificially lit shop windows."⁹ In "Bezúčelná procházka" the interest of the camera in objects other than the metropolitan cityscape becomes more prevalent as the film proceeds. The camera captures reflections of trees and architecture in the tram windows: Nature and urban elements seem to blend in the glass surfaces.

The Late Arrival of Czech Cinema as an Art Form

Compared to the flourishing Czech avant-garde poetry, theatre, cabaret, art and architecture of the 1920s (constructivism, functionalism, poetism), it is surprising that there is hardly any activity in the area of film. However, there were several manifestos and projects for experimental film forms. They mostly came from the "poetist" members of the Czech group "Devětsil" (1920-30). Although many of the poetists were indeed professional writers, they looked for the poetic not only in literature but in all areas of life. The representatives of this group were intensely interested in all things technical and modern, including the new medium of cinema. Their theoretical head, the photographer, typographer and critic Karel Teige, published his

⁷ Bregant, Michal: Alexander Hammid's Czech Years. Space and Time of His Early Films. In: *Omasta: Tribute to Sasha* 21-41, 23 (cf. fn. 6).

⁸ Lewis, David: *Kinoglaz* (1924), <http://www.allmovie.com/movie/kinoglaz-v186870/review> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁹ *Omasta: The Quiet Man* 13 (cf. fn. 6).

enthusiastic "Foto-Kino-Film/Photo-Cinema-Film" as early as 1922. Jaroslav Seifert, Teige, and Vítězslav Nezval proposed different kinds of poetistic films and "filmic poems", which to use their expression were supposed to be "photogenic" or "optophonetic" ("fotogenická/filmová/optická/optofonetická báseň").¹⁰ In 1925 Teige and Seifert wrote a "score for a lyrical film" ("partitura lyrického filmu") called "Port" ("Přístav").¹¹ None of these filmic poems or abstract films was ever made.¹² The film critic Jan Kučera wrote in 1931: "Our film circles always considered the avant-garde as an infantile fantasy of certain eccentrics [dětinské blouznění několika výstředníků]."¹³

Hackenschmied was one of the film practitioners who were interested in developing film as an art form. There are a few films from the 1920s that can be considered as inspired by avant-garde aesthetics – among them were Gustav Machatý's films on which Hackenschmied is supposed to have worked as a set-designer.¹⁴ But most Czech production was considered "low level."¹⁵ Conversely, for some left-wing avant-garde artists it was inconceivable to take part in a Czech commercial film production. However, if a poetist did so, he or she would often avoid being mentioned in the credits, as was the case with the prominent "Devětsil" member Vítězslav Nezval, who provided the idea for Machatý's film "Erotikon" (1929). A melodramatic love story was too conventional for the taste of Nezval's peer group. Some years earlier another "Devětsil" member, Jiří Voskovec, was excluded from the group for playing – under a pseudonym – the leading role in Karel Anton's melodramatic film adaptation of Vilém Mrštík's novel "Pohádka máje"/"Fairy Tale in May" (1926). Work on mainstream film productions was not considered an activity fit for progressive artists.¹⁶ This changed in the 1930s, as we shall see in the case of the "Devětsil" and "Proletkult" member Vladislav Vančura, an acclaimed writer who

¹⁰ *Hradská, Viktoria: Česká avantgarda a film [Czech Avant-Garde and Film].* Praha 1976. – For the inspiration by French avant-garde thinking, namely Louis Delluc, cf. *Fabian, Jeannette: Kinographie und Poesie. Zur Medienästhetik der tschechischen Avantgarde.* In: *Lüdeke, Roger/Greber, Erika (eds.): Intermedium Literatur. Beiträge zu einer Medientheorie der Literaturwissenschaften.* Göttingen 2004, 223-383, 288-299.

¹¹ Cf. the analysis of this animated photo montage of "geometrical naval bodies" by *Wutsdorff, Irina: Avantgardistische Konzeptionen zum Film im tschechischen Poetismus.* In: *Balagan. Slavisches Drama, Theater und Kino 6 (2000) H. 2, 105-127, 115-119.*

¹² *Srp, Karel: Karel Teige in the Twenties. The Moment of Sweet Ejaculation.* In: *Dlubosch, Eric/Švábka, Rostislav (eds.): Karel Teige.* Cambridge/Mass. 1999, 10-45, 32. – Cf. also *Felcman, Jakub: Kino v psacím stroji. Fenomén fiktivního scénáře v českém prostředí [Cinema in the typewriter. The phenomenon of the fictitious scenario in the Czech lands],* PhD Charles University, Prague, 2010. https://is.cuni.cz/dipl_st/index.php?id=&tid=&do=main&do=detail&did=82752 (last retrieved on 30.3.2012).

¹³ *Kučera, Jan: Filmová dramaturgie [Dramaturgy in Film].* In: *Přítomnost 8 (18.2.1931) č. 7, 106.*

¹⁴ *Anděl: Alexandr Hackenschmied 7 (cf. fn. 4).*

¹⁵ Cf. film critic *Linhart, Lubomír: Jak byl znárodněn československý film [How Czechoslovak Film Was Nationalized].* In: *Film a doba 11 (1965) 125.*

¹⁶ *Osolsobě, Ivo: On the Three Frontiers of Theatrical Freedom. The Liberated Theater of Voskovec and Werich in Prague, 1927-38.* In: *Schmid, Herta/Striedter, Jurij (eds.): Dramatische und theatralische Kommunikation. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theorie des Dramas und Theaters im 20. Jahrhundert.* Tübingen 1992, 238-252, 238.

was entrusted by Miloš Havel's AB Studio in Barrandov directing several films in the 1930s: "Před maturitou"/"Before the Finals" (1932, with E. F. Burian's music and Nezval's lyrics), "Na sluneční straně"/"On the Sunny Side" (1933) and "Marijka nevěrnice"/"Faithless Marijka" (1934, with Bohuslav Martinů's music).¹⁷

To sum up: in the 1920s there was no attempt among Czech artists to make films that would be independent of the Czechoslovak movie industry. This is surprising if one remembers that there were many outstanding Czech photographers who had enough technical expertise to develop into filmmakers. Jaroslav Anděl sees the reason for this in a specific inclination of the poetists to choose "perception" over "production."¹⁸ This makes Hackenschmied's experimental film of 1930 even more surprising. Let us have a closer look at it.

Hackenschmied's "Independent Film"

The late arrival of artistic ambitions in Czech film meant that the first Czech avant-garde film was made in the sound era (which in Czechoslovakia started in 1929). However, budgetary constraints meant that "Aimless Walk" had to be silent. According to Hackenschmied, the film cost only \$10 to produce; it was shot with a Kinamo,¹⁹ borrowed from a friend, the film critic and playwright Dr. Otto Rádl.²⁰ There was no affluent patron financing the film, as was the case with the French avant-garde, nor was there a political party or a government in need of propaganda that supported film making, as was the case in the USSR. This film can be considered truly independent, and at that time that was a rare thing. Hackenschmied himself obviously found it important to define what "independent film" was:

It is debatable whether film is essentially more art or more industry. But it is certain that it has something of both. Film is art if it is made by an independent artist. The industrial character of film lies in the complicated technology of production and the necessity to produce on a large scale in order to show a profit, i.e., to produce for a large, broad public. For this kind of production, of course, factory efficiency is necessary, which greatly limits the freedom of creative individuality directing the production of the film. The creative strength of the film artist (both director and actor) is hindered and manipulated by the business end of production,

¹⁷ A DVD of this film was published by the Czech Film Archive NFA in 2010. – On Devětsil cf. *Witkovsky*, Matthew: *Avant-Garde and Center: Devětsil and Czech Culture, 1918-1938*. Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2002.

¹⁸ "Prvořadým příkazem nebylo vyrábět, nýbrž vnímat." *Anděl*, Jaroslav: *Dvacátá léta: překvapivý sňatek konstruktivismu a poetismu* [The Twenties: A Surprising Match between Constructivism and Poetism]. In: *Anděl*, Jaroslav: *Umění pro všechny smysly* [Art for All Senses]. Praha 1993, 19-45, 22.

¹⁹ He mentions this sum in the film "Aimless Walk – Alexander Hammid" (1996) by Martina Kudláček where we can also see him holding a Kinamo in his hands. "The Kinamo was the smallest of competing, compact 35 mm movie cameras brought to the market in the early 1920s." Cf. *Buckland*, Michael K.: The Kinamo movie camera, Emanuel Goldberg and Joris Ivens. In: *Film History: An International Journal* 20 (2008) No. 1, 49-58. – The film material he used consisted of left-overs from the AB Film Studio in Vinohrady, cf. *Pacovská*, Edita: "Dostal Oscara, no a?" [He Got an Oscar, so what?]. 24.03.2004, http://www.fotografavani.cz/art/fo_tech/hackenschmied.html (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

²⁰ About Rádl (* Prague 1902 – † New York 1965), who was one of the editors of the journal "Studio", cf. *Tomeš*, Josef / *Léblová*, Alena (eds.): *Československý biografický slovník* [Czechoslovak Biographical Dictionary]. Praha 1992, 582.

to which the artist must submit because a film is usually a business venture. And to the businessman the artist is only the labor needed to improve his product (the film) and to increase his profit.²¹

Hackenschmied's vision of the future is positive, though:

The rapid development of film technology (which, admittedly, is credited to the rise of the film industry) made it possible to lower production costs enough so that an individual with a little financial support could undertake shorter films. In this way originated in France the first so-called avant-garde films, which represent the only untainted (though not always perfect) film art because they arose from a pure desire to create, and not to make money.²²

This is exactly what he himself had achieved in 1930: a "shorter film" about a journey to a part of Prague which an average film audience in 1930 (but also today)²³ would not find very interesting. Why Libeň? We will return to this question later.

Introducing a Subject into the City Symphony

In the first shots of the film, when we see the upper parts of buildings against the sky and their reflections, we are shown cobblestones, a puddle, tram rails, the tram itself, and leaves, but not where exactly we are in Prague. The medium-range and close-up shots of the tram moving by remind us of the beginning of Ruttmann's "Symphonie der Großstadt" (1927). A minute later, however, we recognize Nové město as the tram moves along the street Na poříčí (literally: "On the River Basin"). This also means that at the beginning of the film typical city symphony traits prevail which often lack a strictly documentary approach to city space and do not insist on a clear orientation²⁴ – in Vertov's "Man with the Movie Camera" (1929) different cities are even combined into a portrait of "The City". The genre of the city symphony celebrates the city and movement through city space. By riding on and hanging from trams, the camera is able to glide through the city space on rails, sometimes as "phan-

²¹ In the article: *Hackenschmied*, Alexandr: "K prvnímu představení filmové avantgardy v Praze v kinu Kotva" (cf. fn. 4). In English in Logos 3.3 (Summer 2004) under the title: The First Screening of Avant-Garde Films in Prague at the Kotva Cinema. In: <http://www.logosjournal.com/hammid.htm> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Today, the main interest in Libeň is connected to Bohumil Hrabal. The writer lived there after he started working in a Libeň recycling mill in 1954. Later, he was a stagehand (1959-1962) at the S. K. Neumann Theatre (now Divadlo pod Palmovkou) in Libeň. After the house Na hrázi 24 where he lived was demolished in 1988 when the subway was built, a "Hrabal Wall" with paintings was initiated. <http://prague-praha.org/2010/08/25/> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

²⁴ Siegfried Kracauer criticized "Symphonie der Großstadt" as a series of scraps without an intellectual concept, even denying that the film was a portrayal of Berlin: "Dieser Film 'Berlin' ist eine schlimme Enttäuschung. Gewiß, er setzt sich aus Photographien zusammen, die zum Teil ausgezeichnet sind, weil sie quere Perspektiven nehmen und merkwürdige Details auf die Platte bringen, Häuser von unten, Rinnsteine [...]. Während etwa in den großen russischen Filmen Säulen, Häuser, Plätze in ihrer menschlichen Bedeutung unerblickt scharf klargestellt werden, reihen sich hier Fetzen aneinander, von denen keiner errät, warum sie eigentlich vorhanden sind. Ist das Berlin?" *Kracauer*, Siegfried: *Wir schaffen*. In: *Frankfurter Zeitung* vom 17.11.1927 (Nr. 856), reprinted in: *Kracauer*, Siegfried: *Werke* 6.1. *Kleine Schriften zum Film*. Ed. by Inka Mülder-Bach. Frankfurt/Main 2004, 411-413.



Fig. 1: "Aimless Walk" 1:18, Denisovo Station

tom rides," when the camera is mounted beside the driver, for example in Walter Ruttmann's *"Symphonie der Großstadt"* (1927).²⁵

In the city symphony shots of *"Bezúčelná procházka"* we also see the tram from the outside and later the camera seems to be mounted on the tram, immobile. We see other vehicles cross the tram's path and the shadow of the tram. But we do not yet see the protagonist.

The editing of the sequence of the tram's movement, the shadow, the first clearly recognizable landmark, adorned with sculptural figures (the Denisovo Station), and a pan over the footboard heighten the suspense and create nervous, human subjectivity. Michal Bregant notes that the "close-up of the steps of the streetcar (shot from the subjective high angle of the passenger)" helps "to create tension."²⁶ In this moment *"Bezúčelná procházka"* leaves behind the genre of the city symphony.

The subjective angle (we do not know yet whose point of view it is yet) and the casting of a diagonal shadow prepare the viewer for the doubling of perspective that will be built upon later. Hackenschmied was later to use a similar "shadow-first" device more pronouncedly in his American film with Maya Deren: *"Meshes of the Afternoon"* (1943).

²⁵ See also the highly mobile camera in *"Entr'acte"* by René Clair (1924).

²⁶ Bregant: Alexander Hammid's Czech Years 27 (cf. fn. 7).



Fig. 2: "Aimless Walk" 1:28, the first appearance of the man

The introduction of the subjective glance also brings a change of direction of the world moving by (1:16). Here we suddenly understand that we are in the tram not just with an anonymous, "omnipresent,"²⁷ and authorial camera (as in most city symphonies), but we rather see the one and only protagonist of the film (Bedřich Votýpka), a man in a hat introduced like an early film noir hero.

Votýpka was not a professional actor, but a friend of Hackenschmied's. He was originally from Libeň. In 1927 he had written a screenplay for a documentary film about the sluices and scout camps at the Vltava river "Svatojánské proudy, projekt přehrad" ("The Svatojanské Streams, Water Reservoirs Project"), directed by Antonín Vojtěchovský.²⁸ It was Votýpka with whom Hackenschmied had visited the groundbreaking "Film und Foto" (FIFO) exhibition in Stuttgart (May-July 1929) which included modern American and Soviet photography.²⁹

²⁷ *Anděl*: Alexandr Hackenschmied 8 (cf. fn. 4).

²⁸ A film about the Vltava embankment in Podskalí. http://www.filmarchives-online.eu/viewDetailForm?FilmworkID=cddde1350c6d2e3af18e26abdae95f5c&set_language=fr (last retrieved on 30.03.2012). The film shows how the flow of the river had been altered by the construction of water reservoirs and dams. These would also change the Svatojánské Streams south of Prague. It would no longer be necessary to haul boats upstream with the help of horses (koníčkování). Later we shall see that the rectification of the Vltava was a topic that obviously preoccupied Hackenschmied who grew up in Karlín, a place strongly influenced by the river.

²⁹ One of his articles about the exhibition appeared in "Studio". *Hackenschmied*, Alexandr: Film ve Štutgartu [Film in Stuttgart]. In: Studio 1 (1929) č. 9, 286-287.

Diagonal Compositions, Water, and Rhythmic Montage

A contemporary reviewer in the Czech journal “Studio” wrote, “By using photographic distortion, setting the camera at a tilt, and with new angles, one discovers a new beauty of things in the most primitive motifs of the urban periphery.”³⁰ In the film it appears that the tram has no doors. This not only allows passengers to alight by jumping from the moving tram, but also draws our attention to the border between the moving vehicle and the immobile street under it. The end of the wooden floor of the tram forms a footboard. It appears eight times in the film and has several functions: it cuts the screen diagonally, preparing the viewer for the dynamics in the narrative.

The dynamism of the footboard is anticipated by two shots with diagonal forms at the beginning of the film: rails running from bottom right to left and one rail from bottom left to right, quoting the ubiquitous trams and their tracks in the city symphony genre.

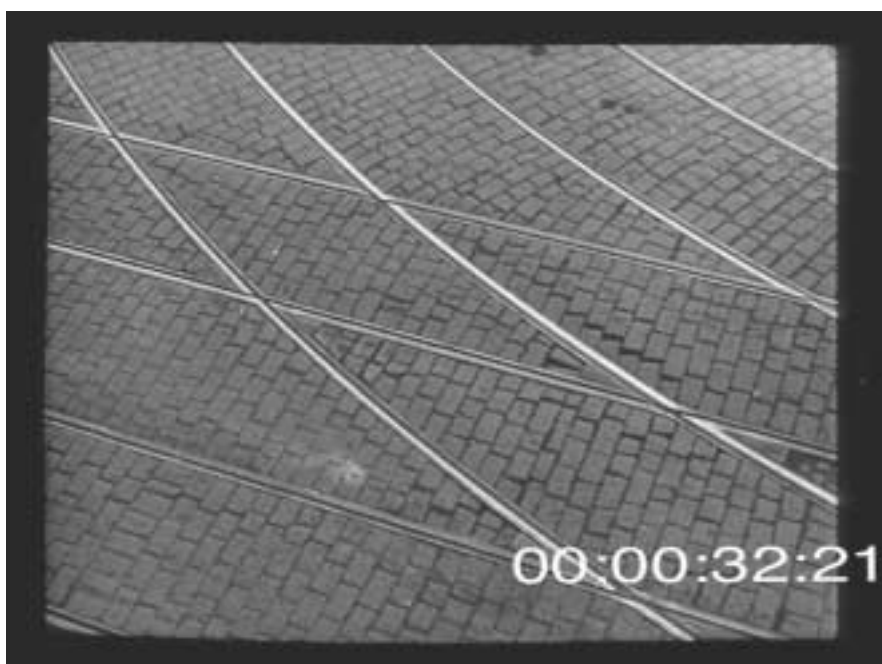


Fig. 3: “Aimless Walk” 0:32, Tram Lines I

³⁰ “Využitím fotografického zkreslení, zešikmení pohledu a pod novými zornými úhly je pod nejprostšími motivy velkoměstské periferie objevována nová krása věcí”. In: Studio 2 (1930-31) č. 7, 218-219. Quoted in: Mrázková, Daniela/Remeš, Vladimír: Cesty československé fotografie: Vyprávění o historii československé fotografie prostřednictvím životních a tvůrčích osudů vybraných osobností a mezních vývojových okamžiků [Ways of Czech Photography: A History of Czechoslovak Photography Through Creative Biographies of Selected Personalities and in its Decisive Moments]. Praha 1989, 75.

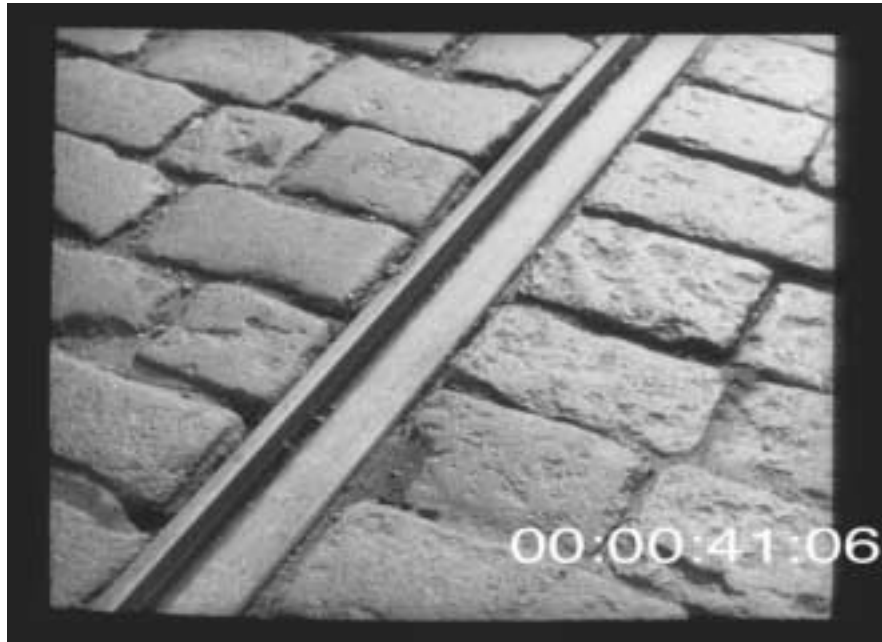


Fig. 4: "Aimless Walk" 0:41, Tram Lines II

The proximity of the tram footboard to the cobblestones gives a visual representation of speed. This shot, with some alterations, is edited with other images of the tram journey. Together they form a repetitive pattern and create a rhythm which accelerates slightly towards the end of the sequence.

When the camera pans over the footboard, it not only contrasts with the anonymous city-symphony-phantom-ride camera at the start of the film. This glancing down and brushing over the footboard creates both a feeling of suspense and a slight vertigo effect. The shortness of the footboard shots seems to draw us outside the tram. Where will the camera, and by implication the man, hop out of the tram?

Intercut into the tram sequence are shots of even shorter duration showing rippling water with a reflection. They add to the fracturing of the journey by introducing the shapeless and blurred surface of a liquid mirror, the "old" Vltava now seeping through. The gentle movement of the water contrasts with the speeding (sub-) urban scenery and the rectangular shapes of the buildings behind the tram windows. The shots of dark water not only interrupt the fixed course of the tram, but also punctuate the trip with interjections that introduce a different layer of time. Are we to believe it is a memory – an image from the past? A few moments later, when the man leaves the tram on the bridge, we realize that these images could also be an anticipation or an imagination of the river Vltava, an image of what might lie ahead. When the man sits down by the embankment, we see water again, this time in a longer shot, and it shows the same reflection as in the preceding shots. The images



Fig. 5: "Aimless Walk" 1:16, Footboard I



Fig. 6: "Aimless Walk" 1:33, Footboard II

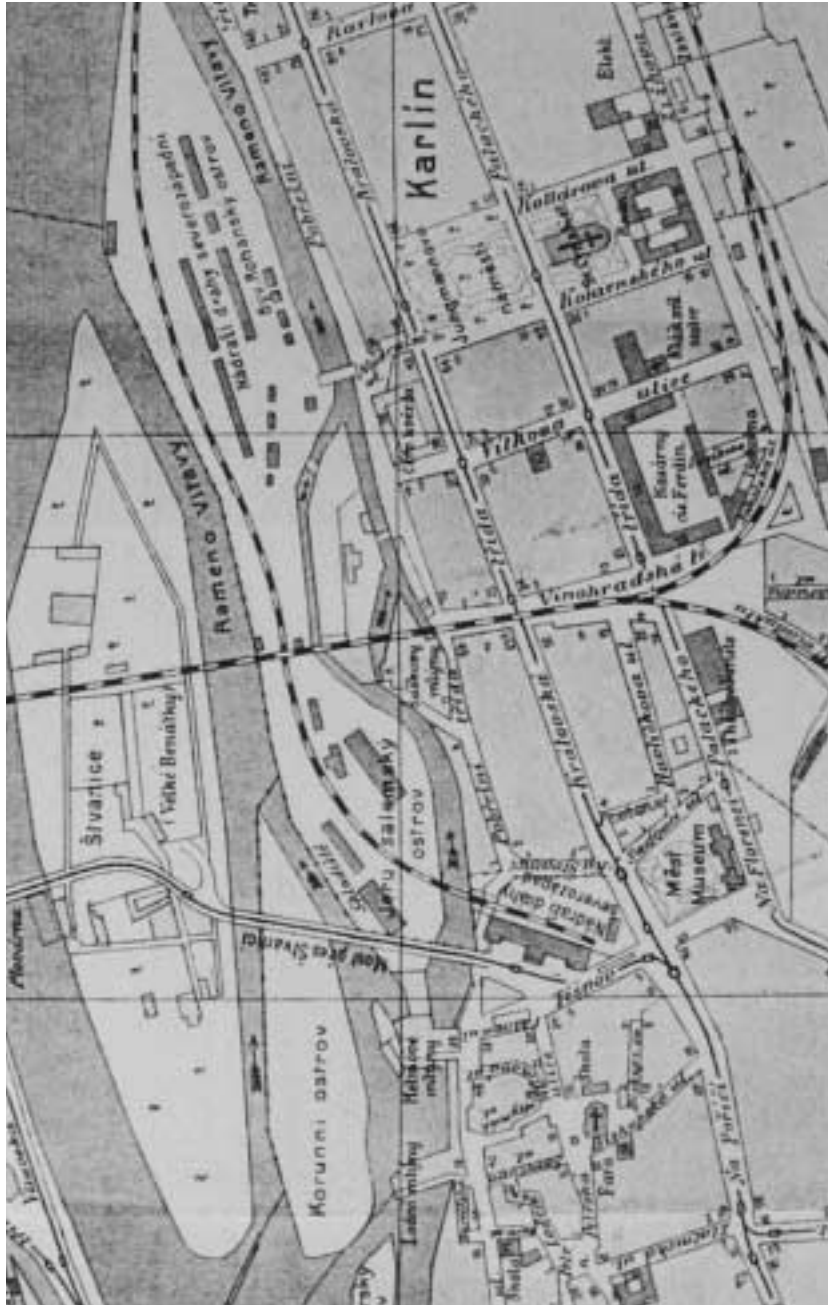


Fig. 7: Map of Karlin and Štvanice (1910)

of water might also stand for crossing the river on Hlávka bridge (Hlávkův most). In this case he probably would have taken tram No. 18 which would have come from Wenceslas Square via Denisovo Station over the Hlávkův most to Holešovice. From there he might have changed to line 12 (Smíchov Holešovice)³¹ which in 1929 was extended onto the Libeň bridge.³² The tram connection of the Libeň bridge with Libeň itself was completed only in 1931, so the tram journey to the new bridge had to be done via Holešovice and not via Karlín.

The emotional tonality of the water contrasts with the sunlit Prague city center and its adjoining suburbs; its minor key produces an atmosphere of longing. Just as Nové město is replaced by the small shops, the low semi-industrial structures, and the working-class neighborhoods of Holešovice and Libeň, the film genre changes as well. If we stay with music terminology: the city symphony is superseded by a barcarole, an intimate musical genre that is connected with boating and gondolas.³³ Later, when the man arrives in Libeň with its waterways, ships, and dockyards, we understand these images as foreboding in hindsight.

A Study in Movement, Direction, and Point of View

Bregant stresses the role of rhythmical editing in this low-budget film:

Hammid [i.e. Hackenschmied], who had no technical equipment for editing, achieved a dynamic, purely cinematic tension by rhythmically altering static and dynamic shots, employing close-ups and extreme close-ups. This is evident immediately from the beginning of film, in the transition from the lingering shots of the tram tracks and the surface of a puddle by the curb to the fast pace of the streetcar, when we subjectively follow the passing exterior through the front window of the carriage. The view of the moving carriage is very typical for Hammid, familiar to us from both his photographs and his later films (for instance in "Crisis", 1938) – and it enables him to establish the link between the static and dynamic elements.³⁴

Although the director, who was very good at downplaying his achievements, described the shooting as a casual walk ("And there I was with a camera in my hand for the first time. So I took it for a walk in the neighborhood in Prague where I lived"),³⁵ one can assume that his filmic idea could have been realized only on the

³¹ In 1923 tram no. 18 started on the following route: Holešovice, Uranie - Jatky - Štvanice - Denisovo nádraží - Jindřišská - Václavské náměstí - Karlovo náměstí - Moráň - Vyšehrad - Nusle, Fričova ulice. From 1929 tram no. 12 went via Libeň, Dolní nádraží (u Palmovky) - Libeňský most - Dělnická - Jatky - Štefánikův most - Čechův most - Klárov - Malostranské náměstí - Vítězná třída (Újezd) - Plzeňská třída (Anděl) - Západní nádraží. *Fojtík, Pavel/Linert, Stanislav/Prošek, František: Historie městské hromadné dopravy v Praze [The History of Urban Mass Transportation in Prague]. Praha 2005, 111, 115.*

³² *Dušek, Pavel: Encyklopedie městské dopravy v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku [Encyclopedia of City Transport in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia]. Praha 2003, 207.* Dušek writes that on 29 October 1928 the tram started running between Dělnická street and Libeňský most, and only on 28 September 1931 between Libeňský most - Primatorská třída (today: Zenklova) in Libeň.

³³ The island of Štvanice between Karlín and Holešovice was called Velké Benátky [Great Venice] as we can see on the map of 1910.

³⁴ *Bregant: Alexander Hammid's Czech Years 27 (cf. fn. 7).*

³⁵ In Martina Kudláček's documentary "Aimless Walk – Alexander Hammid", produced in 1996 by Česká Televize & Mina Film.

basis of a well-planned shooting as well as a strong visual imagination which might have been exercised in countless tram rides without the camera, searching for the poetical rhythm of the "score" of his first film. One could perceive this film in the context of the poetists' manifestos that were never put into practice. In fact, the beginning of the film starts out as a "photogenic poem" without a narrative – a ride through Prague as imagined by the poetists might not have looked so different. But as the film proceeds we notice that there is more to it than the joys of modern urban transportation and geometric compositions to please the eye.

Hackenschmied's film is a study in orientation in space as perceived from a moving vehicle. The first thing we have to bear in mind is that in 1930 Prague trams drove on the left side of the street. The introduction of right-hand traffic was imminent, but had not yet been implemented as it meant a major change for a metropolitan city. Czechoslovakia had agreed to it under the "Paris convention" in 1925, but did not actually go ahead with it until March 1939. The change planned for the 1 May 1939 was accelerated by the invasion of Hitler's troops on March 15.³⁶

Few of the shots we see fit the man's point of view (POV). The glances down to the footboard and up to the statues at the Denisovo station seem to be typically human in nature. But the footboard is on the left side of the tram – if it were from the POV of the man standing on the right side of the tram, we would see it framed by the interior of the tram. In the sequence of shots from inside the tram we are confronted with two alternating directions of "movement" of the outside world. If the camera shoots out of the left window things go by from right to left. If the camera looks out of the right window the city moves by from left to right. What is unusual here is that the two directions are connected with two positions, two points of view. One belongs roughly to the man, the other to the cameraman. The left-to-right direction is connected to the POV of the protagonist, standing at the right-hand window of the tram; all new objects come into the frame from the left and leave the frame on the right. He is looking out of the right window and straight ahead, in the same direction the tram is going; we do not see him turning to the left side of the tram or leaving his position until he decides to get off the tram. It is not quite clear whether the shots with the passengers represent his POV or the camera's. The right-to-left direction belongs to a perspective not attached to the man; most of the time it seems to display typical city symphony camera behavior. The two POVs and the right-to-left and left-to-right directions of movement attached to them are intercut by either a shot of the footboard or a shot of water (for example a footboard in 1:32, water in 2:08).

One detail is particularly important in the sequence inside the tram. While the tram is going past the Denisovo station (which is east or on the right side of the tram

³⁶ Cf. the photo of a poster saying "In Prag wird RECHTS gefahren" in the book *Pfitzner, Josef: Das tausendjährige Prag. Mit Bildern v. Franz Höch*. Bayreuth 1940, 110. Pfitzner, a historian and member of the NDSAP from 1939, was the German deputy mayor of Prague from 1939 to 1945 and was responsible for germanizing Prague. Fdv: *Vpravo jezdíme už 70 let* [We Have Been Driving on the Right Side for 70 Years Already]. In: http://auto.idnes.cz/vpravo-jezdime-uz-70-let-0vd-/auto_ojetiny.aspx?c=A090316_122929_auto_ojetiny_fdv (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

when it leaves the center) we see a right-to-left movement of the station when it should be the other way around!

This might mean that Hackenschmied preferred to shoot the Denisovo station on the way back because he was closer to it and the view was unobstructed from the left side of the street. But this sudden change of direction must have been disorienting for a Prague audience that first saw the tram leaving the city and then had to assume that the tram was travelling back towards the center at the Denisovo station. Together with the shadow and the footboard, this reversed movement prepares the introduction of the protagonist, who from the very beginning is associated with an unsettling feeling of a double-sided movement.

There are several possible explanations of the “wrong” direction. The right-to-left-movement of the Denisovo station might be an (imagined) return back to the center. Or a flashback of an earlier ride? This encourages the viewer to construct a narrative: what are we to make of this somber-looking figure: is he returning to the scene of a crime? Hackenschmied may have used his camera going in both directions, and later edited the shots of leaving and arriving in Prague in one sequence.

The visual riddle in orientation has no one-dimensional solution that would fit into the sparse narrative of the film. The only thing we can be sure of is that the man is leaving the center of Prague (stores and urban architecture are becoming intertwined with views of the periphery including: fallow fields and factories), and that at the same time there is a contradictory movement – as if he had an invisible double doing the “opposite” thing simultaneously. His doppelgänger stares out of the tram on the other side – without the protagonist himself moving. And the camera assumes viewpoints that are either analogous to or mirror the protagonist’s POV – which makes one think that the camera itself acts as a doppelgänger of the man, or the man of the camera.

The last shot in the tram sequence makes the man himself, who has until now been immobile, an object of movement and shows him (previously associated with the left-to-right direction) entering the right-to-left sphere of the frame. The kinetically accurate turning around while jumping from a moving vehicle seems to signal a more significant and all-encompassing turn of the protagonist. In the next shot the man first walks towards the camera and then turns to the other side. After a cut we see him on the left side of the bridge walking towards the steps. In short, the film confuses the viewer’s sense of direction, but in a low-key fashion that works at a subconscious level and does not disturb the eye of a viewer accustomed to a montage of sights in city symphonies. Hackenschmied obviously counts on this expectation and cleverly subverts it.

The Libeň Bridge – not “On the Sunny Side” of Prague

The bridge connecting Libeň and Holešovice appears in a number of photographs and films of the late twenties and early thirties. It was designed by the architect Pavel Janák and built by the engineer František Mencl between 1924-1928 in a “massive and solid” cubist style with a span of 16 meters which gave it a “certain liberty and lucidity.”³⁷

³⁷ “[...] působí zvláštní volností a přehledností.” Mencl, František: “Most libeňský.” [The Libeň Bridge]. In: Styl XI [XVI] (1931-1932) 136-137.



Fig. 8: The Libeň Bridge

It is made of reinforced concrete and, unlike many other bridges in Prague, it is unadorned. The choice of this bridge as the target of the tram ride concurs with the contemporary “celebration of the beauty of unadorned life” and the bans on “dangling ornaments” formulated in leading lines of discourse at that time.³⁸

Originally the bridge was called Masarykův most (1928-39) and from 1939 to 1940 it bore the name Baxův most.³⁹ In 1940 the name was changed to Libeňský most before reverting back to Baxův most in 1945. From 1952 to 1962 the bridge was named

³⁸ In his article on Karel Teige’s trouble with being both a poetist and a constructivist, Peter Zusi quotes his “Foto-Kino-Film”: “Only a short step was required for this vitalist celebration of the beauty of unadorned life to develop into a purist celebration of the beauty of the unadorned machine: the beauty of a machine, of an automobile, is the beauty of reality and of the pure form, which doesn’t need to be dolled up with ornaments or wreathed with poetry.” Zusi, Peter: *The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism*. In: *Representations* 88 (Fall 2004) 102-124, 110.

³⁹ Named after Karel Baxa, a nephew of the writer Karel Havlíček Borovský, and the mayor of Prague from 1919-1937. – Cf. also Dušan, Josef: *Encyklopedie mostů v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [Encyclopedia of Bridges in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia]. Praha 1999. – For Prague bridges see also: <http://virtualni.praha.eu/mosty/libensky-most.html> – <http://prago.info/index.php/200711295815/Libensky-most.html> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

Stalingradský most. From 1962 onwards it was once again named Libeňský most; currently it is in a neglected state and at risk of demolition.⁴⁰

Incidentally, we find the same bridge in an early Czech sound film “Na sluneční straně” (“On the Sunny Side”, 1933) which was directed by the writer Vladislav Vančura. The film is about new methods in education, based on the idea that an orphanage in its reformed version of a “home for children” (Dětský domov) is more wholesome than a dysfunctional family the children might otherwise live in. The plot is as follows: cruel capitalist parents, whose business has gone bankrupt, consider killing their daughter in order to collect the life insurance money.⁴¹ The Czech script was a collective effort – it was written among others by the avant-garde poet Vítězslav Nezval and the member of the Prague Linguistic Circle and former Russian formalist Roman Jakobson.

In one scene we see the mother and the girl on their “last” trip to Libeň where the mother is supposed to kill the girl on the outskirts of Prague, throw her into the Vltava and then shoot herself. The mother is giving the daughter money to buy her last meal. Since the film was shot in 1933 we can see the new gasometer (built in 1932) in the background when the girl lets go of her balloon and cries out, “My balloon flew away” (“ulít balón”). Interestingly, Libeň here – as in Hackenschmied’s film – is connected with extreme existential situations, crossroads, and criminal ideas (even though the mother does not ultimately kill her daughter). Libeň in film certainly does not represent the “sunny side” of Prague.

On a print from the period of World War I, showing the Grab oilcloth and carpet factory, we can see how Libeň looked in the decades before the film, and also at the time when Hackenschmied was a boy.⁴² In Vančura’s film the “sunny side” of Prague is located in the south-east of the city, Podolí. But here in the north-east, the Vltava looks ravaged by modern industry. Nature appears violated, the space organized, the vegetation pruned, with chimneys exuding black smoke. There is no human being in sight. The emptiness of the outskirts is in stark contrast to the bustling streets of town centers seen in the city symphonies.

⁴⁰ On current plans to widen the bridge cf. press release from 5.5.2011 of the “Club For Old Prague” (“Klub Za starou Prahu”): *Jandáček*, Václav: Mezi Štvanicí a “Blankou” [Between Štvanice and “Blanka”]. http://www.zastarouprahu.cz/ruzne/Tiskova_zprava5-2011.pdf (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁴¹ In the first half of the 1930s the motif of life insurance fraud preoccupied novelists and script-writers: “hardboiled” crime writer James M. Cain published his insurance embezzlement story “Three of a Kind” in 1935; nine years later it was filmed by Billy Wilder in the noir “Double Indemnity”. Vladimir Nabokov’s novel “Otchaianie”/“Despair” (published in Russian in Berlin 1934) revolves around a life insurance fraud based on an imaginary double. “Despair” begins where the film “Aimless Walk” ends: a man meets his doppelganger on the outskirts of Prague. Cf. *Drubek*, Natascha: Prague i Doppelgaengers: “Bezúčelná procházka” (Hackenschmied, 1930) and “Otčajanie” (Nabokov, 1932). In: *Slovo a smysl*. In preparation, 2012.

⁴² *Tomeš*, Josef: Městská část Praha 9. 4. Díl. Libeň [The Municipal District Prague 9. Part 4. Libeň]. Praha 2001, 31-34. – *Bečková*, Kateřina: Zmizelá Praha. Továrny a tovární haly. 1. díl Vysočany, Libeň, Karlín. [Vanished Prague: Factories and Warehouses. Part 1. Vysočany, Libeň, Karlín]. Praha 2011, 110-111, 124. In 1875 the Grab factory had replaced the Košínska vineyard.



Fig. 9: "Grab & Sons" Factory in Libeň

The atmosphere of the Libeň waterfront was captured in contemporary photographs that show empty spaces on the periphery of a metropolitan city. The river and its banks in this part of Prague seem to stress the contrast between natural and industrial space.

Even this picture, which at first sight seems to be idyllic, highlights the two constant Libeň themes: the surface of the water as a darkly foreboding mirror and the drudgery of workers' existence: the bent dark figure of an adult, a child working.

A photograph from the 1920s: the old wooden bridge over the Vltava in Libeň.⁴³

"À propos de Prague"?

The second part of the film is filled with images of water in different forms and functions. It provides idyllic river scenery (a man fishing), a bleak background of the industrial areas, and a reflecting surface: "The water guides us through the periphery."⁴⁴

We already mentioned the brief shots of dark water that intercut the earlier tram sequence. These shots intrude on the narrative sequence of the journey (2:01, 2:09,

⁴³ On the site of Prague 8, this photo is described as "Koníčkování na Vltavě", obviously a description of hauling boats upstream with the help of horses (in this case: people instead of horses). [http://www.praha8.cz/\(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45\)/zdroj.aspx?typ=5&id=159&sh=46628671](http://www.praha8.cz/(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45)/zdroj.aspx?typ=5&id=159&sh=46628671) (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁴⁴ "[...] voda, průvodkyně periferií". Cf. Štoll, Martin / Matějů, Martin: Praha dokumentární [Prague in Documentary Film]. Praha 2006, 37.



Fig. 10: Photo of Libeň from the 1920s

2:13). The interruption of the sequence of urban architecture (houses and their reflections in the windows of the tram) was made without apparent motivation. The introduction of the element of water was sudden and fleeting at the same time.⁴⁵ We already tried to interpret the shots as an anticipation of the river by which the protagonist will soon sit and ponder.

The montage of shots showing water can also be seen in a dialogue with French cinema of the preceding years. In “Paris qui dort” (1925, René Clair)⁴⁶ we see a man in a hat, the guard of the Eiffel tower, rushing through a “sleeping” Paris. Among other figures frozen by a magic ray, a man stands immobilized on the embankment; the dark water under him is ready to embrace his suicide. The image (2:55) of Votýpka sitting beside the Vltava has a similar impact and composition, dividing the space diagonally. Both films mix the fantastic (Clair’s ray and Hackenschmied’s double) using the space of a real city.

A film Hackenschmied engages in a direct dialogue with is Man Ray’s French “L’Étoile de mer” (1928). The film contains several motifs we will find in Hackenschmied’s short two years later: glistening rails and the profile in a tram window, a chimney, docks. P. Adams Sitney pointed out “a number of remarkable coincidences of imagery and structure between” the film “L’Étoile de mer” and “Meshes of the

⁴⁵ Diminishing from 20 to 13 frames, so less than a second.

⁴⁶ 31 avant-garde films (among them film by René Clair, Germaine Dulac and Jean Renoir) were bought for distribution in Czechoslovakia by the Futurum Film company in December 1930. *Štábla: Data a fakta z dějin československé kinematografie 1896–1945*, 196 (cf. fn. 4).



Fig. 11: "Aimless Walk" 2:55, Sitting at the Vltava in Libeň

Afternoon" (Alexandr Hackenschmied/Maya Deren, 1943) without mentioning Hackenschmied's "Bezúčelná procházka" which may have been unavailable to him.⁴⁷

Another connection can be established with Jean Vigo's "À propos de Nice" (1930). This film, photographed by Boris Kaufman, also uses shots of water, in this case the sea, intercut into the opening sequence, giving the film a distinctive rhythm. "À propos de Nice" was inspired by the same city symphony film that influenced Hackenschmied: "The Man with the Movie Camera" (USSR, 1929) made by Vertov (born Denis Kaufman), the older brother of Boris Kaufman. Boris Kaufman had studied in Paris and stayed in France after the October Revolution. Vigo's film about a seaside town premiered on 28 May 1930 in Paris. It was one of the films later chosen by Hackenschmied for the avant-garde film program in the Kotva cinema in the autumn of the same year. Thus the Prague audience would have been able to follow the dialogue between Vigo's film on the subject of Nice and Hackenschmied's film apropos of Prague.

⁴⁷ Looking at these three films now, it seems that Hackenschmied responded to "L'Étoile de mer" twice: Once in his 1930 film and the second time 13 years later, together with Maya Deren. In 1943, in their surrealist film about a couple they quote Ray's images of a man ascending the staircase and the knife. Both films have the images of mirroring or glass surfaces in common. *Sitney, P. Adams: Meshes of the Afternoon*. In: *Sitney, P. Adams: Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978*. Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, 1979, 3-19, 19.



Fig. 12: The Factory Rustonka

When Hackenschmied took Prague audiences on his “aimless walk”, they were not about to see just another city symphony. It was a different type of journey which seems to be inspired by lyrical “poetism,” it does not rely solely on the effects of the city symphony’s fast montage, and then, rather unexpectedly, develops a narrative that leads the rational viewer out of his depth.

Libeň: Industrial Suburb and the Old Jewish Quarter

There are several ways to move through a city, but the tram seems to express most aptly the concept of a modern capital – even if it is the medieval city of Prague.

Some of the tram routes are older than the First Czechoslovak Republic. One example is the tram connecting Prague and Libeň, which was built when Libeň was formally still a village on the northeast periphery of Prague, albeit with a concentration of over 40 factories. Libeň became a city in 1898 and in 1901 was subsumed into a district of Prague. The tram to Libeň was one of the first electrical tramways in Prague. Built by František Křižík, it opened its course in 1896, running between Karlín, Libeň, and Vysočany, for some time still competing for the space in the street with the earlier established “koňka” (horse tram).⁴⁸

Until the second half of the nineteenth century Libeň was a rather romantic place, with picturesque river banks and patches of wild nature. It had several vineyards – one of them, Kolčavka, was turned into a cement pipe factory in the 1880s. The rail-line between Prague and Vienna, which from 1844 ran through Libeň, was one of the reasons for the rapid industrialization of this area. A natural asset was Libeň’s prox-

⁴⁸ Křižík had built his first tram on the Letná in Prague in 1891, but it was mainly a showcase advertising electrical transportation, as it was only 1.4 km long. *Dušek: Encyklopedie městské dopravy* 197 (cf. fn. 31).

imity to the Vltava river connecting Prague via the Labe/Elbe to Hamburg. After the establishment of the print works ("kartounka")⁴⁹ in the 1820s, several machine works were built: Rustonka in 1832,⁵⁰ the factories of the Prášil brothers,⁵¹ the Erste böhmisch-mährische Maschinenfabrik/První Českomoravská továrna na stroje⁵², Bohumil Voleský or John Fowler's factory for steam engines for plowing.

Among the Libeň factories were textile manufacturers (Perutz),⁵³ a hat manufacturer (Weider), an oilcloth factory (Grab),⁵⁴ several paint factories (Chitz & Meller, Klein, Heitz), the old Libeň Castle Brewery (until 1900), a new steam brewery (The Bohemian Breweries, Ltd.), chemical factories, soap-works, a factory producing tobacco pipes (Fritsche & Thein),⁵⁵ a currier, and a leather tannery (Eckstein and Jellinek's "Libenia"). All of these were dependent on the water from the nearby river. The distillery F. X. Brosch, which in 1872 moved from the Old Town to Podviní in Libeň, was the largest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ In 1881, Belgian gas-works was constructed in the street

⁴⁹ "Kartounka" comes from the word cotton/Kattun. There were centres of textile printing in the first half of the nineteenth century in the villages Libeň and Smíchov (the Prziham and Porges family factories). Both were close to Prague, but Smíchov only became part of Greater Prague (Velká Praha) in 1922. Jungmann, Jan: Smíchov, Město za újezdskou branou [Smíchov, the City behind the Újezd Gate]. Praha 2007, 168.

⁵⁰ První pražská strojirna – Rustonka [The first Prague Machine Works - Rustonka]. http://www.fabriky.cz/2007_rustonka/ (last retrieved on 30.03.2012). On Libeň industries cf. Jungmann, Jan: Libeň – Zmizelý svět [Libeň – A Vanished World]. Praha 2010, 92. – Tomeš, Josef: Městská část Praha 9. 4. Díl. Libeň [The Municipal District Prague 9. 4 Part. Libeň]. Praha 2001, 31-34.

⁵¹ They procured the Petřín Lookout Tower (Petřín rozhledna 1891). In 1927 it merged with companies from districts nearby: Emil Kolben's electrotechnical plant in Vysočany and Breitfeld & Daněk's factory in Karlín. Together they became the biggest machine plant in the country: Českomoravská - Kolben - Daněk (ČKD). – Bečková: Zmizelá Praha 27-37 (cf. fn. 41).

⁵² *Ibid.* 84-85.

⁵³ A large Libeň textile factory (1875) belonged to Benedikt Perutz, the father of the writer Leo Perutz, born in Prague in 1882. Jungmann: Libeň – Zmizelý svět 39 (cf. fn. 48). – Tomeš: Městská část Praha 9, 32 (cf. fn. 41). For Perutz see also: <http://www.stifterverein.de/index.php?id=191> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁵⁴ "[...] the most prominent member of the family was [...] Hermann Grab (1843-1900), who contributed significantly to industrial development in Libeň. He entered the business in Libeň as a director of the M. Grab synové family operation. Around 1876 he and his brother Josef bought the Košínska farmstead (House No. 106) where he established a large oilcloth factory in 1879-1880. Grab's imperial and royal leatherette, oilcloth and carpet monopoly factory was the largest of its kind in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy toward the end of the nineteenth century." [http://www.praha8.cz/\(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45\)/files/=25573/Grabova+vila.pdf](http://www.praha8.cz/(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45)/files/=25573/Grabova+vila.pdf). (last retrieved on 30.03.2012). His grandson Hermann Grab junior became a writer and musician. Cf. Adorno, Theodor W.: Hermann Grab. In: Neue Rundschau 16 (1949) 594. – For more about the Grab family cf. <http://www.stifterverein.de/de/autorenlexikon/e-h/grab-hermann.html> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁵⁵ The steam brewery had several owners (Goldfinger/Kallberg, Knobloch, Kubík) before it became the "English" brewery in 1889. In 1906-1928 it belonged to the Kornfelds. The brewery was housed in the building of the former Gottlas kartounka (cf. the street Kotlaska). <http://liben.evangelnet.cz/f/news/141/vychazka-libni-3.pdf>. (last retrieved on 30.03.2012). – Jungmann: Libeň – Zmizelý svět 115-120 (cf. fn. 48).

⁵⁶ For a photo from 1928 cf. Bečková: Zmizelá Praha 120 (cf. fn. 41).



Fig. 13: Praha Libeň

Švábky. In the 1890s a landing with a dock was built close to Libeň Castle. The rectification of the Vltava began after the great flood of 1890. In 1869 Libeň had 5,845 inhabitants; by 1894 the number had tripled.⁵⁷ Vojtěch Rakous wrote, “The amazing growth of Libeň can rightly be called a purely American phenomenon.”⁵⁸ Rakous was the pseudonym of one of Libeň’s businessmen, Albrecht Österreicher (born in Brandýs nad Labem in 1862, died in Libeň in 1935), who was one of the first Jewish writers to publish successfully in Czech.⁵⁹

There is a long history of Jewish life in Libeň. The first time Jews are mentioned in written records dates back to 1561. After the Jews were temporarily evicted from Prague in 1744 by Empress Maria Theresia, Libeň became the second important center of Jewish life in the environs of Prague.⁶⁰ The ghetto of Libeň, situated in Alt-Lieben, was called Judendorf and in the nineteenth century Judenstadt.⁶¹ According

⁵⁷ Tomeš: Městská část Praha 9, 35 (cf. fn. 41).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* “Úžasný vzrůst obce Libeňské možno právem nazvati zjevem čistě americkým.” Rakous, Vojtěch: „Starý Židovský hřbitov” [The Old Jewish Cemetery]. In: Věstník židovských náboženských obcí 10, quoted in Bendová, Eva: Ztracená duše Židovské čtvrti v Libni [The Lost Soul of the Jewish Quarter in Libeň]. In: Vlčková, Olga: Do Židů. Zmizelá Libeň v dramatickém textu Miroslava Bambuška [Unto the Jews. Lost Libeň in the Dramatic Text of Miroslav Bambušek]. Prague 2009, 10.

⁵⁹ Vojkovičtí a přespólní [The People from Vojkovice and its Environs]. Praha 1910. – About Rakous cf. Tomeš: Městská část Praha 9, 55 (cf. fn. 41).

⁶⁰ “Libeňská synagoga”. [http://www.praha8.cz/\(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45\)/zdroj.aspx?typ=2&id=2364&sh=-131356424](http://www.praha8.cz/(nzdqyu45mcf5pt55cb55gi45)/zdroj.aspx?typ=2&id=2364&sh=-131356424) (last retrieved on 30.03.2012). – Jungmann: Libeň – Zmizelý svět 31 (cf. fn. 48).

⁶¹ Bendová: Ztracená duše Židovské čtvrti 7-8 (cf. fn. 56). – Cf. also: Do Židů - science fiction

to Josef Tomeš, most Libeň Jews considered themselves Czech and not German.⁶² The first synagogue and residential neighborhoods were situated in a rather unsalubrious area where others preferred not to build houses: the flood region of the Vltava. In the film we see parts of the now demolished Jewish ghetto which is close to the river and the bridge, south of the Rokytka tributary.⁶³ Today only two houses of the old ghetto remain.⁶⁴ In the course of constructing the Libeň bridge in 1924-28, the Jewish cemetery was partially destroyed.

By the summer of 1930 when the film was shot, the boom period of the Libeň factories were over. The economic and financial crisis following Black Friday in 1929 had a strong effect on Czechoslovakia as an exporting country. As Miloš Vojtěchovský points out, the economic depression is visible in the film.⁶⁵

Soviet Influences and the Genre of the Film Study

Many Czech avant-garde artists and writers in the First Czechoslovak Republic sympathized with communism or were left leaning. Soviet film was greatly admired.⁶⁶ Teige had travelled as a member of a cultural delegation to the USSR and had seen Soviet films.⁶⁷ In Prague itself the cultural organization "Proletkult" (organized by the poet and communist S. K. Neumann) showed Soviet films in the worker's district of Žižkov during the early 1920s.

The significance of the work of Soviet cinematographers in avant-garde cinema of the 1920s as a background for Hackenschmied's film has never been properly evaluated. The history of the influence of Soviet avant-garde film seems to be filtered by the changing perspectives on the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the political changes in Czech history. A review of the book "Alexandr Hackenschmied" (2000)⁶⁸ criticizes Jaroslav Anděl's omission of Hackenschmied's Soviet sources of inspiration in photography and film; the reviewer stresses how impressed Hackenschmied was by the Soviet style of presenting stills from avant-garde films at the Stuttgart exhibition "Film und Foto" in 1929.⁶⁹

o zmizelé části Prahy [Unto the Jews – Science Fiction About a Vanished Part of Prague], <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/kultura/91995-do-zidu-science-fiction-o-zmizele-casti-prahy/> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁶² Tomeš: Městská část Praha 9, 35 (cf. fn. 41).

⁶³ *Ibid.* 42-45.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

⁶⁵ Vojtěchovský, Miloš: Psychogeografie okraje (text věnován Alexandru Hackenschmiedovi) [Psychogeography of the Outskirts (A Text Dedicated to Alexandr Hackenschmied)]. Prague 2004. http://hammid.wz.cz/periferie/hackenschmied_psychogeografie_okraje.rtf (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁶⁶ Cabada, Ladislav: Intellectuals and the Communist Idea: The Search for a New Way in Czech Lands from 1890 to 1938. Lanham 2010, 67-110.

⁶⁷ He ranked Vertov and Eisenstein higher than Pudovkin whom he thought too centered on the narrative. Teige, Karel: "Vsevolod Pudovkin" (1930). In: Kral, Petr: Karel Teige a film [Karel Teige and the Cinema]. Praha 1966.

⁶⁸ Chuchma, Josef: Hackenschmied zahájil ambiciózní edici [An Ambitious Edition Was Started with Hackenschmied]. In: Mladá Fronta Dnes 18.8.2000, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 16.

Interviews with the filmmaker in the 1990s do not necessarily help to clarify this. In 1930 Hackenschmied readily admitted his fascination not only with French but also with Russian avant-garde films: "They are special films and (especially the French and new Russian ones) truly avant-garde because they are, both in concept and technique, far ahead of commercial cinema."⁷⁰ But in 1993 Hammid feels compelled to deny the Soviet influence when interviewed by the Czech filmmaker Jaromil Jireš: "They did not influence my work I was more influenced by Ivens, Cavalcanti, Richter, and Ruttmann. These were in my mind when I shot 'Aimless Walk'."⁷¹ Jireš, however, mentioned Pudovkin and Eisenstein, and did not ask the obvious question concerning the pioneer of documentary film, Vertov, and his brothers. The Vertov-Kaufmans worked as cinematographers in Moscow and France, and later in the USA.⁷² Hackenschmied's son Tino Hammid confirmed in a personal communication in November 2010 that his father was a great admirer of Soviet avant-garde film.

Several elements in this film remind the viewer of Vertov's "The Man with a Movie Camera": the sleeping Libeň homeless seem to be the cousins of the Soviet vagabonds. But, as Bregant points out, they can also be found in Cartier-Bresson's work of the early 1930s.⁷³ The influence of Soviet photography and Kaufmanian cinematography is visible in the pronouncedly avant-garde low-angle camera positions which are predominantly used when showing proletarians at work.

What is the main difference between "Bezúčelná procházka" and "Man with a Movie Camera"? It is mainly the "consciousness of a narrative continuum and awareness of the film as a whole"⁷⁴ that the former clearly displays, despite its title. This is true in contrast with many other city documentaries and city symphonies. Hackenschmied's film surprises by the fact that in addition to the camera viewpoint, a human figure with its own perspective is introduced. And this figure uses the tram not to enjoy, but to leave the city and take a walk (procházka), not in the countryside, but in an industrial suburb, the "back side of the city, the dumping ground of detritus and human fates."⁷⁵ "Bezúčelná procházka" differs from other city symphonies not only in the presence of a protagonist, but also in its somewhat ironic position towards avant-garde ideologies and aesthetics: the awe of industrial work

⁷⁰ Cf. *Hackenschmied*: K prvnímu představení filmové (cf. fn. 4).

⁷¹ "Neměli vliv na mou práci, spíš měli vliv Ivens, Cavalcanti, Richter a Ruttmann. Na ty jsem myslel, když jsem natáčel Bezúčelnou procházku." Jireš, Jaromil: Deník z New Yorku [Diary from New York]. Scenario and direction Jaromil Jireš. 1993, Videorecording, VHS, length 35 min, library of FAMU, the Prague Film and TV School.

⁷² Boris Kaufman – who like Hammid worked for the US Office of War Information – later cooperated with Hammid on his film "Hymn of the Nations" (1944, both uncredited). This film also included "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the "Internationale", which was later removed. "Cinema: Toscanini: Hymn of the Nations". In: Time magazine, April 29, 1946 and "Hymn of the Nations" on <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036023/fullcredits#cast> (last retrieved on 30.03.2012).

⁷³ *Bregant*: Alexander Hammid's Czech Years 28-29 (cf. fn. 7).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 24.

⁷⁵ "Odvrácená tvář města, v němž jsou skládky odpadků a lidských osudů". Štoll/Matějů: Praha dokumentární 37 (cf. fn. xy).

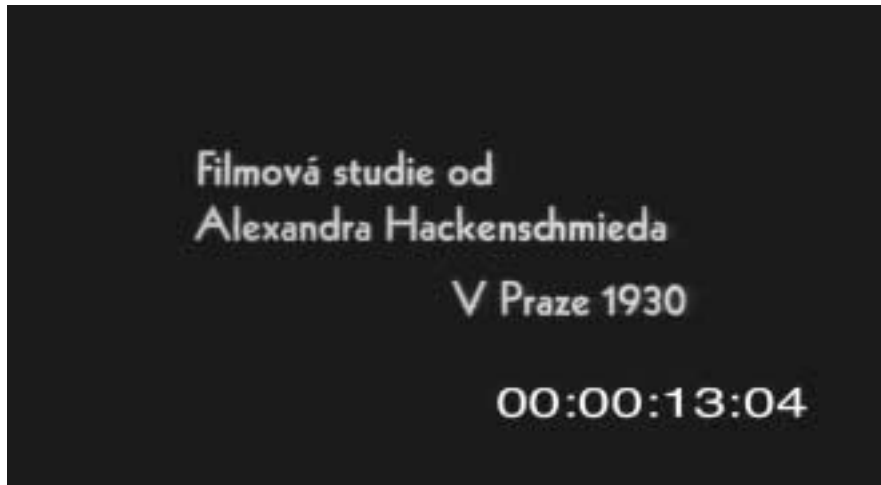


Fig. 14: "Filmová studie"

and the proletarian.⁷⁶ In this film a middle class flâneur in a hat rides to a proletarian district and watches workers on construction sites, but also sees the unemployed and the homeless sleeping under the open sky. Unlike the objective camera, the subject position of the protagonist (as in the "The Man with the Movie Camera") allows for a response to the Libeň environs. The man himself lies down on the grass to have a smoke, with the lighted cigarette repeating the smoking chimney of a Libeň factory. In the context of the intense discussions of Marxist ideas and bourgeois individualism in the 1920s, "Bezúčelná procházka" does not take a position, but rather presents the viewer with visual riddles.

The other difference lies in the evolving mini-narrative following a split or doubling with its creation of a doppelgänger, reminiscent of feature films such as the "Student of Prague" (1913). Hackenschmied's flâneur could in fact be without a regular occupation, unemployed, or a student who is free to take aimless walks through and beyond Prague. In his essay about Charles Baudelaire and in the "Passagenwerk" ("Arcades Project", 1927-1940) Walter Benjamin characterizes the flâneur as an arrogant dandy who – while walking the streets – observes the city.⁷⁷ Here one is reminded of the observing position the poetists held, in Anděl's view. At first we might think that the man in "Bezúčelná procházka" is just a passing observer, not so far from the poetist subject with a lyrical perception of the outside world. Yet this dandy stroller of city streets changes into a different type as soon as he leaves the city center and we get the impression that he is not the beholder but the beheld.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Anděl: Alexandr Hackenschmied 7 (cf. fn. 4), quotes the review in "Studio" 1930-31, č. 7, which saw mainly "ironic documentary scenes" ("ironické dokumentární scény") in "Aimless Walk".

⁷⁷ Benjamin, Walter: The Arcades Project. Cambridge/Mass. 1999, 442.

⁷⁸ "On one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on

“Bezúčelná procházka” is neither a documentary nor a fictional film. This ambiguity is expressed in the coining of a new film genre in the opening title: “Filmová Studie” – a film study or film essay. There is a significant difference between a film essay and a city symphony, mainly in the logical or philosophical structure of an essay. T. Valasek writes that the film essay tries to explore the visual and intellectual possibilities of a filmic idea⁷⁹. Michal Bregant stressed the “idea” out of which Hackenschmied’s film originated: “The idea of ‘Aimless Walk’ is a simple one, and one realizable only by cinematic means. It originated as a very simple idea that Hammid wanted to test, mainly, to disconnect via the medium of editing the character of the main actor and narrator in two.”⁸⁰ Hackenschmied’s “study” of film techniques, space-time relations, and genre, building on a sophisticated use of literary motifs, is unprecedented in Czech cinema.

In that sense one could argue that Hackenschmied was indeed influenced by the Soviet school in further developing their concept of film as philosophy (Eisenstein’s montage as visual dialectics) and cinematic thinking (Vertov’s: the camera as an analytical instrument).⁸¹

“The Student of Prague” (1913, 1926)

Two silent films based on a tragic doppelganger story set in Prague may have been an inspiration for the doppelganger in Hackenschmied’s debut. Both films bear the word Prague in their title: “The Student of Prague”.

The motif of the doppelganger (and the word itself) goes back to romanticist literature. A key text is Adelbert von Chamisso’s “Peter Schlemihl’s wundersame Geschichte”/“Peter Schlemihl’s Remarkable Story” (1814) where the hero sells his shadow for a sack of never-ending gold to a man who turns out to be the Devil. Despite his wealth, Schlemihl cannot marry his fiancée, as he has no shadow and the shameful “lack of a shadow is the sign of ineradicable difference.”⁸² At the end of Chamisso’s text, this difference is revealed: Peter Schlemihl – his name comes from the Yiddish schlemiehl or schlimazel describing an unlucky person – is Jewish.

E. T. A. Hoffmann developed this idea of split or double identity. In his story “Die Geschichte vom verlorren Spiegelbild” (“Story of the Lost Mirror Image”), Erasmus Spikher, a married man, falls in love with a girl on his journey to Florence, but has to leave Italy. His innamorata asks him to leave his mirror image behind with her. First he refuses (“How can you keep my reflection? It is part of me. It springs out to meet me from every clear body of water or polished surface”) but then gives in. When his wife in Germany sees him without a reflection, she calls him a demon and does not

the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man.” *Ibid.* 420.

⁷⁹ Valasek, Thomas E.: Alexander Hammid. Průvodce jeho filmářskou dráhou [Alexander Hammid. The Guide to his Career as a Film Maker]. In: *Slováková, Andrea* (ed.): *Do. Revue pro dokumentární film*. JSAF, Jihlava 2003, 75-138, 104.

⁸⁰ Bregant: Alexander Hammid’s Czech Years 26 (cf. fn. 7).

⁸¹ Drubeck, Natascha: *Russisches Licht. Von der Ikone zum vorrevolutionären Kino*. Köln, in print, here Chapter II.6.

⁸² Block, Richard: Queering the Jew Who Would Be German: Peter Schlemihl’s Strange and Wonderful History. *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 40 (2004) 2, 93-110, 97.



Fig. 15: Balduin and his double in "Der Student von Prag" (1926)

want him back. He travels the world to find his reflection. There he "struck upon a certain Peter Schlemihl, who had sold his shadow; they planned to travel together, so that Erasmus Spikher could provide the necessary shadow and Peter Schlemihl could reflect properly in a mirror. But nothing came of it."⁸³

Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1839) is another romantic doppelganger story. There the hero kills his twin ("In me didst thou exist – and in my death, see [...] how utterly thou hast murdered thyself"). "William Wilson" was loosely adapted into the 1913 German film "Der Student von Prag" ("The Student of Prague"; directed by Stellan Rye and Paul Wegener with a script by Hanns Heinz Ewers). In the silent film the poor student Balduin signs a contract that allows Scapinelli to take anything he wishes from the room. Scapinelli takes his mirror image, which begins to live a life of its own. When his doppelganger turns against him, Balduin kills himself, in the act of destroying his "alter ego."

The 1926 "Student of Prague" film (directed by Henrik Galeen, starring Conradt Veidt) shares with the earlier film a Czech actress: Lyda Salmonová. The 1913 ver-

⁸³ "[...] beide wollten Kompagnie gehen, so daß Erasmus Spikher den nötigen Schlagschatten werfen, Peter Schlemihl's dagegen das gehörige Spiegelbild reflektieren sollte; es wurde aber nichts daraus." Cf. "Die Geschichte vom verlorren Spiegelbilde" (1815). In: *Hoffmann*, E.T.A.: *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*. Darmstadt 1985, 282.

sion of that film was even closer connected to Prague as it was shot on location in and around the Prague Castle (for example using the Belvedere as backdrop). These film representations of Prague form a background for Hackenschmied's treatment of the doppelgänger.

Libeň as Prague's Double

According to the filmography of the Czech National Film Archive,⁸⁴ only two Czech films used Libeň as a location up until 1930. Most on-location shooting was in Staré and Nové Město, Hradčany, Letná, Malá Strana, Vyšehrad, several in Smíchov and Holešovice, and three films in Karlín.⁸⁵

"Bezúčelná procházka" ignores the historical sights of "old" Prague, in order to follow a centrifugal movement and explore the city's half-industrial periphery in the north-east. One might ask why Hackenschmied's working title "Na okraji"/"On the Outskirts"⁸⁶ was abandoned in favour of the slightly misleading "Bezúčelná procházka". After all, "procházka" refers to walking, not riding a tram. In her chapter on Prague as "magical capital of Europe", as André Breton called it, Anja Tippner mentions a text seminal for the literary topos of Prague in the twentieth century: "Le Passant de Prague", written in 1902 by Guillaume Apollinaire. This text – highly influential in Czech literary circles – contains two elements which correspond to "Bezúčelná procházka": its title "Le Passant du Prague" ("The Stroller/Walker of Prague"),⁸⁷ and the location of Apollinaire's hotel in the street Na poříčí (he spells it "Porjitz"), which is also the first topographically identifiable point in the film. From Na poříčí Apollinaire takes a walk through Prague together with an accidental acquaintance, Isaac Laquedem,⁸⁸ an incarnation of the Wandering Jew.⁸⁹ Tippner views the outcome of Apollinaire's visit to Prague in the context of an ongoing modernist – and in her account specifically surrealist – appreciation of Prague as a space drifting between the "uncanny" ("unheimlich") and the "idyllic":

Viele der in Apollinaires Text eingeführten zentralen Motive wirken im surrealistischen Prager-text weiter: der Flaneur, die Magie, Judentum und Kabbala. Für Teige steht Apollinaire in der Tradition der schwarzen Romantik [...] ⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Both dramas used the old wooden bridge over the Vltava which was replaced by the Masaryk bridge in 1928: "Plameny života" [Flames of Life] (1921, dir. by Václav Binovec, studio Weteb) and "Batalion" [The Battalion], 1927 (dir. by Přemysl Pražský) starring Prague balladeer Karel Hašler. Český hraný film I. 189–1930 [Czech Fiction Film]. Praha 1995, 280, 150, 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 280–283.

⁸⁶ *Anděl*: Alexandr Hackenschmied 7 (cf. fn. 4), quoting the journal "Studio" 2 (1930–31) č. 7, 218–219.

⁸⁷ The "stroller" or "flaneur" was reused by Nezval in his prose "A Prague Flaneur". Nezval, Vítězslav: Pražský chodec [Prague Flâneur]. Praha 1938. – Tippner, Anja: "Die permanente Avantgarde?" Surrealismus in Prag. Köln 2009, 159.

⁸⁸ Taken from the title of a novel by Alexandre Dumas, 1853.

⁸⁹ Tippner, Anja: "Die permanente Avantgarde?" 151–153 (cf. fn. 85).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 153. Tippner quotes M. Decaudin's term of "glissement" to describe Apollinaire's drifting between the Real and the Imaginary. – Cf. also *Dierna*, Guiseppe: Praha za soumraku Rakouska-Uherska: mýtus a jeho dvojník. [Prague in the Twilight of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: The Myth and its Double]. In: Analogon 18 (1996) 109–112.

Even if we do not know which one of the doppelganger stories Hackenschmied might have had in mind, it is striking that he chose Libeň for his "film study" of doubling. It might also be a coincidence that in 1930 Libeň had the only surviving buildings of a Jewish ghetto in Greater Prague (the residential neighborhoods of the old ghetto in centrally located Prague-Josefov were demolished between 1893 and 1913). However, when "Bezúčelná procházka" stages the doubling or splitting of the nameless stroller (passant) played by Votýpka in Libeň, both the German student Balduin without a reflection and the shadowless Jew Schlemihl come to mind. In the last part of the film the connection between the doppelganger and the shadow turns into a visual argument: the human figure in Libeň is seen as silhouette (7:10), as if the man without his alter ego had turned into a shadow. This shot closes the circle with the earlier shot in the film where we see a shadow of the tram from a subjective angle but there is no person attached to this point of view.

In Libeň "Bezúčelná procházka" registers the effect of the worldwide economic depression. The film shows us the sad and tired face of modernity: the industrialization, the exploitation of water and soil. For a long time Libeň used to be an undesirable spot for living because it often flooded. On the other hand in the second half of the nineteenth century, the empty spaces close to industrial Karlín turned into a highly exploited and productive site, generating considerable wealth and work for many. In the twentieth century it started to lose this role, the used and battered land was abandoned and slowly returned to its former emptiness.

This post-industrial wasteland is home to the "ineradicable difference" that was personified in Schlemihl in Chamisso's romanticist tale. Hackenschmied takes the modern Schlemihl-William-Balduin to Libeň, a place that procures reflections for people without an intact mirror image and houses eternal wanderers, people without shadows. In the twentieth century the romantic metaphor of the "shadowless" became the condition of the modern, cosmopolitan man.⁹¹ Sometimes such an existence without unequivocal identity leading to aimless rambling was freely chosen, often it was an unwanted result of the hostility of the age. Only a decade after Hackenschmied's film many Prague citizens experienced forced migration, exile, or deportation. The author of this film was able to choose western exile, but many citizens of Libeň were deported to the east.⁹²

In Hackenschmied's Libeň the dark water seems to be everywhere, with a mirror surface reflecting and doubling. It is the same water that ran through Old Prague. In the final shots, after the man has met his double, superimposed images of urban architecture drown in the Libeň waters. Libeň is the shadow, the dirty doppelganger of the city centre – held together by the tram going back and forth mechanically, and the river Vltava, passively reflecting whatever happens on its banks. By taking apart

⁹¹ According to Rolf J. Goebel, the Benjaminian flâneur is the "personification of geographic dislocation, cultural transgression, and conceptual reconfiguration." Goebel, Rolf J.: "Benjamin's Flâneur in Japan: Urban Modernity and Conceptual Relocation." In: *The German Quarterly* 71 (1998) No. 4, 377-391, 378.

⁹² *Drubek-Meyer*, Natascha: Opfer und Leichenverbrenner. Das "jüdische Thema" in der tschechischen Literatur und Kinematographie nach 1945. In: *Osteuropa* 58 (2008) no. 6, 341-356.



Fig. 16: “Aimless Walk”, Dark Reflection

the genre of city symphony, “Bezúčelná procházka” offers a study of a Prague hitherto unseen – through the dark reflection of its doubles.

Biography of Alexandr Hackenschmied/Sasha Hammid

Alexandr Hackenschmied was born on 17 December 1907 in Linz to Czech parents. He grew up in Prague where he studied architecture and art history. In the 1920s he started working with Czech film directors as a set designer. As a writer he contributed to the journal *Pestrý týden* and other periodicals. In 1930 he made his first film “Bezúčelná procházka”, in 1932 “Na Pražském hradě” (“At the Prague Castle”), and in 1932/33 he collaborated on “Zem spieva” (“The Earth Sings”) with Karol Plicka. During the 1930s Hackenschmied worked for the Film Studio in Zlín (Filmové Ateliéry Baťových závodů, FAB), founded by Jan A. Bat’a in 1936. While employed there, Hackenschmied cooperated on numerous advertizing films, such as *Silnice zpívá* (The Highway Sings, 1937, directed by Elmar Klos). In 1938 he shot *CRISIS* together with the American director Herbert Kline. This documentary film reflected the political situation in the Sudetenland in the year of the Munich Agreement leading to the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. When the film premiered at the end of March 1939 in New York, Hackenschmied had already left the country. One of the critics wrote an article in the “New York World Telegram” with the title: “Timely Film Shown on Munich ‘Betrayal’. The ‘Crisis’ Tells Story of Tragedy in Czechoslovakia’s Dismemberment at Hands of Europe’s

Great Powers". Hackenschmied went first to Paris and then to London where he – again with Kline – completed "Lights out in Europe" (1939-1940).

In 1939 Hackenschmied arrived in the USA and changed his name to Hammid. In Los Angeles he met Maya Deren (born Eleanora Derenkovskaia in Kiev). The films they made together in the forties played a seminal role in the development of American experimental cinema. "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943), made by two European immigrants outside the American movie industry, provided or (re)introduced an aesthetic model of cinema as independent art. Deren subsequently became a filmmaker in her own right. Later Hammid worked as a documentary filmmaker for the Office of War Information and for the United Nations. He also worked on the IMAX format film *TO FLY* (1976).

After 1989, Czech filmmakers were able to reestablish contact with Hammid and visited him in New York. Alexandr Hackenschmied / Sasha Hammid died on 26 July 2004 in Manhattan.

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