

Émigré Traces: John Heartfield in Prague

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The article examines John Heartfield's stay in Czechoslovakia between 1933 and 1938. Circumstances of his flight from Germany are discussed on the basis of archival materials, the reception of his photomontages for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* is revisited, and his contribution to the Czech book design of the interwar period is stressed.

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It would seem that we know almost everything about German graphic designer John Heartfield (Helmut Franz Josef Herzfeld): his role in Berlin Dada, his book designs for the Berlin publisher Malik, his propaganda work for the German Communist Party, the Soviet stay in 1931-1932, the escape to Czechoslovakia in 1933, and five years later a further flight to England.¹ An 'official' biography by his brother Wieland Herzfelde appeared in three editions, each slightly different, and the scholarly literature is enormous. Nonetheless, with a biography that fractured, and numerous sources hidden behind the barrier of a lesser-known language – not to speak of the political biases that invalidate parts of previous research – areas to (re)visit remain. The present essay looks at those connected to Heartfield's stay in Czechoslovakia during 1933-1938. With the help of Czech archival materials, it is possible to revisit refresh details of Heartfield's biography, trace conflicts resulting from the exhibition of his works, and review his forgotten participation in the world of Czech book design.

Politics of a Biography

On 22 April 1933, not three months after Hitler's ascent to power, John Heartfield succeeded in escaping from Berlin and crossing illegally from Germany to Czechoslovakia over snow-covered mountains. He proceeded to Prague, where he appeared still in hiking gear before the surprised patrons of Café Continental, a gathering place for German émigrés. One of hundreds of persons then hastily fleeing Germany, he stayed and worked in Prague until December 1938, when post-Munich circumstances forced him to leave for England.

As Heartfield came to Prague with no documents, an interview with the Prague police was a necessity. On 25 April 1933, the interviewing officer recorded among other things: 'The present individual is a graphic artist and will, by his own statement, be able to find means of subsistence. He was not a member of any party. He wants to stay in Prague permanently and together with his brother establish a new livelihood here'. The officer further noted that 'The present individual is of Jewish confession (presently not practising)'. His final recommendation was that Heartfield apply for a 'residency permit without passport'.²

The next day, 26 April 1933, Heartfield submitted a residency application. Among other things, he gave an account of his escape:

During the Easter Holiday I was attacked at night in my apartment by SS and SA. I succeeded in escaping through the window. Subsequently I hid for a while with friends and tried to retrieve from my apartment at least the most important things. This turned out to be impossible because the intruders settled in my apartment permanently and anyone

who went there [...] would have exposed himself to maximum danger. Because I was in constant danger of being attacked in Berlin, I eventually decided to leave the country, a prudent decision as I lost my entire work material through the seizure of my apartment. I proceeded on foot from Oberschreiberhau across the Czechoslovak border to Dolní Rokytnice, and from there I took a train to Prague. Here I found refuge with Dr. Schmolka, Prague, Kamzíkova 3, land registry no. 545, where I am now registered. My father was Jewish, he died, my mother was Protestant and is also dead. I myself do not belong to any religion and carry no party membership. I am respectfully applying for permission to stay in Prague as an independent artist.³

In both documents Heartfield denied his political links – specifically, his membership in the German Communist Party (KPD) – and put his Jewish background on record. Indeed, admitting his association with KPD would have been quite unwise. Already on 1 March 1933, soon after the *Reichstag* burning and with a *de facto* suspension of German civil law in sight, the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior circulated a memorandum drawing attention to an increased influx to Czechoslovakia of German refugees, whom it labelled potentially subversive elements. Heartfield qualified in this regard. He was a communist and his escape was fundamentally driven by the political repression visited upon the KPD after the collapse of the Weimar state. Despite receiving a remarkable 12.3 percent of the vote in elections held on 5 March 1933, by the end of that month many of its functionaries had been detained. In the resulting transfer of KPD activities abroad, the reconstitution of communist publishing formed a prime goal. Heartfield's brother Wieland Herzfelde, a prominent communist activist, had already moved his Malik Verlag to Prague and launched an émigré magazine, *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, close to the KPD. The *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ) although not formally associated with Malik, was also a KPD priority.

While Heartfield's political motivation for fleeing is transparent, the other point on the record, his Jewish background, seems at first harder to discuss. The refugee forms used by the Prague police commonly asked whether one intended to request assistance from the Prague Jewish Aid Committee. Heartfield never did so – but how far was he really from being a Jewish artist on the run? Can we meaningfully raise the question of his – and his brother's – Jewishness? The 1930s have many contradictory indicators in this respect. Prague-based émigré periodicals, such as *Der Gegen-Angriff*, *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, and even *AIZ*, in which both Wieland and John were active, show Nazi anti-Semitism as a recurrent theme. Initially, there was basic unwillingness to treat the issue outside the class schema supplied by Marxist ideology, summarized by a period slogan: '*Ob Jud, ob Christ – Kapitalist bleibt Kapitalist*' (Jew or Christian – Once a Capitalist, Always a Capitalist). But other factors began to emerge. For one, the Nazis quickly seized on Heartfield's background, thus effectively constructing his Jewishness, although by their means and for their purposes. Moreover, the trauma of emigration and forced exposure to the mechanisms of Nazi anti-Semitism made a number of Marxist Jewish intellectuals aware of things other than class. In a polemic commentary by Heartfield in *Der Gegen-Angriff* made during his initial months in Prague, for example, we note a sarcastic paragraph on anti-Semitic statements by Nazi ministers Frick and Goebbels.⁴ Significantly, this sarcasm returns in Heartfield's photomontages that target the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany. Although their number – perhaps no more than six – is tiny against the backdrop of Heartfield's entire work, these works quite exceptionally do not fit doctrinal discussions. They are

straightforward and – classless. Nor were they merely reactions to topical events such as the imposition of the so-called Nuremberg Laws in 1935,⁵ but continued during Heartfield's English exile and beyond.⁶ As late as 1960, Heartfield, speaking in East Germany, devoted a speech to anti-Semitism in which he denounced vandalization of Jewish cemeteries in the neighbouring Federal Republic: 'We will challenge each single manifestation of anti-Semitism, even though it may involve juveniles, because this is a phenomenon which turns out to be deadlier than cyanide'.⁷ The force of Heartfield's voice was veiled by party jargon, though – in order for a citizen of the German Democratic Republic to talk about anti-Semitism, West Germany, considered an 'heir' to the Nazi state in GDR propaganda, had to be invoked. Heartfield seems to have been comfortable with this.

The Scandals

Judging by the sheer volume of work during the Czech period, Heartfield's priority lay in photomontages for the *AIZ*, which was printed in Prague through November 1938, from mid-1936 under the title *Volks-Illustrierte (VI)*. Clearly, this was his 'mission'; of the 238 *AIZ* photomontages by Heartfield from between 1930 and 1938, 201 were made in Prague.⁸ The first to be made there appeared on 10 May 1933. *AIZ* was meant to be smuggled into the Reich, but other ways of sending photomontages there are also documented, for instance as postcard reprints captioned in German and Czech (figure 1).



However, the Czech public, outside the Sudetenland, probably knew little about them until a representative selection of Heartfield's work was shown at an international caricature exhibition organized by the Mánes Art Society in the spring of 1934.⁹ The story of this exhibition is known – the National Socialist German state exerted strong diplomatic pressure, leading to the removal of those caricatures offensive to 'German feelings'. The situation was repeated in 1936, when Mánes organized an international photography exhibition that also included Heartfield's work, and again in the fall of 1937, during the Society's fifty-year jubilee show.

These conflicts emanated almost reflexively from Czechoslovak censorship practices. Rather than practising pre-emptive censorship, the interwar Czechoslovak state let publishers and printers print what they wished, but reserved the right to prohibit public circulation of materials it deemed objectionable. To avoid such confiscations, especially of periodicals, publishers usually

submitted their products to the police before printing. Controversial passages were omitted in proof, hence the occurrence of blank columns marked ‘censored’, especially in periodicals with radical leanings. (Books with passages blackened by court order are also known.) Exhibition censorship, by contrast, was not the norm. Art associations simply did not communicate with the police. This is documented in a police report quoted in a memorandum from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, written on the occasion of the 1937 Mánes anniversary exhibition: ‘Following a long-established practice, art societies do not report their events to the Police Headquarters. The police tolerate this and do not enforce legal directives rigorously in such cases’.¹⁰

Of the three Mánes exhibitions, the 1934 International Exhibition of Caricatures and Humor (Mezinárodní výstava karikatur a humoru), where Heartfield exhibited no fewer than 36



works, certainly became the most notorious (figure 2).¹¹ It opened on Friday, 6 April, and several days later, probably on Thursday, 12 April, German ambassador Walter Koch submitted a protest to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs against the presence of works that in his view ridiculed the current German state, including the Chancellor, that is, Hitler; President Hindenburg; and the swastika, the official German emblem. He requested their removal. Five of the indicted works were by Heartfield.¹² According to press reports,¹³ deputy foreign minister Kamil Krofta explained to Koch that he could not intervene in matters of art, but a second German *démarche* followed quickly, and on Saturday, 14 April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted Mánes President Josef Gočár. Gočár was diplomatic and assured the Ministry of his understanding. But negotiations continued still on Monday, 16 April, when Krofta himself had to get on the phone and ‘very urgently appealed to Mánes’ patriotism and wished it to follow a request dictated by higher interests of the state’.¹⁴ The Mánes secretary, who received this message, called back after a while requesting that the removal order be confirmed in writing, to demonstrate that Mánes had ceded only to such ‘higher interests’. He had a reason. The Prague German-language newspaper, *Prager Tagblatt*, reported on 17 April that over the weekend Mánes had held an emergency meeting in which all reachable members had decided ‘not to make any changes voluntarily’.¹⁵ Heartfield showed great appreciation for their action in a letter to Mánes on 15 April 1934, in which he thanked the society on behalf of German émigrés, stressing that attacks on their freedom implied future attacks on Czech artists as well.¹⁶

Although the Ministry initially took a liberal stance, at least according to press reports, the internal memorandum of 17 April 1934 that summarizes these events indicates that the

Ministry actually proceeded quite aggressively, expecting full compliance. That a police order would be necessary seemed to have shocked the Ministry. A ministerial official noted with astonishment that if *Prager Tagblatt* is right in reporting that the Mánes membership voted for non-compliance, the Ministry would face two possibilities, neither of which fit official expectations: ‘Either the Mánes Society does not recognize its duty to subordinate its particular interests, artistic or commercial, to overall state interests, or it does not recognize the competence of Minister Beneš and his deputy Krofta to judge what state interest in the domain of foreign policy requires. In both cases Mánes’s decisions are a lesson for the Ministry that will not be easy to forget’.¹⁷ Clearly, a mechanism of pressure, rather than a court decision, the only principled way of handling the case, was assumed.

In 1936, when Heartfield exhibited twenty photomontages at the International Exhibition of Modern Photography (Mezinárodní výstava moderní fotografie), the lesson had sunk in. A German *démarche*, speedily honoured, requested the removal of two items: *Dagger of Honor* (*Der Ehrendolch*, *AIZ*, 31 October 1935) and *They Judge the People* (*Sie richten das Volk*, *AIZ*, 12 March 1936). In 1937, the Czechoslovak government became proactive, removing potentially controversial pieces in advance of diplomatic protests. This may well reflect previous experience, but the 1937 exhibition was also officially under the patronage of the President of the Republic, Eduard Beneš. The Minister of Schools and Popular Enlightenment apparently raised objections at the invitational opening: ‘According to a confidential communication, the Minister made organizers aware of the objectionable nature of two works, catalogue no. 28 (Glory and Fall of a Dictator) and no. 29 (The Dictator’s Thoughts About the Well-Being of the People) by František Bidlo. The organizers have removed these pictures and crossed them out from the catalogue so that today, when the exhibit opened to the public at 10 a.m., they no longer were on view’.¹⁸ Surprisingly, Heartfield’s photomontages made it past the official opening, but prompted protests the very next day; four of the six on display were removed.

Despite its failures, Mánes comes out of these affairs looking defiant. It not only resisted the Ministry, but also made several gestures of solidarity, for instance offering free tickets to German refugee organizations. (The exhibitions, especially that of 1934, were undoubtedly important events for the German exile community.) And the minutes from the membership meeting on 18 November 1937 record a proposal by Mánes president Gočár to organize an exhibition of censored artists. It received a resounding yes in a vote, but the proposal never materialized.¹⁹ The police seem to have resisted in their way as well. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum summarizes an officer’s finding after an on-site inspection: ‘The adduced works do not draw any special attention by visitors, the apparent reason being that their manner is identical to caricatures printed in the daily press’.²⁰ The memorandum also contains an itemized list suggesting that the inspecting officer proceeded nonchalantly, concluding for example that in Heartfield’s photomontage, *The Peaceful Fish of Prey* (*Der friedfertige Raubfisch*, *AIZ*, 12 May 1937), it was ‘in no way obvious that the montage should represent General Göring’. What one could see was a shark’s head ‘propped on some uniform decorated with golden threads’.²¹ In *Death to the Octopus of War* (*Tod dem Kriegspolypen*, *AIZ*, 11 August 1937) the officer did note a German-type helmet, but ‘the swastika was not on it’. It is hard to establish whether the exhibition and print versions differed, but the officer might have turned a blind eye, as the *AIZ* reproduction actually does contain this symbol of the Nazi state, and it was precisely such use of state symbols that formally justified Nazi protests.

The Photomontages

Heartfield's basic tool of expression, photomontage, had already been fundamentally transformed at his emigration in 1933. Writing in 1929, German art critic and photographer Franz Roh noted in the preface to his influential illustrated anthology, *foto-auge/photo-eye*: 'While photomontages used to be from destructions, chaotic whirls of blown-up wholes, they now mostly show a constructive structure and an almost classically guarded and calm manner'.²² The new photomontage became simpler, often more illusionistic and, in a salute to the 'new photography' movement, largely preserved individual images intact rather than dismembering them. Heartfield's *AIZ* work shows such photomontages, including biplanar, poster-like compositions with a lone foreground element and a simple photographic background, often compatible with one-point perspective. Unretouched photographs with added lettering are also present. At the same time, his work from the Prague period certainly cannot be reduced to a single compositional formula. 'Richer' photomontages consisting of multiple segments and conflicting perspectives also appear. Overall, Heartfield develops into a caricaturist, doing what had been common in the field of photomontage: furthering an unmistakably personal style, a distinguishing 'touch'. Heartfield solved this challenge in a unique way; rather than visual 'handwriting', he offered a personal manipulation of photographic material. In that sense, he furthered a general mistrust of the 'drawing hand' characteristic for vanguard artists in this era of mechanical reproduction.²³ At the same time, it should be noted that, in the Czech lands at least, Heartfield had no systematic imitators, but only distant echoes. Czech caricaturists such as František Bidlo, Adolf Hoffmeister and Antonín Pelc had already negotiated photomontage in their work and were not ready to give up their individual styles. The only Czech name that occasionally appears in the Prague issues of *AIZ/VI* is Karel Vaněk – actually the pseudonym of an old *AIZ* staff member, Hans Leupold.

In general, the acceptance of photomontage as a modern means of expression was not automatic. Thus in 1928, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* brought an essay by Franz Höllering, who cautioned proletarian photographers in dramatic words to avoid the bourgeois fad of photomontage: 'You are a worker. Be proud of it. You have nothing in common with the latest bourgeois pastime fashion. In your hands, a camera is meaningful only if you use it as a weapon'.²⁴ Others attempted to justify photomontage in the proletarian context. The Hungarian-born Alfred Kemény (1895-1945), writing under the pseudonym Durus, articulated a theory of revolutionary photomontage that fit the proletarian frame. Whereas bourgeois photomontage falsified social reality through fragmentation, 'Revolutionary photomontage of the Marxist 'artist' (technician) **reveals** [Teige's emphasis] actual circumstances, real relations and contradictions of social reality through photographic details (reality details) related dialectically both in terms of content and form'.²⁵ Durus found that this revolutionary dialectical photomontage was most intimately linked with 'the epoch-making activity of the ingenious "monteur" John Heartfield'.²⁶ Much discussion of Heartfield in the German émigré press continued this line of argument, and attempted to exempt Heartfield from the objection of bourgeois formalism or traces of Dada. Critics of his photomontages, however, did not disappear entirely. Soviet criticism disliked the fact that Heartfield was good at destructive caricature, but not at providing clear, positive images. The influential Hungarian literary theorist Georg Lukács criticized Heartfield from his Moscow exile as well.²⁷

We note in passing that the Nazis discussed photomontage after 1933 as well, expressing their rejection of the technique. In doing so, they were treading on thin ice, for their own use of

montage was actually promiscuous. But one could have no doubts as to Heartfield. In 1938, with Heartfield on a number of ‘wanted lists’, a freshly baked Nazi theorist of propaganda, *Parteigenosse* Erwin Schockel denounced Heartfield in racial terms – while not denying the efficacy of his posters. Having first described him as a ‘Jew disorderly dressed in dirty clothes’, he proceeded to give his basic criticisms: ‘Just as the Jew was never himself creative, merely producing ‘works’ by copying, exploitation and attempted insight, this man Heartfield is in no way different. All his posters, illustrations and the like are photographs. Indeed, they are in part very skilfully put together by way of montage to which lettering is added’.²⁸ The predicate ‘very skilfully put together’ (*sehr geschickt montiert*) was a standard ethnic epithet from the inventory of anti-Semitic discourse – the motif of the Jew as a mechanical person. It was popular in Germany, where it had been articulated by Richard Wagner in the 1850s.²⁹

Curiously, little attention was paid in these discussions to one factor that raised Heartfield’s images beyond mere photomontages – the accompanying text(s). While mostly anonymous, we assume that these originated largely with Wieland Herzfelde.³⁰ The brothers’ collaboration obviously flourished in the Prague days, and in view of its extent, one may wonder about the fundamental issue of authorship – it is hard to say what prevents one from regarding Wieland as co-creator of the final product. He had his merits as a poet, more so than John, at least to judge from private poems such as ‘Flüchtlingslied’ (Exile’s Song, 1938).³¹ The texts often go well beyond the usual gloss on imagery. Were a formal predecessor to be named, the Renaissance and Baroque emblem suggests itself. This was a tripartite hybrid genre on the border of entertainment and popular pedagogy, consisting of an image (*pictura*), a brief, often puzzle-like title (*superscriptio*) and a further explicative text (*subscriptio*), often a poem. The intent was to administer a philosophical, religious, moral, or even humorous message by way of glossing an image. Typically bundled to whole collections in so-called emblem books, emblem images would show human figures, animals, plants, objects or complex events, always subject to textual interpretation typically located in the *subscriptio* part. A number of *AIZ/VI* montages have this structure. Thus Heartfield’s photomontage entitled ‘Hurrah, the butter is finished’ (*AIZ*, 19 December 1935) shows a family at a dining table in the ‘incomprehensible’ act of enthusiastically digesting metal objects. The event, as well as the somewhat puzzling title, the modern equivalent of *superscriptio*, are then explicated by the attached quotation from a speech by Göring, the equivalent of *subscriptio*: ‘Iron ore has always made the *Reich* strong, while butter and lard have made a people fat at the best’. At the same time, there is continuity with a more recent tradition. Glossing, explaining, captioning – thus controlling – the image was central to the late nineteenth-century socialist enlightenment movement, in which the ‘captionist’ held a crucial role. Communist propagandist Willi Münzenberg’s straightforward statement on the importance of text (written in 1931) is worth quoting: ‘A skillful editor can reverse the significance of any photograph [by a caption] and influence a reader who lacks political sophistication in any direction he chooses’.³²

Czech discussions of photomontage appear to have been limited, and neither Heartfield’s photomontages nor Herzfelde’s texts received detailed discussion.³³ Nonetheless, Czech sources do provide some insight into Heartfield’s working methods. Remember that in Prague he continued with ‘richer’ compositions, some of which required extensive preparations, including studio photography and careful staging. In some instances, objects or props were presumably prepared just for the occasion. One thinks of the numerous variations on the Hitlerite Christmas tree, or the remarkable *Die Butter ist alle! (Hurrah, no more butter!)*, which bear distinct traces of

surrealism. Here, Heartfield relied on his Czech collaborators. The Czech photographer and typographer Vladimír Hnízdo (1906-1983) recalled:

I stood as a model for Heartfield's montage 'China, the awakening giant – woe to the intruder!', which appeared as a double-page spread [in *V* 4 May 1938]. I was tied with two strong dirty boat ropes that some harbour people let him borrow just for his friendly smile. My head was then cut off and replaced with the head of a Chinese. Other workers in the printing office could not resist either when Johnny asked them to stand as models. His rule was to look for models always in his immediate neighborhood and nobody could refuse, even when this was occasionally not much fun. [...] For instance, one day he put our employee Honza into a large earthen jar that used to be a mustard container in some store. He placed him inside so that only his head was sticking out, onto which Heartfield poured real mustard now running down Honza's face in streams. We were telling him to use some brown marmalade or chocolate frosting instead, but he did not give in. He did not want to work with fake means because he thought that the result would also be fake.³⁴

The 'mustard photomontage' appeared in *AIZ* on 8 March 1935, but, based on the proportions of its individual segments, we rather think that the above-mentioned Honza could have been put in the jar only via montage. This small inconsistency – a desire for a nice story took the upper hand – should not cast doubt on Heartfield's working methods. His was not a photomontage based on the appearance of images randomly drawn from a hat. Dada was left far behind.

The Hosts

Although known and respected in Prague for his work, Heartfield's contact with the Czech avant-garde was apparently not intensive. This may surprise those who think of interwar Prague as a happy place where everyone knew everyone, but German refugees in Czechoslovakia typically sought out primarily their ethnic and/or political counterparts. Thus, Wieland Herzfelde recalled that he contacted the Czechoslovak Communist Party as early as April 1933.³⁵ Despite its leftist leanings, the core of the Czech avant-garde, born in the optimism of the early 1920s, was simply not a natural match. In 1932-1934, this loose group was moving towards André Breton's conception of surrealism, which was critical of Stalin's Soviet Union. Heartfield, by contrast, continued to be a loyal communist and, at least in the printed record, never expressed criticism of the Soviet Union.³⁶ Among the founding members of the Czech interwar avant-garde, perhaps only Adolf Hoffmeister (1902-1973) had some contacts with him; one imagines so, since Hoffmeister was active on the Mánes board of directors and galvanized the caricature exhibition of 1934. Yet it is indicative that even he, in his reminiscences, mentions but one prewar encounter with Heartfield – on the occasion of Heartfield's departure – although he reports several conversations with him in the 1950s and 1960s.³⁷

Lack of private exchanges does not equate to a lack of publicly expressed support, as documented by Karel Teige's article 'Free Art?' from 1934. Teige gave Heartfield highest marks: 'Heartfield's montages are the peak in the evolution of modern revolutionary caricature, and they also were the most valuable contribution in the exhibition from the entire collection of international caricature. Diplomatic notes by the German ambassador described **these top works of modern caricature** [Teige's emphasis], which incidentally represent the most genuine works of the contemporary avant-garde in art, as mere heavy-handed trash'.³⁸ He then denounced the

removal of Heartfield's work, ending with a brief history of political caricature, in which Heartfield ranks with Honoré Daumier.

One might wish for more from a man who in 1932 had written an important essay on photomontage, but clearly, 'Free Art?' was primarily an expression of solidarity.³⁹ One senses as well that Teige, while passionate in his defense of artistic expression and anti-Nazi protest, also tried to integrate Heartfield into his own perspective. For one, he used the occasion to comment critically on the exhibition's Soviet pieces, which apparently did not include only caricature. He did not think highly of those works that showed 'a kind of academic classicism and romanticism, or even conventional descriptive realism'.⁴⁰ Such judgements implicitly contrasted Heartfield with conservative proletarian art. More remarkably, Teige repeatedly tried to incorporate Heartfield into avant-garde art (meaning, for Teige in 1934, principally surrealism) – recall his statement that Heartfield's are 'the most genuine works of the contemporary avant-garde in the art'. Such interpretations nonetheless highlight the distance between the Czech avant-garde and the German communist emigration. One week before Teige's article, *Der Gegen-Angriff* ran an anonymous piece entitled 'Freedom of Art – Slightly Crippled', which reacted to the Mánes affair in no uncertain terms: 'No – there is no freedom of art; there is only an art of freedom. [...] What therefore remains for us to do is not to fight for a utopian 'Freedom of Art,' but for political freedom, which is the only way to make art free'.⁴¹ There is no attempt here to integrate Heartfield into any art movement – everything is politics, there are no subtleties, no talk of the avant-garde.

Overall, it seems that during his Prague years Heartfield, or, better, the Heartfield brothers, could rely on expressions of solidarity, but were otherwise confined to that relatively small part of the Czech communist Left that kept contacts with German émigrés. An important role was played by Jarmila Haasová-Nečasová (1896-1980), a journalist and intimate of the famous Prague German author, the *rasender Reporter* Egon Erwin Kisch, and by her partner and future husband, the journalist Vincenc Nečas (1903-1972). Heartfield felt good in the Nečas home, not only thanks to Jarmila's proficiency in German – commitment to a common political cause and shared experience was crucial. Czech, German and/or Jewish, most in this circle were refugees in one way or another. Jarmila, Czech by origin, was married in the 1920s to an important Prague literary critic, Willy Haas, with whom she moved to Berlin. She escaped home in 1933, and became active as an editor of Czech communist women's journals. Another communist activist, Franz C. Weisskopf, was also a Prague German-language author who became active in Berlin in the 1920s, then returned to become the *AIZ* editor-in-chief after 1933. And Kisch, a Communist Party member since its founding, had strong authority in the Nečas circle, although he resided only irregularly in Prague. He was detained in Berlin after the *Reichstag* burning, but as a Czechoslovak citizen he was let go. He continued to contribute to *AIZ* after 1933 and held the highest opinion of Heartfield. Overall, one senses an echo of the prewar Czech-German-Jewish Prague, with a major difference – this was a solidly communist, not just liberal or leftist, community.

Among the traces Heartfield left in this ambience are Czech adaptations of his *VI* photomontages. It is a forgotten fact that his work found its way into the literature of the Czech left, especially in the politically tense years of 1937-1938: eight photomontages from *VI* were adapted in those years for the 1937 volume of *Španělsko* (Spain), an anti-Franco magazine; eight photomontages appeared in 1938 in *Svět v obrazech* (The World in Pictures), an illustrated magazine with a leftist undertone; and one in the 1937 volume of *Svět sovětů* (The World of the

Soviets), a pro-Moscow propaganda magazine. *Španělsko* exclusively uses photomontages addressing the Spanish Civil war, while in *Svět v obrazech* compositions from the days of the Munich crisis (September 1938) stand out. In some instances, the Czech version appeared a few days earlier than its German counterpart, indicating that the participating periodicals actively collaborated with Heartfield. The original texts, often poems, were translated into Czech. We read the translator's initials F. N. as belonging to František Němec (1899-1968), a journalist working, among other places, for the Czech communist daily *Rudé právo* – in other words, we see here another 'safe' connection, within the Party, rather than a link to the Czech avant-garde. The translations occasionally differ from the originals. Thus, in *The Great International Lies Competition under the Protectorate of Dr. Joseph Goebbels*, originally in *VI* on 15 August 1937, the editors of *Svět sovětů* replaced the titles of European newspapers stuck on journalists's hats with those of Czech tabloids, and changed as well the captions in the bubbles (figure 3).



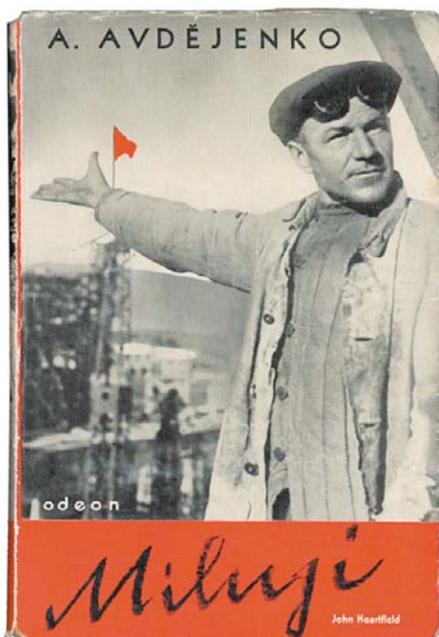
One Czech replacement caption substitutes 'Dimitrov Out of Favor' with 'Air Force Chief Alksnis Arrested'. Was the bubble about Alksnis perhaps an attempt to ridicule rumours about Stalinist purges in the Red Army? A specialist in the history of Soviet show trials may be able to provide the answer.

By contrast, Heartfield photomontages made exclusively for the Czech market are rare. We know only of two: one for the opening issue of *Svět v obrazech*, in January 1938, and the other for the June 1938 issue of that magazine. Again, Hnízdo provides some glimpses. In the first, Heartfield used a picture of Hnízdo's wife posing as a magazine vendor, while, to prepare the second, Hnízdo photographed a Czech soldier in full battle gear for Heartfield.⁴² Again, the selection is not accidental. Heartfield was instrumental in starting *Svět v obrazech*, and the June 1938 cover reacts to the mobilization of the Czechoslovak army in May 1938. The Communist Party had a vested interest in presenting this event as a manifestation of a seamless unity of the working class and the army.

The Books

Although *AIZ/VI* was his main focus, Heartfield did not give up book design during his Prague years. In fact, he participated in Czech book culture as well. A case in point is the series *Spisovatelé Sovětského svazu* (Authors of the Soviet Union, 1934-1937), published by Jan Fromek's Odeon, in the 1920s the publishing house of the Czech avant-garde. In the 1930s,

Fromek (1901-1966) moved closer to the Czech Communist Party, and one imagines his contact with Heartfield was forged on that basis. For Fromek, Heartfield appeared at the right moment. The late twenties and early thirties were the peak period of photographically-based cover design, and when Fromek started his Soviet series, major Prague publishers were already churning out photomontage covers by the hundreds.⁴³ Fromek's series went beyond the bare proletarian editions of the 1920s, such that Heartfield now designed trade books in both cloth and paper. As with a number of far earlier Malik books, the entire space of the cover – front, spine, and back – is used, making this work quite different from the *AIZ/VI* compositions. Also as for Malik books, Heartfield uses movie stills from Soviet films, reminding us that photomontage was not the only technique he used. Of the ten-volume set, only two covers are signed by Heartfield (figure 4),



four are anonymous, although very likely his (figure



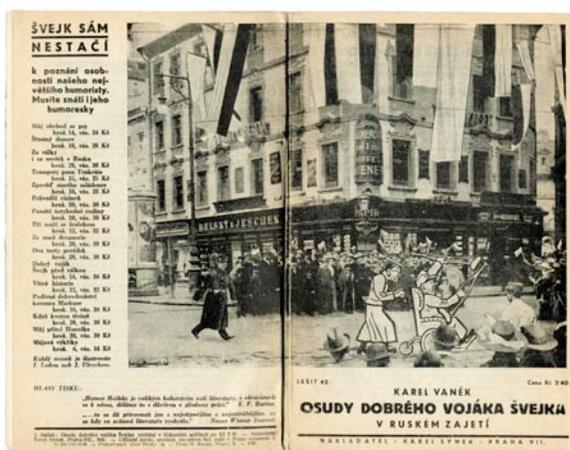
5), and four are done in his style by other designers, in two cases by Fromek himself. The disappearance of Heartfield's signature from Fromek's dust jackets

has a brutally simple explanation – the signed volumes appeared in 1934, but the *dubia* are all dated between April and October 1935, a period largely corresponding to Heartfield's French sojourn (March-August). Security reasons were among the motives of this extended stay.⁴⁴ His name reappears on other book covers after his return, for instance one published by Družstevní práce (Cooperative Work) in 1937, which echoes earlier motifs such as the five-fingered hand, or the oil rig familiar from German editions of Upton Sinclair.

Finally, there are the 1936 covers for *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek, and its continuation by Karel Vaněk (four and two volumes, respectively). In this case, Heartfield worked for an apparently nonaligned publisher, Karel Synek, who owned the Hašek copyright. (Hašek died in 1923.) Heartfield could have hardly addressed a more popular, albeit controversial Czech author. *Švejk* was admired by the general reader who took it for great, absurdist fun; hated by those enamoured of a heroic line to Czech history; and claimed by the Left as a document of literature rooted in the people. Some even saw in *Švejk* a Czech Dada. But Heartfield did not have to go to Prague to discover *Švejk*. For the German Left, *Švejk* was an exemplary antimilitarist novel, one that had found its way to the world precisely via Germany. The figure of Švejk appears in Grosz's and Heartfield's work already in the 1920s. As impersonated by actor Max Pallenberg, Švejk smiles at the reader as well from the front cover of *AIZ* on 24 January 24 1928 (in a picture not made by Heartfield), at the time of a legendary staging of Hašek's story by Erwin Piscator in Berlin.

In his *Švejk* covers Heartfield responded sensitively to what had become the dominant visual interpretation for Czechs, namely that by Hašek's friend, painter and illustrator Josef Lada (1887-1957). Lada transformed *Švejk* into a comic strip in the Prague daily *České slovo* in 1923-1925, and he illustrated numerous editions of the book. Although not the first Hašek illustrator, he provided canonic images of Hašek's characters for decades to come. As in Sir John Tenniel's illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland*, Lada's art became, for its native audience, inseparable from the text. Heartfield cut out Lada's hand-drawn characters and turned them into quasi-marionettes moving on stages modernized through photographic backdrops (figure 6, 7, 8).





In one instance, the cover of volume six, he even took the liberty of collaging two separate Lada illustrations to produce an image which does not exist in the book. While the material is entirely Czech, there are strong echoes of Piscator's Berlin staging. For one, much in Piscator's conception revolved around caricatures moving before realistic, cinematically projected backdrops. Piscator had thought at one point of having Švejk alone played by an actor while representing the remaining characters through marionettes. In line with this, Piscator's stage designer, George Grosz, did stage sketches with marionettes. Heartfield, who worked for Piscator as well, although not on the Švejk staging, appropriated this basic idea in representing the characters through Lada's drawings. Thus, the graffiti-smearred cattle-wagon with Švejk playing cards that appears on volume three of the Synek edition (figure



7) is strikingly similar to the wagon with soldiers drawn by Grosz seen on Piscator's stage.⁴⁵ Heartfield's covers for *Švejk* represent a unique contribution; rooted in his German period, and in the work of his close friends Grosz and Piscator, they simultaneously establish a dialogue with Lada and a broader local tradition.

Conclusion

Is there a larger conclusion? Obviously, we could have taken the black-and-white position that Heartfield's years in Czechoslovakia were dominated by his 'mission', the anti-Nazi struggle. That notion is not invalid, although its intricacies and nuances await further investigation. (Note, for instance, that the renaming of *AIZ* to *VI* was prompted by KPD acceptance of the Popular

Front strategy, in France.) Heartfield the propagandist worked within a space defined by KPD policies, and the Prague years only enhanced his role in this capacity. The available evidence nonetheless points to seams and tensions – we believe it is possible to see more Jewishness in Heartfield than is generally realized, more Herzfelde in Heartfield than admitted, more photography in his work than commonly described – and more involvement with the visual culture of the Czech Left than is generally known.

Illustrations

Figure 1. John Heartfield, *Mr. von Papen Out Hunting (Pan z Papenu na lovecké stezce/Herr von Papen auf dem Jagdpfad)*, letterpress, originally in *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (11 October 1934), 14.5 x 9.5 cm (5 11/16 x 3 3/4 inches). Private collection. This and subsequent illustrations by John Heartfield © 2008 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. This postcard, printed in Prague and published by Lene Reiner, carries on the verso Heartfield's name and the inscription (in Czech and German): 'Help the victims and opponents of Hitler's Fascism!'. As a member of the German Parliament, Franz von Papen aided the Nazi rise to power; for several months in 1942, he served as acting Reich Chancellor.

Figure 2. John Heartfield, *On the Intervention of the Third Reich... (Zur Intervention des Dritten Reichs...)*, in *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* 13, no. 18 (3 May 1934), rotogravure, 38.2 x 28 cm (15 x 11 inches). Private collection.

Figure 3. Unidentified author, after John Heartfield, *The Great International Lies Competition under the Protectorate of Dr. Joseph Goebbels (Velká mezinárodní soutěž ve lhaní pod protektorátem dra. Josefa Goebbelse)*, *Svět sovětů*, vol. 6, no. 9 (1937), rotogravure, 37 x 26.5 cm. (14 9/16 x 10 7/16 inches). Library of the National Museum, Prague. *First published in Volks-Illustrierte August 15, 1937 with Heartfield's signature.*

Figure 4. John Heartfield, detail (front panel) of dust jacket for A. Avdejenko, *I Love (Miluji)*, Prague 1934, 20.5 x 13.5 cm (8 1/16 x 5 1/16 inches). Private collection.

Figure 5. Attributed to John Heartfield, detail (front panel) of dust jacket of Bruno Jasenski *Man Changes Skin (Člověk mění kůži)*, vol. 2, Prague 1935, photolithograph, 19.5 x 13.5 cm (7 5/8 x 5 5/16 inches). Private collection.

Figure 6. John Heartfield, cover for Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk (Dobrý voják Švejk)*, vol. 2, Prague 1936, photolithograph, as shown 21 x 27.5 cm (8 1/4 x 10 13/16 inches). Private collection.

Figure 7. John Heartfield, dust jacket for Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk (Dobrý voják Švejk)*, vol. 3, Prague 1936, photolithograph, 20.5 x 13 cm (8 1/16 x 5 1/8 inches). Private collection.

Figure 8. John Heartfield, cover for Karel Vaněk, *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk in Russian Captivity (Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka v ruském zajetí)*, vol. 42, Prague 1936, letterpress, as shown 20.5 x 26.5 cm (8 1/16 x 10 7/16 inches). Private collection.

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1 – Helmut Franz Josef Herzfeld was born in Berlin, where he also lived for most of 1913-1933. It is often claimed that in 1915 he assumed the name John Heartfield, but there is no evidence that this actually implied a legal change of name. His personal documents, at least in the interwar period, bear the name Helmut Herzfeld – John Heartfield was a pseudonym. The present essay, which concentrates on the 1930s, has relied particularly on Roland März's source anthology, *John Heartfield: Der Schnitt entlang der Zeit – Selbstzeugnisse, Erinnerungen, Interpretationen*, Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst 1981; and David Evans, *John Heartfield: Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung/Volks-Illustrierte, 1930-1938*, New York: Kent Fine Art 1992, which contains a reprint of Heartfield's works for this magazine and a lengthy introduction. Another notable reference is the German version of the exhibition catalogue *John Heartfield*, ed. Peter Pachnicke and Klaus Honnef, Cologne: DuMont 1991; a reduced English version appeared with Harry N. Abrams in 1992. Heartfield's Czech years have been touched upon in a variety of reminiscences, some in the catalogue to his 1964 Prague exhibition, *Stále ještě... Výstava John Heartfield, fotomontáže*, Prague: Národní Galerie 1964. Michael Krejsa, 'NS-Reaktionen auf Heartfields Arbeit 1933-1939', in Pachnicke and Honnef, *John Heartfield*, 368-378 (not in the English version) offers research based on Czech and German archival material. On the Czech years, see also Sabine T. Kriebel, 'Revolutionary Beauty: John Heartfield, Political Photomontage, and the Crisis of the European Left, 1929-1938', PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley 2003, and Keith Holz, *Modern German Art for Thirties Paris, Prague, and London*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2004.

2 – *Perlustrace cizinců* (Aliens' Screening Form), 25 April 1933; Archives of the Prague Police Headquarters 1931-1940, box 6421, folder H/1723/6 Herzfeld Helmut; on deposit in the National Archives, Prague-Chodovec.

3 – Application in letter form addressed to the Prague Police Headquarters, in Czech; archives of the Prague Police Headquarters.

4 – See his 'Wahrheit "Made in Germany": Romain Rolland und die Kölnische Zeitung', in *Der Gegen-Angriff* (Prague), 1 July 1933; in März, *John Heartfield*, 325-328.

5 – See 'Gesang der Antisemiten' (Song of the Anti-Semites), *AIZ* 19 September 1935, with a text most likely by Wieland Herzfelde, or 'Goebbels-Rezept gegen die Lebensmittelnot in Deutschland' (Goebbels's Recipe to Counter Food Shortages in Germany), *AIZ* 24 October 1935.

6 – See the photomontage for Reynolds News 1939 entitled 'Reservations: Jews Driven Like Cattle', in Honnef and Pachnicke, *John Heartfield*, fig. 122.

7 – The speech is reprinted in März, *John Heartfield*, occasion unspecified; the title 'Rede gegen Antisemitismus' (Speech Against Anti-Semitism) was probably supplied by März, *John Heartfield*.

8 – Numbers based on Evans, *John Heartfield*.

9 – The society was named in honor of nineteenth-century Czech painter Josef Mánes (1820-1871).

10 – Memorandum from 13 October 1937, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, folder Heartfield.

11 – For an account based mainly on the German-language press, see Jiří Veselý, 'Die Mánes-Affären 1934-1937', *Philologica Pragensia*, 1975, 53-45; see also Krejsa, 'NS-Reaktionen auf Heartfields Arbeit', and März, *John Heartfield*.

12 – Specifically, *Adolf, der Übermensch* (Adolf, the Superman), *AIZ* 17 July 1932, with an x-ray image of Hitler digesting coins; *S. M. Adolf* (H. M. Adolf) *AIZ* 21 August 1932, with Hitler in a pre-1914 imperial uniform; *Der Sinn des Hitlergrußes* (The Meaning of the Hitler Greeting), *AIZ* 16 October 1932, with Hitler receiving banknotes from an anonymous industrialist; *Göring, der Henker des Dritten Reiches* (Göring, the Henchman of the Third Reich), *AIZ* 14 September 1933, with Goering in a blood-stained uniform and an axe in his hand; and *Das Mörderkeuz* (The Murderer's Cross), *AIZ* 3 August 1933, showing a worker's corpse laid over a swastika. See Krejsa, 'NS-Reaktionen auf Heartfields Arbeit', 377, n. 16.

13 – See *Prager Mittag*, 14 April 1934, quoted from März, *John Heartfield*, 335f.

14 – Memorandum from 17 April 1934; Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, folder Heartfield.

15 – Ibid.

16 – The letter appeared in Czech in the communist newspaper *Haló noviny* on 19 April 1934, 4. We assume that its German version in Wieland Herzfelde, *John Heartfield: Leben und Werk*, Dresden 1962, 56, represents the German original.

17 – Memorandum from 17 April 1934.

18 – Memorandum from 13 October 1937, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, folder Heartfield.

19 – Protokoly členských schůzí Mánesa (Minutes from Mánes membership meetings), 18 November 1937; Mánes Archives, on deposit in the Archives of the City of Prague (Archiv hlavního města Prahy), Prague-Chodovec.

20 – Ibid.

21 – Ibid.

22 – Franz Roh, 'mechanismus und ausdrück: wesen und wert der fotografie', in *foto-auge: 76 fotos der zeit*, ed. Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Fritz Wedekind 1929, 3–7.

23 – The German typographer Jan Tschichold summarizes this in 1929: 'Many are quite reserved as regards hand-drawn images; these often falsified painterly representations of the old days do not convince us any more, and their individualistic pretense is unpleasant for us'. Quoted from his *Eine Stunde Druckgestaltung*, Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Dr. Fritz Wedekind 1930, 8.

24 – Franz Höllering, 'Fotomontage', *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 2:8 (1928), 3–4; reprinted in English in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art & Aperture 1989, 128-131.

25 – Durus, 'Fotomontage, fotogramm', *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 5:7 (1931), 167; in English in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, 182-185.

26 – Durus, 'Fotomontage als Waffe im Klassenkampf'. In *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 6:3 (1932), 55-57.

27 – Much of the Soviet discussions is summarized in Hubertus Gassner, 'Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship, 1931-1932', in Honnef and Pachnicke, *John Heartfield*.

28 Erwin Schockel, *Das politische Plakat: Eine psychologische Betrachtung*, München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 2nd edition, 1939, 189 (first edition 1938).

29 – It is a curiosity – or a sign of happy amnesia? – that Roland März, *John Heartfield*, cuts off his quotation from Schockel right before the expression 'sehr geschickt montiert', thus blurring the broader anti-Semitic context.

30 – Herzfelde did sign some of his longer poems. His overall collaboration with Heartfield has recently been stressed in Nancy Roth, 'Heartfield's Collaborations', *Oxford Art Journal* 29:3 (Autumn 2006), 395-418.

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- 31 – In März, *John Heartfield*, 410.
- 32 – Willi Münzenberg, ‘Aufgaben und Ziele der internationalen Arbeiter-Fotografen-Bewegung’, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 5:7 (1931), 99.
- 33 – See Jindřich Toman, *Photo/montage in Print: Czech Interwar Sources*, (Prague: Kant 2008).
- 34 – Vladimír Hnízdo, [Od jara roku 1933...], in *Stále ještě....*
- 35 – Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Vorwort’ (Preface), in Helmut Praschek, *Neue Deutsche Blätter, Prag 1933-1935*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag 1973, 5.
- 36 – On the contrary, parts of his article ‘Heimkehr’ (Homecoming), on the occasion of his return from the Soviet Union in 1932, were worded in a pro-Soviet jargon. Sabine Kriebel, justifiably questions whether Heartfield wrote the pertinent passages.
- 37 – Adolf Hoffmeister, ‘Monteurdada John Heartfield’, in *Stále ještě*, 8-10.
- 38 – Karel Teige, ‘Svobodné umění?’ (Free Art?), *Doba* 1 (24 May 1934), 140.
- 39 – Karel Teige, ‘O fotomontáži’ (On Photomontage), *Žijeme* 2 (1932/33), 107-112, 173-178.
- 40 – Ibid., 141.
- 41 – ‘Freiheit der Kunst – leicht invalid’, *Der Gegen-Angriff*, 12 May 1934; quoted in Holz, 95.
- 42 – Hnízdo, [Od jara roku 1933...], 19.
- 43 – See Toman, *Photo/montage in Print*.
- 44 – Krejsa, ‘NS-Reaktionen auf Heartfields Arbeit’, 374.
- 45 – For reproductions see Erwin Piscator, *Das politische Theater*, Berlin: A. Schultz Verlag 1929, photo plate preceding 193. Andres Zervigon (personal communication) suggests that Heartfield’s *Švejk* covers might also relate to what Heartfield did in wartime propaganda films produced under Count Kessler’s oversight in the first half of 1918.