

# Under the Banner of the Book: the Work of Karel Teige

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*Painter, designer and critical theorist, the Czech modernist Karel Teige (1900-1951) sought to address the central dilemma of Modernism: the conflict of the functional with the fantastic, the mundane with the magical. Associated with the influential avant-garde group Devětsil, Teige found the book to be an ideal medium for his artistic vision, combining innovative designs and avant-garde ideas to forge an instrument of mass appeal. The present article analyzes the underlying principles of Teige's philosophy of design and illustrates the evolution of his art with reference to his own writings and a variety of examples.*

*This article is based on a lecture given at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in April 1990, and repeated in the McGill University Library Lecture Series, in October 1990.*

*Peintre, designer et théoricien critique, le moderniste tchèque Karel Teige (1900-1951) a cherché à percer le dilemme du modernisme: le conflit du fonctionnel et du fantastique, du banal et du magique. Proche du groupe avant-gardiste Devětsil, Teige a découvert dans le livre le moyen idéal de donner libre cours à sa vision artistique, et combiner des conceptions novatrices et des idées avant-gardistes pour forger un instrument ayant un grand rayonnement. Cet article analyse les principes sous-jacents de la philosophie de la conception de Teige et illustre l'évolution de son art en faisant référence à ses propres écrits et à de multiples exemples.*

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J'inventai la couleur des voyelles!-A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O  
bleu, U vert. -Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque  
consonne, et avec des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai  
d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous  
les sens.

Rimbaud, *Alchimie du verbe*

In April 1990, when the Czech communist daily *Rudé Právo* published a full-page article about him, many Czechs encountered the name of Karel Teige (Figure 1) for the first time. And yet, Teige (1900-1951) should have been very hard for the culture-loving Czechs to ignore. Leader of the Devětsil group so prominent in Czech artistic and intellectual life in the Twenties, a groundbreaker in such areas as typography, design and the theory of modern art and archi-

ecture, Teige influenced the course of Czech modernism between the two World Wars; he also made a contribution to the internationalization of the avant-garde. His personal exchange of ideas and his correspondence with Filippo Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Ilya Ehrenburg, El Lissitzky, Le Corbusier, Amédée Ozenfant, Jean Badovici, Theo van Doesburg, Mart Stam, Hannes Meyer, Laszlo Moholy Nagy, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, André Breton, Paul Eluard and Frederick

Kiesler, among others, helped put the Czech circle of left-wing avant-garde artists at the very center of the most interesting developments in European inter-war cultural history.<sup>1</sup> It is not the purpose of this article to focus on these international connections, but rather to attempt to describe Teige's work in light of one of the central themes of the modernist project, the conflict between the functional and the fantastic; and particularly, the way this conflict was dealt with by those of the modernists who found themselves politically on the Left.

Karel Teige was nineteen years old when he made the following comment in his diary, doubtless unaware that for the rest of his short and prolific life he would attempt to address its challenge:

I cannot really articulate that dichotomy which is part of the eternal conflict between tradition, law and the limits of the *métier* on one hand, and fantasy, invention and the unbridled will to revolution on the other. This "longue querelle de la tradition et de l'invention, de l'Ordre et de l'Aventure" is what I cannot solve...<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the next three decades, he would explore this gap stated so eloquently by Apollinaire, through his writing, his design and his search for social modernity, only to see his "march into tomorrow" turn into a dance of death and decay. He died of heart failure on October 1, 1951, amidst the wave of arrests of left-wing intellectuals, many of whom were his friends.

Painter, designer, author, translator and critic, and the leading theorist of the Czech avant-garde between the two World Wars, Teige espoused the left-wing ideals of the new socialist utopia with the zeal of a revolutionary and the skill of a poet. Taking for his own Zola's device of "d'être de son temps", he helped define and organize the program of post-war Czech modernism around the common desire to "push open the windows on the world", a desire concomitant with the goals of the newly born republic. This program, he felt, was centered around the polarity of two

crucial aspects of *Weltanschauung*, two elements of *Weltordnung*: poetry and construction. It was Teige who was largely responsible for putting this dualism at the centre of the Czech modernist project. As the Czech critic F. X. Šalda (1867-1937) put it,

With a radical stroke, Teige divided the world into two spheres. One was the sphere of reason, of construction, of work, of everyday life. The other was that of the irrational, of play, of the holiday spirit. To poetry, he assigned quite openly the task of play and by doing so, offended a great number of ponderous little citizens in this forever self-important nation, where every other man studies his lines in the mirror to make sure they have the right air of philosophy and sophistication. And yet, he didn't say anything else than what had been already said by that pathetic moralist Schiller when he wrote: "Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst."<sup>3</sup>

Teige's contribution to modernism can be examined through the two distinct phases in which he and his collaborators attempted to articulate the complex relationship inherent in the polarity of "Poetism" and Constructivism.<sup>4</sup> The first phase coincided with the establishment and development of the Union of Modern Culture, *Devětsil*, of which Teige was the principal theorist, and lasts from 1923 through the early thirties. This was followed by a second period in which Teige and most of the members of his group adopt the principles of Surrealism.

In the first period, Teige sought to transcend the tension he had himself generated by fusing the theoretical and the practical through the development of a novel approach to book design. In the second, deteriorating economic and political conditions undermined Teige's faith that the tension might be resolved through a unified aesthetic practice. Rather, he found himself increasingly operating in two distinct modes—a public theoretical discourse and a separate, more private artistic practice focusing upon surrealist collages.



Figure 1. Josef Šíma, *Portrait of Karel Teige*, 1923. (Photograph courtesy of the Museum of National Literature, Prague, accession 16523.)

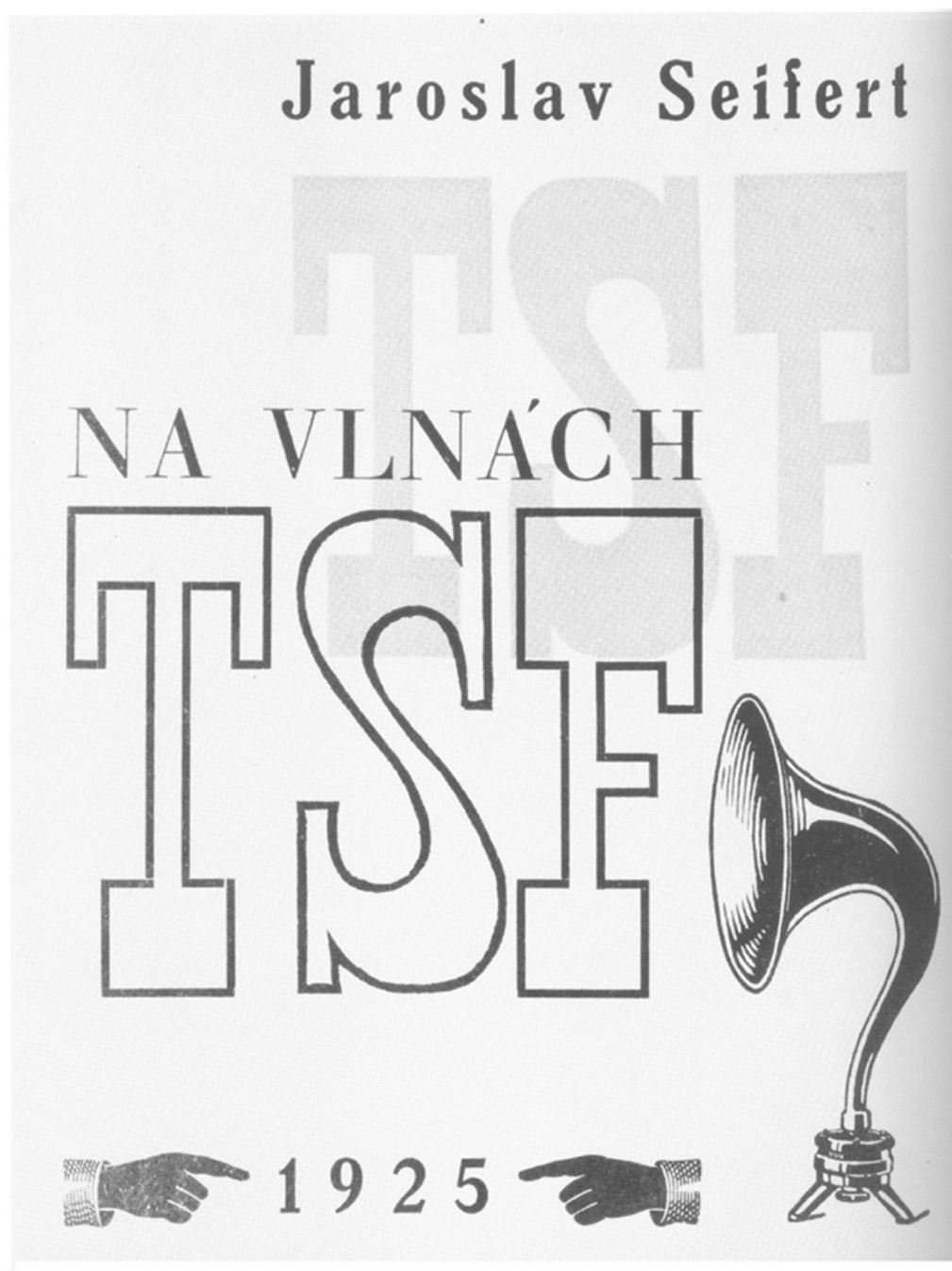


Figure 2. Cover of Jaroslav Seifert, *Na Vlnách* [On the waves of T.S.F.], Prague, 1925.  
(Collection of the author.)



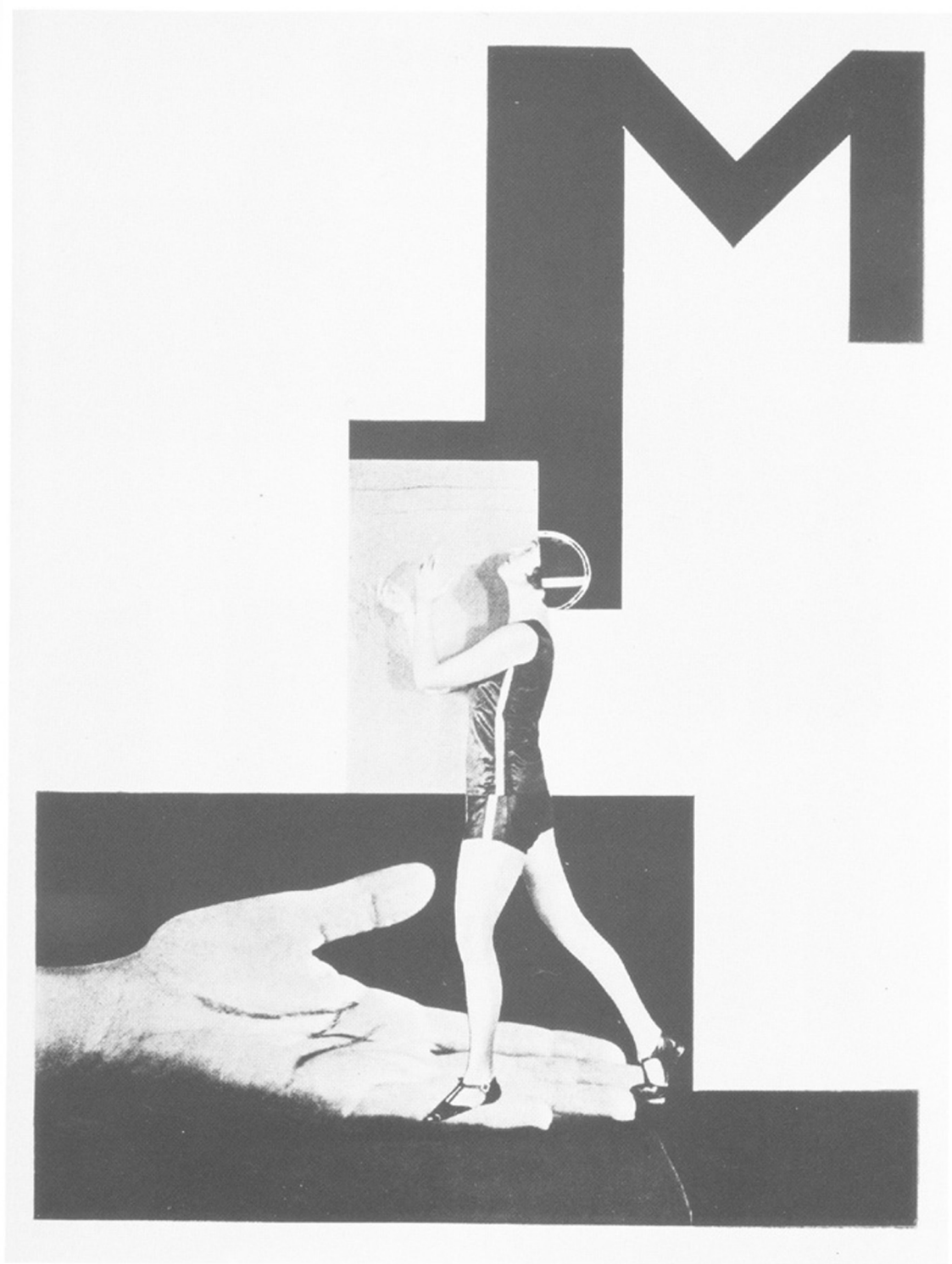
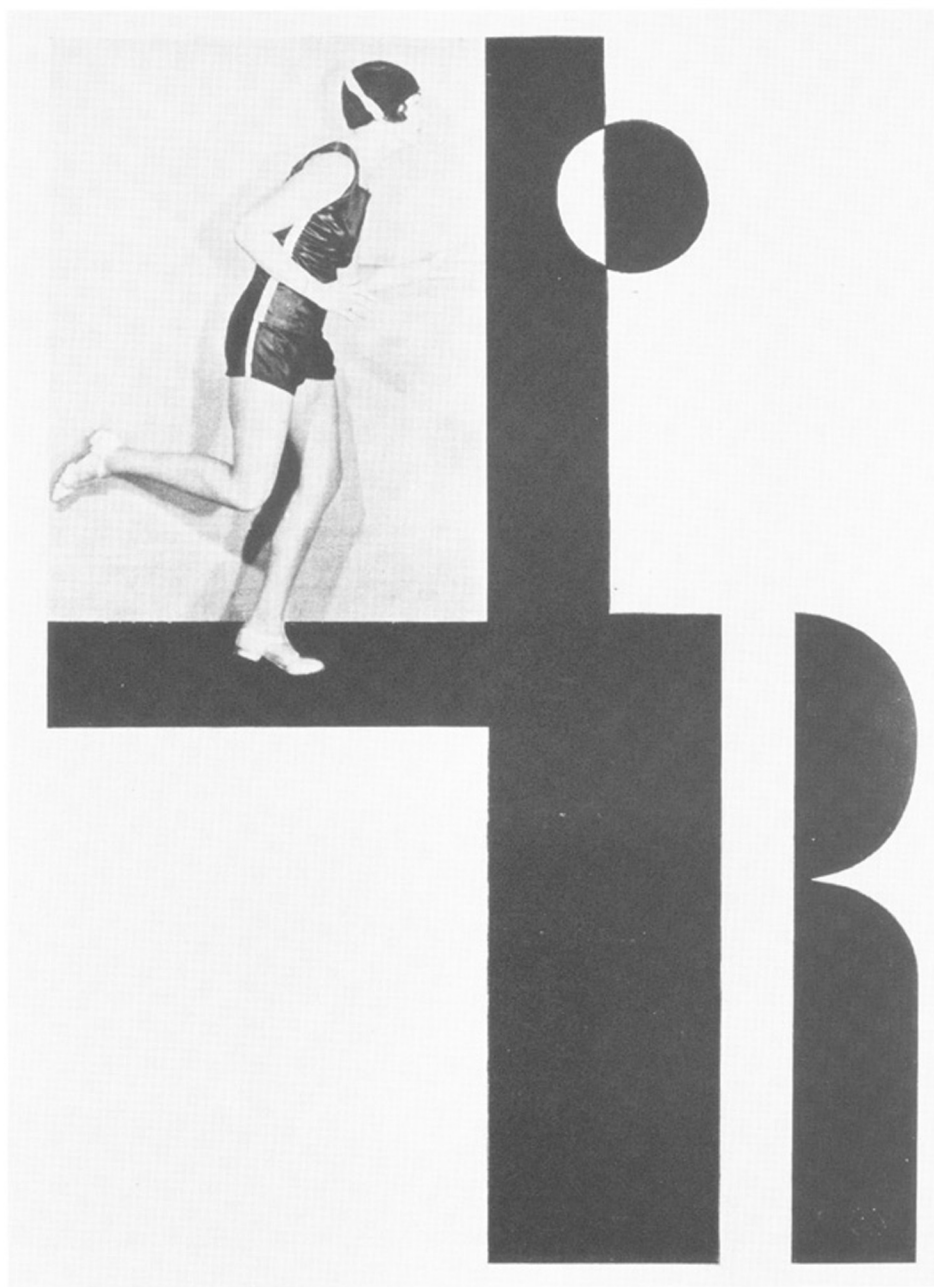


Figure 3. The letter "M" from Vítězslav Nezval, *ABC*, Prague, 1926. (Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries.)



**Figure 4.** The letter “R” from Vítězslav Nezval, *ABC*, Prague, 1926. (Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries.)



Figure 5. Cover for Karel Teige, *Stavba a básně* [Construction and Poetry], Prague, 1927. (Collection of the author.)

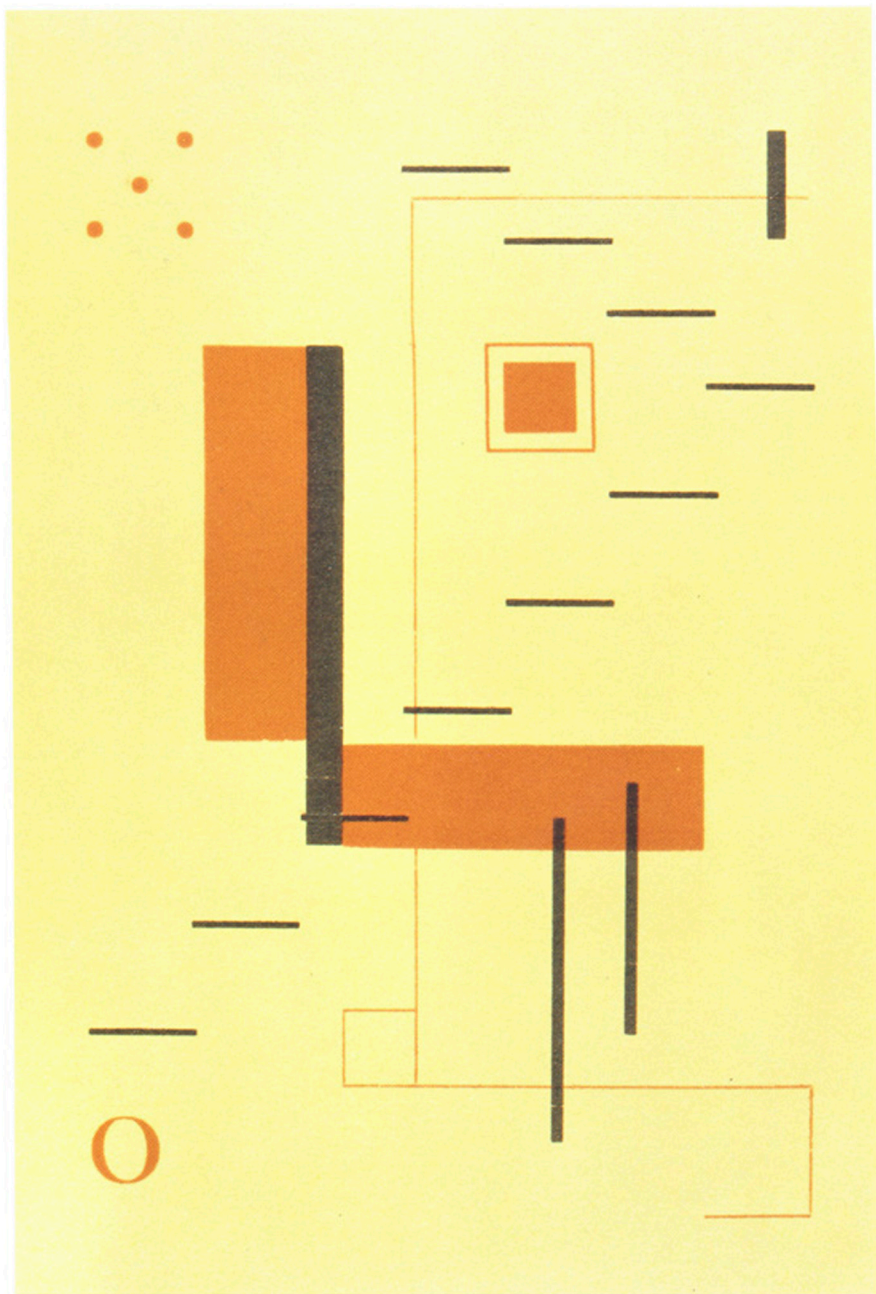


Figure 6. Illustration for Konstantin Beibl, *Zlom* [Rupture], Prague, 1928. (Collection of the author.)



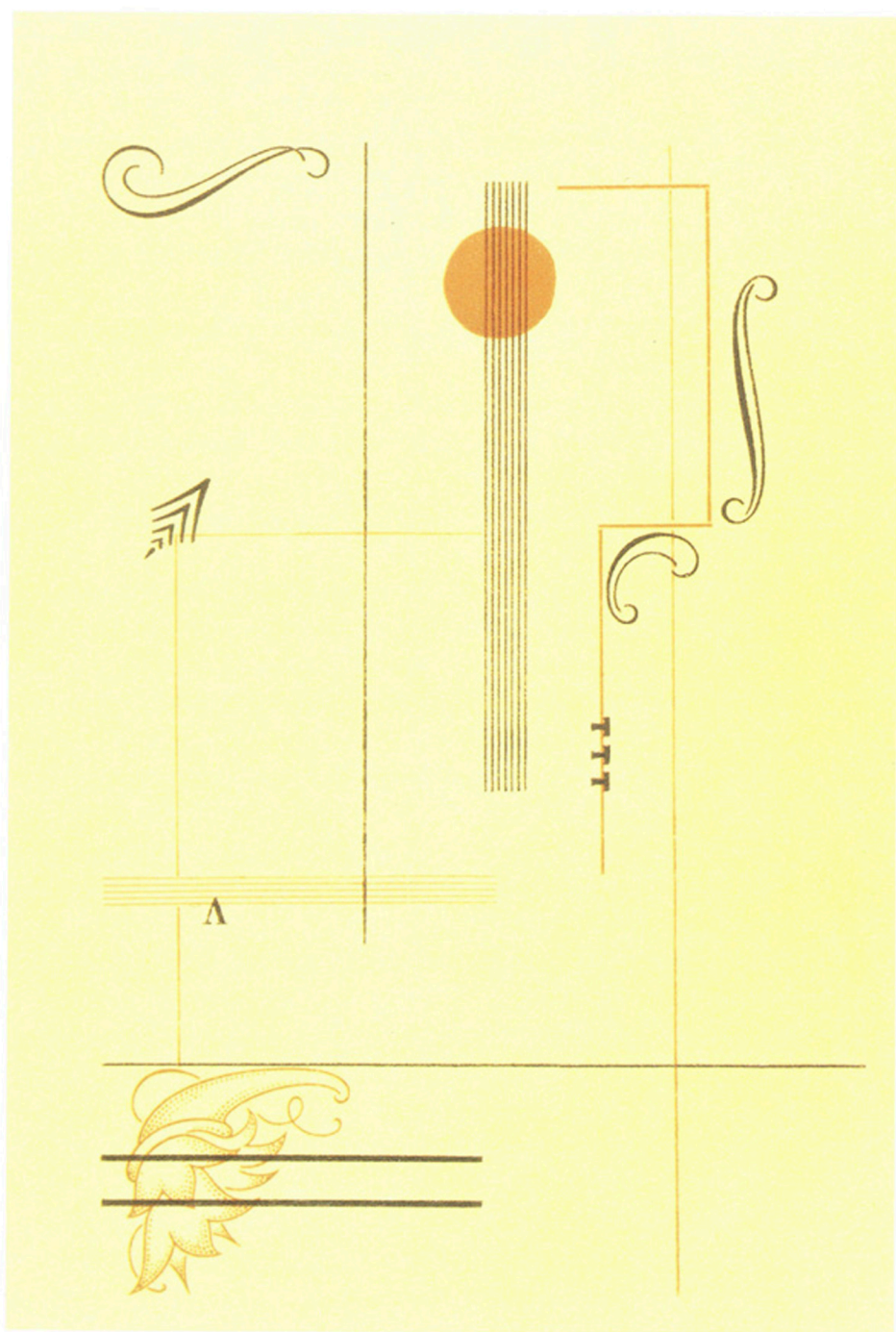


Figure 7. Illustration for Konstantin Beibl, *Zlom* [Rupture], Prague, 1928.  
(Collection of the author.)





**Figure 8. Collage "Baudelaire's Shore." (Photograph courtesy of the Museum of National Literature, Prague, accession 31830.)**

The first stage of Teige's development is dominated by his role as "spiritus rector" of Devětsil, a left-wing avant-garde group of artists, poets, dramatists, critics, film makers, composers and publishers.<sup>5</sup> One of the earliest manifestations of this group was an innovative form of visual poetry inspired by the fusion of painting and poetry adumbrated by Cubism, and called "image-poems."

... We have tried to compose the tourist poem, a reflection of travel lyrics, combining it from several significant elements: an ocean liner's flag, binoculars and a letter with the words "Wish you were here!" These clues should be sufficient to represent reality in a way that is inaccessible to words. Or we got ready to shoot *The Departure for Cythera*, a short lyrical film including a departing yacht, a fluttering scarf to bid farewell, and a neon sign "Au revoir. Bon vent!"<sup>6</sup>

As Teige emphasized elsewhere, these small graphic works relied on the juxtaposition of simple, often banal elements "which rational logic maintains in a mutual estrangement", but in which their unexpected proximity "creates an electric lyrical tension".

Teige, who originally wanted to be a painter, rapidly shifted his interests to this new collaborative art form. It is questionable whether he abandoned the drawings, watercolours and oils of his early years because of a desire for a larger vision of life as *poiesis* or because he felt his was an insufficient talent for becoming a serious painter. The linocuts which he published in the local modernist reviews such as *Červen*, *Kmen*, *Veraikon* and in the early avant-garde vehicles that he himself had helped establish, the collections *Devětsil* and *Life II*, were perhaps an attempt to bridge the individual manifestations of what he had as a sixteen year old referred to in his diary as "artistic reclusiveness" to more popular efforts of expression.

For Teige, after an initial period of experimentation with visual poetry, the book and book design quickly became the vehicle of preference, the vehicle that lent itself ideally

to his desire to reconcile the clarity and precision of construction with the principles of poetic making in the very body of his own work. The ramifications of mass distribution, the opportunity of giving shape to a new conception of the medium and the possibilities inherent in collaboration with different artists, writers and publishers were additional incentives. In the twelve short years of Devětsil's existence, years marked by ideological and artistic tensions among the group's members, Karel Teige wrote, translated, designed and collaborated on more than one hundred and fifty titles, one sixth of the total output of nine hundred titles with which Devětsil members were associated.

In addition to the major role he played in the editorship and design of the two Devětsil collections of 1922 mentioned earlier, Teige's early publications included a catalogue pamphlet on the Russian-born sculptor Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), published on the occasion of an early exhibition in Prague, organized by Devětsil in April 1923. Quoting from a letter sent him by the artist on the occasion of the exhibition's opening, Teige identified with Archipenko's statement that he saw himself "neither as a revolutionary, nor a conservative artist," but rather as one who seeks "the NEW in an effort to solve plastic problems which are inspired by [our] time and governed by [our] feeling."<sup>7</sup> In the same period, his early interest in architecture led him to take over the editorship of *Stavba* [Construction], which quickly became a platform of international constructivist exchange.<sup>8</sup>

Teige's assault on the image of the mass market book which, unlike the ornate bibliophile editions of yesteryear seemed to have been deprived of any rights to a true visual presence, began with several attempts to "visualize" the poetry of two of his closest Devětsil friends, Vítězslav Nezval (1900-1958) and Jaroslav Seifert (1901-1984). "The new language of poetry," he declared at the time, "is *heraldry*: the language of signs."<sup>9</sup> Teige's designs for Nezval's *Pantomime* (1924) and *ABC* (1926) and Seifert's *On the Waves of T.S.F.* [T.S.F. = Telegraphie sans fil] (1925) were as radical attacks on the tradition of

Czech typography as were the first Cubist canvases on the tradition of naturalist painting.<sup>10</sup>

To find an adequate range of type faces for *Pantomime*, a collection of poems, plays and music audaciously illustrated by an eclectic mixture of reproductions, publicity stills, and original work of Nezval's friend Jindřich Štyrský (who also designed the photomontage cover in the style of an "image-poem"), Teige literally rummaged in the type-cases of the prominent bourgeois weekly *Národní Politika*, emerging to shower friends with examples of his finds. The unique typography of individual poems in Seifert's collection *On the waves of T.S.F.*, which Teige designed in its entirety, represents the first truly consistent embodiment of Teige's synthetic treatment of the book as of his conception of modern typography (Figure 2). For the *ABC*, a collection of Nezval's poems originally published in *Pantomime*, Teige reinterpreted the cycle through a combination of typography and photomontage. The success of his efforts is best explained in his own words:

Typography and photomontage can become art only in those rare and exceptional circumstances when a graphic artist and a poet meet in an eclectic kinship of spirit, when the two create a book together as a coherent work of poetic making, so that the graphic realization of such a book becomes an optical poem ... Qualitative transformation takes place only when the contents will be not a mere photo-illustrated text, but will be transformed into a coherent, organic and simultaneous phototext. Then the type will be not merely accompanied by images, but the whole book will be written simultaneously by word and image. Only then the image will be not something added, but will become an invisible part of the expression of the author's idea.<sup>11</sup>

Among the most enduring images of Teige's typographical creations is his design for Nezval's poetry as danced on the stage of the Liberated Theatre, Devětsil's dramatic

platform, by Milča Mayerová, a pupil of Rudolf Laban.<sup>12</sup> (Cover and Figures 3, 4.)

Among Teige's multiple interests in this period was his preoccupation with the medium of film and the possibilities of motion pictures as a new form of popular culture. (Of anecdotal interest is perhaps the fact that the only honorary foreign members of Devětsil were three great names of the American cinema: Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.) Teige's early manifestos, such as "Photo-Cinema-Film" from *Life II: Collection of the new beauty*, and other articles and essays written in the early years of Devětsil's existence, were published as a collection under the laconic title, *Film*.<sup>13</sup> In a postscript to the book, which he also designed, Teige explains that it was the vitality, intensity and unconventionality of the medium, as well as its popular appeal, that made cinema an ideal vehicle of the new era of art. "I want to show that Chaplin's and others' silent movies are the only truly popular art today. These serially produced mechanical film plays I consider to be the authentic art of modern times..."<sup>14</sup>

True to his ideal of poetic making, Teige, in collaboration with poet Jaroslav Seifert, also attempted to create modern filmscripts: for this, he drew on a variety of Devětsil publications, such as *Disc*, *The Zone* and others.<sup>15</sup> Teige's interest in film in general, and in Chaplin in particular, is also evident in his book designs for such works as Louis Delluc's *Drames du cinema* and Chaplin's *My trip abroad*; the Czech translation of the latter was introduced by Teige's essay on the man he called "the poet of laughter". The influence of film was evident also on the cover of *The World Which Is Laughing*, Teige's own collection of essays.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to writing about film and concurrent with his many other preoccupations in this period, Teige actively pursued a policy of introducing the work of foreign authors as part of the Devětsil program. His own translations of two works of French Dada author Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Oui et non ou la cage dans l'oiseau* and *L'autruche aux yeux clos*, are attempts to introduce a little known author, whom he admired, to the Czech pub-

lic. Teige had been introduced to Ribemont Dessaignes by painter Josef Šíma who designed the cover of the original French edition of *L'austruche* as well as those of the two Czech translations. *Oui et non ou la cage dans l'oiseau* had been translated directly from the author's manuscript. The manuscript itself subsequently disappeared, much to the distress of Ribemont Dessaignes scholars for whom the only extant text, in Czech, remains, understandably, inaccessible. Teige returned to translation twice more during his Devětsil years: in 1929, when, in collaboration with Philippe Soupault, he selected and later translated (together with Jindřich Hořejší, 1886-1941), as well as designed, the Czech edition of Lautreamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* and again in 1930, when he collaborated on a translation of Stendhal's *De l'amour*, which he also designed.<sup>17</sup>

Equally rooted in his belief in the necessity of the international orientation of avant-garde art are his designs for dozens of translations of authors many of whom he knew and corresponded with, such as Philippe Soupault or Isaac Babel, and most particularly Ilya Ehrenburg.<sup>18</sup> He also created designs for the works of writers, living and dead, whom he admired and drew inspiration from, especially Baudelaire and Apollinaire, but also Balzac, Flaubert, Verlaine, Cocteau, Emile Verhaeren, Blaise Cendrars, Jules Romains, Jules Supervielle, and Joseph Delteil, among many others.<sup>19</sup> Above all, his integral design for the fourteen successive parts of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, published between 1927 and 1931 by Odeon, the house most committed to Devětsil ideals, remains among the most outstanding examples of his work.<sup>20</sup> The consistency of approach and the subtle variations within the series attest to Teige's thoughtful and innovative methods.

The theoretical issues underlying Teige's approach to book design were adumbrated in his manifesto on modern typography written in 1927.<sup>21</sup> With considerable design experience already to his credit, Teige methodically analyzed his own approach to the book designer's task and addressed the different components of the book in turn.

I view the cover as a poster of the book... That's why it is essential that it have a maximum impact. To do so, it must be composed in a dynamic equilibrium of both colours and forms. To emphasize this equilibrium, I usually choose primary colours and primary geometrical forms. I feel it is the orthogonal forms, the square and the oblong, that best correspond to the orthogonal plane. The circle too imposes itself as the form most agreeable to the eye. ... The title page requires similar considerations as the cover. It too is a banner of the book. Its visual construction, compositional lay-out and the choice of types and colours should be a pictorial, optical transcript of the literary content of the book. The colophon, most important bibliographically, should be a detailed cadastre of the book: it requires the clarity of a ledger."<sup>22</sup>

In his essay, following El Lissitzky's famous eight-point manifesto, Teige also summarized his six points for the new, constructivist typography. His anti-decorative, anti-academic stance, his emphasis on simplicity and legibility of design and its harmonious, synoptical articulation, his insistence on a full understanding of the author's purpose as the *sine qua non* of design as well as on the exploitation of the full range of technological possibilities, and finally his call for a close collaboration with the printer, which Teige compared to the relationship between an architect-designer and a construction engineer, were the first comprehensive formulation, in Czechoslovakia, of an entire publishing program, exemplified by houses such as Odeon or Aventinum, and publishing series such as Symposium, the Pleiades, and others (Figure 5).

Nowhere is Teige's conception of constructivist typography more consistently evident than in the thirty issues of *ReD* (*Revue Devětsilu*), the last of the Devětsil periodical publications, which appeared between 1927 and 1931.<sup>23</sup> Subtitled *Revue internationale de*

*l'activité contemporaine*, it extended the ideals of *L'Esprit Nouveau* in its determination to become a synthetic platform for international avant-garde activity. Having supreme editorial and design control, utterly free of any constraints from publisher Jan Fromek (1901-1966), Teige could produce total consistency both in the matter of content and in typography. Individual issues held true to his originally stated ambitions: "our content will simply be the life of contemporary creativity, the birth of new forms, the victory of inventions, and the creative tension of experiments".<sup>24</sup> Thematic issues became a trademark of the review, beginning with v. 1, no. 2 (10 years of Soviet culture), no. 5 (International Architecture) no. 7, devoted to Devětsil's Liberated Theatre, and no. 9 (Manifestos of Poetism); in volume 2, numbers 2 (Apollinaire), 6 (Marinetti and Futurism), 8 (Photo-film) and 9 (International Architecture again); finally, in volume 3, published between 1929 and 1931, no. 5 devoted to Bauhaus, a double no. 6/7, featuring the text of the course Teige taught at the Bauhaus in the Fall of 1929, entitled *Sociology of Architecture*, no. 8 (*Le grand Jeu*), and a final number once again devoted to International Architecture.

In this period, Teige's book design reached its apogee in the two collections of poetry by Konstantin Biebl (1898-1951), *With the ship that brings tea and coffee and Rupture*.<sup>25</sup> In the latter, Teige's typographical compositions in black and red on a luminous yellow background embody his concept of 'modern illumination', transcending the conventional blandness of black and grey (Figures 6, 7).

Teige's last designs of the Devětsil years include Biebl's *Heaven, Hell and Paradise*, Nezval's *She wanted to rob Lord Blamington*, Stendhal's *De l'amour* (in Teige's own translation), and Teige's own collection of essays on modern poetry, *The World Full of Smells* published as a second volume of a larger cycle, *Of Humour, Clowns and Dadaists*.<sup>26</sup> In this period also belong his critical overview of Czech architecture in the 20th century, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*; a separate publication of the Bauhaus lectures, *Sociology of Architecture*; and the three volumes

of the MSA series [= *Mezinárodní Soudobá Architektura*, International Contemporary Architecture]. In the last year of Devětsil's existence, Teige published his book *Minimum Dwelling* (1932), a work of close to 400 pages which at the time of its appearance constituted the "biggest monograph on the problem of housing in the international professional literature."<sup>27</sup>

In the optimistic climate of the 1920s, Teige's solution to the modernist puzzle was a hopeful one; it could be interpreted as poised on an integration of theory and practice in the making of books which were both beautiful and functional. But the 1930s brought a decisive shift both in the political climate and in the work of Teige and his circle. Teige's interests increasingly seemed to have separated into a public and a private realm, as if the poetic and the constructive could no longer co-exist in quite the same way. Most of his public activity at the time came to be centered around his work promoting functionalist architecture. After *Minimum Dwelling*, he published a monograph on the work of a fellow Devětsil member, architect Jaromír Krejcar (1895-1949), (whose wife, Milena Jesenská, had been the addressee of Franz Kafka's *Letters to Milena*).<sup>28</sup> This work was followed by other publications on the sociology of architecture and housing: *Garden Cities of the Unemployed* (1933) and *Architecture of the Left and the Right Wing* (1934), both sponsored by the Left Front, the more politicized faction of the former Devětsil members.<sup>29</sup> In 1936, he published *Art Fair*, an attempt to formulate his viewpoints on the sociology of art.<sup>30</sup> *Vladimír Majakovskii* (1936), Teige's incisive study into the history and theory of Russian Futurism, also appeared in that year.

Teige's work as book designer is limited in this period to a series of cover montages for the work of his friend, Vítězslav Nezval. They present an interesting contrast not only to his early interpretations of *Pantomime* and *ABC*, but also to the 1926 title page designs for Nezval's books *A Lesser Rose Garden* and *The Carnival* (the second with Otakar Mrkvička, 1898-1957). The classical cover of the 1928 bibliophile edition of Nezval's *Jewish Cemetery*, illustrated with six original litho-



graphs by Jindřich Štyrský, stands apart from the rest of Teige's graphic work and in a way forms a stylistic transition in his approach to Nezval's oeuvre. Teige's covers for Nezval's *Poems of the Night* (1930), *The Glass Cloak* (1932) and *Return Ticket* (1933) already reveal Teige's surrealist orientation. *Farewell and a Handkerchief* (1934), *The Invisible Moscow* (1935) and *Woman in the Plural* (1936) are but a few further examples of this process.

Beginning in 1935, the more private dimension of Teige's activity begins to emerge. As his most devoted pupil and interpreter Vratislav Effenberger pointed out, from that point onward until his death, "surrealist collages became a pictorial diary of Teige's thinking". Of the more than three thousand works of this private realm, some are byproducts of Teige's book cover montages of the 1930s, such as Verlaine's *Les poètes maudits* or Nezval's *Prague with the Fingers of Rain* (1936); others are studies and improvisations on the work of other artists, such as Max Ernst, Giorgio di Chirico or René Magritte. Still others are inspired by, or reinterpret, the poems of his heroes of modernism, Baudelaire's "Invitation au voyage," (Figure 8) or Mallarmé. Many are inspired by his ongoing philosophical reflections, or are products of his growing anxieties as well as of his poetic visions and dreams, including the endless exploration of female body, that "Venus born of the pavement".

Although he considered his collages part of the private realm, Teige acknowledged their value as works of art; in his manuscript on the collages of Jindřich Štyrský, he wrote:

The transition from concrete to real, from realized fantasy to fantastic reality, from real groupings of utopian objects to the fantastic constellations of real objects, elected by desire to express the hidden tension, this transition was facilitated by hyperbolic collages whose important evolutionary function cannot be considered a minor experiment. Here, as many times before, a fundamental evolutionary act first takes place not in the works created by traditional techniques,

but in a space free of the trickery of the painterly script.

From 1934 on, after their initial ambivalence about the surrealist movement, members of the original Devětsil circle finally established the Prague Surrealist Group. Teige's distinctive qualities of leadership, international orientation and ability to combine the practical and the theoretical became engaged in the service of the surrealist revolution. In 1934-35, Teige edited the collection *Surrealism in Discussion*, based on the discussion evenings organized by the Left Front.<sup>32</sup> In the spring of 1935, he welcomed André Breton to Prague where the latter, together with Paul Eluard and the members of the Prague Surrealist Group, gave a series of lectures, the core of which led to Breton's *Qu'est ce que le surrealisme*, published in Czech in 1937.<sup>33</sup> Teige fostered contacts between the Czech surrealists and members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, particularly Jan Mukařovský and Roman Jakobson, some of whose books he had designed. In 1938, following the ideological rift within the Prague Surrealist Group which led to Nezval's departure, Teige published a pamphlet entitled *Surrealism against the Current* in which he summarized the principles of the work of the Group and defended them against the attacks of Nezval's clique.<sup>34</sup> This slim, cheaply printed booklet was his last pre-war publication.

In an earlier period Teige had believed that it was possible to achieve a synthesis of Poetism and Constructivism in the collective practice of a group of politically engaged and aesthetically informed intellectuals; in the 1930s he apparently could no longer sustain this belief. Instead of a coherent artistic practice, focused on the writing and production of books, we find in this period an increasingly fragmented praxis—on one hand, his socially oriented theoretical writings and on the other, a hermetic creation of esoteric and self-referential collages.

In the post-war years, Teige's voice came to be heard in increasing isolation by a close circle of surrealist friends. In a fragment from his post-war writing he expresses a wish "to sleep with my eyes closed where the world cannot come, to sleep over and over under the

destroyed sky on the soft seaweed of spring rushes.”<sup>35</sup> After his death, in 1951, his legacy was suppressed for almost a decade, until Nezval’s memoirs at least broke the oppressive silence; a second generation of Prague surrealists led by Effenberger could, in the mid-1960s, at last take steps to publish some of Teige’s writings from the 1920s and 1930s, together with an extensive commentary.<sup>36</sup> The appearance of the third projected volume, of Teige’s writings from the 1940s, was halted by the Soviet invasion of 1968.

More than twenty years later it has now once again become possible for both Czech and foreign scholars interested in the Czech avant-garde to re-discover the full extent of Teige’s contribution.

In his myriad interests, in the depth of his scholarship, in his sometimes inflexible ideologies and above all in his design, he remained, to the end, a poet in the original Greek sense of the word *poiesis*, in the sense in which his friend Vítězslav Nezval described him in his 1938 book, *Passant de Prague*:<sup>37</sup>

Poet is he who destroys and rebuilds the myths, who destroys them to shape them into others, always more real.

## Notes

1. Following Teige’s death, his entire personal archive, together with his extensive library, was confiscated by the then Ministry of State Security. While originally slated for destruction, part of Teige’s literary estate, consisting of 72 boxes of manuscripts and selected correspondence, survived and was eventually deposited with the archive of the Museum of National Literature in Prague. The above information is based on a brief inventory of the surviving archive: Růžena Hamanová, comp., *Karel Teige (1900-1951)*. Literary estate 736 (Praha: Literární archiv PNP, 1968).
2. Diary, 20 August 1919. Cited in *Karel Teige. Od poetismu k surrealismu* [Karel Teige: from Poetism to Surrealism]. Exhibition catalogue. (Brno: Dům umění města Brna, 1967), unpag.
3. F. X. Šalda, “O poetismu” [Poetism], in *Nejmladší poezí česká* [The Youngest Czech poetry] (Praha: Otto Gíral, 1928), 100.
4. Teige’s early conception of Poetism was published in *Host* [Guest], 9-10 (July 1924) 197-294, and later reprinted in his book *Stavba a báseň* [Construction and Poetry] (Praha: Vaněk a Votava, 1927), 159-166. In it, Teige expressed the nature of Poetism as a *modus vivendi* in which art, literature and philosophy are fully integrated with everyday life, are everyday life. Later theoretical modifications, as well as numerous examples of Poetism in art and literature of the period, were gathered in a collection by Květoslav Chvatík and Zdeněk Pešat, comps., *Poetismus* (Praha: Odeon, 1967). Numerous references to Poetism can be found in a recent exhibition catalogue, *Czech Modernism* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989).
5. In 1986, the first post-World War II exhibition representing the activities of Devětsil was organized in Prague and Brno under the title *Devětsil: Česká výtvarná avantgarda dvacátých let* [Czech avant-garde of the twenties]. A modified Devětsil exhibition was shown in Oxford in the Spring of 1990 under the title *Devětsil: Czech Avant-garde Art, Architecture*

and Design. Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues. The origin of the name Devětsil remains ambiguous and is alternately argued to have been derived from "devětsil," a Czech name for "butterburr," or from a compound of two Czech words, "devět" (nine) and "sily" (forces).

6. Karel Teige, "Obrazy" [Images], *Veraikon*, 10 (3-5), (1924), 38-39.

7. Karel Teige, *Archipenko* (Praha: Devětsil, 1923), 3.

8. *Stavba: měsíčník pro stavební umění* [Construction: art of the building monthly], published by the Architects' Club in Prague, 1922-1938, 14 vols. Teige joined the editorial board beginning with volume 2, 1923. He was editor-in-chief in 1926-27.

9. Karel Teige, "Poetismus", *Host*, 3(9-10), 1924.

10. Vítězslav Nezval, *Pantomima. Poesie*. Praha Ústřední studentské knihkupectví a nakladatelství, 1924; *Abeceda*. Praha: J. Otto, 1926; Jaroslav Seifert, *Na vlnách TSF. Poesie*. Praha: V. Petr, 1925.

11. Karel Teige, "Fototypografie", *Typografie* (Prague), 40 (11933).

12. Milča Mayerová, born 1901, Czech dancer and dance educator, had been photographed by photographer Karel Paspá. It is on Paspá's images that Teige's montages were based.

13. Karel Teige, "Foto-Kino-Film", *Život*, 2 (1922) 153-168; Karel Teige, *Film* (Praha: V. Petr, 1925).

14. *Ibid*

15. *Disk: revue internacionální kultury* [review of international culture], an avant-garde quarterly, published in Prague and Brno between 1923 and 1925, under the aegis of Devětsil. *Pásmo* [La zone], published by Devětsil in Brno, in 2 volumes: 1924-25, and 1925-26.

16. Louis Delluc, *Filmová dramata*, tr. J. Fastrová (Praha: Ot. Štroch-Marien, 1925); Charlie Chaplin, *Hurá do Evropy*, tr. L. Vymetal (Praha: A. Synek, 1929); Karel Teige, *Svět, který se směje* (Praha: Odeon, 1928).

17. Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*, ed. Philippe Soupault and Karel Teige, tr. Jindřich Hořejší and Karel Teige (Praha: Odeon, 1929); Stendhal, *O lásce* (Praha: Škeřek, 1930).

18. Philippe Soupault, *Bratři Durandea* [Frères Durandea] (Praha: Odeon, 1926); Isaac Babel, *Rudá jízda* [Konarmii] (Praha: Odeon, 1928); Ilya Ehrenburg, *Dýmky* [Pipes] (Praha: Aventinum, 1924); *Trust De* [Trust for the Destruction of Europe] (Aventinum, 1924); *Láska Jeanny Neuillové* [Love of Jeanne Ney] (Komunistické nakladatelství, 1925); *Neobyčejná dobrodružství Julia Jurenita* [The extraordinary adventures of Julio Jurenito] (Aventinum, 1926); *Historie jednoho léta* [Story of one summer] (Odeon, 1927); *Nesnáze Kavárenského povaleče* [Difficulties of a café bum] (Odeon, 1927); *V průběžné uličce* [The canal street] (Odeon, 1928). Several of the Ehrenburg designs were done in collaboration with Czech painter and designer, Otakar Mrkvička.

19. Charles Baudelaire, *Fanfarlo* [La fanfarlo] (Praha: Odeon, 1927); Guillaume Apollinaire, *Sedící žena* [La femme assise] (Praha: Odeon, 1925); *Zavražděný básník* [Le poète assassiné] (Praha: Aventinum, 1925); *Prsy Tiresiovny* [Les mamelles de Tiresias] (Praha: Odeon, 1926); Honoré de Balzac, *Chagrinová kůže* [La peau de chagrin] (Praha: Aventinum, 1925); Gustave Flaubert, *Paměti bláznovy* [Mémoires d'un fou] (Praha: Aventinum, 1924); Jean Cocteau, *Kobout a Venuse* [Le coq et Venus] (Praha: Odeon, 1927); Emile Verhaeren, *Svitání* [Les aubes] 2nd. (Praha: Odeon, 1925); Blaise Cendrars, *Zlato* [L'or] (Praha: Odeon, 1926); Jules Romains, *Obrozené městečko* [Le bourg régénéré] (Praha: Odeon, 1928); *Psyché* (Praha: Škeřek, 1931); Jules Supervielle, *Muž divokých krajů* [L'homme de la pampa] (Praha: Odeon, 1927); Joseph Delteil, *Cholera* [Choléra] (Praha: Odeon, 1926).

20. Marcel Proust, *Hledání ztraceného času* [À la recherche du temps perdu] (Praha: Odeon, 1927-32).

21. Karel Teige, "Moderní typografie", *Typografia*, 34 (7-9), (1927), 189-198.

22. *Ibid.*, 90.

23. *ReD (Revue Devětsilu)*, 1-3 (Praha: U.S. Devětsil 1927-1931).
24. *ReD*, 1 (October 1927), 1.
25. Konstantin Biebl, *S lodí jež dováží čaj a kávu* (Praha: Odeon, 1928) and *Zlom* (Praha: Odeon, 1928).
26. Konstantin Biebl, *Nebe, peklo, ráj* (Praha: Jánská, 1930); Vítězslav Nezval, *Chtěla okrást Lorda Blamingtona* (Praha: Odeon, 1930); Stendhal, *O lásce* [De l'amour] (Praha: Škeřík, 1930); Karel Teige, *Svět který voní* (Praha: Odeon, 1930-31).
27. Karel Teige, *Moderní architektura v Československu* (Praha: Odeon, 1930); M.S.A. (Mezinárodní soudobá architektura), 1-3 (Praha: Odeon, 1930-31); *Nejmenší byt* (Praha: Petr, 1932).
28. Karel Teige, *Práce Jaromíra Krejčara* [The work of Jaromír Krejcar] (Praha: Petr, 1932).
29. Karel Teige, *Zabradní města nezaměstnaných* (Praha: Pavlová, 1933); *Architektura pravá a levá* (Praha: Levá Fronta, 1934).
30. Karel Teige, *Jarmark umění* (Praha: Odeon, 1936); *Vladimír Majakovský* (Praha: Prokopová, 1936).
31. "Jindřich Štyrský", manuscript 1946, 1948. Cited here from the exhibition catalogue *Od poetismu k surrealismu* (Brno: Dům umění města Brna, 1967), unpagged.
32. *Surrealismus v diskusi*. Ed. Karel Teige (Praha: Levá Fronta, 1934).
33. André Breton, *Co je surrealismus?* (Brno: Jícha, 1937).
34. Karel Teige, *Surrealismus proti proudu* (Praha Surrealistická skupina, 1938).
35. Quoted in the exhibition catalogue, *Od poetismu k surrealismu* (Brno: Dům umění města Brna, 1967). unpagged.
36. Karel Teige. *Výbor z díla*. [Selected works] Vol. 1, *Svět stavby a básně. Studie z dvacátých let*. [The world of construction and poetry. Essays from the twenties.] Vol. 2, *Zápas o smysl moderní tvorby. Studie z třicátých let*. [The struggle for the meaning of modern creation. Essays from the thirties.] (Praha: [Československý spisovatel, 1966-69.
37. Vítězslav Nezval, *Pražský chodec* (Praha: Borový, 1938). The title was originally used by Guillaume Apollinaire in his short story "Le passant de Prague", *L'Héresiarque et Cie* (Paris: Stock, 1910).