

# MONTAGE OR FAKE NEWS?

AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE

Virtual programme accompanying the exhibition *John Heartfield – Photography plus Dynamite* at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2 June – 23 August 2020

## John Heartfield and Film

Angela Lammert (curator)

Sergei Tretyakov, who wrote the first monograph on John Heartfield (1936), coined the descriptive phrase “film as a kitchen for montage” when discussing the artist’s political photomontages. The idea to organise a film and media section with a double screening of the silent movie *Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1924) and the photofilm *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962) was conceived as a “dialogic” contribution to the John Heartfield exhibition. A juxtaposition with both films recalls Heartfield’s early involvement with animation films – a little known chapter in the artist’s oeuvre until now. Together with his close friend and fellow artist George Grosz, Heartfield made exaggerated, satirical figures cut out of cardboard, which they combined and animated using the stop-motion technique. In 1916 Heartfield began working for the Greenbaum-Film company in Berlin as a film set and production designer. A recommendation from the writer, art patron and diplomat Harry Graf Kessler, which linked the artist with the film service of the of the Supreme Army Command, led Heartfield to discuss new forms of film propaganda with George Grosz. The two artists planned to make a puppet film grotesque about German soldiers and an animated world chronicle, similar to Julius Pinschewer’s promotional film *Das Gebot der Stunde* (1917). There was even the idea of a film project *Soldatenlieder* (*Soldier’s Songs*), a silent grotesque with actors. Information about their work on the now lost animation film *Sammy in Europa* (also titled *Pierre in Saint Nazaire*) has survived through documentation, including a letter on Malik-Verlag letterhead. Grosz’s hand drawn figures were pasted onto cardboard and given movable joints. These were then repositioned a millimetre at a time, and filmed frame-by-frame. UFA’s animation film division was developed out of these works, with Heartfield as its first artistic director. Apart from this film work, in 1919 he made at least seven educational and cultural films. Film historian Jean-paul Goergen’s discovery of Heartfield’s the only film left, *Hohlglasfabrikation* (*Hollow Glassware Production*, 1918–19), is a small sensation for the exhibition. It features a worker posed with his various tools and also addresses the topic of child labour.

In his photomontages John Heartfield also took up some image motifs similar to Sergei Eisenstein who was known as the pioneer of cinematic montage and reexamined the filmmaker’s montage techniques. Heartfield’s contributions to Kurt Tucholsky’s *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (1929) are an example. He also used a film still of Eisenstein’s film *Panzer-*

*kreuzer* (*Battleship*) *Potemkin* (1925) for the cover of a publication by F. Slang (aka Fritz Oskar Hampel), published by the Malik-Verlag in 1926. Considerations on Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” undertaken in connection with John Heartfield’s photomontage technique by film historians Ulrich Gregor and Naum Kleeman are dialogically juxtaposed to a text by filmmaker Gusztáv Hámos about Chris Marker’s “thought montage” in his science fiction photofilm *La Jetée*, made 36 years later. In contrast to Eisenstein, Marker, who fought with the French Resistance during the Second World War, and made one of the first anti-colonialist films, *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953), in collaboration with Alain Resnais, spoke of the “montage of resonance” in film. Both interpretations are based on the dialectic of images. How has the concept and political function of montage changed in film?

Recommendation: On YouTube you can watch the movie *Strike* with music performed by the Alloy Orchestra, in a digital version by International Corporation and Film Preservation Associates. Only excerpts of the film *La Jetée* are currently available on the internet.

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## Heartfield – Eisenstein. A Dialogue

Naum Kleeman and Ulrich Gregor

### Part I

#### Mediums of Expression with New Meaning

John Heartfield was not the inventor of montage in photography, nor was Sergei Eisenstein responsible for inventing montage in film. But each of them gave new meaning and dimension to these expressive media. Both artists have made such a lively and convincing impact through the development of montage in their works that their respective uses of montage techniques are often linked first and foremost to their names.

Heartfield resolutely defied the “smooth” commercial photomontage popular in advertising posters as well as sentimental pictorialism, for instance in the style of Henry Peach Robinson. Instead, his starting point to montage grew out of the Dada movement with its satirical forms of “alienation” and disrespect of everyday logic. Anti-war propaganda and anti-bourgeois manifestos were his visual objectives, as his striking works clearly show.

In a similar vein, when staging his epic films, Eisenstein rejected the luxurious pseudo-historical productions of Hollywood that provided a stage especially for movie stars. He also turned away from sentimental chamber plays. Instead, he relied on a direct representation of the course of social conflicts and on a view of the masses composed of individualised types.

The style of both artists show similar characteristics: a fragmentation of real objects and figurative rearrangement of these fragments; a metaphorical use in the implementation of whole objects and images as well as their parts; zoomorphic metaphors as a means for satirical characterisation; active emotional and intellectual influence on the viewer’s perception.

In their personal and artistic communications we find less of a reciprocal influence than a typological affinity and a genuine, collegial association.

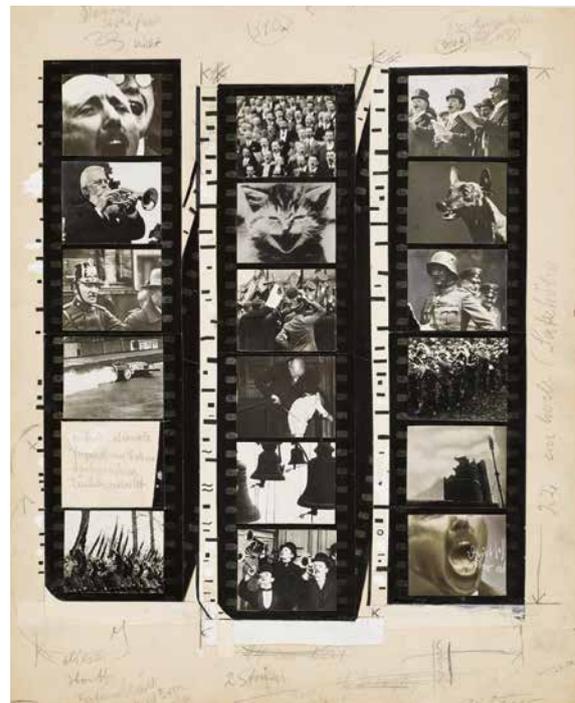
Naum Kleeman, film historian (Moscow)

### Part II

#### Montage as Connecting Element

John Heartfield and Sergei Eisenstein are often associated with one another and their works are positioned in the same discourse. The two artists were contemporaries. They belonged to related artistic and political movements, and there were similarities of method as well as objectives within their artistic practices. Montage techniques were the unifying elements between them – in Heartfield’s case his photomontage praxis as a graphic artist and political activist, and in Eisenstein’s oeuvre – as film director and theoretician – as the central concept of an expressive image design and novel cinematic technique for narration.

Eisenstein coined the term “montage of attractions” which he derived from theatre praxis. Under “attraction” he understood “any aggressive theatrical moment; each element, which influences the thoughts and psyche of the viewer.” With these kind



John Heartfield, *Deutscher Tonfilm*, Original Assembly, 1929 for *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*. A picture book by Kurt Tucholsky with many photographs. Montage by John Heartfield ©The Heartfield Community of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020, Akademie der Künste, Berlin



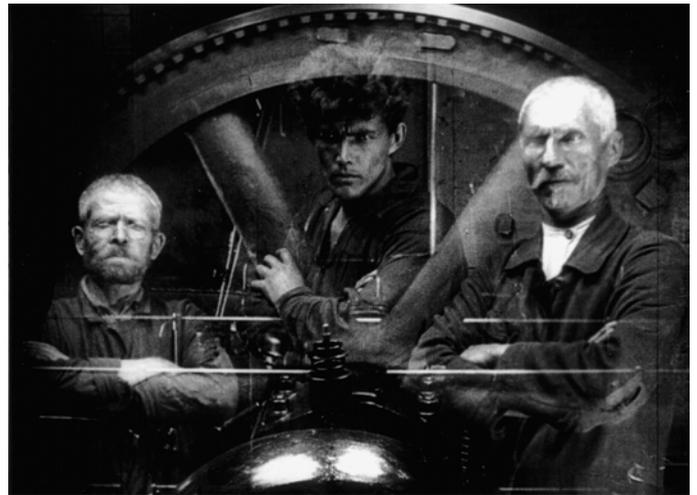
*Strike*, 1924, Director: Sergei Eisenstein, Filmmuseum Berlin – Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek

of “mathematically calculated” attractions he wanted to shake his audience awake and lead them on the path to new insights. Numerous examples of these montage practices are found in Eisenstein’s film *Strike (Statschka)* from 1924.

Heartfield’s artistic methods for photomontage were based on a similar principle. Here, too, it was a matter of developing the expressiveness of an image or graphic representation from a clash of heterogeneous, seemingly incompatible elements. Their encounter in a photomontage, achieved through a process of manipulating the material, is intended to evoke a shock-like experience in the viewer. It is perceived as a surprise, but also as a provocation.

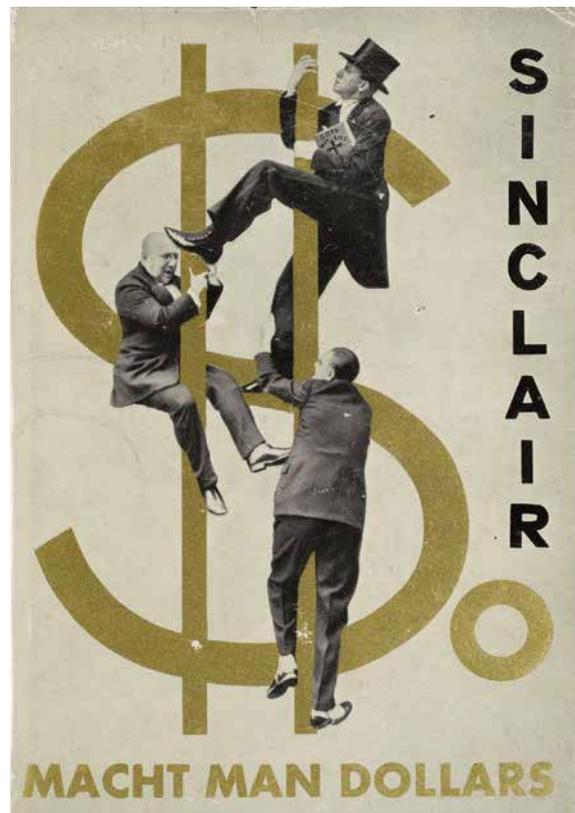
Montage served both Eisenstein and Heartfield as a trigger for realisation and enlightenment. It was a tool for generating emotions, for reflection and possibly for instigating a change of perspective and political opinion. In contrast to Eisenstein’s use of them, Heartfield’s montages originate on a two-dimensional plane as graphic works, book illustrations or posters. In Eisenstein’s case montage was also created in an individual image, or so-called image frame, but it occurred largely in temporal succession.

In Heartfield’s graphics the artist’s affinity to the medium of film becomes apparent time and again. He was interested in film mainly as a vehicle for political content, which he attacked or parodied. Particularly characteristic is a photomontage that was published under the title *Deutscher Tonfilm* as an illustration in Kurt Tucholsky’s *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (1929). In a sequence of individual image frames, montaged to replicate film scripts, it’s as if we recognise a film clip from Walter Ruttmann’s film *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927). The rhythmic principle of the arrangement of image sequences becomes apparent. However, in Ruttmann’s case, the aim is less directed at political statements than at an evocation of a “big city rhythm”. In contrast, in a montage of individual images, the political statement is clearly recognisable as the grounding principle of the composition for Heartfield: He is interested in



caricaturing everyday life of a nationalistically orchestrated society.

In Eisenstein’s films montages can be found in single images – through superimpositions, double exposures, cross-fading – as well as in the collision of motifs or image sequences. One particularly distinctive example from the film *Strike* is the combination of a graphic structure with realistic image content. The three workers, who appear at the beginning of the film, slowly cross their arms while the contour of a previously rotating but now stationary machine wheel can be seen behind them. This is a suggestive, visual metaphor for the underlying “strike” concept.



John Heartfield, *So macht man Dollars*, Upton Sinclair, Book cover, Malik-Publisher, Berlin 1931 ©The Heartfield Community of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020, Akademie der Künste, Berlin



John Heartfield, *5 Finger hat die Hand. Mit 5 packst Du den Feind. Wählt Liste 5. Kommunistische Partei!*, 1928 ©The Heartfield Community of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020, Akademie der Künste, Berlin

In his film *Strike*, Eisenstein uses similar montages for the parodistic connections/cross-fading of images of animals with the individual portraits of spies – a method of working, for which there are quite similar examples in Heartfield’s work. The portraits of Eisenstein’s spies transform in a particularly original way in *Strike* through their embedding into a graphic structure in the sequence. The spies become visible to us through small windows, which are side by side and below one another, as in a painting or book illustration.

The inclusion of text in montage sequences is interesting in the works of both Heartfield and Eisenstein. At the beginning of Eisenstein’s film *Strike*, letters from one of the intertitles transforms into an image motif; at the end the close-up of a face is followed by two intertitles: “Remember, Proletarians”. For Heartfield, a combination of text and image formed the basis of design of his graphic works, in illustrations, photomontages and posters (for example, a Sinclair Lewis book cover).

There are some remarkable similarities between the image motifs used by Heartfield and Eisenstein, including the motif of the raised hand. In Heartfield’s work it appears in the design for his “*5 Fingers Has The Hand*” election poster (“*5 Finger hat die Hand. Mit 5 packst Du den Feind. Wählt Liste 5. Kommunistische Partei!*”). In Eisenstein, the motif can be found in the metaphoric sequence of many hands raised simultaneously, in which a severed finger on one hand is particularly noticeable.

This sequence of the hands, contrasted with scenes from a slaughterhouse, directly introduces the major scenes of repres-

sion of a workers’ demonstration, which is a central example of the “montage of attractions”. This famous sequence has been quoted and reproduced several times in other films, for example in Fernando Solanas’ Argentine agitation film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968).

Ulrich Gregor, Film critic and film historian (Berlin)

## Part III

### Two Reflections

Dear Ulrich,

Thank you for the text about Heartfield and Eisenstein. I could add two reflections:

First: The combination of political journalism (*publicistic*) and visual poetry (often surrealistic) is a common Heartfield feature in all epochs just as it is with early works by Eisenstein. Both play with grotesque metaphors, with paradoxical parallels and rhymes; both use alienation effects. I’m certain that the young Brecht was influenced by both of them.

Second: Both play with the size of objects and with different perspectives – they construct a hypothetical world with the help of montage: Heartfield spatially; Eisenstein using time.

You ask whether Heartfield and Eisenstein ever met. Yes, in Germany in 1929, together with Kurt Tucholsky, and Eisenstein received a copy of the book *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* as a gift from him with a dedication (it survived in his library; we scanned the photomontage *Der deutsche Tonfilm* from it).

And Eisenstein spoke very highly of Heartfield at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (WGIK) in Moscow – unfortunately, the stenograph reports have not yet been published. In vol. 4 of the six-volume edition (that’s the textbook on directing, *L’art de la mise-en-scène*, 1934), there is a comparison about Heartfield and the Surrealists: Eisenstein believed that their methods were similar, but that their objectives were different. John Heartfield was concerned with satirical images of bourgeois society and the Surrealists were interested in the depths and darkness of the unconscious.\*

Naum Kleeman

## Part IV

### A School of Visual Arts. Eisenstein on Heartfield and Surrealism

The principle of combining real elements from a pool of visual reserves becomes a school of visual arts. Surrealism made some use of this in its image practices, where it was more of a “free play of the imagination” [...] It is characteristic that one and the same formal principle can lead to results of simultaneously delusional, mystical, non-representational works from the declassified [part of] Surrealism, but also to John Heartfield’s targeted photomontages in political pamphlets. Heartfield’s works clearly reflect social power, using general psychological pre-conditions for establishing ready-made forms to express his class attitudes. [...] Photomontage has the effect of a barricade in Heartfield’s hands.\*

Sergej Eisenstein

\* Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works* [originally cited from the German version, *Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 4, Moscow, 1966, p. 651.]

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## Time Travel is a Thought Montage

Gusztáv Hámos

### Introduction

*La Jetée* (1962), (*The Jetty*, 1962), is a French science fiction short film (26 minutes). Set in the aftermath of World War III in post-apocalyptic Paris, where survivors live underground in the Galerien des Palais de Chaillot, scientists experiment with investigations on time travel, in the hopes that test persons can be sent to different times – into the past or the future – to find a way to save the present.

### Doubling

Chris Marker's *La Jetée* begins with a photographic duplicating process a kind of double exposure that allows the double presence of the nameless hero intertwined on the two time levels: the protagonist finds himself in one place, yet "twice" at the same moment: once as a child and, at the same time, as an adult man.

The Hungarian artist, poet and filmmaker Miklós Erdély (1928–1986) depicts himself in his photo series *Időutazás* (*Time Travel*, 1976) as twice present and interconnected on two planes of time. As an adult he kneels down to himself as a child. In another black-and-white photograph in the series he watches himself as a teenager playing chess with his father. Then he taps himself as a younger man on the right shoulder.

In the fourth photograph, his younger alter ego appears to be enjoying himself as if in a trance while Erdély's mature adult version whispers a warning about drugs in the ear of his.

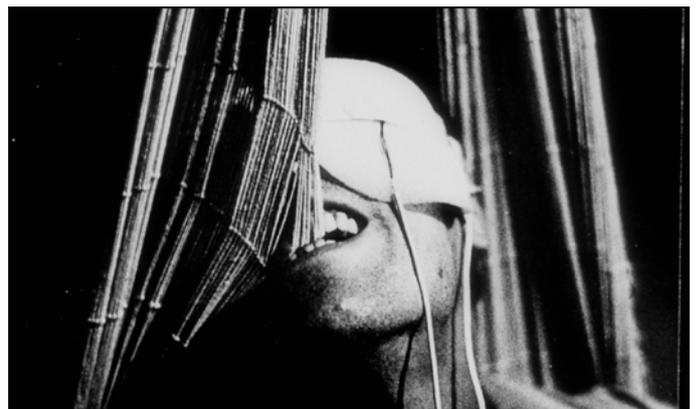
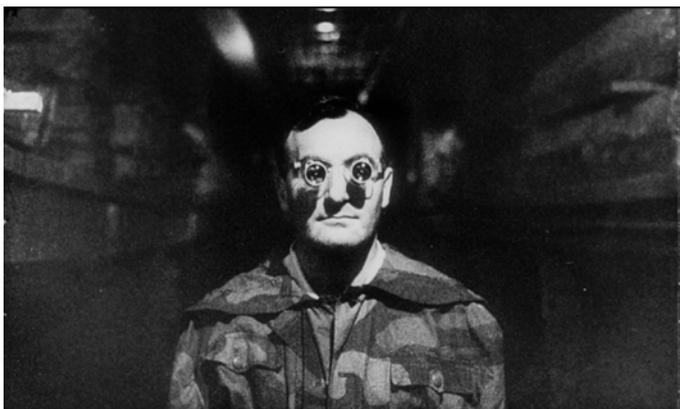
Erdély wants to contradict the theoretician and philosopher Roland Barthes by creating photomontages based on a principle that could be summed up with the words: "That-has-NOT-been". He also contradicted the fundamental principle of photography, having the potential to reference to the reality (our reality; the world). We assume that the photographic image shows the past and embodies the notion "This is how it was", but in essence, we know it's just an image, a copy of the light reflection that was there.

The double vision in Marker's *La Jetée* can be explained by the spatio-temporal hardships that author and screenwriter Jean Cayrol experienced as a member of the French Resistance and forced labourer at the quarries of the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps. When the body confronts a spatial, physical or biological emergency, the mind must free itself from the body, to separate itself in order to survive. It will replicate itself so as not to cease to exist, as Imre Kertész wrote in *Fiasco* (*A kudarc*, 1988). To survive, the mind removes itself from the shelter of the body, freeing itself from physical constraints.

### Time Jam

With one exception, *La Jetée* is a montage of filmed black-and-white photographs for the narration in stretched time.

"Film and photo are related to each other like fire and ice", wrote Peter Wollen. "Film is all light and shadow, incessant motion, transience, flicker, a source of Bachelardian reverie like flames in the grate. Photography is motionless and frozen, it has



Stills from *La Jetée*, 1962, Director: Chris Marker © Argos Films

the cryogenic power to preserve objects through time without decay. Fire will melt ice, but then the melted ice will put out the fire (as in *Superman III*).” (Peter Wollen, “Feuer und Eis”, in Hubertus von Amelunxen (editor): *Theorie der Fotografie IV*, Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2000, p. 358; see also Peter Wollen, ‘Fire and Ice’ in *Photographies*, no. 4 (Paris, April 1984) 118–20).

Wollen cites Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (F, 1962) as an example. “Strung together in the chain, it can carry a narrative as efficiently as moving picture” (see citation above, p. 360), especially as the photo film, more than movies, shared a dependence on a soundtrack.

## Photofilm as a Tool of Time Travel

A photograph from the past shows us something that is no longer the same in the present. We can use a photographic image to think about the future of the past. A photograph also makes us think about the past of the past, the present of the past and the future of the past. Everything that has been, all that is gone. With the invention of photography, which depicts reflected light from bodies and objects, we suddenly have evidence of that which existed before. With the invention of film, which captures movement from reality in the series of progressing images, we are able to visualize what was there in the making. When we place a photograph in its cinematographic context and watch the evidence of something that has existed go through the process of becoming right before our eyes, and when we watch a photofilm such as *La Jetée*, we embark immediately on a time travel.

## Time Travel is Thought Montage / Digging in Time

Chris Marker’s ultimate photo film was the first to compellingly demonstrate that what is typical of the film medium is not exhausted by the representation of movement, but is defined by the reorganisation of time as it is common for the new cinematic age, based on 24 frames per second. The uniqueness of the only moving image sequence in *La Jetée* (when the protagonist’s lover opens her eyes and looks directly at the camera, at him, and thus also at us) makes us think about the difference between still images in photography and moving images in cinematography. We see the moving image in the context of the spaces between thoughts; we think and feel at the same time.

## Photofilm

Film depicts something that has taken place in the past. Paradoxically, we nevertheless interpret a moving image sequence



Still aus *La Jetée*, 1962, Regie: Chris Marker © Argos Films

as the present, because the illusion of movement is being recreated again and again in the *here* and *now*. Film shows something from the past, but our actual process of perception does not make us think of the past, but instead focuses our attention on what is now in the making and what will be in the future. What captures our attention at the cinema and what really interests us is the process of becoming.

Given the context of a film’s fleeting images, a photo stands for permanence, even when we no longer hold it in our hands. When we see a photograph on the screen in a cinema, we think perhaps of the completed future of the photo’s past, and alternatively, we expect a future of the cinema in the present. The photo in a cinematographic context reflects all times relating to the past: the past of the past, the present of the past and the future of the past. And on top of that, something that is still becoming awaits us there.

Gusztáv Hámos, filmmaker, author, co-editor (with Katja Pratschke and Thomas Tode) of the book *Viva Fotofilm. bewegt/unbewegt*, published by Schüren-Verlag, Marburg, 2010

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## Addendum

### Naum Kleeman

While talking with Cornelia Klauß (Secretary, Film and Media Arts Section) on 27 April 2020 about why Sergei Eisenstein is still relevant today, Naum Kleeman replied: “Eisenstein goes beyond belonging just to his own time. He was thinking about 3D cinema and wrote about stereoscopic film. Although he did not foresee the internet, Eisenstein once mentioned that he wanted to write a ‘spherical’ book to be able ‘to go inside it’ from all sides because he believed that every “cell” should be interconnected. This concept corresponds to our websites.

It is imperative to understand that Eisenstein is not a ‘style’. His style is part of his time, much like he himself is as an artist – this is the theory of film. He did not intend to explain an individual film style, but rather the possibilities of cinematic language. This is interesting right now because of the digital revolution of film language. Eisenstein is of great help here. Filmmakers can now use their computers to discover that Eisenstein thought very practically and not only theoretically.”

### Gusztáv Hámos

In the opening credits of his 1995 film *Twelve Monkeys* director Terry Gilliam decidedly mentions the film *La Jetée* as the basis for the script. In this work, Gilliam refers to a time travel motif on the one hand, and on the other, he makes reference to John Heartfield’s aesthetics. Gilliam got his start with Monty Python, the film troupe of comedians who drew on the traditions of vaudeville, the circus and burlesque. Whether in *Twelve Monkeys* or Gilliam’s more well-known film *Brazil* (1985), overstatement extremely distorted by the optics is just as striking as the profusion of details in the imagery, which set signs, lay tracks and refers to references in the background. The connection to collage is unmistakable.

Gusztáv Hámos answering a question about contextual references in the two films:

“*La Jetée* was the source of inspiration for Janet and David Webb Peoples, the screenwriters of Terry Gilliam’s *Twelve Monkeys*. Instead of Earth being contaminated by nuclear war, a deadly virus is introduced that wipes out nearly the entire human race. The survivors live underground in Philadelphia, just like in

Paris as it was depicted in the film *La Jetée*. Unlike the nameless hero in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*, the main character in Gilliam’s *Twelve Monkeys* has a name, James Cole. In 2035 Cole is held captive in an underground compound beneath the ruins of Philadelphia. And just as in *La Jetée*, a group of evil scientists send the hero on a trip through time. The purpose of this trip is not to secure energy and food, but to locate the original virus so that the scientists can develop an antiserum. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, the story behind *Twelve Monkeys* takes on a sad topicality today.”