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# Shaping the Unshapeable?

## *Videographic Curation of Early Czech Cinema*

### Abstract

Whenever a curator attempts to present films from the very beginnings of cinema to contemporary spectators, multiple pressing questions always come to mind. Shall the ephemeral one-minute scenes be shown individually or as parts of larger wholes, sorted out according to thematic or chronological affinities? How to successfully reproduce not only the films' content but also their inherent technological features or the distinctive quality of early cinematic experience? How is it possible to make the audience aware of the historical distance that the surviving archival artifacts covered? How can we navigate between the film materials' past, present, and future?

This study brings forth the idea that to understand the earliest cinematic works in a richer way, film curatorship may adopt a more creative and interventionist approach — not in order to turn the artifacts into something entirely different but to highlight their hidden cracks and ambiguities. More specifically, it examines a videographic essay titled *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* (Jiří Anger and Adéla Kudlová, 2021) that plays with the paradoxes and contradictions of the recently digitized films of Jan Kříženecký (1898–1911), or, more precisely, of the very *first* images of the works we see. Both the videographic essay and its written accompaniment showcase that curation of uncertain, disfigured, and fragmentary archival artifacts from the beginnings of cinema does not necessarily have to limit itself to filling the gaps; instead, it can embrace their lacunas as windows onto all the things that make the earliest cinema so strange and fascinating.

### Keywords

early cinema, film curatorship, archives, digital humanities, videographic criticism, Czech cinema, Jan Kříženecký

## Introduction

Few kinds of archival artifacts challenge film curators as much as those from the very beginnings of cinema. For those responsible for preserving and presenting moving images, the fascination pioneering cinematic works produce goes hand in hand with anxiety. Whenever one attempts to screen, for example, the films by the Lumière brothers, multiple pressing questions always come to mind: Shall the ephemeral one-minute actualities be presented individually or as parts of larger wholes, sorted out according to thematic and/or chronological affinities? What types of film materials shall be used: the original nitrate prints from the brink of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are difficult to screen due to the non-standard single pair of round perforations<sup>1)</sup> and reek of special protection because of the permanent risk of burning or falling apart, later generation copies, which often differ significantly from the original material-wise and content-wise, or the digitized/digitally restored facsimiles of either? At what speed shall the films be projected, considering that the standard framerates we are now familiar with were not applicable back then?<sup>2)</sup> How to successfully reproduce not only the films' content but also their technological features (such as camera instability)<sup>3)</sup> and the distinctive quality of early cinematic experience as a collective event? How is it possible to make the audience aware of the historical distance that the surviving archival artifacts covered without overwhelming it with extra information?<sup>4)</sup> And when the curator proceeds from merely showing the films towards creating original interpretations (texts, videos, performances) of early cinematic artifacts as aesthetic, historical, and technological phenomena for the times we are living in, how can she or he navigate between their past, present, and future?

As someone who participates in an ongoing project undertaken at the National Film Archive (Národní filmový archiv) in Prague on the "first Czech films," I have had a chance to experience first-hand how many problems, paradoxes, and contradictions the process of curating earliest cinema involves. The digitization of the earliest surviving Czech films, made by Jan Kříženecký<sup>5)</sup> between 1898 and 1911 with the equipment obtained from the Lumières, gave birth to a body of work that simulates an authentic archival imprint of his-

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- 1) Eric Loné, "Lumière," in Harold Brown, *Physical Characteristics of Early Films as Aids to Identification*, ed. Camille Blot-Wellens (Brussels: FIAF, 2020), 165–168.
  - 2) Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: A Guide to Study, Research and Curatorship* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 61–66.
  - 3) On the camera instability in the earliest cinema, see Benoît Turquety, *Inventing Cinema: Machines, Gestures and Media History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 231–248.
  - 4) This topic was addressed poignantly by Elif Rongen-Kaynakçı during a discussion on curating early cinema: "A Season of Classic Films | Where, How and to Whom — the challenges of presenting earliest cinema," *Filmový přehled*, June 3, 2021, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/cs/kalendar/detail/a-season-of-classic-films-where-how-and-to-whom-the-challenges-of-presenting-earliest-cinema>. Asli Özgen and Elif Rongen-Kaynakçı, "The Transnational Archive as a Site of Disruption, Discrepancy, and Decomposition: The Complexities of Ottoman Film Heritage," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 21, no. 1–2 (2021), 77–99.
  - 5) Of course, Kříženecký had collaborators, notably Josef František Pokorný, who acted as a producer and arranger of the 1898 films, and Josef Šváb-Malostranský, a cabaret actor who had a huge role in the creation of first short fiction films at the 1898 Exhibition of Architecture and Engineering in Prague where the first Czech films were presented.

tory, yet which is at the same time riddled with fissures, ellipses, and uncertainties. The films were digitized from the original prints and negatives (crucially, without retouching damages and instabilities that pertain to the films' technological qualities and material history)<sup>6)</sup> and subsequently released on DVD and Blu-ray (*The Films of Jan Kříženecký*) in December 2019. The DVD / Blu-ray collection, which includes texts and videocommentaries by film archivists and historians as well as period photographs and documents,<sup>7)</sup> strove to marry respectful cataloging and contextualization of the materials with reflecting the incompleteness of analog fragments and the necessary shifts that occur with the digitization process — what Michael Loebenstein terms “presentation with seams.”<sup>8)</sup> Still, the edition was relatively tame when it came to deciphering the extent to which the digitized films' hybrid and fragmentary character shapes our experience of them. While the archivist and curator in charge of the digitization, Jeanne Pommeau, documented and demonstrated physical elements such as color layers on the prints, marks of static electricity, or camera trembling and also more common mechanical and chemical damages and ellipses in textual and audiovisual form,<sup>9)</sup> the aesthetic potential of these features remained unexplored. Now it is time to experiment with practical forms of presentation in which this potential shall be unleashed, in which the so-called imperfections of Kříženecký's films shall serve to reinvigorate their historicity, materiality, and aesthetics in a defamiliarizing yet still historically accurate fashion.

This article delimits one such exercise in experimental curatorship that goes beyond merely exhibiting and contextualizing the first Czech films and interprets them via original creative forms. A videographic essay titled *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* (Jiří Anger and Adéla Kudlová, 2021) plays with the paradoxes and contradictions of the earliest cinematic works. While we watch the *first* Czech films for the *first* time in a digital form, the very *first* images of the works mostly stay overlooked. Thus, the essay gathers every single “first frame” of each piece of digitized original film material (nitrate prints and negatives) and assembles them into a compilation that reveals them in detail as well as part of a larger mosaic. On the one hand, the essay exploits the possibilities of digital technology to show the individual frames from multiple angles and bring obscure details to the fore; on the other, it is also a reflection of an early screening practice, when projectionists started the presentation with a still image that gradually evolved into a continuous movement.

The video essay subscribes to the dynamically evolving tradition of “videographic criticism.”<sup>10)</sup> Its approach is based on performing research by means of the moving images and

6) See the short report on the digitization project: Jeanne Pommeau and Jiří Anger, “The Digitization of Jan Kříženecký's Films,” *Iluminace* 31, no. 1 (2019), 104–107.

7) Jiří Anger, ed., *Filmy Jana Kříženeckého / The Films of Jan Kříženecký* (DVD / Blu-ray, Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2019).

8) Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein, eds., *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace* (Wien: Synema — Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, 2008), 203.

9) Jeanne Pommeau, “The Digitisation of Jan Kříženecký's Films,” in *Filmy Jana Kříženeckého / The Films of Jan Kříženecký*, ed. Jiří Anger (DVD / Blu-ray Booklet, Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2019), 31–35; Jeanne Pommeau, “The Digitisation of Kříženecký's Films [videocommentary],” in *Filmy Jana Kříženeckého / The Films of Jan Kříženecký*, ed. Jiří Anger (DVD / Blu-ray, Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2019).

10) Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant, eds., *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and*

sounds themselves, instead of in a traditional written text, thereby opening up a new epistemology of studying film objects in the digital age and general possibilities of what Bernd Herzogenrath terms “practical aesthetics,” a way of thinking *with* and *through* the artwork, not *about* it (in the sense of imposing external concepts on it).<sup>11)</sup> In many ways, videographic criticism builds upon found footage and archival film practices,<sup>12)</sup> albeit in the context of academic film and media studies and the evolving field of digital humanities. As I argue through the text, the “videographic essay” format offers many opportunities not only for research but also for curatorship, as it allows us to make the historical, technological, and aesthetic ambiguity of the first Czech films more accessible (or at least more comprehensible).

To better approximate the aims and implications of the videographic essay, this study includes both the actual video and its written elaboration that proceeds in three stages. First, it delineates epistemic conditions of curating early cinema, with specific attention towards the films of Jan Kříženecký as cinematic milestones and marginal archival artifacts at the same time. Second, it covers various examples of creative appropriation of early films by European film archives, introducing ways in which they enable us to actualize the original works. Third, it contextualizes *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* and outlines how it can help us understand the materiality and aesthetics of Kříženecký’s films within the fluid digital landscape. As a whole, this study brings forth the idea that film curatorship may, under certain conditions, involve active (re)interpretation and deconstruction of archival artifacts — not in order to turn them into something entirely different but to unveil their hidden cracks and exploit their powers to make us understand the films in a richer way.

### Touching Early Cinematic Artifacts with Surgical Gloves

The history of the first Czech films is a never-ceasing struggle in how to make them visible and graspable. Kříženecký’s cinematic works are mostly actualities from official ceremonies and everyday city rush whose aim is not to give a comprehensive account of captured events but first and foremost make these events perceptible despite limited technical possibilities. Even in their time, they were perceived as ephemeral, blurry, and incomplete, and their aging and circulation in multifarious contexts have only reinforced these qualities. Simultaneously, the peculiar nature of the Lumière film technology, which Kříženecký used in shooting, developing, and projecting his films, impinges upon the form and con-

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*Image* (Montreal: caboose, 2019); Volker Pantenburg, “Videographic Film Studies,” in *Handbuch Filmanalyse*, eds. Malte Hagener and Volker Pantenburg (Berlin: Springer, 2020), 485–502.

11) Bernd Herzogenrath, “Toward a Practical Aesthetics: Thinking With,” in *Practical Aesthetics*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 1–24.

12) See, for example, Christa Blümlinger, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst* (Berlin: vorwerk 8, 2009); Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014); Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Third Revised Edition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Catherine Russell, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

tent of the moving images much more noticeably than we are used to — in some cases, it brings the films' aesthetic effects close to what we know as experimental cinema.<sup>13)</sup> This was, somewhat paradoxically, allowed by a non-intrusive approach to digitization that did not involve retouching or overstabilization of the image.<sup>14)</sup> Thus, while the newly accessible films boast high-definition picture quality, achieved by scanning the materials in 4K, and many new options for exhibition and manipulation, the digitization process did not efface the deformations present in the material but rendered them all the more visible in the image. It preserved not only damages and instabilities caused by the ravages of time but also deformations inherent in the material properties of the original nitrate prints and negatives as well as those resulting from the mechanical functioning of the Lumière camera (Cinématographe-type) that Kříženecký used. This strangely hybrid form enables us to perceive weird shapes that one usually does not encounter among the rips, dots, and dust in stock archival footage nor in crystal-clear digitally restored films. Material-technological elements — not only more traditional damages like splices or scratches but also intrinsic deformations such as a yellowish-orange color layer, marks of static electricity, or camera instability — endow the moving images with speculatively and aesthetically generative features and make the films' aesthetic effects and meanings inseparable from their shifting materiality and circulation across many eras and contexts.

Thus, we are dealing with archival artifacts that are cherished as milestones that initiated the history of Czech cinema (however inaccurate such a statement might be)<sup>15)</sup> yet are also part of what Katherine Groo calls “bad film histories.”<sup>16)</sup> Groo’s “particularist approach to film historiography” teaches us to take “the absences, imperfections, and discontinuities of the [...] image as crucial concepts and methodological coordinates rather than obstacles to be overcome or resolved.”<sup>17)</sup> Bad film histories remind us that “the historiographic process will be messy, imperfect, and open to revision, especially as our artifacts change, degrade, and disappear from the archives.”<sup>18)</sup> At the same time, treating all the rips, dots, and dust seriously is not just a matter of historicity, i.e., “the relationship that the film bears to past time and the properties that contribute to it being historically meaningful bearing and the particular relationship that film bears to past time,”<sup>19)</sup> but also a matter of aesthetics. For example, in the fifth chapter of her book *Bad Film Histories: Ethnog-*

13) I have elaborated on these affinities elsewhere, see, for example, Jiří Anger, “Keep That Image Burning: Digital Kříženecký, Color Veil, and the Cinema That Never Stops Ending,” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 20, no. 1–2 (2020), 123–155.

14) Pommeau and Anger, “The Digitization of Jan Kříženecký’s Films,” 105.

15) The question of firstness is a source of controversy in every national cinema. There are films that were made or shown on Czech territory before Jan Kříženecký’s works, and it must be constantly reminded that at the end of the nineteenth century, the Czech lands were still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Not to mention the fact that many films from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are unknown. Thus, we work with the primacy of Kříženecký’s films as a discursive construct, which was established by the Czech Cinematograph at the Exhibitions of Architecture and Engineering in 1898 and reproduced by domestic historiography and the popular press.

16) Katherine Groo, *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

17) *Ibid.*, 8–9.

18) *Ibid.*, 9.

19) *Ibid.*, 8.

*raphy and the Early Archive*, Groo investigates badly damaged early ethnographic films from the Dutch EYE Filmmuseum collections and examines various clashes and intersections between the figurative landscape of the films — its images, cinematography, and compositional patterns — and their material landscape — rips, tears, and textures.<sup>20)</sup> Thus, the mechanisms that distort the archival artifacts might sometimes also be the mechanisms that guide them towards new creation.

While Groo focuses on forgotten, nameless, and discarded early ethnographic films, and we have at our disposal treasured artifacts of Czech cinema, those two are not as incompatible as they might seem. The yellowish first-generation nitrate prints and the original camera negatives, which were references for the digitization, have been deemed just as unworthy of public attention as the Dutch travelogues, and consequently almost invisible until their digitization.<sup>21)</sup> Albeit the reasons for neglect were different — there is the single Lumière perforation that made the prints difficult to screen<sup>22)</sup> and also the understandable claim that the oldest artifacts of Czech cinema should be protected from projection — the role of physical agents in “clouding” what was originally represented in the images was a factor as well. The punctured skins of many Kříženecký’s films have been as much of an obstacle to seeing their figurative content as the distorted surface-landscape of the ethnographic films analyzed by Groo blocks the beautiful view of nature, and due to many of the deformations being tied to the properties of the Lumière technology, they have been all the more insistent and difficult to get disposed of. Therefore, even a privileged milestone of early cinema can become part of bad film histories and, thanks to this dynamic between high and low, make for an all the more interesting curatorial and research object.

How is it possible, then, to curate and appropriate such “bad” film artifacts and embrace their deformations and ellipses not as obstacles but as potentialities waiting to be unleashed? Paraphrasing Paolo Cherchi Usai, if the film archivist is like a “physician who has accepted the inevitability of death even while he continues to fight for the patient’s life,”<sup>23)</sup> the curator confronted with the first Czech films is like a doctor easing his or her “patients” (the dilapidated film objects) towards this death being forever suspended. In other words, the doctor keeps the patients eternally stuck in a moment before the death comes (as in Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “The Secret Miracle”)<sup>24)</sup> without ever granting any of them resolution (either in figuration or abstraction, analog or digital, stillness or movement, past or present). The curator must “touch” the films with surgical gloves, carefully discern the materials’ inner tensions within the tiniest cinematic units and play them out frame-by-frame.

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20) Ibid., 255–289.

21) Pommeau and Anger, “The Digitization of Jan Kříženecký’s Films,” 104.

22) Ibid.

23) Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001), 105.

24) Jorge Luis Borges, “The Secret Miracle,” in *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 143–150.

## Curation, Appropriation, and Remix of Early Cinema Within Film Archives and Museums

Of course, the idea of giving a second life to early cinematic artifacts through creative appropriation is nothing new. Pioneering found footage works by Ken Jacobs, Malcolm Le Grice, Ernie Gehr, or Al Razutis from the 1960s and 1970s experimented with second-hand prints of early films to show how aesthetically and conceptually rich those supposedly primitive works can be. The importance of found footage for film historiography and archival theory and practice cannot be overestimated,<sup>25)</sup> and while it is mainly celebrated for the knowledge it gives us of the materiality and historicity of early cinema, there have also been attempts to build upon found footage's creative impulse within the archives themselves. Perhaps the most frequently mentioned example is the *Bits & Pieces*<sup>26)</sup> project inaugurated by the Nederlands Filmmuseum (now Eye Filmmuseum) in the late 1980s. The project aimed to resuscitate all the abandoned, fragmentary, and unidentified films<sup>27)</sup> stored in cans covered by dust and destined to be either thrown away or disintegrate completely. Thus, the Filmmuseum initiated a series of compilations consisting of selected film fragments that were deemed to possess certain aesthetic qualities. In an interview with Christian Olesen, film curator Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi emphasized "subjective aesthetic experience as a criterion for selection," a matter of "speak[ing] to the aesthetic sensibility of the archivist because of a particularly curious, bizarre, or surprising feature."<sup>28)</sup> Although *Bits & Pieces* was based on decidedly non-interventionist principles, still accentuated by the "Archivist is not a filmmaker" motto on the project's website,<sup>29)</sup> the curatorial consideration of the films' aesthetic effects and the fragments' circulation in newly assembled wholes and different contexts endow the bad film artifacts with a surplus that in many ways resonates with the achievements of found footage filmmaking. Subsequent EYE Filmmuseum projects such as *Scene Machine* (a mash-up application involving the first forty years of Dutch film history) or *Celluloid Remix* (a contest encouraging user-produced remixes of early films) amplified this impulse, shifting the perspective from rescuing archival fragments and giving them visibility to offering them for reuse and recontextualization in a digitized form.<sup>30)</sup> Curators thereby actively encourage appropriation for artistic, scholarly, or popularizing purposes to get across the notion that early cinematic

25) See, for example, Bart Testa, *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992); Eric Thouvenel, "How 'Found Footage' Films Made Me Think Twice About Film History," *Cinéma & Cie* 8, no. 10 (2008), 97–103 or Giovanna Fossati, "Found Footage Filmmaking, Film Archiving and New Participatory Platforms," in *Found Footage: Cinema Exposed*, eds. Jaap Guldemon, Giovanna Fossati, and Marente Bloemheuvell (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 177–184.

26) "Bits & Pieces," *eye*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.eyefilm.nl/en/collection/collections/film/bits-pieces>.

27) Due to a lack of copyright protection, the fragments are often described as "orphan films." Dan Streible, "The Role of Orphan Films in the 21st Century Archive," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007), 124–128.

28) Christian Olesen, "Found footage photogénie — An interview with Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi and Mark-Paul Meyer," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 2, no. 2 (2013), 557.

29) "Bits & Pieces."

30) Grazia Ingravalle, "Remixing Early Cinema: Historical Explorations at the EYE Film Institute Netherlands," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 15, no. 2 (2015), 82–97.



fragments are distinctively oriented to the present (and to the future), precisely due to what they lack or hide from us, as their blind spots wait to be filled by the contemporary viewer.

Besides such compilations, film archives and museums have tried to reanimate the found footage tradition in the “video essay” format, which employs film fragments for the sake of analysis.<sup>31)</sup> For instance, the Austrian Film Museum (Österreichisches Filmmuseum) made a few significant video essays on early cinema at the turn of the 2000s and 2010s.<sup>32)</sup> These essays were integrated into special DVD collections with archival films that were part of the *Edition Filmmuseum*. The noughties saw a boom of archival DVD editions whose aim was not only to present newly digitally restored films and supply contextual information in the booklet but also to introduce research findings and potentialities. The video essay was only one of the many formats these editions brought and put to use: from standard “talking-head” interviews with archivists, scholars, and filmmakers through audio commentaries consisting of experts giving insight on films in real time<sup>33)</sup> to complex systems of referencing and annotating films such as Hyperkino,<sup>34)</sup> we have a vast arsenal of possibilities how to curate archival artifacts in the digital age.<sup>35)</sup> *Edition Filmmuseum*’s editions also profited from engaging key figures of Austrian experimental cinema and found footage. For example, Peter Kubelka (a co-founder of the Museum) starred in a DVD documentary *Peter Kubelka: Restoring Entuziazm* (Jörg Burger and Michael Loebenstein, 2005), in which he demonstrated the nuances of synchronizing image and sound in Dziga Vertov’s early sound cinema classic right behind the editing table. The video essays absorbed these stimuli, and some of them stood the test of time as successful marriages of poetic imagery with minute attention towards the ebbs and flows of archival practice and scholarly argumentation, which is carried out by explanatory voice-over as well as the actual images and sounds. *Vertov in Blum: An Investigation* (Adelheid Heftberger, Michael Loebenstein, Georg Wasner, 2009),<sup>36)</sup> which focuses on the restoration of *The Eleventh Year* (1927) and the relationship with its infamous proto-found-footage double, a German film *In the Shadow of the Machine* (Albrecht Viktor Blum, 1928), presents a potent exercise in comparative analysis that involves a detailed side-by-side juxtaposition of the films’ fragments and intricate montage visualizations created with ImageJ software.<sup>37)</sup> While the

31) For the early developments of the video essay (also “audiovisual essay” or later “videographic essay”), see Tiago Baptista, “Lessons in Looking: The Digital Audiovisual Essay” (PhD diss., Birkbeck, University of London, 2016).

32) “Video Essays,” *Filmmuseum*, accessed February 28, 2022, [https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/research\\_\\_education/education/video\\_essays](https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/research__education/education/video_essays).

33) Mark Parker and Deborah Parker, *The DVD and the Study of Film: The Attainable Text* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121–139.

34) Natascha Drubek and Nikolai Izvolov, “Critical Editions of Films on Digital Formats,” *Cinema & Cie* 6, no. 8 (2006), 203–214.

35) C. G. Olesen, “Film History in the Making” (PhD diss., Amsterdam University, 2017), 116–142.

36) Adelheid Heftberger, Michael Loebenstein, and Georg Wasner, “Vertov in Blum: An Investigation,” *Filmmuseum*, 2009, accessed February 28, 2022, [https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/\\_research\\_\\_education/education/video\\_essays/vertov\\_in\\_blum](https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/_research__education/education/video_essays/vertov_in_blum).

37) Olesen, “Film History in the Making,” 197–200. For more information on the digital humanities project that involved the restoration of Vertov’s films, see also Adelheid Heftberger, *Digital Humanities and Film Studies: Visualising Dziga Vertov’s Work* (Cham: Springer, 2016).



work's mode of address may appear slightly too didactic, its use of data visualizations and frame-by-frame analysis showcases how video essays can unravel the connections between archival practice, scholarly research, and experimental filmmaking that shape our notion of what early cinema is and can be.

Concerning specifically the earliest cinema, an inspirational research and curatorial project with videographic overtones emerged in Switzerland. It is called *50 Seconds of Basel* (50 Sekunden Basel)<sup>38)</sup> and it centers around a single film — *Bâle — Le pont sur le Rhin* (1896) — shot by a Lumière opérateur Constant Girel. One of the first Swiss films captures the everyday rush on the 13th-century Rhine Bridge, including an electric tram, a horse-drawn carriage, a beer truck, and over 70 people passing by the Cinématographe. The research team, operating within a larger project called “Filmgeschichte entdecken. Kinetografie in der Schweiz 1896–1900”<sup>39)</sup> (Discovering Film History. Cinema in Switzerland 1896–1900) and supported by numerous archival and research institutions (Cinémathèque suisse, Universität Basel, Digital Humanities Lab, etc.), aimed to reconstruct the circumstances of the shooting, identify all the figures involved, and, chiefly, recreate the film with digital tools to investigate links between the local and the global, as well as between the past and the present. One of the videos is a 3D Panorama of the Rhine Bridge scene (2020) which enables us to move 360° in a virtually reconstructed space with true-to-scale buildings and objects.<sup>40)</sup> What is most intriguing about this short video is not historical authenticity per se nor the immersivity of high-end digital technology but how it establishes connections between the panorama and the original film. There are moments when the past and the present are juxtaposed — either as a frame-within-a-frame or by means of superimposition — that allow us to compare and contrast delightfully smooth yet (especially in the anaglyph version) somewhat uncanny surfaces of CGI buildings and objects with nostalgia-inducing yet highly volatile and shaky images from the Lumière film.<sup>41)</sup> These juxtapositions also intersect with textual inserts containing historical information on the objects and places we are passing by, creating another layer of meaning. *50 Seconds of Basel* may not exactly qualify as videographic criticism, but it provokes us to imagine multifarious encounters between the “old” technology (which does not signify just aging but also features inseparable from the film's conditions of production such as the camera trembling) and the “new” technology (which aspires towards total realism yet often makes the reality so shiny and bright it starts to look alien) which can lay the groundwork for a larger argument on how the early cinematic artifacts can fare in the ever-changing online landscape.

38) “50 Sekunden zwischen Belle époque und Moderne: Ein interdisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt zum ersten Basler Lumière-Film *Bâle — Le pont sur le Rhin*,” *50 Sekunden Basel 1896*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://50sekundenbasel1896.ch/home.html>.

39) “Projekt: Was der Kinetograf alles sichtbar macht,” *50 Sekunden Basel 1896*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://kinematografie.ch/projekt.html>.

40) “3D-Panorama: Eine szenische Nachbildung der Alten Rheinbrücke mit digitalen Mitteln,” *50 Sekunden Basel 1896*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://50sekundenbasel1896.ch/panorama.html>.

41) The vertical and horizontal camera trembling is typical for many early Lumière films (including some of Kříženecký's films), due to the instability of the Cinématographe. Laurent Mannoni, “Les Appareils cinématographiques Lumière,” 1895, no. 82 (2017), 52–85.

With regards to *The First Frames of Czech Cinema*, we understand these archival experiments as important predecessors for dealing with “bad” early cinematic artifacts in an inventive yet historically respectful way. Yet, as I argue in the next section, the tools and methods of videographic criticism can portray the artifacts’ curiosities and ambiguities in a novel manner and find a proper balance between respectful contextualization, aesthetic defamiliarization, and scholarly argument. Furthermore, the videographic essay also hopes to widen the scope of the discipline, which is still skewed towards Hollywood cinema, European and Asian arthouse canon, and quality TV and tends to bequeath archival artifacts to the margins.<sup>42)</sup>

### The First Frames of Czech Cinema

As indicated earlier, *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* takes the form of a quasi-compilation that shows all the opening frames of the digitized nitrate prints and negatives (i.e., those that carry visual information, excluding the artificially added opening titles) both individually and as parts of a larger mosaic. Not counting the three compilations assembled from various (usually later-generation) materials and the recently found nitrate print of *Escorting the Cradle of František Palacký from Hodslavice to the Prague Exhibition Grounds* (Přenesení kolébky Františka Palackého z Hodslavic na Výstaviště; 1898),<sup>43)</sup> there are 28 known original film materials (21 films) that survived. While watching the individual films, as soon as each of them starts playing, its opening frame appears, but only in a fleeting, almost imperceptible form — before we are able to process it, it disappears in an uncompromising 24 fps movement. Considering we aim for an imaginative return to the grassroots of cinema, the first frames of the films, or at least what remained of them after all the years of decay, cannot be ignored. As they were the first images that appeared during screening, waiting for the “sudden transformation from still image to moving illusion” that came as the cranking began,<sup>44)</sup> and also the first images that ran through the printer, they might be considered the actual cinematic firsts. The digitization has only broadened this invisible primacy, as the first frames were also the first images that passed through the 4K scanner. To make these images visible again, with all their complicated and often contradictory histories at play, the videographic essay seems like an appropriate format.

In terms of videographic criticism, *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* is in many ways close to a tendency called “deformative criticism.” This approach “strives to make the original work strange in some unexpected way, deforming it unconventionally to reveal aspects that are conventionally obscured in its normal version and discovering something

42) An example of a videographic essay focused on archival artifacts can be found here (including an accompanying text): Evelyn Kreutzer and Noga Stiassny, “Digital Digging: Traces, Gazes, and the Archival In-Between,” *Research in Film and History*, no. 4 (2022), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://film-history.org/issues/text/digital-digging-traces-gazes-and-archival-between>.

43) As of the time when this article is being written, the print is still waiting to be digitized.

44) Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 741.

new from it.”<sup>45)</sup> Rather than diving into the depths of a single film text, the approach aims to change the rules of the game, treat the film as a modulable object and “break” it to unveil its hidden qualities. To make the outcome less predictable, the deformative approach is often also “algorithmic” or “parametric,”<sup>46)</sup> whether in the narrow sense of operating according to a computerized step-based procedure or in the broader sense of subjecting a work to one or more generative constraints or parameters.<sup>47)</sup> This approach resonates with the intention behind *The First Frames of Czech Cinema*, which involves deconstructing the films into archives of images and extracting the individual frames according to a pattern that does not depend on their content but on them being the first images in the respective films.

In order to explain the relevance of this approach, both its potentialities and limitations must be addressed. First and foremost, even if we decide to treat film as an “archive of sounds and images,” to use Jason Mittell’s words,<sup>48)</sup> it does not mean such an archive is asymptomatic. The software we work with is still designed to keep us under the illusion of control, giving us (seemingly infinite but inherently limited) options to manipulate images and sounds without questioning the interface within which we are allowed to operate and which is tailored towards visibility and completeness.<sup>49)</sup> Similarly, no matter how sophisticated the protocol is, its success in achieving surprising aesthetic or scholarly results is mostly determined by the way in which we select, arrange, and interpret the data. Hence, rather than uncritically depending on artificial intelligence, we should think about the conditions under which we are breaking the film objects, about the complex interface between human intervention and technological automatism, and strive to defamiliarize not only how we see images but also how the software wants us to see them. To inject the deformative with the performative,<sup>50)</sup> the essayist/curator does not necessarily have to stage a convoluted critique of software ideology. A self-reflexive and performative gesture may lie in the selection of the source material itself or, more specifically, in choosing a film object that is, in a way, always already deformed, unsure whether it even qualifies as an object. Not a familiar Hollywood or arthouse film that needs an enlightened critic and high-end software to make it strange, nor an experimental found footage film that is already coded as intentionally defamiliarizing. The films of Jan Kříženecký constitute such uncertain objects, even more so when we focus on the fact that their most basic building blocks — the individual frames — are the most unstable and undefinable elements. *The*

45) Jason Mittell, “Videographic Criticism as a Digital Humanities Method,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019*, eds. Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), accessed February 28, 2022,

<https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-f2acf72c-a469-49d8-be35-67f9ac1e3a60/section/b6dea70a-9940-497e-b7c5-930126fbd180>.

46) Alan O’Leary, “Workshop of Potential Scholarship: Manifesto for a parametric videographic criticism,” *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 11, no. 1 (2021), 75–98.

47) Alan O’Leary, “No Voiding Time: A Deformative Videoessay,” *16:9*, September 30, 2019, accessed February 28, 2022, <http://www.16-9.dk/2019/09/no-voiding-time/>.

48) Mittell, “Videographic Criticism as a Digital Humanities Method.”

49) Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Neta Alexander and Arjun Appadurai, *Failure* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

50) David Verdeure, “Deformative vs Performative,” *Filmscalpel*, 2019, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.filmscalpel.com/performative-vs-deformative/>.

*First Frames of Czech Cinema* pursues to become an exercise in deformative criticism, but one that puzzles the input as well as the output, and one that does not let the algorithmic protocol have the final say on which perspective we should take.

For the quantity of deformative operations we have at our disposal, we often forget about the nuances of the materials we want to deform. Thus, a renewed attention towards the minor elements of moving images — scenes, shots, even single frames — is necessary. Hannah Frank's call for "studying a building not by walking its hallways or perusing its blueprints, but by examining each of its bricks"<sup>51)</sup> can reach out to practical research as well. Although many videographic works pay attention to a single scene, the analytic or interpretive aim is usually related to its content, not to the material construction that shapes the individual image as a film object. Inspiration may come from videographic essays by Johannes Binotto, a Swiss media theorist and filmmaker whose work gravitates precisely towards the tiniest cinematic units.<sup>52)</sup> Binotto demonstrates how "lingering on the small and particular" can counter the "habit of clicking and swiping through films, clips and images as swiftly as possible," which "follows completely the capitalist logic of quick and smooth consumption."<sup>53)</sup> He asks suggestively: "What multiplicity is there hidden in just one film moment, in just one audiovisual fragment, in one image, one sound?"<sup>54)</sup> *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* pushes this idea in a more parametric direction, asking what if this singular fragment was not a specific image but any image that followed a specific protocol. This way, a game-changing detail may spring out of a wide corpus of visual elements without privileging one picture over another.

The protocol for the essay was based on a now firmly established fact that the earliest film projections were not all about movement. Tom Gunning's famous article "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator" (1989) points out that "in the earliest Lumière exhibitions the films were initially presented as frozen unmoving images, projections of still photographs. Then, flaunting a mastery of visual showmanship, the projector began cranking and the images were made to move."<sup>55)</sup> With the advent of mass digitization, the (re)found closeness between the still and the moving in cinema gained attention in academic circles<sup>56)</sup> as well as the avant-garde (Matthias Müller, Christoph Girardet, Douglas Gordon, Karl Lemieux, and others), where this impulse already sprang to life in the 1960s and 1970s analog works by Peter Kubelka, Ernie Gehr, or Hollis Frampton.<sup>57)</sup> Thomas Elsaesser considers the still image as cinema's "memento mori: re-

51) Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 1.

52) See, for example, Johannes Binotto, "Touching Sound," *Transferences*, 2018, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://transferences.org/2018/02/02/touching-sound/>, or Johannes Binotto, "Trace," *Transferences*, 2020, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://transferences.org/videoessays/trace/>.

53) Johannes Binotto, "Minor Instances, Major Consequences: Video Essay Workshop," *Transferences*, 2020, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://transferences.org/lehre/video-essay-workshop/>.

54) Ibid.

55) Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," 118.

56) See, for example, Eivind Rossaak, ed., *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

57) The mutual inspiration between experimental filmmakers and new film historians is well-known. For an overview, see André Habib, "Finding Early Cinema in the Avant-garde: Research and Investigation," in *Prove-*

minding us that at the heart of the cinema are acts of intervention in the living tissue of time, that the cinema is ‘death at work.’<sup>58)</sup> Therefore, showing the actual first frames of the first Czech films could be a way to demonstrate this repressed will to death at the very moment when the inert filmic matter starts to gain figurative contours. Our videographic experiment thereby examines the frame as a rupture in the cinematic movement, yet one that also initiates it and stirs it to life. In this way, the essay stages a complex dialectic between then and now. On the one hand, it exploits the possibilities of digital technology to change perspective and bring hidden details to the fore; on the other, it is also a reflection of the “sudden transformation from still image to moving illusion”<sup>59)</sup> to which early cinematic exhibitions owed part of their appeal.

The organization of the preserved films (28 digitized original film materials — 15 nitrate prints, 13 original negatives) was based primarily on two criteria — the year of their production and thematic affinity. Frames 1–18 come from the pioneering films presented at the Exhibition of Architecture and Engineering in 1898: numbers 1–9 are from actualities that portrayed everyday life in Prague, 10–15 are from comedy scenes staged by Josef Šváb-Malostranský, 16–18 stem from Kříženecký’s obsession with Sokol athletic exercises.<sup>60)</sup> Frames 19–26 were extracted from other actualities from Prague life shot between 1901 and 1908, while the remaining two frames (27–28) present the monument of a famous Czech historian and politician František Palacký — first as a foundation stone (1898), then as an almost complete sculpture (1911)<sup>61)</sup> — and together represent a sort of longitudinal documentary that circumscribes both the creation of the monument and Kříženecký’s creative career.

The key question was how to present this assemblage of frames in a simple, not-too-intrusive form and simultaneously turn it into something more than an ordinary YouTube “supercut”<sup>62)</sup> that would simply replace one form of determinism (frames as units lost in a continuous movement) with another (frames blindly following each other according to a pre-established linear pattern).<sup>63)</sup> This is why we decided to show the frames in two forms

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nance and Early Cinema, eds. Joanne Bernardi, Paolo Cherchi Usai, Tami Williams, and Joshua Yumibe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 261–274.

58) Thomas Elsaesser, “Stop/Motion,” in *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, ed. Eivind Rossaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 118.

59) Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment,” 119.

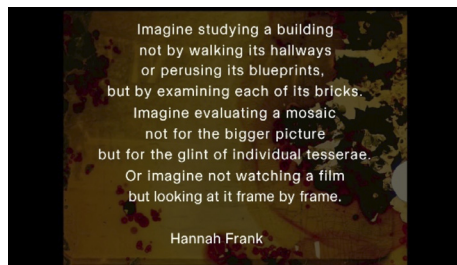
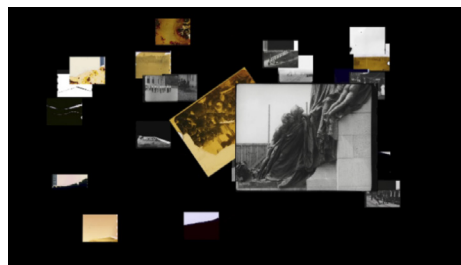
60) This obsession is perhaps most visible in his longer actualities from Sokol rallies which have been presented in the compilations.

61) The camera was also present when the monument was formally unveiled on July 1, 1912, resulting in the film *Unveiling Ceremony of the Monument — July 1, 1912* (Slavnost odhalení pomníku 1. července 1912; Unknown, 1912). The film includes material from the earlier fragment *František Palacký Monument Prior to Its Completion* (Pomník Františka Palackého před dokončením; 1911) that served as a source for Frame 28.

62) Andy Baio, “Fanboy Supercuts, Obsessive Video Montages,” *Waxy*, April 11, 2008, accessed February 28, 2022, [https://waxy.org/2008/04/fanboy\\_supercuts\\_obsessive\\_video\\_montages/](https://waxy.org/2008/04/fanboy_supercuts_obsessive_video_montages/).

63) Of course, there are many ways in which supercut can be employed in a more academically rigorous and/or aesthetically inventive manner. See, for example, Allison de Fren, “The Critical Supercut: A Scholarly Approach to a Fannish Practice,” *The Cine-Files*, no. 15 (2020), accessed February 28, 2022, <http://www.thecine-files.com/the-critical-supercut-a-scholarly-approach-to-a-fannish-practice/> or Max Tohline, “A Supercut of Supercuts: Aesthetics, Histories, Databases,” *Open Screens* 4, no. 1 (2021), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.openscreensjournal.com/article/id/6946/>.

at the same time — individually in detail and as building blocks of a larger mosaic. Each frame is first seen as an isolated image and “deformed” in various ways (rotating, flickering, zooming in and out, stretching and narrowing). Then it is inserted into the background, where a mosaic of all the frames is being built. By combining “the sequential and the simultaneous modes of viewing,”<sup>64</sup> we present the first frames as irreducible to being erased or marginalized in favor of smooth and continuous flow as well as to being interchangeable units in a coherent whole. Paraphrasing Ian Bogost, the first frames “remind us that no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens.”<sup>65</sup> Of course, the intersection of the sequential and the simultaneous, the temporal and the spatial, is not without contradictions. On the one hand, the individual frames accumulate progressively faster so as to make the essay’s rhythm and tempo more varied and consequential, which makes it more challenging for the viewer to appreciate each singular image. On the other hand, the mosaic that is being constructed out of the frames in the background allows the audience to get ahold of their similarities and differences, yet the more images appear, the smaller they look, and thus do not enable more nuanced comparison. Still, these contradictions were deemed necessary to account for the paradoxical existence of film as a medium, whose unresolved status between movement and stillness becomes even more apparent in the digital form.<sup>66</sup>



Figures 1–4: *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* (Jiří Anger and Adéla Kudlová, 2021), © Národní filmový archiv (National Film Archive), Prague

64) Baptista, “Lessons in Looking,” 160.

65) Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 40.

66) See, for example, Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).



The videographic essay also includes a written quote by Hannah Frank as another layer that thickens the interplay between various modes of seeing. In the vein of many videographic works,<sup>67)</sup> the text does not explain or mimic what is perceivable in the images but functions performatively as a distinctive meaning-making element. Frank's quote, more a manifesto for taking individual frames seriously than an analysis or interpretation of what is going on, is phased out into fragments and distributed in space, gradually revealing itself during the essay according to the rhythm of the images and turning the individual phrases into building blocks of their own kind. Finally, an experimental soundtrack by Jan Burian, which accompanies the digitized films of Jan Kříženecký on the DVD / Blu-ray release, was added and slightly modified to amplify the humming noise of the nitrate materials.

What can the essay teach us about the first frames of Kříženecký's films or, more generally, about the paradoxical existence of a digitized film frame? Even in the cases when digitization remains as faithful to the original artifacts as possible, the new digital frames will inevitably diverge from their models in some respects, due to the material specificities of analog and digital media as well as to subtle intentional or unintentional shifts that occur during the intricate translation from grain to pixel.<sup>68)</sup> The dilapidated images we see in the essay approximate the physical memory and patina of the originals, yet they also turn them into a snapshot, exempted from the life cycle of decaying nitrate prints and negatives and projected into a medium that allows for manipulating with the fragile frames as with any other visual data. *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* emphasizes this hybridity by "doubling" the traces of analog deformations in the digitized frames with further deformations of a digital kind. This approach takes aim at the often-presupposed neutrality and transparency of the digitization process, engaging digital manipulations in a way that makes the newly acquired malleability of the first Czech film frames directly perceptible. Also, the digital deformations (rotating, stretching, zooming, etc.) do not occlude the analog distortions but invent new perspectives from which we can grasp them. Again, the goal is to let contradictions of the first frames of Czech cinema collide and reach productive encounters rather than resolve them in one way or another.

The essay's shifting of perspectives also draws attention to the supposedly peripheral features of frames — the perforations. At the outset of cinema, perforations were often perceived as a "weakening" of film, something that makes films more vulnerable. The single pair of perforations Lumière brothers used was a compromise,<sup>69)</sup> ensuring that the perforated film strip "would be less susceptible to tear or break from the impact, however

67) There is even a "sub-genre" of videographic film studies called the "videographic epigraph." "Videographic Epigraph," in *The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy*, eds. Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant (Scalar, 2019), accessed February 28, 2022, <http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/videographic-epigraph>.

68) See Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel* or, more specifically, Serena Bellotti and Andrea Mariani, "The Digital Witness: Film Reconstruction and the Forensic Imagination in New Media Environments," *Cinergie — Il Cinema E Le Altre Arti*, no. 20 (2021), 27–43 and Patricia Ledesma Villon, "Indeterminable Frames: Exploring Digital Humanities Approaches and Applications for the Moving Image," *Cinergie — Il Cinema E Le Altre Arti*, no. 20 (2021), 125–138.

69) For example, Étienne-Jules Marey used no perforations, while Thomas Alva Edison used four. Turquetty, *Inventing Cinema*, 173.



minimal, of the claws” while still being able to advance steadily through the film gate.<sup>70)</sup> As mentioned earlier, the films of Jan Kříženecký have only a single round hole on each side of the frame,<sup>71)</sup> and thus they are significantly harder to project, restore, or even scan. Thanks to the videographic essay, we can see that the vintage Lumière perforations are not always present in their former state. Although the digitization report states that the not yet standardized aspect ratio of the films was “adjusted in order to make the entire frame visible (even during moments of vertical instability) and also the perforation whenever it was possible,”<sup>72)</sup> due to the limitations and divergences from current standard ratios it was not always entirely viable. This is the reason why we usually see the perforation only at one edge of the frame in a semicircular form.

Furthermore, many of the digitized first frames (particularly those from the prints) are torn to such an extent that the circular holes are nowhere to be seen — some of them — 13, 14, 18 — now have no perforation, others — 1, 2, 4, 10, 15 — had their parts replaced with later-generation film stock with four perforations. The latter group may be understood as a sign of restoration not done right but also as a document of how accidental or pragmatic physical interventions alter the archival object throughout the years. The single most intriguing case might be Frame no. 5 — taken from *Cyclists* (*Cyklisté*, 1898) — which preserves the Lumière half-circle yet also includes three other holes carved into the image as if the film was meant for standard projections. It is not clear whether they testify to mis-handling by archivists or to damage undertaken in a machine designed for film stock with four perforations, but as an impossible archival artifact, it belongs firmly to Groo’s bad film histories.



Figure 5: *Cyclists* (*Cyklisté*; Jan Kříženecký, 1898, source: nitrate print), © Národní filmový archiv (National Film Archive), Prague

70) Ibid., 174.

71) The only exception is *František Palacký Monument Prior to Its Completion* (Frame no. 28), which was shot on a standard material with four rectangular perforations.

### Coda: Towards Videographic Archival Editions?

Both the videographic essay and its written accompaniment were meant to show that curation of uncertain, disfigured, and fragmentary archival artifacts from the beginnings of cinema does not necessarily have to limit itself to filling the gaps; instead, it can embrace their lacunas as potentialities for aesthetic and educational actualization and estrangement. *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* followed impulses that were latently present in the archival world but only occasionally sprang to life (*Bits & Pieces*, *Vertov in Blum*, *50 Seconds of Basel*, etc.). By mixing them with tools of videographic criticism (or, more specifically, the deformative/parametric approach), the essay attempted to stage various encounters between figuration and abstraction, analog and digital, stillness and movement, past and present that the digitization made visible in the first Czech films. By dissecting the opening frames, it accentuated the ambiguity of the films' firstness, entailing cherished historical status as well as inevitable fragility and contestation, and of their basic construction units, inherently unstable yet self-sustainable and aesthetically potent. In doing so, the essay addressed the concerns about digitizing and curating the earliest cinematic artifacts that should be taken seriously anytime another collection of "first films" in the history of a nation X emerges.

To point briefly towards the future, will there ever be a systematic videographic edition of archival films? Speaking of the first Czech films, the National Archive in Prague has recently released an online collection of Kříženecký's films that updates on the original DVD / Blu-ray and brings in formats suitable for the online space, such as a map of all the places where Kříženecký shot his films, a timeline of his life, and a few videographic essays (including *The First Frames of Czech Cinema* in English and Czech).<sup>73)</sup> Still, the videographic impulse is perhaps too one-sidedly oriented towards the films' materiality and ignorant of other issues such as the circulation of the materials in numerous compilations, documentaries, and TV shows or their larger historical context within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, East-Central European region, or global cinema and culture at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a whole. Generally, in marrying materialist concerns with issues of historicity and circulation lies a significant potential to make digital curation of marginal archival artifacts (and not just the earliest ones) more complex and, at the same time, more attractive to the audience.

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72) Ibid., 107.

73) "Filmy Jana Kříženeckého," *Kontexty Filmového přehledu*, 2022, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/cs/kontexty/filmy-jana-krizeneckeho>.

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- Cyclists* (Cyklisté; Jan Kříženecký, 1898)
- Escorting the Cradle of František Palacký from Hodslavice to the Prague Exhibition Grounds* (Přenesení kolébky Františka Palackého z Hodslavic na Výstaviště; Jan Kříženecký, 1898)
- František Palacký Monument Prior to Its Completion* (Pomník Františka Palackého před dokončením; Jan Kříženecký, 1911)
- Peter Kubelka: Restoring Entuziazm* (Jörg Burger and Michael Loebenstein, 2005)
- The First Frames of Czech Cinema* (Jiří Anger and Adéla Kudlová, 2021)
- Unveiling Ceremony of the Monument — July 1, 1912* (Slavnost odhalení pomníku 1. července 1912; Unknown, 1912)
- Vertov in Blum: An Investigation* (Adelheid Heftberger, Michael Loebenstein, Georg Wasner, 2009)

## Biography

Jiří Anger is a researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague (KREAS Project). He also works at the National Film Archive in Prague as a researcher and editor of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Iluminace*. He specializes in theory of archival film, experimental cinema, and videographic criticism.

Anger's texts and videos have appeared in journals such as *NECSUS*, *Film-Philosophy*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *[in]Transition*, *The Moving Image*, and others. He is the author of the monograph *Afekt, výraz, performance: Proměny melodramatického excessu v kinematografii těla* (Affect, Expression, Performance: Transformation of the Melodramatic Excess in the Cinema of the Body, 2018). He has recently finished a doctoral thesis titled "Aesthetics of the Crack-Up: Digital Kříženecký and the Autonomous Creativity of Archival Footage."