

**May 16, 2024**

**16:00-18:00**

***In Visible Presence: Soviet Afterlives in Family Photos*** (MIT Press, 2023) book discussion with Oksana Sarkisova and Olga Shevchenko, moderated by Lorena Rizzo (University of Basel)

**18:00-19:00**

Apéro at eikones

**May 17, 2024**

**09:30**

Coffee and welcome at eikones

**10:00 -13:00**

**Photographic Currents in and out of the Archive**

Chair: Olga Shevchenko

Participants:

Christopher Pinney (University College London), **Localizing and De-localizing: Vernacular and Demotic**

Zeynep Gürsel (Rutgers University), **Portraits of Unbelonging: Photography, Nationality, Mobility**

Suryanandini Narain (Jawaharlal Nehru University), **Telling Stories, Discovering Histories: Intersectional Narratives of Family Albums**

Özge Calafato (University of Amsterdam), **Affect, Implication and Memory: The Afterlives of Family Photographs from the Early Turkish Republic**

**14.30-17.30**

**Between Private and Public: Afterlives of Soviet Photographs**

Chair: Oksana Sarkisova

Participants:

Denis Skopin (Bard College Berlin)

**Photographs from a Card Index of Stalin's Secret Police: Historical Comments and Theoretical Considerations**

Victoria Musvik (University of Oxford)

**Scars, Traces and Embraces: Perestroika Amateur Photographers and Their Work with the Afterlives of Soviet Collective Affects**

Natalija Arlauskajte (Vilnius University)

**"What We Leave Behind": Lithuanian Documentary Animation Based on Family Albums**

Galina Orlova (independent researcher)

**Recycling the Photo Garbage: Through Dump Archeology to the Historical Unconscious of the Soviet Century**

**18.00-19.00**

**Screening "Family Album in Lithuanian Animation"**

a curated selection of animation films introduced by Natalija Arlauskaitė

## **Abstracts in order of presentation:**

Christopher Pinney, University College London

### **Localizing and De-localizing: Vernacular and Demotic**

The linguistic paradigm of vernacularization involves a distilling out of local idioms from much larger cosmopolitan structures. 'Demotic', by contrast, denotes a “ground-up” practice “of the people” rather than the reactive ‘top-down’ trajectory of theories of vernacularity. It was this sense of a local, subordinate, practice developed in opposition to dominant class practices that Bourdieu advances in his work on photography and visual culture. While this may well be an appropriate characterization of the hierarchical dynamic of 1960s French photographic, it fails to accurately describe the dynamics and contours of all “popular” photographic activity. Vernacularity has certainly done useful work in the past and I do not propose its complete abolition. However, 'demotic' assumes a widespread subaltern practice which is “more than local and less than global.” “Demotic” seems a better descriptor than “vernacular” for two central reasons. Firstly, a good deal of popular photography reveals a desire to engage with (rather than withdraw from) the cosmopolitan: telephones, cityscapes, motorbikes, airplanes are all symptoms of a modernity and mobility that connects, rather than disconnects, localities. This melange of speed, glamour, consumption and aspiration forms the core repertoire of much global popular photography. Secondly, much global popular photography looks very similar. This is the “more than local, less than global” space of the demotic, a distributed horizontal space of popular practice whose dynamic space is quite different from the vertical place of the vernacular.

Zeynep Gürsel (Rutgers University)

### **Portraits of Unbelonging: Photography, Nationality, Mobility**

In 1896 Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II issued a decree that allowed Ottoman Armenians - and only Ottoman Armenians - to emigrate on the condition that they expatriate and never return. A key step in this process was sitting for a photograph. While these photographs look like family portraits and were often produced by professional Armenian studio photographers, they are binding legal documents of exclusion. These photographic subjects were no longer Ottoman subjects. As emigrants left on steamships from ports on the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, their likenesses entered police files in the empire's capital, Constantinople where I was to encounter them more than a century later in the Ottoman state archives. *Portraits of Unbelonging* is a history of mass migration told on an intimate scale that interrogates nationality and subjecthood and the rise of the document-based global security regimes that govern citizenship and mobility today. Drawing from this research, in this talk Prof. Gürsel will trace the story of one family to highlight the gap between the law as it is pronounced by a sovereign and as it is experienced by individuals, families and communities. This talk is based on a single image and takes up *In Visible Presence's* invitation to tend to "the unsettling power of photography to evoke the invisible."

Suryanandini Narain (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

### **"Telling Stories, Discovering Histories: Intersectional Narratives of Family Albums"**

This talk shall examine intersectional narratives around family photographic albums within the specific domain of feminine historicization. I shall examine two photographic albums from the 1960s to the 1990s belonging to middle class Indian families, where visually contingent narratives will evoke contentious issues of memory and history, private and public gendered positions within familial contexts and the urban and small town perceptions of

family photographs and their potential. The albums exist as fraught entities along the axis of time, with multiple histories that engage with photography as a mnemonic device, blurring the lines between narratives of memory, history and myth. The talk locates family photographs as they articulate the familial/domestic and the public/exterior as non-divergent domains, especially through the lens of travel related personal photographs. The narratives also respond to vastly different phases of India's socio-economic fabric, and political histories that differentially regard leisure, family and femininity as key themes.

Özge Calafato (University of Amsterdam)

**Affect, Implication and Memory: The Afterlives of Family Photographs from the Early Turkish Republic**

This talk will trace the afterlives of Turkish family photographs, found in flea markets and antique shops across the country today. Whose classed and gendered afterlives do these orphaned photographs represent and reproduce as they become archival objects, as well as objects of cultural analysis decades later? What do the photographs themselves morph into as their intended function, audience and circulation networks change? This talk will explore the ways in which photographs are implicated in the making and sustenance of collective memory of the modern Turkish Republic.

Denis Skopin (Bard College Berlin)

**Photographs from a Card Index of Stalin's Secret Police: Historical Comments and Theoretical Considerations**

In my talk, I will be commenting on a selection of photographs originating from the Archive of Audio and Visual Information in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. These photographs of impressive size and quality were taken in the 1900s by Maxim Dmitriev, a prominent photographer based in Nizhniy Novgorod. All of them show the representatives of tsarist elites: members of the local administration, judges, merchants and police officers. It so happened that after the Revolution these snapshots ended up in the card index of Soviet political police (Cheka, renamed NKVD in the 1930s). So, the main interest of these photographs is to bear handwritten marks left by secret police officers – arrows and comments on the depicted persons. In my talk, I would like to put forward a hypothesis regarding the way in which the secret police officers used these photographs and explore how these photographs influenced the fate of those who were depicted in them.

Victoria Musvik (University of Oxford)

**Scars, Traces and Embraces: Perestroika Amateur Photographers and Their Work with the Afterlives of Soviet Collective Affects**

Photographs have been often seen as symptoms, traces and physical footprints of reality. Photography theory, from Walter Benjamin to Georges Didi-Huberman, has advanced many explanations about why we expect from the medium revelations about the unconscious, unmasking of invisible memories and debunking of hidden political manipulations. In this paper, using both images and interviews about them, I will follow Oksana Sarkisova and Olga Shevchenko's reflection on the "pluralistic and controversial" private memories about the Soviet past - and especially on the impossibility of distinction, in the vein of Aleida Assmann, between victims' and perpetrators' memories. Pre-1985 and perestroika amateur photographers worked a lot with opening up of the enclosed spaces and visualized the affective traces of their own and their families' recent and not-so-recent pasts. By looking at their dealings with such diverse subjects as drunk tanks, prisons and female dorms, along with

Afghan war experiences, Stalin's repressions, the 19th-century's oppression of the Old Believers and even Ivan the Terrible's irrational outbreaks of anger, I will aim to show that though such "shades of gray" exist, we nevertheless need to make a certain ethical move. Like these practitioners, we must bring into late Soviet "gray zones" finer distinctions between passive acting out or unthinking identification with the aggressor and active symbolizing conversions of dark affects, courageous explorations of morbid memories or gentle nudges to solidarity. It is also important to think of the reasons why these photographers' voices have been mostly silenced, and their images - forgotten.

Natalija Arlauskajte (Vilnius University)

### **"What We Leave Behind": Lithuanian Documentary Animation Based on Family Albums**

Contemporary Lithuanian documentary animation, mostly created by female artists at the beginning of their artistic careers, is an unusual but meaningful entry point into the heated discussion of "Where does post-Soviet end?" Based on family photographs, these films, made between 2007 and 2023, offer an opportunity to see how the dominant historical narrative woven into the photographic family history is supported and then altered; what visual and - in a broader sense - curatorial strategies are created by artists of two generations. The paper will present and analyze these films: *Grandpa and Grandma*, 2007 by Giedrė Beinoriūtė, *What We Leave Behind*, 2018 by the sisters Juratė and Vilma Samulionytė, *Combing*, 2019 by Eglė Davidavičė (Mameniškytė), *Buttermilk*, 2020 and *Plica Polonica*, 2023 by Agata Trasevič, *I am Tired*, 2022 by Eva Rodz, and the multimedia installation *Postpostpost*, 2023 by Margarita Valionytė.

Galina Orlova (independent researcher)

### **Recycling the Photo Garbage: Through Dump Archeology to the Historical Unconscious of the Soviet Century**

When Nicholas Mirzoeff describes late modernity as a world saturated with images, he doesn't worry about the disposal of visual waste. When Marco Armiero introduces the Wasteocene created by relationships with waste that produce waste people and places, he doesn't mean the photo garbage. In my paper, I focus on a musician, photographer and employee from the industrial dump in the Kaluga region, who operates in the virtual space of the LiveJournal (LJ) blog platform as Xatarov. In 2015 - 2017, Xatarov recycled more than 10,000 photographs from family archives that were sent to the landfill into a digital anonymous archive of the Soviet century. I will be interested in Xatarov's technology and ethics of participation, in his philosophy of the trace, in the affective repertoires of the LJ community's response to the exhibition of discarded photographs, and, of course, in the patterns of the anonymous photographic archive that make the Soviet age and its photographic recordings visible. The reflexive and critical position of the curator in the last four years, which cut his life by war and the closure of the dump, will be a special issue for consideration.