Contemporary Lithuanian Photography: The Discourse of Memory

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As Lithuania approached the twentieth anniversary of its independence, the need to consider the development of contemporary culture resulted in histories of various media, including photography. The latter posed specific methodological problems because of its heterogeneity and involvement in the social and political history of the country, not only as an artefact, but also as a recorder and catalyst of change. Therefore, a historian can neither use traditional art historical approaches that emphasise style and iconographic analysis nor focus exclusively on photography as a medium used by artists. This paper provides an example of writing a history of contemporary photography as part of visual culture, in which images are artists' texts about memory, meta-texts about the status of photographs as tools of memory, documents that record memory and artefacts that help to recover memory.

When the twentieth anniversary of Lithuanian independence was approaching, a need to sum up what had happened in the country during that period resulted in reconsidering cultural change. A private publishing house, Baltos lankos (founded in 1992), initiated a series of books on the past twenty years in contemporary art, television, theatre, cinema, architecture, photography, etc.[1] Photography's situation was peculiar. While Lithuanian art historians already had a tradition of art history and there had even been attempts to rewrite it by using a new socio-cultural approach[2], photography as a recently recognised art had none. The only existing history of photography, written by Virgilijus Juodakis, covered only the older period, until 1940, was not referenced and did not go beyond an account of facts.[3] Thus, the task of writing the history of contemporary photography in independent Lithuania was methodologically challenging.

1 Three books in the series have been published so far: S. Valiulis, Telemano užrašai [Notes of a TV addict]. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2010; A. Narušytė, Lietuvos fotografija: 1990–2010 [Lithuanian photography: 1990–2010]. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2011; T. Grunskis, J. Reklaitė, Laisvės architektūra [The architecture of freedom]. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2012.
2 See J. Mulevičiūtė, New Aims, Old Means: Rewriting the Lithuanian Art History of the National Revival Period. – Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi 2010, vol. 19 (3/4), pp. 42–48.
3 V. Juodakis, Lietuvos fotografijos istorija (1854–1940) [The history of Lithuanian photography (1854–1940)]. Vilnius: Austėja, 1996.

Having said that, an international example did exist: the British-American scholar Charlotte Cotton had classified contemporary artists using photography according to the strategies they followed.[4] But this approach limited research to writing about photography as an art and left its other functions aside. The history of contemporary culture in Lithuania, however, is inseparable from, and was even triggered by, its socio-political context. The documentary function of photography has played an important role in the process of liberation, and its exclusion from the history of the medium would create a blind spot. Therefore, the history of photography as an art cannot be told separately from the history of understanding, dealing with and using photographs as artefacts, as well as from the history of visualising and changing collective mentality through photographs.

What connects those issues is photography's special relationship with memory: it is recognised as a tool of memory, but an inadequate one,[5] and as such is routinely used to write and rewrite history. This 'history-telling' quality of photographic memory was visualised in a series of eight photographs by the contemporary Lithuanian photographer Arturas Valiauga (b. 1967) in 2002. The series *I Dropped in on Stepas*, *We Talked about Life* (fig. 1) lies at the crossroads of art and documentary and, like W. J. T. Mitchell's 'talking metapicture', is 'a representation of the relation between discourse and representation, a picture about the gap between words and pictures'[6]. This time the 'metapictures' describe the relation between the discourse of history as recovery of lost collective memory and photography as a tool of memory. They represent a peculiar country house whose walls are entirely covered with images: cuttings from magazines showing faces of people, animals and landscapes, advertising posters, postcards, occasional photographs of naked bodies, packages of seeds, etc. Three observations concerning history, photography and memory can be made here: (1) the walls of the house are a visual record, a memory of three decades in the history of Lithuania; (2) this record is itself an image, a *strong image*, in the sense of Gottfried Boehm, which establishes something and creates an 'increase in being'[7] but, contrary to text, does not provide a 'story' or a sequence of events, presenting instead an accumulation of visual signs without any hierarchy or order, as if it were a kind of non-selective, objective memory; (3) although some people in the cuttings are familiar and do remind one (vaguely) of events and problems that occurred during that period of transition, many faces have been forgotten and can no longer serve as triggers of memory[8]. Therefore, this series by Valiauga symbolises for me the duality that complicates the process of writing a

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4 C. Cotton, The Photograph as Contemporary Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 2009.

5 R. Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. Trans. R. Howard. London: Vintage, 1993, p. 91; S. Bull, Photography. London, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 92.

6 W. J. T. Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 65.

7 E. Grigoravičienė, Vaizdinis posūkis: vaizdai-žodžiai-kūnai-žvilgsniai [The pictorial turn: images-words-bodies-gazes]. Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2011, p. 33, paraphrased from Was ist ein Bild? Ed. G. Boehm. München: Fink, 1994, p. 35.

8 I discussed the discourse of memory in this series by Valiauga in A. Narušytė, Recollection: The Work of Collective Memory in Contemporary Lithuanian Photography. – Meno istorija ir kritika / Art History & Criticism 6. Istorijos (re)konstrukcijos nuo 1945-ųjų iki dabar / Performing History from 1945 to the Present. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 2010, pp. 100–107.

history of photography: writing the history of contemporary Lithuanian photographs for the first time and following the history of Lithuania written *by* photographs.

Without a history, everything that had been photographed, all images created, published and exhibited during the twenty years of the country's independence, existed in a similar state of chaos; their totality meant nothing, and it was impossible to see any development or meaningful sequence in their dazzling variety. To write a history meant to select, to classify, to create a hierarchy and, above all, to struggle against forgetting and, together with memory, recover lost meaning. As a result, I created eleven parallel stories of photography.[9] Yet the most intriguing was the class of images that had served the society as 'vehicles of collective memory' and were themselves like texts about memory, and served as an aid in sustaining identity, as if to confirm Paul Ricœur's statement: 'As the primary cause of the fragility of identity we must cite its difficult relation to time; this is a primary difficulty that, precisely, justifies the recourse to memory as the temporal component of identity, in conjunction with the evaluation of the present and the projection of the future.'[10] Certain photographs have also helped to provide this 'temporal component of identity' in Lithuania; they have participated in the recovery of collective memory and have also recorded the changing attitudes towards memory and history. To write their history meant also to interpret their pictorial self-reference in Mitchell's sense and treat photography as part of visual culture, in which images are artists' texts about memory, meta-texts about the status of photographs as tools of memory, documents that record memory and artefacts that help to recover memory.

Forgetting

One of the most literary images of Soviet stagnation in the 1980s was the mankurt, who had no memory. The mankurt was a character created by the Kyrgyz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov in his novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980): 'The *mankurt* did not know who he had been, whence and from what tribe he had come, did not know his name, could not remember his childhood, father or mother – in short, he could not recognize himself as a human being. Deprived of any understanding of his own ego, the *mankurt* was, from his master's point of view, possessed of a whole range of advantages. He was the equivalent of a dumb animal and therefore absolutely obedient and safe. He never thought of trying to escape.'[11] In 1983, the novel was translated into Lithuanian, and the theatre director Eimuntas Nekrošius adapted it for the stage for the Youth Theatre in Vilnius. It was clear to the audience, as well as the readers of the novel, that the mankurt was the *homo sovieticus*[12] who had lost his memory and thus

9 Published as a monograph A. Narušytė, Lietuvos fotografija: 1990–2010.

10 P. Ricœur, Memory, History, Forgetting. Trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 81.

11 Ch. Aitmatov, The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years. Trans. F. J. French. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 126. Russian publication: Ч. Айтматов, И дольше века длится день. St. Petersburg: Азбука-классика, 2004, pp. 137–138.

12 Svetlana Boym claims that the mankurt 'became a metaphor for homo sovieticus during glasnost', but it happened earlier than that. See S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia. New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 58.

did not understand who he was, did not oppose the regime and was numbly obeying orders.

Forgetting was not enough, however. The emptiness left by the destroyed memory was to be filled by the only approved version of the past, the great narrative of 'historical materialism', according to which the entire history of humankind led towards the socialist revolution. Memory preserved in photographs had to witness this 'truth'; thus, documents were staged and images contradicting the 'truth' were hidden, destroyed or edited. Yet the version of the past itself kept changing over time, and photographs had to be adapted to it. For example, people killed or deported by the regime were subsequently edited out of documentary photographs. The British photographer David King, who had been collecting such images since the 1960s, noticed that the photographic terror had penetrated even private spaces: when people disappeared from public life, Soviet citizens felt obliged to carry out visual executions on their book shelves.[13] Thus, during the Soviet period, the memory of the photographic image was unstable and untrustworthy.

Counter-memory

Nevertheless, photographic memory was not destroyed completely by deleting 'unwanted' people: some unchanged prints still survived and their inconsistencies attracted David King's attention, while his collection became evidence of the persistence of photographic memory. Moreover, the authorities could not control what was photographed and how much of the 'incorrect' present would be stored in photographers' archives of negatives: shelves filled with boxes full of film rolls, only occasionally sorted according to subjects and years. During the Soviet period, exhibitions and publications showed only what was approved by the Glavlit censorship[14], but images that reached the public were only a small fragment of recorded and still 'latent' reality.

Albums represent another case of irrepressible memory. Every family had albums filled with photographs that showed not only the Soviet present, but also the past, the inter-war period of independence that recorded grandparents' youth. As Jonas Valatkevičius put it, the albums 'were real (for what is in a photograph *is real*) inserts of the missing world in Soviet reality, which demonstrated that it was possible to live differently.'[15] Thus, photography preserved what Svetlana Boym, in her study of Soviet culture, called 'counter-memory'. According to her, counter-memory was 'an oral memory transmitted between close friends and family members and spread to the wider society through unofficial networks. The alternative vision of the past, present and future was rarely discussed explicitly; rather, it was communicated through half

13 D. King, The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia. New York: Holt, 1997, p. 10.

14 Главное управление по делам литературы и издательств – The Supreme Bureau of Literature and Publication Affairs.

15 J. Valatkevičius, The Story of Man's Relationships with the Camera in Four Steps. – Kartos: kintanti fotografija / Generations: Changing Photography. Ed. A. Narušytė. Alytus: Erdvės, 2005, p. 103.

words, jokes and doublespeak.'[16] The counter-memory hidden in photographic archives was like another, unofficial, channel of visual memory.

Some ambiguous images that emerged in photography also had the power of counter-memory. Algirdas Šeškus, Vitas Luckus, Alfonsas Budvytis, Vytautas Balčytis and Remigijus Pačėsa disturbed the discourse of national photography with almost illegible photographs as early as the early 1980s. They seemed to record what was necessary: typical Soviet urban spaces and monuments, portraits of Communist Party leaders enlarged in posters, ideological slogans and other symbols that cluttered the public space in order to delete historical memory. Yet the monotony and sometimes intentional imperfection of their photographs expressed their insincerity towards their subjects (fig. 2). Their photographs seemed to be observations of a bored passer-by, tired of the ideological noise flooding the tiresome standardised environment. Such images expressed the common attitude of the 'society of boredom' that, according to Tomas Vaiseta, practised indifference towards ideology that penetrated all spheres of life and was perceived as meaningless, but unavoidable, if one wanted a peaceful life, career and social benefits. This society superficially participated in the meaningless game of exchanging ideological values, but invented evasive tactics in order to pursue personal benefits and thus create meaning.[17] The intentional poor quality of photographs faithfully mirroring this society may be seen as one such evasive tactic, which transmits an additional implied meaning to the common space of feelings by deconstructing the ideological discourse from the inside.[18] Although the subjects of images corresponded to the requirements of social realism, the would-be neutral 'documentary' character of the photographs expressed indifference and contempt. By straightforwardly repeating what the lens saw, photography made the absurdity of reality visible.

When the policies of perestroika and glasnost started changing the Soviet reality, photographic archives gradually became a source from which memory could be (re-) created. According to Boym: 'During glasnost everyone became an amateur historian looking for the black holes and blank spots of history. There was almost as much euphoria about the past as there was about the future after the revolution – and as the taboos were lifting, the past was changing from one day to the next.'[19] Thus, previously forbidden stories, versions of collective memory, were remembered and new ones were constructed. In Lithuania, as in other occupied countries, the re-creation of 'true' memory, i.e. unaffected by the manipulations of the regime, also meant the re-creation of collective identity. Photography, which was the medium of truth and reality, had a special role to play. The images of reality that had been forbidden by the Soviets could finally be shown and discussed publicly, and an insatiable desire for such images was felt: one needed to inventory the silenced experiences. On the one hand, the newly discovered images helped to reveal the scope of crimes of the regime; on the other hand, they confirmed the reality of the crimes.

16 S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. 61.
17 T. Vaiseta, Nuobodulio visuomenė: vėlyvojo sovietmečio Lietuva (1964–1984) [The society of boredom: Lithuania in the late Soviet period (1964–1984)]. PhD thesis. Vilnius, 2012.
18 T. Vaiseta, Nuobodulio visuomenė: vėlyvojo sovietmečio Lietuva (1964–1984), p. 155.
19 S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. 62.

Both 'art' and 'documentary' photography equally participated in the process of restoring memory. In the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the society was shocked by exhibitions and publications of photographic evidence of the crimes committed by the Soviet authorities against the Lithuanian nation: the bodies of tortured and murdered 'forest brothers' (post-war partisans fighting against the occupation) laid in town squares, and photographs from the places of deportation in Siberia (fig. 3). The technical imperfection in the photographs of dead partisans – blurred details, enhanced contrast and rough texture – seemed to express a specific emotional relationship towards this particular memory: the tension between the desire to see death, as well as the fact of the enemy's cruelty, and the fear of seeing too much. Static photographs did not let people see the details, as if this were old documentary footage, dusty and cracked. The anonymous portraits of deportees looked like conventional amateur photography, revealing almost normal life. Only the people's poor clothes, the landscape of tundra unusual to Lithuanian eyes, funerals punctuating the flow of time and people disappearing from family portraits pointed indirectly to what the deportees were describing in their memoirs: the cruelty of the occupiers, and the inhumanly difficult conditions of life and death[20].

Art photographers of the time enriched the discourse of counter-memory by presenting series of photographs on previously prohibited subjects of Soviet life: life in the Soviet army (Romas Juškelis and Gintaras Zinkevičius), the psycho-neurological hospital resembling a prison (Alfonsas Budvytis), the construction of Soviet blocks of flats reminiscent of the zone from the film by Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (Algimantas Kunčius, *Reminiscences*), a special school for mentally disabled children, who were not supposed to exist in the perfect socialist society (Virgilijus Šonta, *The School is My Home*), identity photographs of people from the village of Seirijai (most of those people were later deported to Siberia or killed by the KGB) taken by Vytautas Stanionis in 1946 and enlarged by his son Vytautas V. Stanionis (b. 1949) in the late 1980s, to be exhibited as double portraits, and the ethnography of religious rituals recorded by Romualdas Požerskis in his series *Religious Feasts*. The fact that, for the latter series, Požerskis won the national prize for culture and art in 1990 is a testimony to the significance that was accorded to the process of re-creating memory (and identity).

This process was summed up by the international exhibition of Baltic photography *The Memory of Images*, organised by the curator Barbara Straka in Germany in 1993.[21] The exhibition showed works by the most important photographers of the region. The concept of memory inscribed in its title was interpreted quite freely: both as a mention, a remembrance, and as personal, national and cultural memory. In the introductory article to the catalogue, Straka wrote that the collective memory recorded in photographs would help the West to learn about the 'new' Baltic states and form a common European identity. Yet the curator of the Lithuanian section, Raminta Jurėnaitė, was

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20   A perfect example of such a discourse is the album of deportees' photographs Tremtis prie Manos upės [Deportation at the Mana River (Russian: Мáна)]. Ed. V. Genovaitė Nacickaitė. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2008.
21   The Memory of Images: Baltic Photo Art Today / Das Gedächtnis der Bilder: Baltische Photokunst heute. Eds. B. Straka, K. Nievers. Kiel: Nieswand Verlag, 1993. The exhibition was first held in Kiel, then travelled to Rostock, Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius.

most interested in showing, or even explaining to, the West why Lithuanians wanted so urgently to break away from the Soviet Union, despite the danger of harming the progressive policies of Mikhail Gorbachev. In the exhibition, the most shocking blow of memory to the Western audience was a reportage by Juozas Kazlauskas.

In 1989, Kazlauskas (1941–2002) participated in an expedition to the places of deportation in Siberia, where people were looking for the graves of Lithuanian deportees in order to rebury their remains in Lithuania. As a former deportee, this expedition was a return to his own past for Kazlauskas, an encounter with his childhood, an act of memory. The photographs that he brought back from Siberia fell somewhere between reportage and art photography: he not only documented events, but also tried to emphasise the drama of the moment. In his photographs, the emptiness of barren landscapes is broken up by crosses, the remains of a gate to a camp or human bones sticking out of the sand. Some photographs soon became icons of deportation and national revival: an engine that had remained on the tracks after Stalin's death, an elderly woman searching tiny coffins for her daughter's bones and people uncovering a grave (fig. 4). The latter photograph is particularly disturbing: it breaks through the numbness that overcomes the spectator looking at distant places where tragedies have happened long ago with an explosion of truth. As Knut Nievers wrote in the catalogue, Kazlauskas's photographs literally show memory dug out of the ground – here, in front of our eyes. This photograph also symbolises the very process of remembrance when, in the emotionally neutral flow of everydayness, a traumatic memory is 'dug out' of the unconscious unexpectedly and raised to the surface of consciousness. The series was an incriminating document against the Soviet occupation.

Therefore, Kazlauskas's photographs were both a tool of memory transferring information of the forgotten past to the present and the very act of remembering. However, their subject – the reburial of deportees' bodies – touches on yet another layer of cultural meaning in this series. As Katherine Verdery pointed out in her study of the boom of reburials in Eastern Europe after the removal of the Soviet dictate, reburials provide a new meaning and are an act of moral purification.[22] The necessity of reburying the victims of political oppression originated from the funerary ritual practised during the Soviet period that was a form of resistance: in opposition to official atheism, people took care to 'rebury correctly' according to old traditions.[23] Thus, beginning in 1989, reburials completed the struggle against enforced atheism, but they were related to the act of political separation: the reburied bodies, according to Verdery, were like returned national heritage that helped to recover the national identity and symbolic capital, similarly to cultural values returned from museums in the colonial centres all over the world[24]. Kazlauskas's photographs documenting the ritual of reburial also signalled that the symbolic capital had been returned and the pre-Soviet order had been restored. Along with the reinstatement (however briefly) of the 1938 constitution, the renaming of streets, re-erection of monuments and reopening of the Vytautas Magnus

22 K. Verdery, The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 38.
23 K. Verdery, The Political Lives of Dead Bodies, pp. 45–46.
24 K. Verdery, The Political Lives of Dead Bodies, p. 49.

University, as well as other 'national' institutions, the act of memorising recorded by Kazlauskas marked the restoration of the original position, 'as it was', thus denying the legitimacy of the Soviet time.

Documenting history: the memory of the present

Проснись, Россия! Пусть будет тебе примером маленькая гордая Литва![25]

This is a slogan on a banner carried at the meeting called to support Lithuania on 20 January 1991 in Moscow (fig. 5). Photographed by Algimantas Vidugiris (b. 1936) from near by, it came out blurred because the photographer was part of the moving crowd and had to react quickly. I do not remember the events of this photograph, but it attracted my attention while I was leafing through the album documenting the national revival.[26] It awakened me from the objective attitude obligatory to a historian weighing facts without prejudice. Photographs of historical events taken twenty years ago are not 'normal' images that can be analysed as documents while searching for historical truth, or that can be read semiotically, anthropologically, psychoanalytically, etc. Any judgement concerning aesthetics seems to be even less relevant. No, these are not images, frozen fragments of life, not 'works of art' conveying the observer's states of mind and visions, but facts spat out by the very events they record: no theory of the relativity and medial nature of photographs works here.

Back then, there were thousands of such photographs; the barricades and many other walls in the city used to be covered with them every day. Nobody cared about their authorship. The photographs seemed to confirm what everybody saw, repeating the 'truth', everything 'as it was', without changing anything. Even the views from above of the great meetings, i.e. from vantage points in which most people had never been, still looked 'familiar' because they visualised the knowledge that there were many of us (fig. 6). They expressed the almost universal perception that one was not a separate person, but part of a much larger formation – a nation. This endowed people with a sense of power, which was reflected in photographs as in a mirror. Hence, the vision from above was 'organic', and not a special strategy of de-familiarisation as practised by modernist photographers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, photography belonged to 'everybody', was impersonalised. Only now have the names become important.[27]

The national revival and the struggle for independence were recorded by the masters of the time: Antanas Sutkus, Romualdas Požerskis, Marius Baranauskas, Juozas Kazlauskas, Raimondas Urbakavičius, Algimantas and Mindaugas Černiauskas, Kęstutis Stoškus, Algirdas Kairys, Algimantas Žižiūnas, Zenonas Nekrošius, Algimantas

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25 'Wake up, Russia! Let the Little and Proud Lithuania be an Example to You!'
26 Nepriklausomos Lietuvos dvidešimtmečio akimirkos [Moments from the twenty years of independent Lithuania]. Ed. R. Žemaitytė. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2010, p. 76.
27 Photographs recording the history of the struggle for Lithuanian independence have been collected and published in two albums: the aforementioned *Nepriklausomos Lietuvos dvidešimtmečio akimirkos* and *Sausis. Laisvės fotografija* [January. The photography of freedom]. Ed. E. Miknevičiūtė. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2005.

Jankūnas, Vytautas Daraškevičius, Algimantas Barzdžius, Virgilijus Usinavičius and others. Thus, the photographers were there – at the centre of events. After twenty years, the sense of the real that Roland Barthes looked for in photographs acquires another dimension: not only that all this had really happened, that people were listening to their leaders with younger and open faces, but also that the photographers felt the urge to record history. From the photographs, it is possible to follow their trajectories.

For example, Kazlauskas was everywhere: not only in Siberia, but also in the meetings of 1988–1989, at the parliament just after the announcement of independence on 11 March 1990, in the meeting of Yedinstvo on 8 January 1991, after the sharp rise in prices, at the Printing House when it was occupied by the Soviet army on 11 January 1991, during the attack on the Radio and Television Building on the night of 13 January, then at the Television Tower, at the Parliament and inside, and during the day he kept on photographing the construction of barricades – among the people and on a roof. Then Kazlauskas photographed the funeral of people killed during the attacks, the bodies of customs officers murdered on 30 July in Medininkai, the statue of Lenin lying on a long truck and Pope John Paul II in Vilnius Cathedral in September 1993. In winter 1994, he went to photograph the beginning of the war in Chechnya, and in 1997 life in the Chernobyl zone. Kazlauskas was attracted to places where most people would be afraid to be, close to death.

Nevertheless, the documents of history recorded by Kazlauskas betray not only the anxiety driving the photographer, but also his ambition of conveying a universal meaning even in photographs of events or, as the modernist theorist Clive Bell has expressed it, a 'significant form'[28]. Thus, some of his shots stand out in the stream of images: they not only testify, but also speak of something more, cut through the elementary surface of facts, revealing the layers of thoughts and time promising to become symbols some day. Such power may be perceived, for example, in the photograph of Vytautas Landsbergis voting at a meeting of *Sąjūdis* in 1988, perhaps due to the captured concentration of his gaze, the movement and light, or the slightly bent backs of Soviet army soldiers marching out of Lithuania in 1992 and their stamping in unison on the pavement, or a pile of metal letters taken off buildings and left on the pavement in 1989: in the photograph, it is no longer possible to assemble the text, but the pentagram star leaning against the letters tells enough to make us understand that this is a narrative of totalitarian ideology dismantled, a dismantled past.

A photographer who reacts to what happens now, to what may become a historical fact, creates memory for the future. In the history of world photography, images that seem to concentrate historical time are constantly quoted and repeated, thus becoming established in people's consciousness, becoming icons that later 'express' an event for those who have not experienced it. Such an image is the falling Spanish soldier photographed by Robert Capa, and the famous statement linked to this photograph, 'If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough' (1936), the symbol of the Great Depression created by Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother* (1936), a moment captured by Henri Cartier-Bresson when a woman is just about to hit an exposed member

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28   C. Bell, The Aesthetic Hypothesis (1914). – Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Eds. Ch. Harrison, P. Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, pp. 113–116.

of the Gestapo (1945), Eddie Adams's shot of General Nguyên Ngọc shooting a sus-
pected Viet Cong leader (1968), a naked girl running away from an accidental napalm
attack, captured by Huỳnh Công (Nick) Út in Vietnam (1972), or the moment filmed
and photographed by many anonymous people when a single man carrying shopping
bags stood in the path of a column of tanks on Tiananmen Square (1989). Those are
'images that changed the world'. To create a photograph with such power one has to
capture a 'decisive moment' when, according to the author of this concept, Cartier-
Bresson, 'elements of movement are in balance. The photograph has to capture that
moment and keep the balance unmoving'.[29] To list such icons, there is no need to refer
to history books: the moment of impermanence captured in them, while waiting for
the unknown of the future, has been firmly inscribed in collective memory. Is it pos-
sible to find such images in the archives of the struggle for Lithuanian independence?
The most precise judge here is memory.

Four shots emerge from the mass of photographs marking different moments of
change in history. First of all, there is a girl photographed by Zinas Kazėnas (b. 1936),
with the Lithuanian national flag above her head and her own figure raised above the
heads of militia officers armed with plastic shields and rubber batons (fig. 7). This is a
shot from the meeting of the Freedom League (*Laisvės lyga*) in 1988, which demanded
that the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact be declared invalid. The
meeting was broken up by the militia and ended in chaotic fighting, injuries and ar-
rests; yet this colour photograph conveys optimism. The joyful combination of colours
on the Lithuanian national flag, then still a rare occurrence in the visual field, lights up
the city painted in dark blue militia uniforms, coldly shining helmets and brownish-
grey stones. And, of course, the face in the very centre of the photograph – the girl smil-
ing at the flag – stands opposed to the formidable flow of uniforms, ammunition and
anonymous power. Her figure looks no less heroic than that of the man on Tiananmen
Square, because she also stands alone against many. Not only in terms of composition,
but also in terms of contrast, the face and the flag rise above the dark mass as concen-
trated light and colour. Its composition is reminiscent of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty
Leading the People* (1830), a romanticist painting in which a woman marching through
the bodies of fallen combatants also carries a flag (and a gun). Yet Delacroix's figure
was not real, not a participant in the battle, but a vision, a goddess, an allegory of free-
dom: the painter enlarged it, and the yellow colour of her dress separates her from
the crowd and from reality. Her grandiose and precipitant figure has been recorded in
memory so well that the absurd nakedness of her breast in that situation is not imme-
diately noticed. Kazėnas's photograph repeats the romanticist archetype, but its effect
is stronger: in Lithuania, she is not an abstract allegory, but a participant in the action,
a child who becomes the herald of the battle, raised above the cordon of militia men. It
is not surprising that this photograph was copied in thousands of *Sąjūdis* posters.

The second image seems to increasingly reveal the distance between the present
Lithuania and the Lithuania of National Revival as the years pass. This is a shot by
Romualdas Požerskis (b. 1951) from the Baltic Way of 1989 (fig. 8). Out of the two and

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29   H. Cartier-Bresson, The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers. New York: Aperture, 1999,
P. 33.

a half million participants who connected Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn in a continuous live chain, we see four men holding hands. Why this photograph? Perhaps because the absolute sense of order in this photograph contradicts the chaos that is associated with mass gatherings: the men form an almost perfectly straight line, standing at equal distance from each other, dressed in their best, solemn. The same strict geometrical order prevails in the composition of the entire shot: the chain of men runs parallel to the band of the forest; the black vertical figures of their bodies connect the horizontal lines of the road, the forest and the sky, as if they were columns of a classical building supporting the roof of the world. In addition, all of the figures are linked by the rhythm of repetition: white triangles of shirts, white hair and berets and a white car on the road. Therefore, this photograph looks not so much like a document of a specific event, as like a political poster, as if reality has been specially constructed for the photographer. This spontaneous order created by people themselves is carried into the event as well: as a sign of strength, a peaceful non-aggressive opposition and determination, because the image's structure implies that everything has been ordered by an invisible architect. Yet, most importantly, the Sunday best, the festive solemnity and the stillness of the image express a now lost relationship with the affairs of the state. This is why I have mentioned distance: this photograph is disturbing as a relic of a lost unity and positive attitude.

The third image is blurred, capturing confusion, full of barely visible details. Visual icons are usually clear, generalised images with fewer figures. For example, the portrait of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (1960) became the symbol of revolution and protest only when the photographer Alberto Diaz (Korda) cropped his comrade's profile and added a palm. In contrast, the shot captured by Virgilijus Usinavičius during the attack on the Television Tower on 13 January 1991 is unedited, but it is affective in its authentic visual chaos (fig. 9). The photographer has captured a special moment: men are trying to stop a tank, and push it off a human body – legs stick out from underneath the tank's tracks. In the centre of the shot is the struggle of a killing machine and human beings, and the emphasis is on the touch of a hand covered with a leather glove and the metal of the tank. The huge, smooth and slightly blurred mass of the tank dominates the left side of the image. The right side is a dynamic mass of people: coats, hats, legs and hands, all tangled up, barely visible bodies, uncoordinated movement and emotions. Some people seem full of tension while pushing away the tank, while others, standing nearby, seem not to notice what is happening next to them, and stand gazing into the distance. Somebody is even smiling, an unclear face, destroying the tension a little, distracting from the drama in the present moment, like a reference to the power of non-stop time to extinguish emotions and destroy memory, showing how small this event is in the infinity of the world, enlarged only by the decision of the photographer. The graphic composition of the shot, action pulled out of darkness by the flash in the foreground, symbolically repeats the genesis of a photographic event when a 'decisive moment' is cut out of the meaninglessness of life accidentally, only because the photographer was nearby and was ready.

1.
Arturas Valiauga. From the series *I Dropped in on Stepas. We Talked about Life* (2002). Colour print. Courtesy of the photographer.

2.
 Algirdas Šeškus. Untitled (1980s). Silver-based print. Courtesy of the photographer.

3.
Unrecognised dead partisans from an unknown district (1940s). Silver-based print.
Courtesy of The Museum of Genocide Victims.

4.
Juozas Kazlauskas. In the Cemetery of Tit-Ary Deportees, Yakutiya (1989). Silver-based print.
Courtesy of the photographer's wife Dalia Kazlauskienė.

5.
Algimantas Vidugiris. Participants in a
Meeting in Moscow (20 January, 1991).
Silver-based print.
Courtesy of the photographer.

6.
Romualdas Požerskis. At the Supreme Council of Lithuania (13 January, 1991). Silver-based print.
Courtesy of the photographer.

7.
Zinas Kazėnas. A Meeting of the Freedom League (1988).
Colour photograph.
Courtesy of the photographer.

8.
Romualdas Požerskis. The Baltic Way (1989). Silver-based print. Courtesy of the photographer.

9.
Virgilijus Usinavičius. The Attack on the
Vilnius Television Tower (13 January 1991).
Colour photograph.
Courtesy of the photographer.

10.
Antanas Sutkus. Goodbye, Party Comrades! (1991).
Silver-based print.
Courtesy of the photographer.
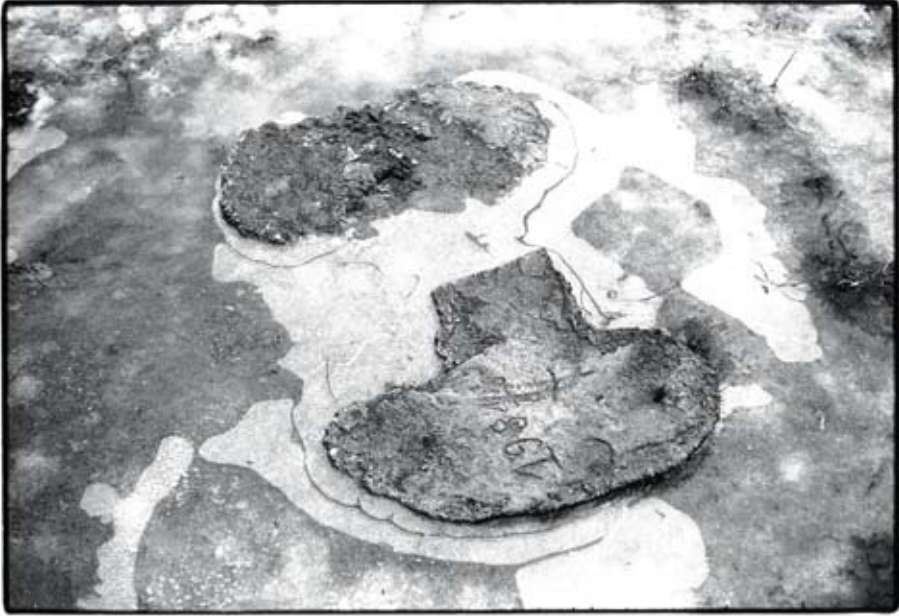
– Илья Иосифович, сыграем?
– я занят, пишу.

– кому Илья Сергеевич, донос?
– в домоуправление № II пишу.

– как Фаина Георгиевна поживает?
– кость ломит.

– а помнишь, Илья...
– помню.

– не весёлые наши времена, Вальмантович.
– гм.

1. – Ilja Josifovic, what about some play?

   – I am busy – writing

2. – Who is the complaint for?
   – For house management No 11.

3. – How is Faina Grigorjevna?
   – She is cooking a bone

4. – and do You remember, Ilja?
   – Yes, I do

5. – we are not having a nice time nowadays, are we, Valmantovich?
   – well,

11.

Gintaras Zinkevičius. The Sequence of a Table (1991–1992). Silver-based prints. Courtesy of the photographer.

12.

Arturas Valiauga. From the series *About Pancakes and Borsht* (2002). Colour print. Courtesy of the photographer.

13.
Joana Deltuvaitė. From the series *Domestic Life* (2004). Colour print. Courtesy of the photographer.

14.
Deimantas Narkevičius. A still from the film
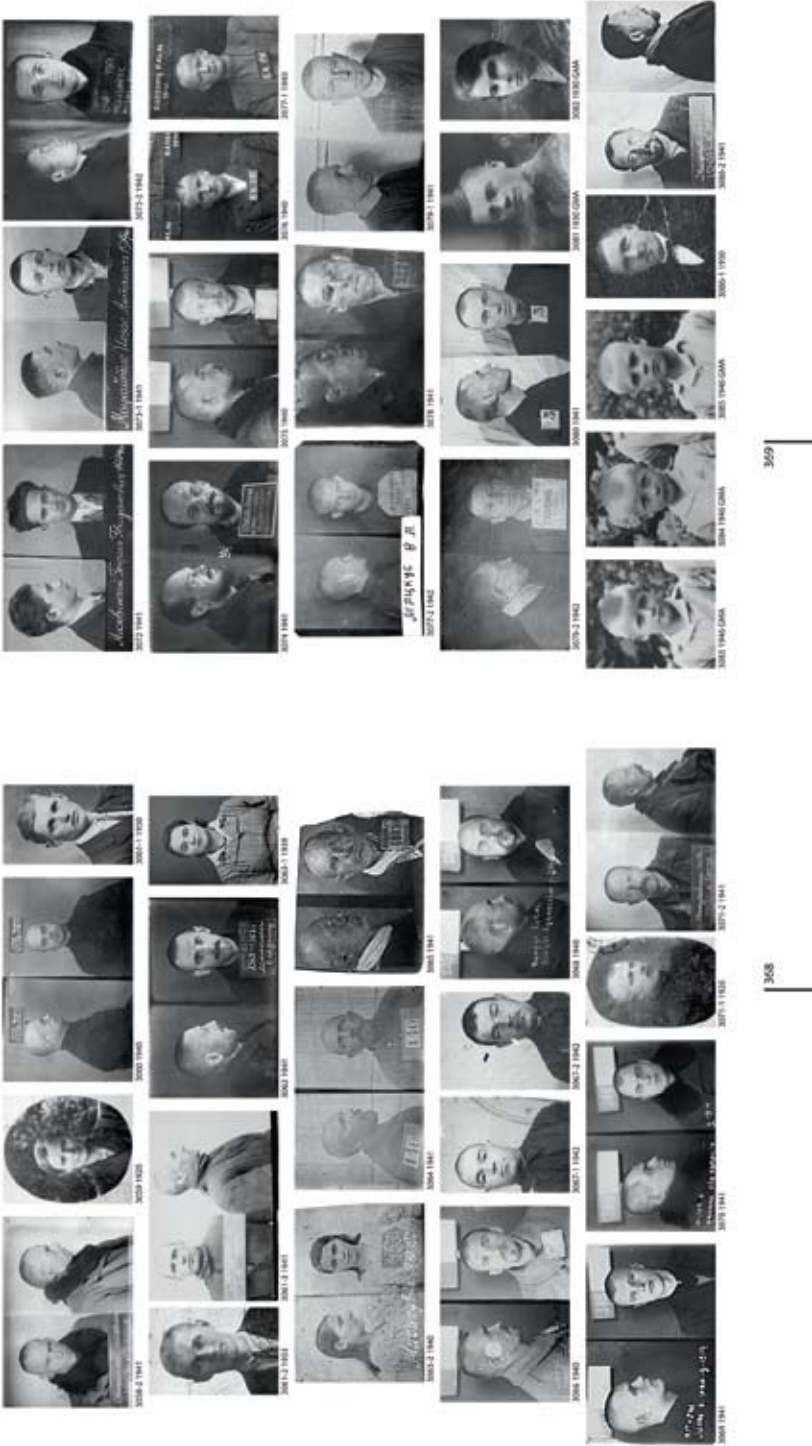*Disappearance of a Tribe* (2005). Courtesy of the artist.

1992

1993

15.

Gintaras Zinkevičius. Forgetting (1992–1993).
Silver-based prints. Courtesy of the photographer.

16. Kęstutis Grigaliūnas. From *Diaries of Death* (2012). Silver-based prints. Courtesy of the artist and The Museum of Genocide Victims.

Yet, when I look at this photograph, I am not interested in the mechanisms constructing the event or collective memory, and not even in the opposition of machine and man, metal and body, but in one detail, which has become the Barthesian *punctum* for me. It is the boots sticking out from under the tank, covering legs clad in warm tights. I remember when I first saw this photograph in an improvised exposition on the concrete wall that surrounded the parliament after the night of 13 January. The boots of the person lying under the tank represented an excerpt from my own everyday life; they marked the way that reality had been taken to the moment captured in the photograph: the television set turned on in the sitting room with voices of people on TV wondering what would happen the following night, a friend's call: 'Shall we go together?', hurried dressing – as warm as possible because the temperature outside was below minus ten – rushing to a meeting, long walks around the protected building in darkness, hot tea from huge barrels, songs and only a slight tension while thinking that nothing would happen that night. But from there, the experiences part ways. I have only heard about what this photograph shows: the shots at the other end of the city, the television presenter Eglė Bučelytė's voice saying 'we are still alive', and the thundering ground when the tanks were approaching the parliament. That moment is related to a personal experience, and completely irrelevant to collective memory: somebody gave me an orange: it seemed like the last orange in my life, so I ate it the way Antoine de Saint-Exupéry ate his orange in the desert in his novel *Wind, Sand and Stars*, trying to remember the smell of the sun, so alien to snow. I later saved the peel, like a photograph of the events. The boots sticking out from underneath the tank in the photograph by Usinavičius marked everydayness, a normal life, an ordinary walk to work every morning without thinking about it, hoping for something, quarrels, swarms of uncontrollable and unnecessary thoughts and everything that happens every day when it passes without tension and without a specific goal. This visual document disturbs and tears apart the zone of safe curiosity, because the anonymous, unmarked everydayness happens to be in an extraordinary place: underneath a tank, right next to death.

Thus, in my personal archive of memory, it is this photograph that is the most significant. But only collective memory turns photographs into icons and a personal *punctum* does not necessarily work here. Another photograph from the same year, 1991, is more likely to become an icon: *Goodbye, Party Comrades!* by Antanas Sutkus (b. 1939) (fig. 10). It shows a statue of Lenin raised into the air by a crane, waving to the audience gathered on 'his own' (now Lukiškės) square. We do not see people here: the shot is clear of accidental details and this is why this photograph may become a symbol of the end of occupation, of a historical turning point. The bronze Lenin flying against the clouds bids farewell not only to those who have come to witness the dismantling of the monument, but to every soul living under the same sky, not only to the participants of the events of 1991, but also to all of history. Yet, he does not disappear completely: his boots have remained on the pedestal, also symbolically.

Thus, this photograph contains the signs of leaving and staying, weightlessness and immovability, temporariness and eternity. A discursive space stretches between those oppositions, where the pathos of farewell is silenced. This is the reason why this photograph is 'strong'. Then one notices some signs of irony. The 'light' flutter of the

bronze coat is opposed by the mechanisms needed to fly the sculpture: the rope and ladder, like theatre props, emphasising the cumbersome process, its performative character, as if it is on stage, which is also a reference to the ideology embodied by Lenin's figure. His waving hand – I do not see this at once – is thickly striped by the white excrement of birds, as are his head and back. The transformation of the function of the gesture is funny, too. While Lenin was standing on the square, seemingly forever, this was an orator's gesture for the imaginary people always gathered here: it was meant to establish his truths visually. Yet one has only to tilt the figure and make it hang in the air for a while and the meaning of the gesture has changed. The photograph, which has stopped the moment, allows one to see this ambiguity and the relativity of every meaning. It indirectly confirms a Soviet anecdote about a citizen who had just left the Do-re-mi bar, which was situated in front of the statue: Lenin would keep telling him to go back into the bar with his imperative gesture, and only after having drunk enough would the leader give permission to go weaving along 'his own' (now Gediminas) avenue. Thus, several narratives and several layers of time are connected in this photograph; laughter accompanies the sense of victory arising from the experience and the memory of imperfect and even sinful life situations. This is why this photograph has not lost value when the process of regaining political independence has become overgrown with new interpretations and feelings, when new people start thinking about it: they did not live through the events and they are not satisfied with one-sided images of sacrifice, suffering and death.

This photograph by Sutkus is also significant in other ways: it marks not only the end of a political, but also of a photographic period. When the alien army was removed, the tension of the field of battle disappeared, and it also disappeared in photographs. The masters of humanist photography stopped recording what was happening and started thinking how to photograph, how to apply their abilities in a new economic system and in the developing field of art photography.

'Nostalgia' for the Soviet times

Since the very beginning, another stream has flown underneath the dominant work of historical memory, which may be confused with nostalgia for the Soviet period. For example, the same exhibition, *The Memory of Images*, also presented a series of five photographs, *The Sequence of a Table*, by Gintaras Zinkevičius (b. 1963), dedicated to Ilya Kabakov (1991–1992) (fig. 11). In each image, we see a table decaying and finally completely disappearing, leaving only a trace – a concrete base – in the last shot. The date when the table was constructed, '1987', has been engraved in the base. Thus, not much time has passed from 'birth' to 'death'.

The photographer who recorded the process of change, however, preserved not only the visual shape of the thing, but also the memory of life related to it, for every photograph is followed by a dialogue in Russian, alluding to the rhetoric of Kabakov's *Albums*, which he started in 1972, and he created fifty of them in total. This is a conversation about nothing, made up of everyday questions and answers, yet the remnants of

tension created by totalitarianism also prevail here: 'who are you writing a complaint to?' an invisible person asks. 'To District Office No 11', the other answers. These fragments have merged conversations of several decades: while playing draughts, chess, cards and/or drinking vodka. The words disappear immediately, like the very subject around which the conversations have been taking place. Only 'hmm' remains at the end: nothing to say. Thus the little table becomes a symbol of the alien Russian culture that was then gradually leaving Lithuania.

When Soviet monuments were being destroyed enthusiastically, and even the bust of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin was moved from underneath the central Castle Hill in the centre of Vilnius to the Pushkin Museum at the edge of the city, this photographic sigh by Zinkevičius over the destiny of a Soviet artefact would have seemed unacceptable: sadness prevails between scraps of conversation and the stages of the disappearing table. Yet the photographer's gaze is also ironic because the everyday meaninglessness of the eternal conversation and the banality of the thing dilute the tragic notes related to destruction and finality: a nostalgic person laughs at himself, at his own absurd wish to stop time. With the same double attitude, Zinkevičius also photographed other places of marginal culture, thus memorialising the turn of Soviet life to the past – inconspicuously, if photography could not stop the action for a short while. Thus, in several short series by Zinkevičius, the discourse of memory of the specific social and political context acquires an existential dimension when the knowledge that everything is temporary dissolves the seriousness of the situation.

At the end of the century (and millennium), however, there was a more widespread process of restoring Soviet memory in Lithuanian culture. The most remarkable case is that of Grūtas Park, where monuments demolished at the beginning of independence were revived for a different life in 2001. Now, they were erected not on pedestals, but on the ground, made equal to the visitor who had come to enjoy the past safely, but without any intention of restoring it. Yet if we remember how much effort and political courage was needed to pull down the monuments, we may ask: who needs all this? What is the point of returning to the past? One possible answer was suggested by Gediminas Lankauskas, who encouraged us to 'interpret the processes of memorialising today as a strategy of accumulating symbolic capital', because, according to him, the experience of the Soviet past, its possession, compensates for the fact that Lithuania keeps falling out of the process of global culture and keeps feeling unable to create anything of significance that could enrich the archive of memory of international culture.[30] On the other hand, he says, when one constantly lives in a transition period, knowledge of how to behave in the old system (and it is recognisable in the environment of Grūtas Park) 'stabilises existentially'.[31] The return to the Soviet period by walking among statues awakening its memory is comforting because those are the places of childhood and the beginning.

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30 G. Lankauskas, Apie sensorinę socializmo atmintį / On the Sensory Memory of Socialism. – Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos / Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology 2006, vol. 15 (6), pp. 47–71.
31 G. Lankauskas, Apie sensorinę socializmo atmintį, p. 65.

The need to accumulate such strange symbolic capital of doubtful value may be perceived in the photographs recording the disappearing Soviet domestic life. For example, Arturas Valiauga (b. 1967) photographed the last working day of the canteen of the Dailė factory in 2002 (*About Pancakes and Borsht*); it seems like a last effort to enjoy what will no longer exist: the equipment that used to be the same everywhere during the Soviet period, the same food served in the same manner and a red compote of undefined composition in a ribbed glass (fig. 12). He notices a silent invasion of the present among things: a naked Barbie doll on the counter and plastic bowls shining with novelty. Yet those are just short breaks in the slow rhythm of the disappearing space. Similarly, the young photographer Joana Deltuvaitė (b. 1981) in her series *Domestic Life* (2004) observes the environment of rented flats that still remain from the Soviet past: clumsily constructed, but seemingly familiar to everyone because they are standard and attached to childhood memories (fig. 13). Things that used to repel in the past because they never changed, and were made without any respect for aesthetics, now are evidence of the reality of the past, as if time has preserved their material shape as proof that life was really lived, that not everything was contrived, not everything was myth and lie. Thus, consciously or not, the preserved past entrenches the reality of being: one still does not need memory because everything is still here and now.

The most remarkable gesture of nostalgia, however, is a film by Deimantas Narkevičius (b. 1964), *Disappearance of a Tribe* (2005), made up only of photographs from the Soviet period: here memory is both revived and buried.[32] Shots that were normal in Soviet family albums simply follow each other in the film: a young man in knickers is sitting on a dune, the sun on his back, his body held erect, his eyes gazing in a friendly manner at us – he is getting himself photographed (fig. 14); two country men in boots, well-worn trousers and too long jackets, embracing, kissing: perhaps meeting, perhaps parting, but it is clear they are kissing for the photograph; a group of nurses are being photographed in front of a hospital, one of them having climbed a tree in order to see (or to be seen) better; young men sitting on a tablecloth stretched on the grass are drinking something, perhaps from a clay pot standing next to them, a guitar and accordion accompanying their smiles; then a funeral: a coffin lifted out of a coach, and traditional mourners. All of the photographs are black-and-white; all are composed in a standard way, familiar from many family albums. Even the faces of these completely unknown people seem to be encountered somewhere sometime in a common time. Not only the style of dress, but also the way they are photographed, even their attitude in front of the photographer used to be almost identical everywhere.

Now, when digital technologies have become routine, photography has changed radically as well – not only professional, but also amateur photography; thus, the shots described here have become a 'true' past. Although many of us used to be photographed this way, now no amateur would be satisfied with a black-and-white photograph and would try to compose the image perfectly. Every shot of the old 'chemical'

32 For the full article on Narkevičius's involvement with photography, see A. Narušytė, Trys fotografijos modeliai pagal Deimantą Narkevičių / Three Models of Photography According to Deimantas Narkevičius. – Lietuvos fotografija: vakar ir šiandien '07 / Lithuanian Photography: Yesterday and Today '07. Ed. M. Matulytė. Vilnius: Lietuvos menininkų sąjunga, 2007, pp. 6–13.

photograph used silver salts, and there were a finite number of shots available from a negative. Film, always running out too soon, could not be used for just anything or haphazardly. Now nothing ends in the virtual memory of images (except the battery); thus, the responsibility for the image has decreased. As Valatkevičius put it, amateur photography during the Soviet period meant a certain level of mastering the instrument; not everybody could photograph and be ordained into the ritual of developing photographs in a windowless bathroom.[33] The amateurs of the time used to compete to see who could 'capture' a more interesting shot, who could create a more technically impeccable photograph. Then there were no photography clichés, as there are now when almost every shot demonstrates an indifference to the image. Thus, an album of Soviet family photographs looks like a heritage of a vanished mentality, a past that has ended before this time. We already look at the totality of those photographs as an archaeological find: with an investigative gaze.

The understanding of a model of life that existed some time ago (actually, not so long ago), which Narkevičius makes visible now, depends completely on photography, on a certain way of photographing. Paradoxically, we already remember the life of time frozen in photographs (even our own) not as our own experience (a certain inner imprint), but from photographs, i.e. only visually. After the live traces of sounds, smells, movements and actions have faded, visual information has the power to fill gaps. Then the condition of the photographic – cut, stopped – moment, mostly related to positive feelings, overflows everything that used to be before and after the off-shot time, although one probably smiled only for the sake of a better image. As images follow each other in the film, it seems that the Soviet life was sunnier, people used to smile, used to be nobler and had a great time. The good quality of the photographs (a richer spectrum of objects and themes, and not the static evidence of 'I was there' that satisfies contemporary amateurs) adds to the positive sense of life, as does the fact that an average man is pictured here who seems to feel great while being photographed and, according to Narkevičius, 'gets photographed in the way he wants to see himself'[34], without an unskilled amateur accidentally distorting the expression of his face and posture. Moreover, photography tends to embellish memory.

By connecting the shots of the past into a single film, Narkevičius has created a fiction of a former life that looks deceitfully like reality. The main character, the artist's father, is presented; the action takes place outside, in the country, at work, at home, during meetings and celebrations, and there is death at the end: an endless freeze-frame of mourners by coffins, mounted from standard funerary photographs; it takes time to slide, as a film of time, into silence, as a reflection of the past and farewell to time. Yet this is all one can say about life preserved in the family album, because the filmic narrative made of photographs develops between moments, photography's 'before and after'. This is an indefinite territory. Thus, every viewer will read *Disappearance of a Tribe* in his or her own way, will inscribe their own experiences into the faces of the people being photographed, will interpret relationships according to their own social

33 J. Valatkevičius, The Story of Man's Relationships with the Camera in Four Steps, p. 103.
34 From my interview with Deimantas Narkevičius in summer 2006.

model and will fill the gaps between photographs with unique memories, links and thoughts.

The photographer has filled those gaps with sounds recorded in places where the photographs were taken. Thus a temporal contradiction emerges because the sounds of the present accompany images of the past. The logic of the film would seem to claim that we find ourselves in another time through photographs and sound, that we are living the lives of the represented people. But, in fact, there are no longer people or customs of the past in the sounds of the present: the voices of photographed people have been hushed, as all sounds are hushed while the frieze of mourners is passing by. The special coincidence of sound and image, as well as the discrepancy of time, make one ask: where do the true traces of the tribe remain, in sounds or in images? Which memory is a truer one or, perhaps, are both equally deceptive? Thus, Narkevičius demonstrates the incompleteness and inadequacy of the photograph as memory: it requires sound and movement, but when those elements have been added, it stops being a photograph and becomes time and fiction. Film, however, is still photography because it is not only created from photographs, but also describes the phenomenon of photography.

Although the time of photography is always the time of the past, through memory it is related to the present: the observer projects his or her desires and longings onto the inaccessible, but still close reality fixed in the image. Yet, after the model of photographic production and viewing has changed, its 'that has been' seems to get detached completely from the present and freezes in the past. By creating a film from photographs, Narkevičius has returned them to the flow of time for a while and given the continuity characteristic to the process of memory to the memory preserved in photographs. Thus, the limited memory of the photograph becomes overgrown with off-shot spaces and narrative structures, inserting into the implicit dramas culminations and into one moment resolutions. The long panorama of people lined up silently by the coffin at the end of the film marks the final break, moves even the faces of live people into the sphere of death. This prolonged moment is the point after which the same story can no longer be continued.

Therefore, the memory of the Soviet visual culture and lifestyle is not just nostalgic: it is marked by signs of the end. Differently from the process of counter-memory, when images of trauma, social critique and national identity were reinforced, photography that reminds us of the Soviet period as a disappearing culture brings an everyday life that does not fit into clichés out of the past, the lives of people that flowed next to a reality constructed by ideology.

Forgetting and new counter-memory

Another series of three photographs by Gintaras Zinkevičius, *Forgetting* (1992–1993), may be read as a symbol of the changing emotional perception of reality that started in the early 1990s. It shows an advertising tower, an absurd thing in itself that was used to advertise cultural events, now used for politics, covered with posters shouting 'Take

the Russian Army Out Immediately'; in the second photograph, the same tower is broken and dilapidated, no posters on it, and the third photograph shows the carcass of an advertising tower in a river (fig. 15). The change takes two opposite directions here. The repetitive pattern of graphic figures on the first tower is energetic and upbeat, although the tank photographed in the poster is what the words on the poster say to get rid of. Its aggressively stretched gun and the victorious figures of soldiers also express the enthusiasm of the society then fighting for independence. The second tower seems to show the society's victory: there is no tank, and peace (of mind) prevails. But there is nothing else: the body of the tower intended to announce new cultural events is decaying, its bones are already visible through the gaps of peeled off planks. Unity and hope unravelled in a similar way when the zest of the fight had waned. And it seemed that everything fell into a hole of poverty and chaos. The third tower symbolises the end of the process. It has disappeared as a symbol marking Soviet public spaces. Everything has been forgotten, as in the Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness, both ideological and cultural events; it is even difficult to recognise the object. It will disappear soon because somebody will find a way to use the metal. But society is also lying in a puddle of depression. Emigration has started – both external and internal. This series of photographs marks a new stage of forgetting.

In the mid-2000s, the process of restoring memory weakened, and became an obligatory part of the official culture, which artists have always tended to ignore. Films documenting and staging the crimes of the Soviet authorities, commissioned by the state, were received very critically as exaggerated dramatisation, unprofessional and wastes of money. It seemed that the counter-memory that had erupted at the beginning of independence had been only a quick burst of emotion, that everything was already clear and that it would be more rational to forget the traumatised past and focus on the future, on the world. Yet, at the beginning of 2009, the graphic artist Kęstutis Grigaliūnas (b. 1957) started looking for photographs of people tortured and killed by the Soviet regime, frontal images and profiles made for identification. He collected an archive that he has been using in his projects: *About Love*, *Diaries of Death*, *The First Trainload: Deportees of 1941*, and *I did not know, my Beloved, that I was kissing you for the last time*.[35] The portraits are a form of identity-photographs used by repressive structures since the mid-nineteenth century: all the people are photographed in exactly the same manner, following the same system, without individuality (fig. 16). The act of photographing and the internationally recognised form deny the exceptionality of people, the meaning of their feelings, desires, dreams and multifaceted lives by leaving the only code for identification: the *criminal*. The variety of people standing in front of this impressive number of such photographs is shown in a monotonous rhythm. Thus photography once again confirms its relationship to death, and the indifferent

35 The photographs, printed in silkscreen technique, were exhibited in the gallery Kairė-dešinė in 2009 (*About Love* – 130 photographs of the participants in the resistance movement), *Diaries of Death* – 920 photographs of Lithuanian citizens tortured, deported to concentration camps and executed were exhibited in the Contemporary Art Centre in 2010; the material was published by Kęstutis Grigaliūnas in three volumes: Mirties dienoraščiai / Diaries of Death. Vilnius: Vilniaus grafikos meno centras, 2010; Mes – iš pirmo vežimo / The First Trainload: Deportees of 1941. Vilnius: Vilniaus grafikos meno centras, 2012; Aš nežinojau, Mylimasai, kad bučiuoju tave paskutinį kartą / I did not know, my Beloved, that I was kissing you for the last time. Vilnius: Vilniaus grafikos meno centras, 2012.

click of the shutter works as a death sentence. Yet not completely: something remains. Grigaliūnas's projects convey exactly this, although the artist does not change anything in the documents he finds. Differences start to emerge while looking at one photographic frame after another: they gradually overshadow the standardising power of photography. The repressive apparatus cannot destroy subjectivity completely because it cannot hide or change the 'criminal's' gaze and the signs of social bondage encoded in his or her appearance. It is clear, even without any comments, that these are not ordinary criminals in the *Diaries of Death* by Grigaliūnas, but intelligent people who had high social status. This confirms the well-known historical facts, yet the visual affects more strongly than facts, especially when it is multiplied like this, when it becomes a work of art that does not make it possible to kill memory in an archive, but makes it a subject of culture and public discourse. In fact, Grigaliūnas realises Susan Sontag's recipe for bringing back the pain of others into images by slowing the time of perception and using the ambiguity of visual texts: 'Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking.'[36]

The archive of criminal photographs accumulated by Grigaliūnas reminds us literally of what we want to forget: the killed and tortured people look at us from photographs, and it is impossible to turn away from their gazes.

Conclusion

To sum up, the discourse of memory in photography has changed radically during the twenty years of Lithuanian independence. What first served to support national identity, with the help of collective memory and documentation of the present, later became a tool to convey the lost sense of reality in the constant state of transition. Thus, photography recorded the gradual process of forgetting, turned towards reflections of its own medium as an imperfect tool of memory and the historical discourse seemed to become irrelevant. Currently, however, artists are turning to photography in order to create another kind of counter-memory – one that conflicts with forgetting – through the sheer number of photographs and the poignancy of reality still present in them. Grigaliūnas's project, which exemplifies the current state of the discourse of memory, emphasises the dimension of time that is needed to perceive the horrors of history. In the same way, photography makes history and the writing of history relevant again.

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36 S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, p. 103.