Photographing under Dictatorships of the Twentieth Century: Public Spheres and Photographic Practices

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The concluding conference of the research project „Fotografie im Nationalsozialismus. Alltägliche Visualisierung von Vergemeinschaftungs- und Ausgrenzungspraktiken 1933-1945", funded by the DFG, was opened by MICHAEL WILDT (Berlin), who welcomed the participants and led over to the keynote lecture. ANNETTE VOWINCKEL (Potsdam / Berlin) talked about image agents, the protagonists of photography distribution in the 20th century and defined them as the „stakeholders of the visual world". Vowinckel raised the question of the difference between censorship vs. „regular" editorials and the role of the audience.

The first panel concentrated on „Photojournalism and Press Photography". KATALIN BOGNÁR (Budapest) detected missing topics in the Photo Archive of the Hungarian Daily Newspaper Szabad Nép between 1949 and 1956 under the Stalinist dictator Mátyás Rákosi. Bognár compared the original negatives with the published pictures and could identify staged scenes and retouched images. Although there was no central censorship office in Hungary, the Communist Party reshaped the structure of the press and had certain topics gradually disappear from the paper.

Subsequently REBEKKA GROSSMANN (Jerusalem) talked about „Agency Photographs and the Contested Nature of a 'National Socialist Aesthetics'". She could identify photographers who had been expelled from Germany after 1933 and „found their way back" to the media landscape via photo agencies who anonymized their pictures. Grossmann concluded that one cannot speak of a closed visual system. She argued with Elizabeth Edwards, who named the National Socialist visual propaganda one of „photographic uncertainties".

HELENA HOLZBERGER (Munich) analyzed photographs of Uzbekistan in the Soviet Press during the first Five-Years-Plan. She detected three channels for adapting the visual code in the periphery: through an exchange of knowledge between Tashkent and Moscow via the Commissariat of Enlightenment, photo-agencies and the press itself. She could not identify visual differences between the images of the capital and the image of the Soviet Orient – the Empire presented itself as one of „equal nations instead of imperial systems".

In her commentary HARRIET SCHARNBERG (Munster) focused on considering propaganda as a particular mode of political communication. The usage of elaborate concepts would allow a closer inspection of how the means of communication were produced and used and would enable us to identify different and changing topics and styles. Furthermore this would prevent us from regarding states as closed realms that do not interact with the outside world and vice versa.

The second panel raised issues of „Self/Representations in Photo Albums". TATIANA SABUROVA (Bloomington, Indiana) took a closer look at depictions of Soviet society from the 1920s to the 1940s. She asked if it is possible to identify generational thinking in the first decades of the Soviet Union and compared official photography with private albums. By using the image of Stalin as the father of the young generation the authorities formed a generational continuity through their official photographs. In private family albums there are variants of depicting generations, especially in different geographical contexts: the uniformity which was propagated by the authorities had not found its way into the private sphere entirely.

The boundary between private and public photographs was also stressed by NATHALIE PATRICIA SOURSOS (Vienna), who talked about „The Dictator's Photo-albums" in the Metaxas-Dictatorship. Similar to Stalin, Metaxas called the National Youth Organi-

zation (EON) his grandchildren and therefore created an imaginary bond. Soursos compared 54 albums, which were made by EON as a present for Metaxas in 1941, with brochures, which depicted the most important topics of his propaganda. After Metaxas' death, his family donated the albums back to the EON and after the organizations dissolution, to the Hellenic Parliament Archives. Soursos argued that by donating these albums back to the state the boundaries between private and public were crossed by Metaxas' heirs.

ULRICH PREHN (Berlin) examined four different photo albums of the work world. He tried to identify „Visual Tropes and Narrative Paradigms in Private and Institutional Photo Albums from Nazi Germany". Taking the memory-shaping function of photography into account and looking at pictures as acts of planned remembrance, each album showed the new presence of the Nazi regime in the work places. For Prehn it is not only the question how work is depicted differently in private or institutional contexts but more how significantly they are for the overall narrative. He pointed out that broader patterns and visual formulas have to be identified in order to be able to analyze their significance for shaping the respective narratives.

After prompting the missing issue of other gender-relations apart from the presented masculine ones ELIZABETH HARVEY (Nottingham) pointed out the question of interdependence or separateness of public and private practices of photography and how we can use e.g. formal family photographs without any context information for an overall narrative and a source of the relationship between the public and the private under dictatorships.

The third panel, entitled "Close-Ups: Localized Photographic Perspectives", started with the talk of LINDA CONZE (Berlin) who compared photographs of the propagandistic photo book „Der Erste Deutsche Mai" taken in Berlin, with the documentation of festive crowds by a self-taught photographer and visual chronicler from the German province. Conze worked out similarities: both photographers did not present the crowd as faceless and disciplined but as more diverse. She took

up Canetti's idea of the crowd as spatial experience and detected „micro-communities", which are merging into the crowd but stay visually independent at the same time. She argued that the photographs could serve as an integrative medium that allowed people to combine their aspirations and visions of belonging to the National Socialist „Volk" with traditional or individual needs like picturing oneself beyond this community.

Looking at a south-European regime FÁTIMA MOURA FERREIRA and PATRICIA LEAL (Minho / Lisbon) analyzed „Political Imaginaries and Propagandistic Mis-en-scène (of the) Portuguese New State" and presented three distinct events in the city of Braga. The authorities formed a propaganda machinery and tried to convince the masses by using photographs to record parades, festivals, conferences and other political propaganda – photography became a medium of order and stability, especially for a population with two thirds being illiterate at that time.

JULIA WERNER (Berlin) could not present her paper about „Shared and Divided Spaces: Photographic Perspectives on Occupied Warsaw" in person. Comparing the photographic work of a Polish and a German photographer she pointed out the sharp visual contrast both collection display, which were due to different privileges, aesthetics, interests, access to photographic material and the photographers' ethnic backgrounds. They only shared the geographical space, which was severely influenced by the occupation regime and its racist population policies which again caused enormous shifts in the ever-changing boundaries between the private and the public spaces.

SANDRA STARKE (Berlin) concluded the panel by talking about „Curt Biella's Photographic Studio in Gunzenhausen under National Socialism", which was simultaneously one chapter of the book presented by THOMAS MEDICUS at the end of the conference day. The photographs of the collection show different aspects in the town's visual memory and depict „microcosms" of its inhabitants. Starke presented three different places of origin: the studio, the street and semi-public spaces. Especially pictures taken in the public sphere reveal more than just

the obvious object: Pamphlets, flags and anti-Semitic sayings turn the pictures into valuable academic sources and – taking up Prehn's point – show their significance for the overall narrative.

In his commentary MALTE ZIERENBERG (Berlin) concentrated on the term „localized". „Locality" did not only seem to refer to a small unit or geographical space, but could describe the process of attaching oneself to a community – photography served as the most important medium in this process by integrating one's own belonging into the big picture, which was presented in the propagandistic mass media. Zierenberg also raised the issue of the ex-post-perspective and missing information about the contemporaries' reaction/use to/of the pictures researchers nowadays combine and use for the narratives they introduce.

The last panel of the day „The Artistic Lens: Photographic Appropriations and Interventions" started with DARIA PANAIOTTI (St. Petersburg) who presented photographers who worked within the confines of photoreportage against the backdrop of the late-Soviet visual poetics of photography. The new politics promoted photojournalism on the one hand, but only accepted a very narrow room for personal scope. By trying to circuit those restrictions, partially being punished for it and arousing attention, the photographers themselves exceeded the boundaries of Soviet documentary in order to get involved in a wider cultural context and gradually undermine the legitimate and tolerated photographic practices.

BERTRAM KASCHEK (Dresden) presented Christian Borchert's work „Artist-Portraits of the Mid-1970s" in the GDR. Kaschek emphasized the permeability of „the state sanctioned public sphere and the plurality of alternative spaces". Borchert wanted both: to work autonomously and to have a wide audience. The key to success was rigor in balancing his artistic aspirations and the state controlled depiction of it in public. Because of his numerous artist-portraits he was able to arrange them for different purposes or exchange portraits for others. Therefore Kaschek argues that every exhibit was an explicit statement between opportunism and subversion.

The aspect of permeability was also addressed by BRIANA SMITH (Des Moines, Iowa). She presented the work of Kurt Buchwald, who worked as an action artist and a conceptual photographer in a period when the change from Social Realism to art in Socialism was already taking place. He used his camera as a documentary medium of his artistic interventions in the public sphere but also for documenting his experimental art in unobserved places to present them in galleries later. As curator Christoph Tannert puts it, Buchwald created an „*ersatz* public sphere" but was also a member in the Association of Visual Artists – the boundaries of the official and subversive spheres were blurry.

In her commentary PETRA BOPP (Hamburg) focused on the possibilities of the presented photographers to share their personal views or artistic values in restricted environments. For her, it would have been interesting to compare the work of the TRIVA group and Borchert from the 1960s and '70s to detect similarities or changes in their imageries which might have developed during these years of transition.

In the fifth and last panel of the conference, entitled „Dodging and Burning: State Repression and Subversive Counter-Strategies", ALUMAH FLORSHEIM-SHOHAM (Jerusalem) aimed to get to the bottom of how the Stasi could form a certain public sphere. By taking into account and simultaneously comparing the theory of Jürgen Habermas' more homogenous assumption of the public sphere which indicates openness to all, with Foucault's approach to the gaze, which disciplines „all forces present and active in that space", Florshein-Shoam concluded that no complete control through the gaze of the secret police existed.

Subsequently DENIS SKOPIN (St. Petersburg) talked about the „Elimination of 'Public Enemies' from Group Photographs in the USSR during the Stalin Era". Arguing with Gilbert Simondon's term of „transindividuality", Skopin sees photography as a device to establish a new form of „transindividual community", which is understood as a collective being with the same values. Therefor Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, was interested in group shots. By arresting one suspected per-

son shown in the photo, the secret police tried to find out more about the other persons depicted.

NATALIJA ARLAUSKAITÉ (Vilnius) discussed the work „About Love" by Lithuanian artist Kestuius Grigalinuas, who used documents of 130 persons persecuted for political reasons and killed in Tuskulenai estate between 1944 and '47. Arlauskaité presented the „memory of terror" in two ways: the archival files themselves with their particular order and the de- and re-archiving or montaging of this material by Grigalinuas. Arlauskaité showed how the visualization of the atrocity archive and the change of its visual regime created a new historical memory order.

In the last talk of the conference JEFF HAYTON (Fairmount, Wichita) spoke about the multi-sided meanings of photography for the East German Punk Scene. Pictures strengthened the group membership but were also used by the authorities to try to destroy them. Hayton claims that the visual representation was actually more important to establish the punk scene in Eastern Germany than the music itself. West German Youth periodicals were smuggled and circulated among the East German youth – subsequently the Stasi blamed the Western media of having caused the scene.

ALEXANDRA OBERLÄNDER (Bremen / Berlin) pointed out the importance of distinguishing a dictatorial regime like the GDR to the profoundly different kinds of dictatorships in the 1930s and '40s. One has to keep in mind that societies in the 1980s were normalized and stabilized and had evolved a consumer culture. For her, the „under" in „Photographing under Dictatorships" seemed dubious when it comes to the 1970s and '80s. The question remained if this „under" was legitimate for the 1930s and '40s.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Lecture
Annette Vowinckel (Potsdam / Berlin): Image Agents. Photography as a New Field of Action in the 20th Century

Panel 1: Views from the Fourth Estate: Photojournalism and Press Photography

Katalin Bognár (Budapest): A Country Without Christmas? Missing Topics from the Photograph Archives of the Hungarian Daily Newspaper Szabad Nép, 1949–1956
Rebekka Grossmann (Jerusalem): Global Visions, Envisioned Mobility and Visual Friction: Agency Photographs and the Contested Nature of a 'National Socialist Aesthetics'
Helena Holzberger (Munich): The Visual Shaping of Stalin's Orient. Photographs of Uzbekistan in the Soviet Press During the First Five-Years-Plan
Commentary: Harriet Scharnberg (Munster)

Panel 2: Reverse Shot: Self/Representations in Photo Albums

Tatiana Saburova (Bloomington, Indiana): „Two Generations": Public, Private, and the Images of Generations in the Soviet Photography
Nathalie Patricia Soursos (Vienna): The Dictator's Photo-albums: Private and public photographs in the Metaxas-Dictatorship
Ulrich Prehn (Berlin): Framing Work: Visual Tropes and Narrative Paradigms in Private and Institutional Photo Albums
Commentary: Elizabeth Harvey (Nottingham)

Panel 3: Close-ups: Localized Photographic Perspectives

Linda Conze (Berlin): Filling the Frame: Crowd Shots of May Day 1934 from Provincial Germany
Fatima Moura Ferreira / Patricia Leal (Minho, Lisbon): Re-reading the Photographic Archive: Political Imaginaries and Propagandistic mis-en-scène–Portuguese New State
Sandra Starke (Berlin): Between Private and Public: Curt Biella's Photographic Studio in Gunzenhausen under National Socialism
Julia Werner (Berlin): Shared and Divided Spaces: Photographic Perspectives on Occupied Warsaw (1939-1945)
Commentary: Malte Zierenberg (Berlin)

Panel 4: The Artistic Lens: Photographic Appropriations and Interventions

Daria Panaiotti (St. Petersburg): Discipline of the Photographic Gaze: Normative Language and Individual Strategies in the Late-Soviet Documentary Photography

Bertram Kaschek (Dresden): Defensive Mimicry: Christian Borchert's Photographic Interventions of the Late 1970s and 80s

Briana Smith (Des Moins, Iowa): „Fotografieren Verboten!" Photography and Action Art in the Late GDR

Commentary: Petra Bopp (Hamburg)

Panel 5: Dodging and Burning: State Repression and Subversive Counter-Strategies

Alumah Florsheim-Shoham (Jerusalem): Public Space in a Dictatorship: the Stasi photographers Design the Public Sphere

Denis Skopin (St. Petersburg): Elimination of „Public Enemies": From Group Photographs in the USSR during the Stalin Era: Psychological and Political Mechanisms of the Phenomenon

Natalija Arlauskaité (Vilnius): Making the Soviet Atrocity Archive Visible: Photo/ Graphic Art Projects by Lithuanian Artist Kestutis Grigaliunas

Jeff Hayton (Fairmount, Wichita): Capturing Difference under Dictatorship: Punk Rock, Photography & Dissent in the GDR

Commentary: Alexandra Oberländer (Bremen)

Closing discussion

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