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COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES OF THE MINSK SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY: IGOR SAVCHENKO, GALINA MOSKALEVA, SERGEY KOZHEMYAKIN (THE 1980S AND THE 1990S)²

Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of collective trauma representation in art in the works of three Belarusian photographers of the post-Soviet period: Igor Savchenko, Galina Moskaleva, Sergey Kozhemyakin. The author gives an overview of such concepts as «trauma», «collective trauma», «work of mourning», and examines some characteristics of the «affective component» of photography. The article sets out theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of the inexpressible and refers to the concepts of I. Kant, E. Burke, J.-F. Lyotard, F. Ankersmit and J. Rancière. The author comes to the conclusion that the images created by Belarusian photographers express splitting, breaking, and fragmentation. The aesthetic program of Belarusian photographers consists in appropriating photos from personal and anonymous archives, recomposing images in a new context, framing, and fragmenting photos. It often reveals that a lot of photos cannot be «read», which allows us to say that there is an unsymbolized residue in these images, i.e. «*punctum*».

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² This is the authorized translation of the Russian original published in the previous issue: AU. Vol. 1 (9). 2020. P. 177–212.

Keywords

Collective trauma, photography, contemporary art, punctum.

Trauma: from the individual to the collective

Trauma Studies appear after the First World War as a response to its tragic events. In 1920, Sigmund Freud writes his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which describes the functioning of the psyche of people suffering from war neurosis. According to Freud, the dream of a person with a traumatic neurosis returns him or her to the situation of disaster and leads to a new state of a repeated fright (*schreck*). The psychoanalyst introduces the concept of «*repetition compulsion*» of the repressed. He relates fixation on trauma with the behavior of hysterics: «hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences»¹. The memories of people with traumatic neurosis never reach the symbolic level. Consciousness protects our psyche from excessive stressors of the surrounding world. The situation of trauma creates such conditions when a person not only suffers from memories, but they start controlling his mental life. Freud discovers the multiple nature of trauma: the events of the present might become a trigger for some traumatic experience of the past. The psychoanalyst comes to an important conclusion that the patient knows and does not know about the significance of an early traumatic event. He knows about this because he has not forgotten it, and he does not know about it because he is unaware of its significance. Thus, the trauma is written in the person's memory, but is not recognized by him.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan offers some new strategies for psychoanalytic work that is mostly connected with Freud's legacy. He suggests three registers of the psychic

¹ Freud, S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961. P. 7.

apparatus: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real¹. The Real is an unsymbolized space of extreme intense experience that consciousness never fully perceives. There is no access to the Real, the encounter with It is only possible as an intrusion of a traumatic symptom: «I call everything that comes from the Real side a symptom. And the Real is everything that does not stick, does not work, creates an obstacle to the life of a person and the assertion of his personality [personnalité]. The real always returns to the same place, we always find it there in the same manifestations.»² Thus, trauma is a predicate of the Real. Cathy Caruth, an American cultural critic, emphasizes that trauma is not a separate empirical event, it appears to be a non-localized event. «It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*,» says Caruth, «The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experience *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.»³ What was seen was so extreme and premature for a person that the mind was too late to realize it. Caruth calls the trauma situation a temporal gap between vision and knowledge, a lag of painful experience in time. Caruth also discovers in «vision from the past» (*flashback*) a paradox that combines intrusion and amnesia. The invasion occurs in dreams or in a state of hypnosis during therapy and it is characterized by high accuracy and detail of what is seen. Amnesia is expressed in the fact that in a conscious life

¹ Lacan, J. On the Names of the Father. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

² Lacan, J. The interview in Panorama, 1974. URL: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1668-there-can-be-no-crisis-of-psychoanalysis-jacques-lacan-interviewed-in-1974> (accessed 07.06.2020)

³ Caruth, C. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1996. P. 62.

traumatic experiences resist comprehension. The gap between vision and knowledge reveals the nature of a delayed trauma: experiences neither find a place for themselves, nor become meaningful memories. Caruth goes on to explain: «... the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time».¹ Then «compulsive repetition» is the mind's attempt to repeat the missed encounter over and over again.

Consequently, there is a structural difference between memory and trauma. Not all forgotten memories are traumatic, but all traumatic memories block the process of their transformation into subsequent conscious memory. Caruth provides the results of neuropsychological research with people who survived the Holocaust. According to the results, the level and daily rhythms of cortisol circulation in Holocaust survivors and their children were similar. It means that the descendants of Holocaust survivors are much more vulnerable to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) if they are exposed to a traumatic event than other people². It leads Caruth to believe that traumatic history can haunt later generations.

Getting rid of the trauma is the «work of mourning» (*trauerarbeit*), which Freud describes in his article *Mourning and Melancholia*. Both processes — mourning and melancholia — are the result of the «loss of a loved person» or to the «loss of some abstraction» (country, liberty, ideals)³.

¹ Caruth, C. Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1995. P. 9.

² Yehuda R., Bierer L. M., Schmeidler J. A., Breslau D. H., Dolan I., Low S. Cortisol and Risk for PTSD in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors // American Journal of Psychiatry. 2000. — №157/8. — P. 1252–1259; Yehuda R., Halligan S. L., Bierer L. M. Cortisol Levels in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors: Relation to PTSD Symptom Severity in the Parent and Child? // Comment in Psychoneuroendocrinology. №28/4. May 2003. P. 594–595.

The melancholia suffers from a sense of guilt, he cannot comprehend his loss. Grief requires a lot of time and effort on the part of the psychic apparatus to manage, but it often ends in so to speak «respect for reality». The «Self» is separated from the lost object and becomes free. The American researcher Domenick LaCarpa, following Freud's work «Mourning and Melancholia», discusses about the ways to work with collective trauma: «acting out» and «working through.»⁴ The «acting out» corresponds to Freudian melancholia: the repressed past completely takes possession of the subject. In this process, the victims tend to repeat traumatic events as if they were constantly experiencing them. The «working through» is similar to Freud's «work of mourning» which is the attempt of victims to free themselves from this haunting past. In the process of «working through», this past is distinguished from the present, and the necessary distance is created.

The victims recognize the suffering they have experienced in terms of their changed identity. «Acting out» and «working through» are not opposites, they are quite different, but they are co-related being a part of the same process of responding to a traumatic event. Another way of responding to trauma, the opposite of «working through», is associated with the formation of «narrative fetishism», which was introduced in the theory of trauma by the American researcher Eric Santner. «Narrative fetishism» for Santner is the way to get rid of grief by replacing it by the plot design of a traumatic event, that takes the place and cause of the trauma.⁵ «Proper»

³ Freud, S. Mourning and Melancholia. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XIV). London: The Hogarth Press. P. 243.

⁴ LaCarpa, D. Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994. P.65.

⁵ Santner, E. L. History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma. Probing the Limits of Representation:

mourning does not free you from the necessity to make sense of what happened; it only masks the trauma, delaying the «work of mourning» for a long time.

If the symptoms of an individual trauma appear a long time (*multiple trauma*), then we can say the traumatic experience might cover not one generation, but the generations to follow. This unsuffered experience can be unconsciously settle down in our bodies. Collective traumatic reactions are reflected in society's inability to express its painful memories. Thus, a collective trauma can be defined as a set of symptoms that are characteristic of a group of people, social or ethnic community. They are often displaced from the symbolic order, and not included in the processes of memory. Thus, trauma continues to be invisibly present in modern times. The «work of mourning» casts a long shadow over the second and subsequent generations «after». In modern Russia and Belarus, we can notice a lack of such «mourning» for the victims of Soviet political repressions. Based on the continuity with the Soviet past, the memory of the victims of political repressions is not as strong as the memory of the great Patriotic war, and the experience of this war is sometimes replaced by the myth of war, which assumes an exclusively heroic self-perception of national identity.⁶ A significant role in the process of understanding of this hard past can be played by art, which often opens new reserves for reflection of trauma. Some post-war artists like Gerhard Richter, Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys and others have promoted the process of overcoming amnesia and understanding the new German identity after the Holocaust. Such art helps us feel otherwise

Nazism and the «Final Solution». Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. P. 143–154.

⁶ See: *Koposov, N. E. Pamiat' strogogo rezhima. Istoriia i politika v Rossii* [A Strict-Security Memory: History and Politics in Russia]. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2011. (In Russian).

impossible experience of the Other. This kind of experience does not belong to us, but we should try to experienced it to order to co-exist peacefully in future. It is not accidental that in the late Soviet period the works that addressed the complicated past appeared. They sought to describe of the collective trauma which was produced by the events of the Second World War and political repression in Symbolic order.

The sublime and the unrepresentable in aesthetic theory

The question remains how art can work with trauma that exceeds our ability to perceive? In Western Humanities different approaches to the art of trauma have been developed by artistic practice after the Holocaust. Philosophers as a rule associate trauma with the concept of the unrepresentable and on the category of the sublime. The unrepresentable in the philosophy of Jean-Francois Lyotard is the ability to think which cannot be seen: «These Ideas, for which there is no possible presentation and which therefore provide no knowledge of reality (experience), also prohibit the free accord of the faculties that produces the feeling of the beautiful. They obstruct the formation and stabilisation of taste. One could call them unrepresentable (or the unrepresentable) »¹ The unrepresentable in Lyotard is associated with the sublime.

In classical aesthetics, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant associate the sublime with grandeur, vastness, and incommensurability of the sublime object with man. The sublime is suspense, darkness, excitement, expectation of possible deprivations, torment, pain, emptiness. The sublime has a double structure: it causes a feeling of anxiety and even horror through a power, but in order to become an aesthetic sense, it must be at some distance from us. As

¹ Lyotard, J.-F. Answering the question: what is the postmodern? In *The Postmodern Explained to Children*. Sydney: Power Publications, 1992. P. 6.

a result of this delay, we may experience an increase in our feelings or «ecstatic horror» (delicious horror).¹

Lacoue-Labarthe in his essay *Problems of the Sublime* asks a question: «Any representation is, by definition, sensuous (physical) — how can it be represented or appear (se manifester) extra-sensuous or supersensible?». ² The philosopher points out that we always make the unrepresentable as possible representable, which expects that representation which corresponds to it. Here we are faced with a contradictory combination. Abstraction could become a similar negative representation of the sublime. In this terms Lyotard writes about modern art: «For an outline of an aesthetic of sublime painting, there is little we need to add to these remarks: as painting, it will evidently „present“ something, but negatively: it will therefore avoid figuration or representation; it will be „blank“ (blanche) like one of Malevich’s squares; it will make one see only by prohibiting one from seeing; it will give pleasure only by giving pain». ³

If for Lyotard modern art makes it possible to imagine that is unrepresentable, Lacoue-Labarthe draws a slightly different conclusion: in the sublime, there is not a representation of what is unrepresentable but there is a «representation without representation» in it. It might be said that in such art the unrepresentable contains some indication or reference to its presence. Lacoue-Labarthe and Lyotard agree that the art of the sublime is now embodied in modern art. The new aesthetic order leans towards ideas of the sublime, the unimaginable, which become its driving forces.

¹ *Burke, E.* A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1759). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

² *Lacoue-Labarthe, P.* Problématique du sublime, Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A., 1989.

³ *Lyotard, J.-F.* Answering the question: what is the postmodern? In *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, Sydney, Power Publications, 1992. P. 7.

Lyotard in *Heidegger and the Jews* continues to think about the unrepresentable and connects it with the Freudian unconscious: «The discovery of an originary repressed leads Freud to assume that it cannot be represented. And it is not representable because, in dynamic terms, the quantity of energy transmitted by this shock is not transformed into «objects' <...> The first blow, then, strikes the apparatus without observable internal effect, without affecting it. It is a shock without affect. With the second blow there takes place an affect without shock: I buy something in a store, anxiety crushes me, I flee, but nothing had really happened.»¹ Actually, Lyotard describes the repressed and forgotten as unconscious affect and it is the work of trauma. Lyotard goes on to write that imagining «Auschwitz» in images or words is a way to make you forget about it. Such art contains something which issue a challenge to representative logic. Franklin Ankersmit in the «Sublime Historical Experience» directly interprets the trauma through the concept of the sublime (or the unrepresentable)². The sublime is the philosophical equivalent of the concept of trauma, and trauma is the psychological equivalent of the sublime. Trauma and the sublime are associated with experiences that inspire too much fear to be placed within the boundaries of our «normal» perception of the world. Ankersmith, like Burke, believes that the experience of the sublime is associated with our distance from the object (the threat is suspended). In a situation of trauma, a person is at a distance from its cause (we are separated from the event by repression) and separated from the «normal» perception of the world, suffers a painful distortion.

¹ Lyotard, J.-F. *Heidegger and «the Jews»*. Minneapolis, London: University Of Minnesota Press, 1997. P. 15–16.

² Ankersmit, F.R. *Sublime Historical Experience*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Jacques Rancier in his article «Are Some Things Unrepresentable?» suggests that such art should be considered in the context of a new aesthetic regime, without drawing a line between the concepts of «representable» and «unrepresentable», which remain in the visual mode. The aesthetic mode of art is described in terms of suspension: suspended are «the usual connections not only between appearance and reality, but also between form and matter, activity and passivity, reason and sensuality».¹ The impact of Rancier's thinking is that unrepresentable in art that refers to catastrophes is not necessarily abstract. Rancier writes about the film «Shoah» by Claude Lanzman: «To investigate something that has disappeared, an event whose traces have been erased, to find witnesses and make them speak of the materiality of the event without canceling it enigma, is a form of investigation which certainly cannot be assimilated to the representative logic of verisimilitude. <...> On the other hand, it is perfectly compatible with the relationship between the truth of the event and fictional invention specific to the aesthetic regime in the arts.»² For Rancier, the unrepresentable expresses the absence of a stable connection between the display and the designation, which would give presence to the absent, would lead to the coincidence of a particular setting of the connection between meaning and nonsense, presentation and concealment. Following that, abstract painting itself cannot find the necessary tools to deal with a disaster. Giving presence to the absent will be correlated with such forms of art in which we could find this suspension, and here there is a photograph as a *trace* of the «former» reality, as a statement of the presence of the referent in the absence of it. Therefore, for an artist working with trauma, it will important first of all to be on the border of the

¹ Ranciere, J. *The Future of the Image*. London: Verso, 2007. P. 121.

² *Ibid.* P. 129.

visible and invisible, to form a living experience of memory, to put the viewer in relation to an unrepresentable experience. In each time, it will be a conversation about the possibilities of art and the possibility of testifying to the horrible past.

Punctum as an effective component of photography

Like a trauma that escapes symbolization, the photographic image contains something that is always excessive to the viewer. In the essay «Camera Lucida», Roland Barthes writes about two ways of reading photos. The first is the *studium*, which is interpreted as a cultural code necessary for reading a photograph. The second is the *punctum* which points to a meaning that cannot be translated into the recognizable symbolic system. Barthes writes that *punctum* might «prick me.»¹ It is a detail that strikes the viewer, but does not appear directly in the photo. *Punctum* adds an extra dimension to photography that is related to our memory. When we begin to express it through language, its affective tension decreases. *Punctum* allows photos to go beyond their borders: it is both inside the photo and outside it. If in the first part of the essay Barthes mainly analyzes the details in photographs that *punctum* evokes in him, then in the second part Bart comes to the idea that *punctum* strikes us first of all with the feeling of «it was», the specificity of the passage of time in photography. He writes: «The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me <...> the photograph of the missing being will touch me like the delayed rays of a star».²

Valery Podoroga points out that the ability of photography to hurt is related to the awareness of a temporary gap between

¹ Barthes R. Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. P. 47.

² *Ibid.* pp. 80–81.

us and the image: «My sense of the past arises from this unstoppable loss of the visible.»¹ According to Podoroga the memory and remembrance are not the same: the first is always universal, while the second «blows up memory», appropriates and plunges into oblivion what is not remembered. Memories correlates with trauma in its ability to tear the structure of conscious memory. Helen Petrovsky expands the understanding of *punctum*. She suggests the concept of «implied referent»: «It belongs to representation to the extent that one acknowledge its existence. However, it from an environment or reality which is basically social, yet is unaware of itself. Its distinguishing feature is the affective openness of experience.»²

Using the example of Cindy Sherman's photographs, Petrovsky explains the «implied referent» as the translation of the particular into the universal, the invisible into the visible. At the moment of looking at a photo, we, the audience, become participants of a collective experience. This reveals a special kind of affective type of collective. Analyzing the work of Boris Mikhailov, Petrovsky writes that «the interference of the photographer in the texture of images does not refute the historical truth — quite the opposite. What Mikhailov manages to convey so successfully is the unimaginable side of the Soviet experience, which remains essentially invisible <...> the transient collective «recognizes' itself in photography, at the same time allowing it to break into the realm of the visible.»³ Thus, the photographer's

¹ Podoroga V. A. Nepredyavlenaya fotografiya. Zametki po povodu «Svetloy komnaty» R. Barta [Undeveloping photograph. Notes on R. Barth's «Light room»] // Avto-bio-grafiya. K voprosu o metode. Tetradi po analiticheskoy antropologii [Auto-bio-graphy. To the question of the method. Notebooks on Analytical Anthropology]. Moscow: Logos, 2001, P. 198.

² Petrovsky, H. Lost in Time: Boris Mikhailov and His Study of the Soviet // Ruins of Modernity. Duke University Press. P. 448.

intervention does not become a violation of the documentary component in the photo, but, on the contrary, makes the invisible visible, manifests and revives the memory shared with others.

In her essay *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag emphasizes the dual ability of photography to create both evidence and artwork. The main leitmotif of this work is the image of pain and suffering in photographs. Such photos should not satisfy our aesthetic sense, otherwise they create a radical distance between the event and the viewer, and suffering becomes abstract. The story itself turns into an archive of images, it forms visual cliché for us, which reduces the sensitivity in relation to the event: «All memory is individual, unreproducible — it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings.»⁴ Saving photographs of the horror that occurred does not help ensure that this horror never repeats itself. Sontag cites the example of albums with images of maimed victims of the First World War.

Sontag draws attention to the fact that these terrible images form the space of our collective responsibility for the violence that occurred in the past. This leads to the strict ethical prohibition of Sontag to depict suffering as a spectacle. It is not necessary to promote the dissemination of images of horror as evidence of tragedy (to Sontag they

³ Petrovsky H. *Bezimyannye soobshchestva* [The Anonymous Community]. M.: Falanster, 2012. P. 196–197.

⁴ Sontag, S. *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Picador. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. P. 68.

will soon lose their potential), but to carry out a responsible study of the past. The pathos of Sontag is to translate «looking» into «attitude», to keep the pain of others in one's own experience by means of moral consciousness. Sontag's analysis of the photograph *Dead Troops Talk* (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patro Near Moquor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986) by Jeff Wall points out that those who have not lived through such things «can't understand» the experience such images represent. Sontag says that those who have not lived through such things can't understand the experience such images represent, she gives such an example from her life, when the picture caused an affective reaction. She recalls seeing images from the Bergen-Balsen and Dachau camps as a teenager: «When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.»¹

We can draw some conclusions: Firstly, the concept of *punctum* expands our understanding of photography, revealing its affective component. Secondly, the connection between memory and photography allows the photographic image to generate the past in the present, removing the distance between them. Thirdly, the extended social meaning of *punctum* and the concept of «implied referent» removes the division of photography into documentary and artistic and opens up new possibilities in the analysis of artistic photography. In this regard, Sontag's reflection on the ethics of photography suggests a special type of community that has a sense of shared responsibility for the past. Therefore, we do not consider the series of the Minsk school of photography as exclusively artistic works and do not begin with their authors' intentions, but through these images we could discover that

¹ Sontag, S. On Photography. New York: Rosettabooks, 2005. P. 15.

invisible mechanics — the «work of mourning» of the late Soviet generation.

Documentary and «ghostly» in the photo series of the Minsk school of photography

The specificity of the artistic practice of Belarusian photographers of the 1980s and 1990s was that they used photographs from personal or collective archives of the 1930s and 1980s. These photos were either amateur («Childhood Memories» by Galina Moskaleva, «Family Album: Real Photos from Real Life» by Sergey Kozhemyakin) or portraits («About Happiness», «About it», photos from the series «Mysteries» by Igor Savchenko, «Children's Album» by Sergey Kozhemyakin). The photographers subjected the images to framing and visual transformation. Let's focus on the way how the representative and documentary functions of photography are split in the projects of Belarusian photographers.



Ill. 1. Igor Savchenko. Alphabet of Gestures. 1992.

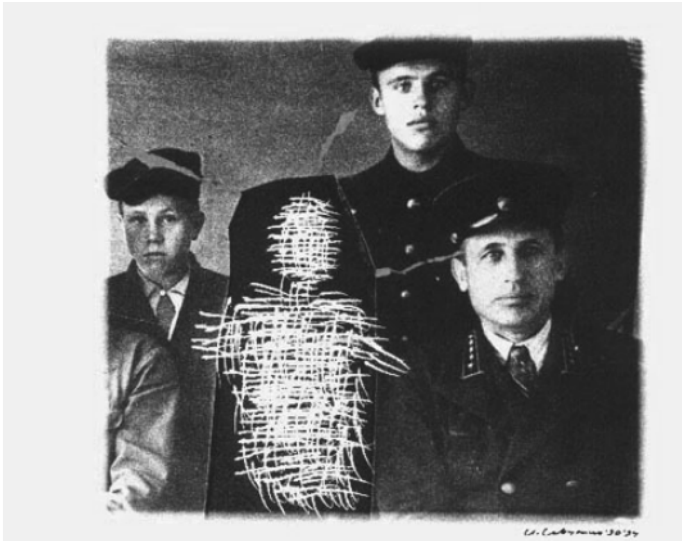
Igor Savchenko's *Alphabet of Gestures* consists of archival images that are framed so that the main objects in the photo are people's hands and feet (Ill. 1). The originals of these photos are portraits, which suggest the presence of a face. Although we could see the person's gender and estimated age, we can't actually identify the people in the photo. The emphasis is on the gesture, posture, and position of their bodies. This creates the effect of depersonalization.



Ill. 2. Igor Savchenko. *Hand on the Shoulder*. 1992.

In the series *Hand on the Shoulder* as a result of framing, we see a portrait and the hand of another person lying on the shoulder. Along with numerous photos where the second figure is removed, there is a picture where a man who puts his hand on the shoulder enters the visibility zone (Ill. 2). In the *Mysteries* series pictured people are painted over with white strokes so that they become almost indistinguishable. In cases of other photos red lines are drawn that look like cracks, dots, marks which cross out faces. In *Mysteries-1* two almost identical photos follow in a row, they show two men in military uniforms and a boy. They are all of different ages and generations, one may suggest that this could be a family portrait. These photos are also cropped, and we can only see the shoulder of the person at the border of the frame. An object is cut out between the figures, and in its place is a black space. In the first photo, a figure is drawn inside it with white

strokes, which indicates the presence of a human figure in this place (Ill. 3). In the case of the second photo, the figure disappears, leaving a black void.



Ill. 3. Igor Savchenko. Mysteries-1. 1993.

Some photographs contain captions that either repeat what the picture depicts (*He and his Shadow, The Picture behind him*), or have an additional meaning (*...of course; but this does not mean that there is no Last Judgment*). Thanks to these captions (*Fighting the red line, Waiting for your main crack, Sitting around the Red Point, Waiting for your main Scratch*), cracks, dots and lines take on autonomous meaning in the photograph. Several images are framed in a similar way as in *The Alphabet of Gestures*: certain parts of the body remain, and the person's hands or face move from the center to the periphery of the photo. In the case of *About it* series of portraits captions also put a special strain on photos: *He*

who knows this, That which knows this, Those who know this, Those who managed to learn this, The One who lost it, Those who have lost it. «It» is something indescribable that cannot be named, or is forbidden by someone to be named. In other words, we cannot know «this» because our experience do not coincide with the experience of his, her, or those?



Ill. 4. Igor Savchenko....of course; but this does not mean that there is no Last Judgment. 1990.

The transformations inside Savchenko's photographs (lines-cracks, dots, crossing out faces, removing people from the photo by cropping) reproduce the actions of the Great Terror in Russia, which was aimed at destroying all traces of «enemies of the people». The fate of those shot or killed in the camps was unknown to their relatives. «Ten years without the right to correspond» — this was the sentence that was reported to relatives, but in reality it implied the highest penalty, execution¹. The victims of repression remained

unburied, their status suspended between life and death: he is not alive and not dead at the same time. In this context, the concept of the *ghost* of the poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida will be productive for us. In an interview with *Cahiers du cinema* Derrida talks about ghosts in movies discussing Lanzmann's film *Shoah*: «The ghosts have survived, they are re-presentified, they appear in the whole of their speech, which is phenomenal and fantastic, that is, spectral <...> Cinema it is a double trace: trace of the testimony itself, trace of the forgetting, trace of absolute death, trace of the without-trace, trace of the extermination. It is the rescue, by the film, of what remains without salvation, salvation for the without-salvation, the experience of pure survivance that testifies.»² Can we talk about photography in the same way? The photographic image is a literal «emanation of the referent» in its absence. On the one hand, the very act of photographing, «grasping» the image of a person symbolically kills it. On the other hand, someone who has disappeared in the present continues to exist in the photograph. This is the ghostly moment: the trace of evidence and the trace of no-trace. In the Savchenko series, we are constantly faced with such a phenomenon of the *ghost*, which in its absence continues to return.

During the Stalinist terror, it was common practice to delete and cross out images of «enemies of the people» in group photos. In family photo albums, the image of a repressed relative became a threat to the family. Denis Skopin's *The Policy of Disappearance in Stalin's Russia and Photography (La photographie et de groupe et la politique de la disparition dans la Russie de Staline)* raises the problem

¹ Cohen, S. F. *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2012. P. 68.

² *Cinema and Its Ghosts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida*. Vol. 37, No. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2015). P. 32.

of removing «enemies of the people» from group and family photos.¹ The space of a group photo assumes the symbolic unity of all the people depicted on it, belonging to the same community. The presence of the «enemy of the people» in the logic of terror becomes the basis for the persecution of other people in the photo. By removing the «enemy», there is a public renunciation of it, a symbolic break with the repressed. Thus, Savchenko's series, reproducing this mechanism of terror, testify the presence of the past, which was not mourned and did not receive redemption.

¹ *Skopin, D.* La photographie et de groupe et la politique de la disparition dans la Russie de Staline. Paris: Harmattan, 2015.



Ill. 5. Galina Moskaleva. Childhood Memories. 1990.

In her series *Childhood Memories* (1989–1994), Galina Moskaleva is already working with a personal archive of photos (Ill. 5.):

My father kept an archive of negatives from my birth to the age of 7,

until our family broke up. After reviewing the archive, I realized that my father did not just take pictures of my mother, neighbors, me, and friends. He looked for poses, States, directed the shoot. The material was simply rich, and with it was quite possible to go on a voyage of self-discovery. In my space-time, images of memories, feelings of my «self» were built up, and memory selects from the past those that are in tune with my current mood, the desire to synthesize my «self».¹

In the cases of these photos we can see duplication of the people and objects depicted. Moskaleva adds color to black-and-white images by coloring individual parts of the photo. We find that the author does not collect photos in a single archive which would be some evidence of the past, but there is a radical transformation of the image. The work that Moskaleva does is a search for the lost time of her childhood which is collected and scattered from images created by her departed father. The series *Childhood Memories* in 1994 is added by the title *Children's dreams* (Ill. 6.). On these photos along with doubling and coloring there are dark blue, almost black spaces that absorb the image, and access to it is even more difficult. According to the author, the main motive for this series were children's nightmares:

Children's dreams, recurring terrible nightmares at night, I tried to transfer this feeling to the photo by coloring it in exciting colors. By giving some not real form as in a dream. The dialogue with sleep is interesting, you stop, they are afraid of it, and it no longer comes to you.²

Black voids on the photos, as well as Moskaleva's phrase about the dialogue with sleep which is born in her practice of image transformation, eliminates the fear of a nightmare

¹ Moskaleva, G. *Childhood Memories*. URL: <http://gala.onthemount.net/?p=36> (accessed 27.03.2020)

² Moskaleva G. *Childhood Memories*. URL: <http://gala.onthemount.net/?p=36> (accessed 27.03.2020)

and resembles a psychotherapeutic study of trauma. Coming out of the trauma is accompanied by a transition to a symbolic level, an attempt to separate yourself from the past that haunts you.

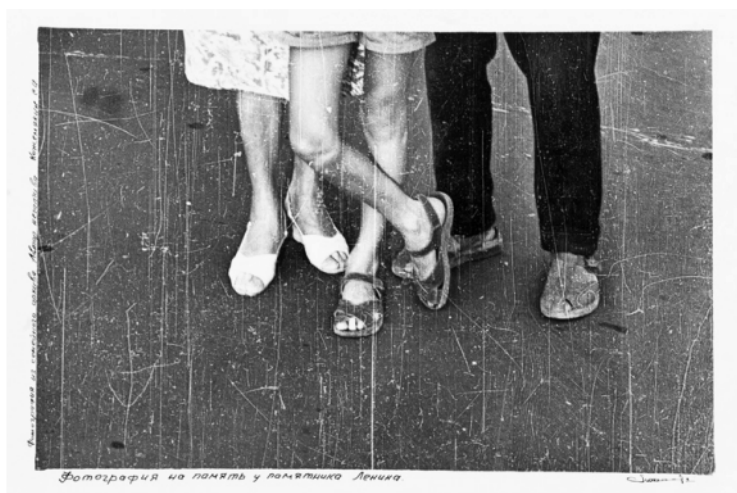


Ill. 6. Galina Moskaleva. «Childhood Memories, children's dreams». 1994.

Freud confers the effect of the uncanny to «that which should have remained secret, hidden, but has come to light.»¹ According to Freud, the uncanny is the native, the known, but now forgotten, the alien that invades and frightens us. Therefore, the effect of the uncanny is given to duplicates, ghosts, mechanical dolls, marionettes — the living dead, the repressed unconscious affect. In Moskaleva's photographs, there is a collision with her own double: images of childhood are something familiar and native, but these images are

¹Freud, S. The Uncanny. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Work. P. 225.

shattered, become indistinguishable, and are endowed with disturbing feelings.



Ill. 7. Sergey Kozhemyakin. «*Family Album: Real Photos from Real Life*» 1953—1989.

In Sergey Kozhemyakin's series *Family Album: Real Photos from Real Life* the images are also shifted to a detail, a fragment (Ill. 7.). Notably that the name doubles the word «real»: photos not too much show about this reality. Numerous scratches and cropping effect distort the people depicted in the photo. We are again faced with the effect of reducing the representative opportunities of photography. The series *Phantom Feelings* (Ill. 8.) represents personal photos of Kozhemyakin mounted on a concrete cube. The author describes the circumstances that served as a starting point for creating photos:

Once I was walking near Uruchya (Minsk sleeping district) on the racetrack and saw a huge concrete cube on which drivers train loading. Absolutely rational object, absolute form, absolute

functionality. It is like the border of materiality, there is nothing further. Like a screen on which ephemeral images appear. Two people breaking out of a cramped space with an easy gait — the title work of the series, which became the starting point.¹

Some photographs actually continue outside the cube, the cramped space opens up, and the borders of the photo become dynamic.

However, this does not happen in all the images, some of them seem to be concreted in a cube. In particular, the photo that Kozhemyakin refers to, which «breaks out of a closed space», actually remains inside the cube and does not go beyond it. On this photo, we again see a familiar image that is typical for Belarusian photographers, the figures of people are blurred and their faces are indistinguishable. In one of the photos of the series, we see a lot of people under umbrellas who turned their backs to the viewer. We can't identify people because their faces are hidden from the camera. In the following photos, we find an overlay of old photo portraits; figures of standing people who are blurred; a group photo of children, fragments of which are darkened and become difficult to distinguish; a photo of a telegram; a photo of a rusted Soviet star against a peeling wall; concrete slabs in the water. In general, this series has a narrative element. We could figure out these images from the point of view of the end of the era (a rusty Soviet star) and the aspiration to freedom (two people walking), but still there is an indistinguishable space in them. In many ways, Kozhemyakin's series *Phantom Feelings* shows the invasion of the past, the presence of ghosts, and forms an anxiety before the present.

¹ Kozhemyakin, S. Keeping the Balance. URL: <https://znyata.com/z-proekty/legends-kozhemyakin-1.html> (accessed: 27.03.2020)



Ill. 8. Sergey Kozhemyakin. Phantom Feelings. 1997—2002

The conditions of post-traumatic culture set a certain kind of sensitivity, a reaction to «structures of feelings» as a living collective experience, which is reflected in art. We are again faced with the effect of splitting of representative possibilities of photography. The photos of Igor Savchenko, Galina Moskaleva and Sergey Kozhemyakin show an invasion of the extreme and uncanny in everyday stories. Fractures, cracks, scratches, like wounds and scars of the past, which still have not been healed.

Conclusion

Analyzing the work of Belarusian photographers, we found a special type of work with archival photos which demonstrates a shift from the representative function of photography. Photos collected by the authors from personal and collective archives are being transformed and thus

become impenetrable. Photographers find unsymbolized residue in these images. This is the expression of a repressed unconscious affect, a traumatic unprocessed past. Collective trauma is thought of as a break in the collective «self», the lack of awareness of the violence that occurred. This results in a combination of recurring symptoms, speech faults, and cultural failures. The conditions of post-traumatic culture suggest various forms of trauma experience. These include «Acting out» and «Working through». The first method relates to melancholy, the repressed past takes possession of the subject, and the second is reconciliation with the trauma. In the landscape of late-Soviet and post-Soviet culture, we can see a variety of memory practices related to the traumatic past. Among them, we highlight the photo series of Belarusian photographers.

Aesthetic theory offers various approaches to art related to trauma. One approach suggests considering it in accordance with the problems of the beautiful and the sublime, the conceivable and the unimaginable. The image of a Catastrophe becomes a representation without representation, or contains an indication of the unrepresentable. Another approach assumes that the unrepresentable expresses the absence of a stable relationship between the display and the designation that would give presence to the absent. This makes it possible to consider photography as the most appropriate medium for endowing this presence. The photographic image becomes the living, undeniable presence of the referent. Breaking the distance between the image and the viewer, the photo forms a space in which the past is actualized. Using the concept of *punctum*, the affective component of photography is distinguished.

The works of Belarusian photographers contain *punctums* of this kind, which provide an additional dimension to the photo associated with our affective memory. The concept of «implied referent» as a combination of affective and historical circumstances in the photographs of Belarusian

photographers allows the invisible side of the Soviet experience to appear. The works of the Minsk authors point to the return of a repressed, traumatic symptom, and at the same time they testify the development of collective trauma, the «work of mourning», which has not yet been completed.

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