

## Introduction: Photography in Transitioning European Communist and Post-communist Histories

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In the 1977 first ever issue of the journal *History of Photography*, Chief Editor Heinz K. Henisch wrote that “[p]hotographic myths crossed frontiers as fast as photographic truths, and we should not be surprised to hear that the Satan of the East was as fascinated with the new invention as the Devil of the West.” (1977, 37) The same publication launched a special section under the title “Early Photography in Eastern Europe,” which appeared throughout the journal’s first six issues. It provided some insights into the history of photography in countries such as Poland, Romania, Latvia, Russia, Finland, Croatia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia. In the introduction that he wrote for this series of articles, Henisch argued that “[t]he fame of Nicefor N’eps [Nicéphore Niépce] and Luijs Žaks Dagers [Louis-Jacques Daguerre] may have travelled to Latvia and beyond, but the West has remained largely uninformed of photographic achievements in the East” (37). At the time of this writing, nearly half a century after Henisch wrote those words, the political East/West split no longer stands, but Henisch’s observation largely still rings true in the context of Anglophonic Western photographic literature.

To assist in filling this knowledge gap, in this interdisciplinary special issue a group of international scholars, academics and practitioners investigate photographic cultures that began developing mainly in the late twentieth century within the region often known in the Anglosphere either as the former Eastern Bloc or as Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that knowledge and understanding of earlier histories of photographic cultures from the same region also necessitate elaboration. Yet, drawing on the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 as an opportunity to render Eastern European photographic histories more visible to photography scholars, political scientists, and cultural historians alike, the special issue is dedicated to explorations of the histories and legacies of the impact that political processes have exerted on social and cultural uses and conceptualizations of photography during a period that, broadly speaking, began in the mid 1970s and ended during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The first decade and a half in this period – from the mid-1970s to 1989 – signifies the gradual weakening of Soviet-regulated dictatorial communist regimes across the countries of the Eastern Bloc, chiefly, although not exclusively, following the emergence of internal and public as well as popular and active sociopolitical calls for their democratization. The remaining years of the period were mainly characterized by the progressive dissolution of the political boundaries between East and West, and by increasing national and patriotic sentiments among citizens of the former communist Eastern European states. This process accelerated at the end of the Cold War and in light of the demise of the Soviet Union, both in 1991. On the one hand, it led to the gradual transition of the former communist European states into free market economy. On the other, it gave rise to a need to reformulate their people’s social, cultural, and political values in a post-communist reality of independence (Berend 2009).

As the studies in the special issue demonstrate, photography gained much prominence and received great attention in Eastern European countries during their gradual transition from dictatorial communism to democracy and free market economy, namely between the mid-1970s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Photographs and the medium more broadly had become absorbed into subtle, vastly instrumental local historical processes that reshaped political life and social lived experience in Eastern European countries of the late- and post-communist periods. The special issue traces the roles photography played in advancing some of these processes through examination of two interrelated matters. On the one hand, it expands knowledge about photographic practices and conventions that developed specifically due to the gradual deterioration of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1970s and during its fragmentation throughout the 1980s. On the other, it provides scholarly understandings of the ways photography was used to assist in re-forming social, cultural, political, and national values in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc during the post-communist era of the 1990s and very early 2000s.

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Back in 1977, Heinz K. Henisch provided three key reasons for the existence of sparse Western literature on the history of Eastern European photography. First, he pointed at a deficit in cross-national exchange of knowledge on photographic traditions and practices. As opposed to scientists and engineers, he argued, international photographic historians only rarely came together to exchange subject-specific knowledge about photography. This was the consequence of their tendency “to view their task in nationalistic terms,” an outlook that stemmed “from the fact that photography itself did much to raise national consciousness in many lands.” (Henisch 1977, 37) Second, as another factor that limited the ability of the West to become exposed to photography from Eastern Europe, Henisch identified “the bitter wars and struggles against unacceptable regimes, which run like a grinding refrain through all accounts of the past century.” (37) As a consequence of Eastern European politics and political conditions “[a]gain and again, the work of talented photographers was destroyed, sometimes accidentally, often with savage deliberation.” (37) Lastly, the third reason Henisch gave for Western lack of familiarity with Eastern European photography was East-West language barriers. “That the world has shrunk is acknowledged often enough,” he wrote, “but communications have not altogether improved in proportion to that shrinkage.” (38)

Whereas this might have indeed been the state of affairs for as long as the nations, cultures, and people of the Eastern Bloc had been concealed behind the Iron Curtain, the majority of these circumstances have gradually faded since 1989. The admission of the bulk of countries from the region to the European Union during the first decade of the twenty-first century accelerated this process, and in the second decade of that century these conditions no longer prevail.<sup>2</sup> Although sociopolitical stability has not necessarily been fully achieved throughout Eastern Europe (Mark 2010; Todorova and Gille 2012), at least for the time being democratic values and practices are largely maintained. Communicating with local scholars is

usually also no longer a challenge. Especially the younger generation of academics from the region – those born in the 1960s, 1970s and later – have adopted English as the lingua franca that they use to communicate with each other, one country to another. Equally, research in the region can be carried out with great ease. At least since the beginning of the third millennium, entering the great majority of countries of the former Eastern Bloc has been as easy as visiting any other European country. Accessing their libraries, archives, and collections also most often requires the making of no more arrangements than elsewhere in the continent, and commonly, interested researchers would find that subject-specific sources are kept and organized under familiar conditions.

In spite of these changes of sociopolitical and cultural circumstances, and notwithstanding some sporadic initiatives, the state of research on Eastern European photographic cultures remains virtually unchanged in the academic Anglosphere. Perhaps one of the most telling examples comes from Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History* (2010: 339-389). This most conventional reference volume on the cultural history of photography dedicates one chapter to photography in the Cold War period without mentioning any photographic culture that existed outside the Western political system.

Especially at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, when so many photography scholars make conscious efforts to tap into diverse photographic cultures from virtually all around the globe, it may seem surprising that artistic, professional, amateur, and non-professional Eastern European photographic cultures remain mostly unknown in the academic Anglosphere. Considered in this light, the ongoing lack of attention it gives to Eastern European photographic cultures would seem as one lasting legacy of the Cold War, and the consequence of the dominant role that neo-Marxist and related Left-leaning research paradigms have played in the development of the scholarly study of photography since Western academia began taking interest in the medium as a serious subject in the 1970s (Pasternak 2017: 23-24).

As is well known, the absorption of photography into academia occurred under the influence of the sociocultural struggles and revolutions that anti-war, peace, human rights, and Left student movements triggered across various parts of the industrialized world in the 1960s, especially in Britain and the United States of America (Nickel 2001, 554-555). These movements' contestations of the social injustices, cultural discrimination, and nationalist sentiments that dominated the experience of life in the West at the time led the younger generation of academics who lived on the western side of the Iron Curtain in the late 1970s and 1980s to focus their full attention on the social and cultural apparatuses that conditioned life and lived experience in Western society. Those art historians and photography practitioners who paved the way for photography into the world of academia during this period framed its study as a set of inquiries into the exploitation of the medium by capitalist institutions of power, and as a means to explore how they used photographs to normalize capitalist values and conventionalize behaviors that served the perpetuation of capitalist economy (Nickel 2001, 555; Pasternak 2018, 41-42). In other words, in the late twentieth century, Western photography scholars were much more concerned with Western photography, and its exploration enabled them to join their peers in fighting their perceived sociopolitical problems "at home."

Taking inspiration from cultural and postcolonial studies, photography scholars of the 1990s and early twenty-first century began to change this condition by making some concentrated efforts to attend to the photographic landscapes of non-Western cultures. Even then, however, they conventionally turned their attention to the previously Western-dependent Asian, African, and Oceanian colonial territories.<sup>3</sup> Looking in that direction enabled them to expose more of the evils the so-called Western devil has spawned, this time through its historical overseas capitalist policies and the development of photographic practices that had facilitated their implementation. At the same time, cultural and postcolonial theories (e.g. Said 1978; Spivak 1994; Smith 1999), along with the emancipatory spirit of the sociocultural, political revolutions in the West, made it somewhat difficult for Western Anglophone scholars to explore local photographic practices in these geographies. This project needed to be initiated by their indigenous peoples, or at least involve them directly, a large number of such scholars initially assumed, to avoid imposing perceived Western attitudes on perceived cultural ‘Others’, and leave space for the voices of those ‘Others’ to be heard.

Although such cultural and postcolonial positions might have also discouraged Western photography scholars from looking at Eastern Europe, the countries of the former Eastern Bloc were seen as part of a different sociocultural environment altogether. During the 1970s and 1980s, the so-called capitalist devil could not be fought in this region as, at least principally, it had already been defeated by the Soviets who replaced it with socialist economy and values. Thus, the Eastern Bloc had virtually no room in revisionist Western anti-capitalist academic projects, and the battles that Eastern Europeans fought with their so-called communist Satan were of no particular interest to the predominantly anti-capitalist research agendas of Western photography scholars. Later, in the 1990s, after the Eastern Bloc collapsed, Western Anglophonic photography scholars had even fewer reasons to expand their research into the region. Eastern European citizens focused their efforts on shaking off the haunting legacies of their communist pasts at the same time as most of them strove to establish free market economy, namely to invite capitalism willfully. Broadly speaking, the former Eastern Bloc turned to photography to move Eastern European societies rightwards on the political spectrum, while Western photography scholars endeavored to motivate their societies to move leftwards on the same spectrum. Yet, whereas the research paradigms that dominated Western photographic scholarship between the mid-1970s and the beginning of the twenty-first century have largely led to the writing of Eastern European photographic cultures out of history, at the very same time photography had in fact become much more popular and politically significant within this region than ever before.

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The majority of authors in this special issue participated in one or more of the annual conferences that were organized between 2016 and 2018 as part of the international conference series *Photographic Histories in Central and Eastern Europe*, initiated by Polish photography researcher Marta Ziętkiewicz. I had the honor of being invited to give one of the keynote

lectures at the first event that was organized in Warsaw in 2016, and since then I have also been a member of the conference series' organizing and scientific advisory committee as well as a regular contributor to the annual installments. The conference series has aimed to advance and promote photographic studies about the region, considering it as an area characterized by a multitude of cultures, languages, religions and economic structures, and united by shared historical experiences of imperialist and socialist powers. From the first event to the 2017 conference that was held in Prague and that of 2018 that met in Ljubljana, a large number of the papers that were delivered in these events demonstrated that Eastern European photographic cultures had transformed drastically during the period of the region's transition from dictatorial communism to democracy and free market economy.<sup>4</sup>

In some situations, regional photographic cultures obtained new characteristics due to the growing employment of photography as a means to criticize the communist authorities; in others, and more commonly, they became richer and more diverse, as an increasing number of photographers, curators, collectors, and social historians chose to use photography to promote pro-democratic values, adjust society to the capitalist sociocultural and economic system, and redefine national, social, and cultural identities in a post-communist reality. Furthermore, the decline of communism within the countries of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s had seen numerous organized efforts to popularize photography and secure its place in local, national histories, at the same time as it accelerated scholarly interest in the medium, in its local social histories, and in its potential to expand the scope of historical research methodologies. The fruits of this process became especially visible in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century when, following the collapse of the USSR, the post-communist societies and nations of the region directly confronted the lingering experiences of their recent pasts. Around that period, a generation of dedicated photography scholars emerged virtually throughout the former Eastern Bloc, whose main aspiration was to salvage local photographic practices. Often claiming that their nations' perceived "great masters of photography" had been forgotten by historians of the medium owing to the long-lasting isolation of their country from the rest of the world, they sought to correct this misfortune. In order to grasp the implications, the significance as well as the flaws of this process with a greater level of clarity, I would like to dedicate some of what follows to attending more closely to some of the ways in which photographic practices and literature from the region altered during the period in question.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, a number of artists and intellectuals living on the eastern side of the Iron Curtin began exploring and presenting historical artistic, private, and archival photographs as a means to reestablish a sense of national continuity between the pre-communist era and their nation's condition of life at that present moment. Soviet communism largely deemed the pre-communist era irrelevant to the nature of social and cultural life in the socialist states of the Eastern Bloc. Aspiring to inculcate citizens of those states into a mindset that sees history as an evolutionary process whose ultimate culmination is the communist way of life, communist leaders expected all citizens of the European satellite states of the USSR to shake off any of their attachments to social values and behaviors that did not adhere to the principles of socialist equality. As a consequence, the display of imagery that

pointed to life before or outside communism were most often repressed in the public sphere, unless they were meant for pro-communist propagandistic purposes. In turning to historical photographic imagery, those who reintroduced visual depictions of the pre-communist world into the public sphere had done so as a means to frame communism not as an achievement in the history of their societies, but rather as an aggressively imposed deviation from their otherwise more organically evolving existence.

When the USSR and the communist infrastructure of the Eastern Bloc began deteriorating at a greater speed from the mid-1980s, some regional scholars endeavored to record the history of local artistic photographic practices. Some of them have attempted to do so by writing historical accounts that linked local national histories of photography to the Western canonical narrative, which they tended to understand as a universal history of the medium and its practices (Miklós 1989: 14-16; Mrázková 1989: 10; Lechowicz 2012). Others have chosen to write exclusive national histories of photography, which highlighted as such the photographic achievements of a people (Birgus and Mlčoch 2011; Macek 2011: V). Either way, such instances celebrated the photographic achievements of perceived national practitioners as a means to demonstrate local contributions to the development of photographic cultures, alongside compatibility with renowned Western photographic trends and accomplishments.

As demonstrated by the majority of the studies in this special issue, following the growing employment of historical photographs in cultural practices that were intended to reshape national and political identities in the Eastern Bloc, and owing to the attempts of its different nations to foreground their achievements in the area of photography, from the late 1980s a large number of regional institutions began compiling photographic collections more systematically than ever before. Similarly, museums and galleries started installing photographic exhibitions on a regular basis, featuring the work of national practitioners from the past and present. Step-by-step, dedicated photography departments were formed in a range of traditional art establishments, and the number of photographic acquisitions often increased. Archives in the region also modified their priorities, cataloguing photographic materials and instituting organized photographic collections. Whether studio portraits of individuals and families or everyday, non-professional snapshots captured by ordinary people, private historical photographs were of particular public interest, as there was virtually no place for private memory under communism. Soviet communism depicted the state of life in the Eastern Bloc as the beginning of the utopian communist dream coming true. Lived experience on the ground, however, significantly deviated from the social conditions officially reported by the communist leadership, and individuals most often still felt more historically connected to their ancestors, as well as emotionally committed to their families, than to any utopian ideas. As Soviet communism repressed any individual experience or narrative that did not support the realities depicted by the powers in charge, in the late- and post-communist period, private historical photographic collections (and photographs that were created by communist states to survey the private lives of citizens) were seen as capable of providing access to less collectively imposed forms of memory, and as portals into more accurate social histories.

It is significant to note that, although the USSR and its satellite countries in Europe employed photography for propaganda, photography had received very little regional recognition as an art form throughout the communist era. Some photography magazines, exhibitions, and art practitioners did exist in the majority of the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and some individuals also attempted to write studies of the history of photography. Nevertheless, practicing art photography and researching the history of the medium were considered somewhat idiosyncratic activities. The late-communist and early post-communist endeavor of Eastern European scholars and national institutions to promote artistic photography, coupled with their aspiration to connect local practices to those most appreciated in the West, was partly motivated by the growing prominence of the medium in leading Western museums and commercial galleries of the time. The subsequent rising demand for artistic photographs in the emerging Eastern European art market also inspired endeavors in which photography was mainly meant to assist local politically influential figures and institutions to rebrand their nations as capable of joining the social structures of democracy and the economic system of the free market (Ziętkiewicz 2015: 14).

These innovative projects did not come without weaknesses, however. Whether focusing on national histories of photography or on their incorporation into the Western canon, the work of scholars who have written on regional photography tends to measure local accomplishments against the photographic practices held in high esteem by leading Western photographic establishments or renowned Western historians of photography. Furthermore, many of them have been eager to establish a link between the photography of their nation and that of traditionally accepted canonical photographers, usually considering association with the “powerful” West as a means to bring prestige to their nation and enhance the cultural capital of its so-called great masters of the medium. For such reasons, the resulting narratives may at times revolve around the issue of compliance with Western values, and end up misrepresenting the reality and diversity of Eastern European photographic cultures.

At the same time, some of these projects might create a fabricated notion of national continuity from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. After all, almost no nation in the former Eastern Bloc existed independently or within the same physical boundaries across this time period; state borders had significantly changed over the years, which means that some photographers who lived within a territory associated with one nation in the late twentieth century in fact used to be part of another. It should not be surprising in this regard that some individual photographers feature in the national history of photography of more than one nation in the region. Their repeated appearance under different national histories of photography inevitably raises significant questions about the concrete sociopolitical context in which they operated and the actual nature of the cultural environments that they aspired to develop.

The national paradigm adhered to by a critical mass of scholars in countries of the former Eastern Bloc has also led many of them to ignore the photographic practices and cultures nourished by members of national and ethnic minority groups who lived in the region before, during, and after the communist era. Most often, the historical narratives of these scholars either write the contributions of minorities out of history or they claim as the subjects and property of their so-called hosting nations individuals whose contributions to photography

have already been established. Whether following the former or the latter tenets, the resulting narratives might give birth to the fantasy of national and ethnic purity; namely, to the idea that photographic achievements within any nationally defined physical boundaries are the unique accomplishments of one coherent society and culture, unaffected by external activities and unchanged by intercultural encounters (Mazur 2014: 31-32).

As opposed to such ahistorical dispositions, other scholars from the region have aspired to limit their explorations of the history of photography in Eastern Europe to the communist and post-communist periods.<sup>5</sup> This enables them to study the history of the medium in the region through acknowledgment of its particular place within the social, political, cultural, and economic conditions that governed the region's countries under communist rule and following its demise. Ignoring the politically interrelated circumstances that had conditioned life and the development of visual and material culture in the region between 1945 and the beginning of the third millennium cannot be an option, they argue, if an informed historical account is to be established. As I explained above, regional histories of photography from the late- and post-communist periods in particular are closely connected to the political circumstances that prevailed throughout Eastern Europe in the years that led to the dissolution of the USSR and thereafter. Therefore, scholarship of this kind tends to prioritize empirical research over national ideological agendas, and the writing of specific in-depth analytical scholarship over grand national narratives about photography (Piotrowski 2012).

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Registering and studying the distinct characteristics of late- and post-communist European photographic cultures, contributors to the special issue endeavor to develop their historically informed and politically conscious study. To do so, they discuss primary photographic sources and present empirically informed textual and photographic case studies from some of the most politically and culturally diverse states in the region, including Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1993), the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), East and unified Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Russia. Some space is also given to photography from Slovenia (formerly one of six socialist republics in Yugoslavia), as a means to account for part of Southeastern Europe's historical association with the Eastern Bloc, and for the (separate yet ideologically related) communist legacies shared by the majority of Eastern and Southeastern European countries.

To enable some comparison between the studies in the special issue, their authors mainly interrogate such photographic practices that developed either as a means to mitigate the impact of Eastern European communist doctrines or with a view to challenging or examining their overpowering sociocultural legacies. While doing so, they touch on a diverse range of photographic production methods and uses, within contexts such as art, amateur and professional practices, artistic museum exhibitions, historical public displays, curatorial strategies, family collections, institutional archives, and others. Analyzing some of the politically transformative work that photography was set out to do in the countries and societies



considered, the studies also discuss its employment and influence within a set of interrelated conceptual frameworks concerning, for example, national identity work, activations of cultural heritage, international collaboration, globalization, social and political history, and collective memory.

In her article on photography in Czechoslovakia during the period of Normalization (1968–1989), **Paula Gortázar** turns her attention to similar photographic theories that emerged almost concurrently in West Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. She demonstrates how they had led to the development of an artistic photographic style that Czechoslovakian photographers especially had adopted to emancipate their production processes from compliance with the communist photographic gaze, precisely when the communist regime was striving to restore its full power across their country. While their photographs did not render the conditions of life under communism a subject of criticism, Gortázar demonstrates that artistic circles in the country nevertheless saw them as celebrations of individual freedom and a means to emancipate human vision from the communist mindset.

**Gil Pasternak and Marta Ziętkiewicz** zoom in on Poland, exploring the use of family and archival photographs in pro-democratic processes that prevailed in the country between the late 1970s and the first half of the 1990s. They focus specifically on exhibitions installed by Polish-Jewish historian and photography curator Aleksandra Garlicka in Poland's formal cultural institutions between 1985 and 1995. Polish photographic scholarship on this period has overlooked Garlicka's photographic activities due to its more common interest in artistic practices and practitioners who objected the communists explicitly. Bringing nuance to Poland's late- and post-communist history of photography, Pasternak and Ziętkiewicz demonstrate that Garlicka strategically used family and archival photographs to prompt familiarity with non-authoritarian Polish social histories, which contributed to revising communist historical accounts about the Polish people and helped attune Polish society to democratic principles.

**Catherine Troiano** explores how Hungarian cultural institutions have engaged with 'national photography', particularly in photographic exhibitions, since the 1980s. In Hungary, the development of photography occurred alongside fluctuating socio-politics, which institutions have had to balance. This process continued largely uninterrupted throughout Hungary's post-communist period, contributing to the nationalization of its cultural sphere and a spreading sense of Hungarian independence. It reached maturity shortly after a right-wing political regime, which still dominates the Hungarian state in the late 2010s, came to power in 2010. Troiano considers the effect of this politically motivated cultural condition on photographic curatorial conventions, narrations of the history of photography from Hungary, and on the work of amateur and professional artistic photographers wishing to gain formal recognition.

**Donna West Brett** concentrates on photographs that were taken by the German Democratic Republic's state security service (Stasi) between 1950 and 1990, which were intended to survey the activities of East German citizens. Around the 1990 unification of Germany, the Stasi set out to destroy records attesting to its unlawful surveillance actions. Many photographic records were saved, however, thanks to citizens who occupied Stasi's

offices across the country, precisely in order to protect the evidence. Framing the surviving photographs as primary historical sources, Brett demonstrates how they enable investigations into Stasi surveillance techniques and how German artists have drawn on Stasi photographs in their attempts to elaborate the history of the German Democratic Republic and process its cultural legacies.

**Marianna Michałowska** investigates artistic photographic practices that emerged in the Baltic States of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia around the period of their emancipation from the USSR and during their attempt to adapt to perceived global artistic conventions. She focuses on a series of exhibitions that was initiated in 1993 with a view to exposing contemporary artistic photography from the Baltic States to so-called Western audiences. Demonstrating that photographic artwork from those states initially tended to be critical of the communist past but gradually turned critical of capitalist culture as well, Michałowska argues that the Baltic States' transition from communist to post-communist reality rendered art photographers politically engaged and thereby transformed the role played by art photography in the Baltic States accordingly.

In *One Photo*, **Marija Skočir** recalls how a photograph by photojournalist Tone Stojko energized a campaign for the democratization of socialist Slovenia and its adherence to human rights laws. Stojko secretly photographed the arrest of political activist and journalist Janez Janša on 31 May 1988. The publication of the photograph increased public distrust in the Yugoslav communist leadership, assisting in demonstrating that Janša's arrest was political; a mere means to oppress his criticism of the state. Although the negative of Janša's arrest has been sold to foreign media, and at the time of writing its location is unknown, Skočir explains that Stojko's photograph remains one of the most iconic assets of Slovenian cultural heritage, commonly understood as a catalyst of Slovenia's quest for independence from socialist Yugoslavia.

In *The Archive*, **Ramina Abilova** provides insights into the complex social and political history of photographic archival collections in Russia. Her survey begins with the establishment of state archives that were created shortly after the October Revolution of 1917, most often in order to facilitate Soviet propagandistic campaigns. Explaining how post-Soviet culture of the 1990s affected the reorganization of these and other institutional archives while leading to the establishment of new ones, Abilova mainly analyses the relationship between this process and the rapid development of Russian photographic scholarship. Her discussion shows that the growing attention that was now given to appropriate photographic conservation and preservation has also increased the status of photographs as legitimate sources in historical research about Soviet and post-Soviet Russian society alike.

The special issue finishes with a photo-essay by **Tamas Dezso** and **Eszter Szablyar**, visualizing human, industrial, and natural landscapes in Romania in the period that followed the country's post-communist transition. Their analytical collaboration employs photography to record the gradually disappearing traces of the oppressive world that the communist regime imposed on Romania between 1946 and 1989, while featuring some of the lasting relics of local cultures, customs, and traditions that largely diminished under the same regime.

Together, the studies in this special issue foreground some photographic scholarship and practices from and about Eastern European countries, elaborating existing understanding of the sociopolitical and cultural work that late- and post-communist European societies have set photography to undertake. It is hoped that in doing so, they demonstrate how the study of late- and post-communist European photographic cultures can expand the visual field of the history of photography, and add another layer to existing scholarly knowledge about the relationship between photography, history, society, politics and culture.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, the term Central and Eastern Europe is also used to refer to the same region but accounts for the geographical position of its countries within the European continent somewhat more accurately.

<sup>2</sup> The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia entered the European Union in 2004, and in 2007 Bulgaria and Romania also became member countries.

<sup>3</sup> For one relevant classical example of essays from that time see, Hight and Sampson (2002).

<sup>4</sup> The first event in the conference series Photographic Histories in Central and Eastern Europe was titled *Discovering "Peripheries"*. The result of a collaboration between Society Liber pro Arte, the Polish Association of Photography Historians, and the yearly journal *Dagerotyp*, it was hosted by the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw on 31 May–1 June 2016. The second gathering was hosted by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague on 9–10 May 2017 under the title *Shaping Identities | Challenging Borders*. The third conference bore the title *Practices, Circulation and Legacies* and was hosted by The City Museum of Ljubljana on 8-10 May 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Or to focus on the regional history of photography during the earlier period of Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian Imperialist control, which crumbled by the end of the First World War.