Introduction: Photo Transfer in Cold War Europe

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During the Cold War, it was very common to think of Europe as a strictly divided continent, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, scholars still tended to look at Eastern and Western Europe as segregated spaces. Some, however, have distanced themselves from writing the history of the Cold War as a history of enemies and antagonisms. Instead, they have started focusing on cultural, technical and social convergences that may show modern (and modernist) patterns on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Historians like Susan Buck-Morss, David Caute, Rana Mitter and Patrick Major – to name but a few – argued that there were many parallels, even if the specific aesthetic forms and social and cultural practices differed.[1] While a serious amount of empirical research has been done over the last years on aspects like cultural and media relations, youth exchange, industrial design, popular music, film and even the development of information science, documentary photography has not generated much interest in this context.[2]

This is remarkable for various reasons: first of all, photographs have long been used for political propaganda, and there are many studies explaining their use in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and other countries during the Cold War.[3] It is striking, however, that photography received less attention than, for instance, literature, film or popular music, for it may well enhance our understanding of the cultural Cold War in a transnational perspective. Secondly, photography is by nature an ambiguous medium, and it was – precisely because it is so

ambiguous – never censored in the same way as the press, theatres or literature in Eastern Europe.[4] Although press photography was subject to press control in the same way as text, photographers and photojournalists could still work as freelancers or develop strategies of subversion when leaving the official path of socialist realism. And thirdly, since photography needs no translation, it is a case in point for any historian who sets out to explore transnational networks, border-crossing activities and the genesis of overlapping collective memories on both sides of the Berlin Wall, especially in a divided Germany.

The aim of this special collection is to present case studies in photo transfer during the Cold War, and there are many different stories to be told. Photo agencies, for example, maintained professional relations already in an early stage of the Cold War, not least because some of them – most prominently Keystone – had long been operating from various countries. For instance, a contract between the photo departments of the American Associated Press (AP) and Zentralbild, the photo branch of the East German news agency Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst (ADN), guaranteed both partners mutual access to pictures. Naturally, this service was more expensive for ADN, since the AP had more employees, offered more pictures and had to be paid in hard currency.[5] Yet the contract allowed East German newspapers like *Neues Deutschland* to print those pictures that are today labelled as 'iconic', among them Nick Út's 'Napalm Girl' and Eddie Adams' 'Execution of a Viet Cong'. In turn, the contract made sure that AP's clients worldwide had regular access to pictures from the GDR, which they could use to illustrate their articles. The Eastfoto agency, a Moscow-based agency with a branch in New York that had been founded in 1932, specialized in offering news photos from Communist countries to Western media, and many of them appeared in the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post* or *Life*.[6]

Exchange between East and West also worked on a personal level, for professional photographers often crossed borders in both directions. When Hungarians protested against their socialist government and the rise of Soviet influence on domestic policies in 1956, West German photographer Rolf Gillhausen spontaneously drove his car to Budapest and soon returned to Hamburg, where he had his photographs published by *Stern* magazine. Likewise, Austrian Magnum photographer Erich Lessing covered the events in Budapest in 1956; his work was recently

republished in a photo book. In 1981, French Magnum photographer Bruno Barbey travelled to Poland in order to document Solidarnosc's activities.[7]

Naturally, cross-bloc activities were not exclusive to Europeans. In 1947, John G. Morris, a former editor for *Life* and at that time picture editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, sent Robert Capa – a United States citizen since 1946 – to the Soviet Union in order to document the daily life of a Russian family.[8] In 1960, David Douglas Duncan published a photo book about the Kremlin.[9] And in 1987, a lavishly illustrated photo book appeared under the title *A Day in the Life of the Soviet Union*. Fifty American and fifty Soviet photographers had spent twenty-four hours on 25 May 1987 taking 100,000 photographs, 275 of which were published in the book. Four decades after Capa's contribution to *Ladies' Home Journal* they gave ordinary people in the United States another impression of what daily life in a socialist country looked like.[10]

In Europe, the exchange, which suffered seriously from the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, intensified when the politics of détente eased work conditions for Western photojournalists. Starting in 1975, Thomas Höpker, a future president of the Magnum photo-cooperative, moved to East Berlin as a permanent correspondent for the West German *Stern* magazine. Needless to say, the State Security had him supervised, while functionaries of the Kulturbund (Cultural Association, the GDR's central institution fostering cultural activities) openly rejected his pictures. In their view, the pictures conveyed 'reactionary clichés of the GDR' and implied that the country was suffering from 'drabness, poverty, militarism [and] backwardness'.[11] Yet Höpker could send his pictures straight to the Hamburg-based editor, and when he moved on to New York in 1977, his colleague Harald Schmitt took over in East Berlin. In turn, the East German photo agency Zentralbild sent out staff in order to document what they would call the 'imperialist', 'reactionary' or 'revanchist' politics of the Federal Republic.

At the same time, East European dissidents sent their photographs to Western editors. In 1968, Czech photographer Josef Koudelka took pictures of the Prague Spring events and sent them to London – anonymously at first, because he feared consequences for his family. The pictures were then distributed all over the world, and in 1970, Koudelka moved to London, where he continued a successful career as a full

member of Magnum – turning the transfer of images into a transfer of manpower.[12]

Likewise, photographers from Eastern Europe travelled to the West, even after the Berlin Wall was built. In the GDR, travel cadres (who had permanent permission to travel to Western countries) like Thomas Billhardt or Zentralbild-photographer Hans-Joachim Spremberg held permanent visas allowing them to work wherever required, be it Italy, the United States, Vietnam, Mongolia or Libya. Even freelancers like Harald Hauswald, notorious for illegally publishing his work in West Germany, successfully applied for travel permits, where he would meet those colleagues who had previously visited the Eastern part of the continent. As mentioned previously, Robert Capa visited the Soviet Union in 1947 and his native Hungary in 1948; Henri Cartier-Bresson travelled to East Berlin in 1962. East German State Security files inform us that many freelance photographers were permanently in touch with colleagues from Western countries. And of course photographers from Eastern and Western countries met at the hotspots of international politics and theatres of war in Korea, Vietnam, China and Cuba. Thomas Billhardt, for example, often got in touch with Western photographers abroad, even though this was officially not allowed. The result was the emergence of a transnational network that was not separated by the Berlin Wall but rather by the political positions and activities of the various actors, which ranged widely from unofficial work for the socialist security services on the one hand to humanitarian intervention or open dissidence on the other.

Likewise, art photographers set up networks that overlapped with those of travelling photojournalists. In 1978, for instance, East German photographers Ute Mahler and Evelyn Richter went to Cologne in order to receive awards at the Photokina photography fair.[13] Sibylle Bergemann, Arno Fischer and Ulrich Wüst, to name but a few, whose work related more to art than journalism, took the opportunity to travel to West Germany and the United States. And, as Sarah Goodrum's contribution to this special collection shows, some networks also included photo curators specialized in art photography like Walter Hahn. In some cases, however, it is difficult to distinguish between art and journalism. While some pictures taken by photojournalists would obviously qualify as art, it may in turn have been a strategy on the part of photojournalists to label themselves artists in order to escape controls on the press and gain more artistic freedom.

Thanks to the border- and bloc-crossing work of documentary photographers, ordinary citizens could get an impression of what the other side of the Iron Curtain looked like. Photo books, illustrated magazines and travelling exhibits supplied a wide range of pictures, even when and where the import of media into the Eastern bloc was strictly controlled. Pictures from the United States, for instance, were circulated in the propaganda magazine *America Illustrated*, which the United Stated Information Agency produced for Soviet readers, and pictures from the United Kingdom appeared in the British *Anglia* magazine. In turn, Moscow produced the magazine *Russian Life*, which informed Americans about life in the Soviet Union. Magazines like *Stern* and *Life* were not officially allowed but were nevertheless widely read in Eastern Europe.

One of the highlights of photo transfer was the *Family of Man* exhibit, produced by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955 and featuring photographs of birth and death, old and young, family life, education, communication and social events. The show toured sixty-nine countries, and, despite harsh criticism by the Soviet leadership, it was also shown in Moscow in 1959.[14] The exhibit was a prestigious and ideologically loaded mass event; yet at least partly it reflected the fact that in the field of photography, the border between the blocs was still permeable. While this exhibition has received a lot of attention and has been discussed widely by historians and art historians, many other ways of exchanging images are still off the radar of scholarly attention. Thus, the aim of this special collection is to draw attention to the overlapping networks of photo art and photojournalism, to a wide range of media including magazines, illustrated books and exhibitions, and to highlight various perspectives on the exchange of images both eastwards and westwards.

Important questions include: who were the agents of photo transfer during the Cold War? What were the networks that allowed for visual exchange across the East-West divide? How did photographs cross the Iron Curtain, legally as well as illegally? How were photographs from the East perceived in the West and vice versa? How strongly was the production and transfer of photographs influenced by ideological thinking? Is there any such thing as a common visual memory of the Cold War? Where and how do Eastern and Western photographs differ, and what is 'modern' in Cold War photography?

Margarete Wach focuses on Poland after the Second World War and the development of the illustrated weekly *Świat*, a Polish equivalent to *Life* not only in terms of style and content but also in that it maintained a Wall-spanning network of professional photographers. Wach shows how the editor-in-chief Władysław Sławny managed to produce a magazine that – under the impact of late Stalinism – adopted the aesthetics of French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson rather than that of Cold War propaganda agents. Sławny thus promoted an exchange of experts and a transfer of visual knowledge across the blocs like no other protagonist in the field of documentary photography. Whatever opportunity the politics of the 'thaw' period offered, he took it up and channelled his energy into the production of a high-quality magazine in Poland.

Gisela Parak takes a close look at the developments that led to the implementation of martial law in Poland in December 1981. Magnum photographer Bruno Barbey travelled to Warsaw in order to document the events, and in the following year he published the photo book *Pologne* in Paris. Parak argues that Barbey's book gave the French audience a glimpse into a socialist society in crisis, and that the publication of the book was an act of solidarity with the Polish people, who were depicted as a historic part of Europe rather than a satellite of the Soviet Union. In other words, Poland is visually treated as a part of a joint European history rather than a socialist society – a perspective that actively undermines Cold War ideological confrontations. Yet it was not only Barbey as an individual who allowed West Europeans a glimpse into a socialist society. It was also the Magnum photo cooperative as an institution that is to be credited for mediating between two seemingly separate social and visual spheres.

Sarah Goodrum tells the story of museum curator Walter Hahn, founder of the East German Museum of Photography. The museum opened in Dresden in 1957 and was closed after only twelve years in 1969, leaving a void in the field of art photography that was not filled until the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). While Hahn argued that in order to fulfil the highest standards in the field of collecting photographs, East Germany would have to follow Western developments and even buy photographs outside the socialist world, authorities insisted on exclusively supporting Socialist Realist photography. While Hahn was one of very few East Germans who actively networked in the West, he failed to establish himself in the East German art world. In

contrast to Gisela Parak's and Margarete Wach's narratives on Cold War photography in Poland, which read as stories of success, this clearly is a story of failure, defeat and lost opportunities.

Adelina Stefan focuses on the postcard as a visual medium of communication that allowed Romanian citizens to both communicate with Western citizens and learn about the West as represented in photographs on the postcard's front side. The starting point of Stefan's story is the rise of international tourism in Romania in the early 1960s, a development prompted by the opening of the country for mass tourism organized by Western travel agencies. As a consequence, many Western tourists got in touch with the Romanian population. Yet while the production of private photographs was supervised strictly by the state – film was by law to be developed in the country and not abroad – the postcard turned out to be an alternative medium for visual communication. Stefan argues that postcards established a common visual culture, into which images from Communist Romania were easily absorbed. Moreover, postcards helped the country to draw nearer to the West – at least until the decline of mass tourism in the 1980s.

All four contributions show that in the field of art and documentary photography, there was no strict separation between the Eastern and the Western bloc in Cold War Europe. Images were traded across borders, be it as magazine photos, contributions to competitions, photo books, art objects or postcards. Western photographers, especially members of Magnum, such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Erich Lessing and Bruno Barbey, travelled regularly to Eastern Europe and set up transnational networks that allowed for a permanent exchange of images and ideas. Although Walter Hahn failed to establish a photo museum in the GDR that would have met international standards, he could still communicate with Western curators.

These findings fit well into the bigger picture of the cultural Cold War as it has emerged over the past two or three decades. Instead of focusing on ideological differences, scholars have taken a closer look at convergences between the East and the West in general and on transnational and trans-bloc developments inside Europe in particular. We could thus argue that the findings of the contributors to this special collection have confirmed a view that is about to become mainstream. Yet they also show that photography was at times at the forefront of cultural exchange for various reasons. First, photography is independent of

national languages, for a picture taken in Budapest will be understood by a recipient in Paris – even if we never know what exactly a recipient understands when seeing a picture. Secondly, photography is the most subversive form of art we could imagine, especially in the orbit of socialist realism. A photo is much more likely to escape control or censorship than text, for it is still documentary. Photography, finally, is thus not just a footnote to Cold War history; it is at the very centre of a notion of shifting ideas, travelling concepts and a joint – and genuinely modern – Cold War culture.

Notes

1   Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, 2002); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: the Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003); Simo Mikkonen and Pekka Suutari (eds), *Music, Art and Diplomacy: East-West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War* (London, 2016); Rana Mitter and Patrick Major (eds), *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London, 2003); Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith and Joes Segal (eds), *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam, 2012); Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (eds), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945-1960* (London, 2003).

2   For an overview on research in the field of the cultural Cold War see Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk and Thomas Lindenberger, 'European Cold War Culture(s)? An Introduction', in Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk and Thomas Lindenberger (eds), *European Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Societies in the East and the West* (New York, 2012) 1-20.

3   See, for example, Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: the Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front* (Oxford, 2008); Ulrich Prehn, 'Working Photos: Propaganda, Participation, and the Visual Production of Memory in Nazi Germany', *Central European History* 48:3 (2015) 366–386; Rainer Rutz, 'Die netten Deutschen und das 'Neue Europa'. Sympathiewerbung für die Wehrmacht, den Krieg und die Besatzung in der NS-Auslandsillustrierten Signal', in Rainer Rother and Judith Prokasky (eds), *Die Kamera als Waffe. Propagandabilder des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (München, 2010) 193–208; Elena Barkhatova, 'Soviet Policy on Photography', in Diane Neumaier (ed.), *Beyond Memory:*

Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art (New Brunswick, 2004) 47–64.

4 Cf. Eszter Kiss, 'Vorbilder, Spiegelbilder und Feindbilder. Der Umgang mit Fotografien im ungarischen Magazin *Képes* 7 Mitte der 1980er–Jahre', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 12:2 (2015) 289–313, http://www.zeithistorische–forschungen.de/2–2015/id%3D5228, accessed 3 November 2016. Eszter Kiss has recently finished a dissertation about the visual politics of the Kadar regime in Hungary in the 1980s.

5 The contracts between Associated Press and ADN-Zentralbild are stored in the German Federal Archives in Berlin Lichterfelde (BArch), DC 900, 960.

6 Sovfoto's picture archive is stored at the McLaren Art Center in Barrie, Ontario; see http://maclarenart.com/permanent–collection/the–sovfoto–archive and http://www.sovfoto.com, both accessed 3 November 2016.

7 Cf. 'Sie fordern die Freiheit. Blutige Revolte in Ungarn – Aufstand gegen Moskau' (featuring the photographs of Rolf Gillhausen), *Stern* 44 (1956) 12; Michael Gehler and Erich Lessing, *Ungarn 1956. Aufstand, Revolution und Freiheitskampf in einem geteilten Europa* (Innsbruck, 2015); Violetta Rudolf, 'Durch die Linse von Erich Lessing: Das ungarische Revolutionsjahr 1956', https://www.visual–history.de/2016/11/01/durch–die–linse–von–erich–lessing–das–ungarische–revolutionsjahr–1956/, accessed 3 November 2016; Bruno Barbey, *Pologne* (Paris, 1982). Barbey's work is discussed in Gisela Parak's contribution to this issue.

8 John Steinbeck and Robert Capa, 'Women and Children in the USSR', *Ladies' Home Journal* 65:2 (1948) 44–59.

9 David Douglas Duncan, *The Kremlin* (New York, 1960).

10 Rick Smolan and David Cohen (eds), *A Day in the Life of the Soviet Union* (New York and Moscow, 1987). The book was part of a series featuring *A Day in the Life of… Australia* (1981), *Hawaii* (1983) *Canada* (1984), *The USA* (1986) and *Japan* (1985).

11 Heinz Frotscher, 'Bemerkungen zu den Bilderschauen in den Kölner Kunsthallen', Auszugsweise Abschrift, 20 October 1976, BArch, DY 27, 9925.

12 The photographs of the 1968 insurrection in Prague were recently republished in Josef Koudelka, *Invasion Prague 1968*, edited by Derek Paton (London, 2008).

13 Some of Capa's and Cartier-Bresson's photographs taken in Russia, Hungary, and East Berlin are provided by the Magnum photo archive at http://pro.magnumphotos.com, accessed 3 November 2016. Ute Mahler

and Evelyn Richter got permission to travel to Cologne in order to accept a photo award at the biannual Photokina fair. Cf. Rainer Knapp, 'Reisebericht vom Besuch der 17. Photokina in Köln', BArch, DY 27/9925, 13.

14 Catalogue: Edward Steichen (ed.), *The Family of Man* (New York, 1955 and reprint 2003). In 1967 the GDR government launched the counter-exhibit *Vom Glück des Menschen* (Of Human Happiness) in East Berlin, indicating that happiness is not universal but the outcome of life in a socialist society; cf. Sarah Goodrum, 'A Socialist *Family of Man*: Rita Maahs' and Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler's Exhibition "Vom Glück des Menschen"', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 12:2 (2015) 370–82, http://www.zeithistorische–forschungen.de/2–2015/id=5245, accessed 3 November 2016.

About the Author

Annette Vowinckel received her doctorate from Essen University, Department of History, in 1999 and her Habilitation from Humboldt University Berlin, Department of Cultural Studies, in 2006. She is a specialist in cultural and media history of the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. As Head of the Department for Media History at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung/Center for Contemporary History Potsdam she recently published a book on the history of photojournalism (*Agenten der Bilder. Fotografisches Handeln im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2016), a special issue on *Photography under Dictatorship* (ed. with Michael Wild and Jan-Holger Kirsch, *Fotografie in Diktaturen*, Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History 12 (2015) 2, http://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2-2015) and an edited volume on *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (ed. with Marcus M. Payk and Thomas Lindenberger, New York 2012).