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Visual Case Study in the History of Russian Child Welfare

Visual research as an attempt to represent physical environment, events or ideas is a rather new approach to the history of social problems in Russia. In this research, we aimed to study the historical, cultural, ideological context of public policy in the sphere of social aid for children deprived of parental care, by employing the analysis of visual representations which have been preserved in the archives of children's homes, in private collections, in state archives and libraries. In our project, the images of children, orphanages and carers are to be seen not just as illustrations or representations but also as important elements of a studied context – no less important than official documents or personal narratives. This is micro-level analysis, which makes it possible to understand how the representations reflect and construct specific forms of arrangement of space in orphanages, disciplinary practices, ideological intentions of the photographers and organizers of such imaginative work. The photos, which represent various activities of the orphans in the institutions, are intended to be read in our study as messages based on the principles and values of Soviet upbringing and presented in chronicles and children's cinematography.

Introduction

Anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, teaching and studying photography, media studies have in common an interest in material culture, practices of representations, interpretations of cultural texts, social relations and individual experience, but offer their own understanding of the visual factors within a culture and a society. Photography, video and electronic media represent ethnographic knowledge, all of them providing contexts for cultural production, social interaction and individual experience, those areas, which are the spheres of field work of sociologists, anthropologists and social historians.

For a social scientist influenced by the image-based approach to research (Prosser, 1998) and contemporary inter-disciplinary visual and textual research of memory (see, for example, Hirsch 1997; Guyas 2007; Langford, 2001), it has become essential to understand the dynamics of images of self and identity, emotions and thinking associated with visualizing private and public spaces, social change and social policies, and to be able to interpret them skillfully. It is especially important for the teachers or instructors of sociological training programs to show the students the conventions, contexts and uses of the visual in professional practice. To do so, it is important to question the ideological base of such concepts, which are often taken for granted, to learn how to consider images as a means of perceiving the world, and as an important form of social knowledge. Involving students and people representing silent groups into the visual production and analysis has an empowering effect, not only because of the channeling of the trauma and suffering through creative practices but also because private and personal experiences are narrated, visualized and are politically significant (Iarskaia-Smirnova/Romanov, 2009).

The ways to construct and define social problems as well as approaches to solving them have varied in different periods of history. What are the differences between male and female labor? How have these distinctions been represented in certain sources and for what purposes? What is the mainstream image of disability in different periods and how can it be challenged? Photographs and episodes from the films, posters and cartoons depicting various images of people in the roles of parents and workers, carers and patients, can be used, as stated earlier, not just as illustrations or representations but also as important elements of a studied context – as important as official documents or personal narratives. Analysis of visual images of children in historical contexts help reveal social relations and socialization practices, labor, education, family life, which shape childhood in a certain space and at a certain time (Higonnet 1998; Kelly 2008; Leppert 2000; MacAustin/Thomson 2003). The phenomenological concern for the power of the image emphasizes its political implications (see Moxey 2008). Visual techniques can be used by the researchers and human rights activists to exert influence on international child policy and institutional reform (Cartwright 2004; Sliwinski 2006).

It is increasingly acknowledged that visual traces and records offer new routes to the past. The researchers using such documents separately from or alongside oral histories and written materials, can significantly enrich and substantiate their interpretations. Visual methods and tradi-

tional data (personal narratives, archival sources) can complement each other as different types of knowledge, which can be experienced and represented by the range of different textual, visual and other ways involving the physical senses (Pink 2001), activating memory work, as in the study by Anniina Guyas (2007), who analyzes a photograph focusing on recollections and family relationships. She provides a visual and verbal deconstruction of autobiographical memories that are acknowledged to inform and influence the author's current private and public roles, and self-perception.

There are various traditions of working with visual sources. For example, it is possible to make one's own photographs of the physical environment and use them alongside the old images of the same places while interviewing local inhabitants. An image embodied in a photograph not only reproduces the appearance of a person but makes it possible to imagine the epoch to which he or she belongs – details of everyday life, clothes, mood – the spirit of the age. This spirit of the age is shaped by the choice of photographer, how he or she directed the composition of a picture, what, and in which order, was selected for publication, for being placed into a family album or used in advertising, shot and edited in a film.

According to Marcus Banks (2001), we shall adopt a dual perspective on visual media, which includes two dimensions of analysis: the content and the context. On the one hand, visual data are concerned with the content of any visual representation: what is the “meaning” of this particular design motif on an art object? Who is the person in the photograph? On the other hand, they are concerned with the context of any visual representation: who produced the art object, and for whom? Why was this photograph taken of this particular person, and then kept by that particular person?

Visual methods provide a means of understanding the practices of representations as cultural texts, developing interpretations of meanings in socio-cultural context, decoding images of social relations and individual experience. Popular historical memory and understanding are shaped by visual depictions that cloud, at times distort, as well as clarify the past, and are essential to the creation of historical myths (Weinberg 1998). The single photographs, photo albums and other collections such as archives contain the elements of hidden curricula, as is shown in a study by Eric Margolis (1999), who examines representations of race, gender, and physical ability in photographs taken in American public school classes between the 1880s and the 1940s. The context of photo production, the use and mean-

ing of the photographs to the owners and spectators are as important as the images themselves. Robert Bogdan and Ann Marshall (1997) analyze pictorial representations and written messages from a collection of early 20th century postcards depicting institutions for people with mental disorders, discussing the asylum views within the context of postcards as a commercial enterprise and what they mean to the sender and receiver.

Photographs and films, as well as posters and drawings are illustrations and visual representations, as well as important elements of the studied historical context. “Pictures are valuable because they encode an enormous amount of information in a single representation. This information is framed contextually in space and time on a flat surface...” (Grady 2004, p. 20). Here we can also draw on the study of Soviet political posters by Victoria Bonnell (1998), who treats propaganda images as part of a visual discourse on power in Soviet Russia and shows how it changed between 1917 and 1953. Her account traces the way people “read” the propaganda art – relying on their habits of interpreting folk, religious, commercial, political and other visual languages under the regime’s effort to raise the “new Soviet men and women”.

Context and sample

After the Socialist Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks sought to replace the family with collective institutions. The theory was that “Soviet power would assume full responsibility for dependent children, raising them in social institutions designed to transform them into steadfast communists” (Bernstein 2001). Measures designed to destroy the “bourgeois” features of the old family in 1920s have led to a growing number of children affected by divorce. The weakening of family relationships led to many children becoming homeless and unsupervised (*beznadzornye*) juvenile delinquents (Madison 1968, p. 40). Furthermore, the First World War and the Civil War had left millions of children orphaned and homeless.

In 1917 and 18 the country with a population of 120 million had 7 million homeless children. After June 1918, all children’s institutions, including former state and monastery refuges became the responsibility of *Narkomsobes* [People’s Commissariat of social welfare]. The word *priyut* [refuge] was replaced by the concept “children’s home”, which were arranged in different ways for different types of children: children’s towns, settlements, colonies, school-communes, pioneer homes – all these names reflect early Soviet ideology. The homeless and abandoned children were considered as state children and the main form of care was associated with

the state-run orphanages, where mortality rates ranged from 25 to 50 percent. In the years of the Second World War, the number of children's homes increased a few times. In particular, while prior to the war in the Saratov region there were 31 children's homes with 3,700 children – by July of 1943 there were already 69 orphanages and the number of children had increased fourfold (Sinitzin 1969, p. 21 f.).

We have analyzed photo albums from two Saratov orphanages: *Krasnyi gorodok* [Red small-town] founded in 1924 and the children's home / kindergarten [*detdom-detsad*] for the "orphans of war" between 3 and 6 years old, founded in 1945. The children's home *Krasnyi gorodok* was located in the building of the former women's monastery on a picturesque Volga river embankment. The largest orphanage in Saratov region, it offered room for more than five hundred pupils in the 1920s and 30s and for about a thousand in the war years. One of the former residents of *Krasnyi gorodok*, Nina Voitsekhovskaia, with the help of other former pupils, collected and arranged photographs (mostly amateur) of this institution's history from the 1930s and 1940s and made an album of them in the 1980s for a commemorative event. She included the lists of pupils and staff; many photographs have inscriptions and titles. She has also written memoirs but did not manage to have them published. The other two albums were made by the staff of the children's home / kindergarten in the 1940s and 1950s. This institution still exists in Saratov but today it takes in children of all ages from the age of 3. These two albums have professional photographs and are decorated with colored appliqué work, titles and inscriptions; some of the photos are shaped in the form of an oval or circle. Although the camera is focused on the children, the main point of the photos is to draw attention to the advantages of the institution.

We have tried to look at the photo-images of orphanage life from different perspectives, applying different expositions and varying the focus of our view. Some photos we have considered from a semiotics perspective. According to Roland Barthes (1991), the photograph comprises two messages: "a *denoted* message, which is the *analagon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the way in which the society represents, to a certain extent, what it thinks of the *analagon*" (Barthes 1991, p. 6). Connotation, i.e., the imposition of a second meaning upon the photographic message proper, is elaborated at different levels of photographic production (selection, technical treatment, cropping, layout) (p. 9). The tasks of these procedures are to impose the meaning onto the photography *analagon* in accordance

with the repertoire of cultural codes, which are understandable and easily received by the viewers.

Some visual units that we have considered as texts to be interpreted in a historical context, are subjected to deconstruction to show the interconnectedness between the consumption and production in photography. Visual representations collected in our study are not only produced but are consumed in a social context, one which evokes a resemblance to representations provided by dominant media and/or by social actors who initiate the use and re-use of visual memories.

Furthermore, the first album helped to activate memory work with its owner, who was our key informant. For example, with the help of a photograph of a building (Figure 1) an informant recollected her sensations of the physical and social spheres of her childhood:

“See what it looked like – here is Pokrovskia street and here the second window on the second floor, well, no, the first window on the second floor, and a window on the other side – right here my bed stood. So, all this was demolished. And, you see the gate? Now only the gate is still there...” (from an interview with Nina Voitsehovskia).

Her written memoirs, oral narratives and the photos served her both as roads to recollection and as aids to their certification (Naguib 2008). Such cognitive mapping of the past shapes reminiscences, molding them into the fixed forms of the past.

We see an orphanage building (former monastery) and the square full of children dressed in white and some other people, possibly the staff. The photo certainly depicts some ceremony, most probably the preparation for the May 1st Labor Day demonstration. The building is presented as a part of the urban landscape (with a church in the background, which was quite rare for those times), and the picture demonstrates cohesion and collective loyalty at a politically important moment in time. “All was demolished, only these gate are still there” – this has become for us a metaphor for the memory work: a photo album is an open door, like the gate that was spared, and inside we see the carefully stored images and inscriptions that constitute a visual landscape of collective biography.

While studying images for information about society, it is important to try to question the role of the different social actors in the produc-

Figure 1: Children's home *Krasnyi gorodok*, 1930s



tion and pre-selection of visual representations. The fragments of individual memories are brought together and fixed by visual images. While telling a collective story based on the album of the children's home, an informant recollects a cultural mapping of the past, which is shaped after several decades after they left the orphanage. The related narration is important when it comes to reflecting upon this multi-stage process of selection of the materials in order to access and understand the logics of its participants.

Reading visual data as cultural texts helps in the discussion of such issues as social order, gender roles, social inequalities. Pictorial constructs of normality and social problems are characteristic of a certain historic period of time; various forms of visual evidence illuminate social issues of the past and contemporary society. Interpretations of visual texts highlight peculiarities of social relations and individual experience as well as offering new understanding of the visual within a culture and a society. Welfare policy was considered as a contextual background for the understanding of ideology and specific social practices of care and control, embedded into the images themselves as well as into their own histories of creation and

use. With respect to such contextual interpretation, we should recognize that the photograph is not simply a source of information, rather, it is part of an interaction between the photographers and spectators, between the different periods in history, between an interviewer and informant in the production of analysis and data (see Jenkins et al. 2008).

The routes of memory: connotation

The corridors of memory store different traces but a photo album provides us with a special cognitive map of the routes passed in childhood and revisited later when the collection was formed. The *selection of the snapshots* is very important in the understanding of the active role of the album's owner as a creator of memory for the others. In 1980s our key informant initiated a meeting of more than 200 "brothers and sisters of a big and friendly family" and provided all of them with such photo albums. The fragments of individual memoirs were bound together in one book and captured by visual images.

In the words of Roland Barthes (1991), the "photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, attached – more or less consciously by the public, which consumes it – to a traditional stock of signs; now, every sign supposes a code, and it is this code (of connotation) which we must try to establish" (p. 7). The childhood images in the albums include somewhat

Figure 2: Photo from *Krasnyi gorodok* album. "Even the little ones have been working. The work can be found for everyone..."



different set of codes. In the *Krasnyi gorodok* album there are signs of "hard childhood": the photo depicts the work in the institution's garden-plot (Figure 2).

In a post-war album from the other institution there are signs of "happy childhood": poses and smiles of the moonfaced well-cared-for youngsters, surrounded by caring adults (Figures 6 and 10). Connotations with social, cultural and political context are made during the shooting, treatment and use of photographs. Among the procedures which alter the reality, there are trick effects, poses, objects, while the procedures applied during the treatment of images include photogeny, aesthetism, and syntax (Barthes 1991, p. 9). A number of visual items viewed as texts are subjected to deconstruction in order to show the interrelation between consumption and production in the practice of photography. The pictures from the archive of the orphanages were professionally taken and arranged into the institutions' album for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution in 1947. The witnessing capacity of the images was

Figure 3: Morning festival devoted to the 30th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist revolution. Photo from the album of the children's home/kindergarten, 1946-47



inextricably tied to the ritual “work” as both elements in and artifacts of the ceremony (see Kendall 2006). They show children marching past the huge

Figures 4 and 5: Morning festivals devoted to the 29th and 30th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist revolution. Photo from the album of children's home/kindergarten (photos taken in 1946–47, re-used for the album dated 1957)



portrait of the “Father of Peoples” (Stalin) (Figure 3). Ten years later, after Stalin’s death and the official condemnation of the cult of Stalin’s personality and during the government of Khrushchov, these pictures were edited by the users (de Certeau 1984). Pictures from the same time (1946–1947) were edited in 1957 by sticking in the portrait of the new leader (Khrushchov), or an iconic leader suitable for any period of Soviet history (Lenin) and used in the second album to connote the loyalty to the regime and compatibility with the ideology of upbringing of that time (Figures 4 and 5).

This cropping procedure indicates not only obedience to the rules of political context but also the abilities of the users to manipulate by the dominant rules of representation.

This practice of amateur photomontage not only shows the conformity with the changing political context but also demonstrates the ability of the users to manipulate the dominant rules of representation. The photographers and the compilers of family albums “seem to be devoted to producing a special kind of truth about life, a particular biased view of human existence” (Chalfen 1998, p. 228). As is shown by Margarita Tupitsyn (1996), the development of photomontage was an important component of “mythographic”, as opposed to “factographic”, representations at the beginning of the Second Five-Year Plan. The striving for documentation had become more blatantly an exercise in manipulation in view of Stalin’s need to present the Soviet Union in a positive light at home and abroad. Instead of attempting to represent Soviet life through fragmented documentary sequences such as those Alexander Rodchenko had created, photographers were called upon to produce scenes of happy Soviet citizens at work and at leisure (Margolin 1997).

Social concern to legitimize the pedagogical project to create a new Soviet person in the institutions for collective upbringing was formed by the ideological work started in the 1920s, which called for the presentation of certain images of the pupils, tutors, procedures for care giving and upbringing on the pages of mass media and books, posters, in photo reportages, in films and documentaries. The imaginative poetic system of these texts is characterized by the poster-like convexity and visualization. By accumulating and analyzing different visual sources in their context, it is possible to highlight the peculiarities of social discourse on the issue of *besprisornost* [abandonment of children] and ways to combat it. The political regime appealed to the visual discourse of power in order to imprint into the people’s consciousness normative images of the great leaders of Communism, men and women – builders of socialism and their enemies,

Figures 6 and 7: The images represent social hygiene and collectivity as the elements of socialist upbringing – children are depicted as self-sufficient, disciplined, clean and happy. Photos from the album of the children's home/kindergarten, 1947



good men workers, and women collective farm workers, as well as progressive Soviet children who self-discipline themselves in matters of schooling, work and collective decision-making.

The photos from the albums reflect those principles which are the cornerstones of the concept of institutional upbringing. We see images of the “true” Soviet children that have been carefully planned and managed in detail by a professional photographer. The connotation procedures used here are *pose* and *object*. When a pose of a four-year old boy smartly making his bed becomes a signifier, “the spectator of the image receives *at the same* the perceptual message and the cultural message” (Barthes p. 26). In addition to a direct message on the self-discipline (see Foucault 1977) and tidiness of children, the absence of adults here indicates self-sufficiency and self-management of the orphans as a collective. White, i.e. clean towels and flat, i.e. neatly made beds are those objects of shooting that constitute the ideological syntax of the order of institutional upbringing: the principles of social hygiene and collectivity. The meanings of a concept of an “order” include not only frameworks for time and space, but also certain qualities to be developed in pupils. Just “to make a bed” would be insufficient; every morning it should be made according to the rules: “making beds, everything should be flat, plain surface, with sharp angles” (from the interview with Bukvar, a former pupil of *Krasnyi gorodok*). To keep things in order, in an appropriate condition, washing, ironing, and repairing them occupied a special time in the life schedule of pupils. This care of oneself introduced children to adult life; it introduced to them a system of recognized values of a wider society of that time.

The principle of *culturnost* [“cultureness”], i.e. correct socialization is explicitly present in the albums. In 1930s and 1940s, “cultureness” was both a means and a feature of positive socialization. The task of rapid industrialization had exacerbated the problem of manpower surplus which was associated with the growing participation of women and peasants. The unskilled, uneducated and undisciplined work force was used in industrial production, and subjected to the measures on eradication of illiteracy, interiorizing the norms of industrial subculture. A concept of *culturnost* in children’s home was implemented in various practices of integrating a child into the Soviet society. In the foundations of this process of acculturation there were hygienic practices, physical discipline, internalisation of the rules of conduct. This was achieved by the strong regulations of collective conduct, through the means of collective marches, sequences of rest, meal, work and study in a time-table. Musical instruments in children’s hands as

well as their poses send out a message about “cultureness” as a sign of correct socialization in 1930s (Figure 8), as well as the orderly kids pictured above (Figures 6 and 7).

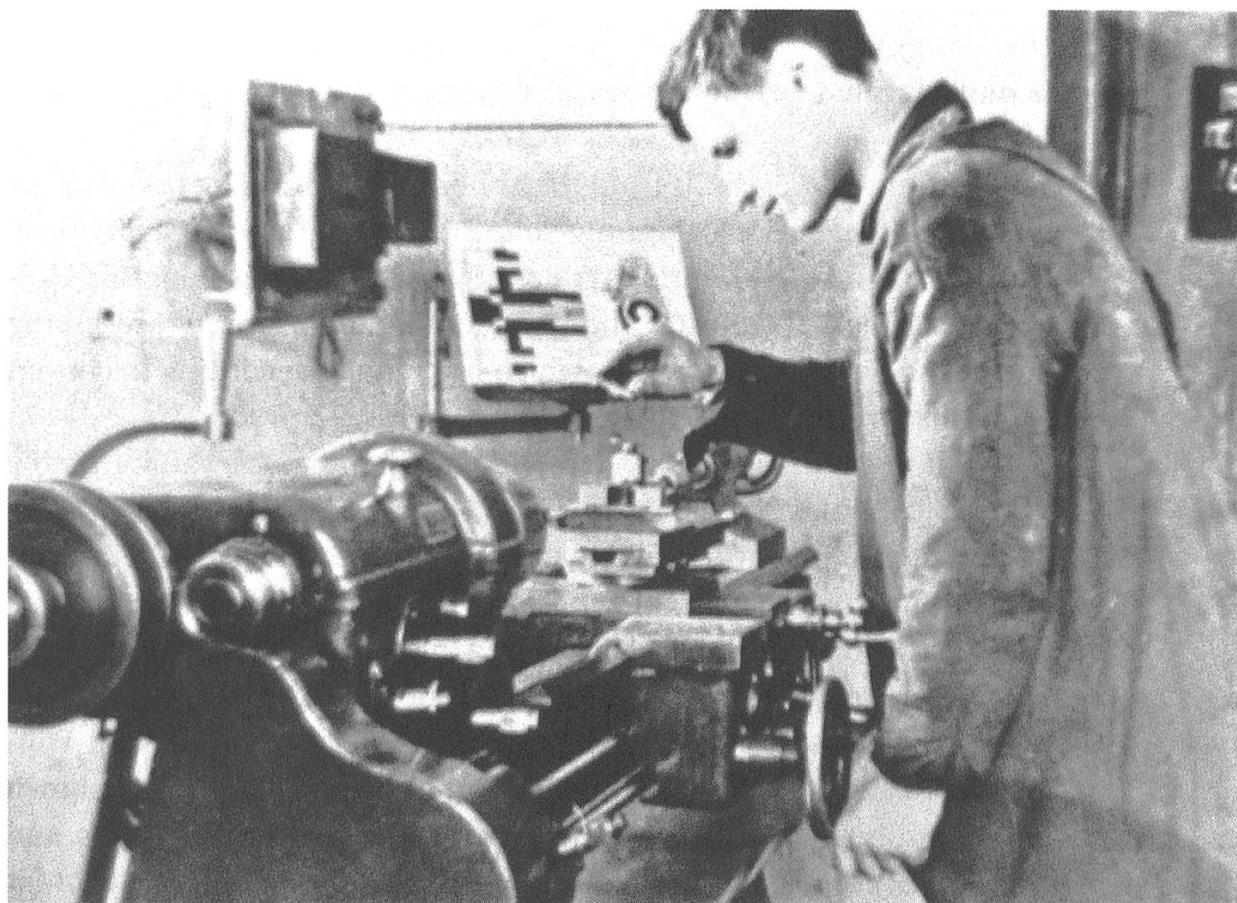
Figure 8: The boys' brass band as a symbol of “cultureness”, 1930s. Photo from the *Krasnyi gorodok* album



In the world of cultural codes of a children's home from the 1930s and 1940s, the photos of the working child contain a message clearly received by the spectator about the value of labor and the autonomy of the workers who are self-managed, skilled and well-organized (Figures 2 and 9). Labor participation is a dominant theme in all interviews with the ex-residents of the children's home *Krasny gorodok* as well as being a central type of image in the album. Talks about the importance of labor (mainly industrial, manual labor) and about its virtual sacrosanctity are commonplace for any person who grew up in 1930s. Such narratives are the natural product of the political system which declared dictatorship of the proletariat as the main doctrine and embellished labor with a special rhetoric. The self-subsistence economy was based on the children's work in maintaining order and cleanliness on the premises, on cultivating vegetables and fruit, as well as producing clothes. The children's involvement in productive activity was

legitimized not only on pedagogical grounds. It was of ultimate importance because of the lack of such necessities as food, money and staff. Some of the labor activities involved agricultural production of food. These duties lasted from early Spring through late Fall and were combined with an academic program; the importance of this contribution into the subsistence of about eight hundred children cannot be overestimated.

Figure 9: A boy working at the milling machine in the workshop, 1940s. Photo from *Krasnyi gorodok* album



Industrial labor was essentially regarded not only as a basic manufacturing necessity, but also as training for future professional skills. These were mainly gender specific: girls were trained in sewing and knitting, while the boys acquired skills in shoe-making, joinery and metalwork, though there are also memories of the former female pupils about their training and work in the shoe workshops, where their success seems to have been particularly pleasing to the foreman for industrial training.

A home or an institution? Modes of visual communication

Christopher Musello (1980) and Richard Chalfen (1987, 1998) have developed frameworks for the qualitative study of collections of snapshots in the context of family photography. Their aim was to examine what these photographs represent and how these images serve as representations of a particular form of the human condition, how the construction, organization and viewing of family photographs can be understood as a social activity (Chalfen 1998, p. 214). In this perspective, the snapshot as well as the events surrounding why and how it was taken and how it was used are called the “home mode” of visual /pictorial communication (Chalfen 1998, p. 215). This means that it is a symbolic form embedded in a communication process that essentially involves making (encoding), interpreting (decoding), and a multi-faceted use of pictures. Furthermore, it focuses on family life, mostly at home (ibid).

Several photographs from the children’s homes were taken in the context of the conventions of family-snapshot photography (see Figure 6). The staff took on the conventional roles of parents, posing alongside children at mealtimes (Figure 10), and thus holding the power of preserving collective and personal memories, which are shaped according to certain expectations and are fabricated by them (Hirsch 1997, p. 98).

But any similarity between an institution’s album and a family one is merely an illusion. In contrast to the home collections, an orphanage album does not bear testimony to the lives and times of several generations. It has the impersonal aspects of an institution’s achievements because such a collection is usually created for public display. This is especially true for the albums of the childrens’ home / kindergarten, where youngsters become the symbols of Soviet care. However, in Nina Voitsekhovskaia’s album, the staff and children of *Krasnyi gorodok* are shown as one big family – the album contains a lot of inscriptions with names, and Nina has a story to tell about each photograph. At the same time, the order of things represented in an album and narrative reflect principles of collectivity, “cultureness” and labor participation, in accordance with the concept of institutional upbringing. The political-ideological context, which dictates the selection of shots, defines the borders of individual freedom and the subjectivity of figures presented in societal rather than in individual contexts. In some sense, such reified images are the manifestation of a romanticized view of childhood, in the midst of war and deprivation (Hutnyk 2004).

Figure 10: Photo from the album of a children's orphanage in 1947. This is an image of the State providing youngsters with maternal care; the children are depicted as well-fed and happy.



These albums undoubtedly present the official version of an institutional and general political order. Photographs representing children's activities in an orphanage can be read as a message in a wider ideological and cultural context of the 1920s to the 1940s, echoing the professional media discourse on the principles and values of Soviet upbringing, which are presented in posters and other visual media. For example, the pedagogical concerns with bringing up children who can be self-sufficient but at the same time tied to the collective, as well as the concept of social hygiene, are presented in early Soviet posters (Figure 11), as is the concept of institutional child care equal to family care (Figure 12).

A concept of upbringing in the children's homes from the 1920s to the 1940s was effective in forming an important instrument of social control by creating a special sense and practice of collectivity. The collective has had an important effect on the various aspects of children's lives.

Figure 11: A Soviet poster of 1923 devoted to the sanitary-hygienic propaganda. The babies are depicted as a self-organised collectivity demanding – as a substitute for healthy parents – trained midwives, and cleanliness. This was a time of severe famine, epidemics, high rates of illiteracy.



The children's sense of the collective was formed not in games of recreation but at work, and a pupil was hardly ever left by him- or herself. According to the new family ideology developed in 1920s, the children's homes were to become a polygon of the new techniques of upbringing for the creation of politically relevant alternatives to the family. The negative side of a notion of collectivity and institutional safety was lack of individual space and intimacy, as well as freedom to think independently. Mental formation was promoted through the collective reading of approved literature, collective discussion of the books and films, collective conviction of the deviants. The development of loyalty towards the political order was performed by the creation and reproduction of the "proper" hierarchies, where the leading positions are occupied by the children who are most in tune with the aspirations of the tutors, i.e. the most "cultural", obedient, following officially designated rites and rules. The whole process of becoming involved

Figure 12: “Let us surround orphans with motherly tenderness and love.”
Soviet poster, 1946



in the established order of things was arranged by the adults and proceeded under their vigilant control, even when the children demonstrated certain elements of self-discipline. And although the children called the orphanage “our home”, they still experienced that homelessness which, in the words of Svetlana Boym, is not just a poetic metaphor. Analogous to the life situation in the densely populated communal apartment, “I” could be taken away as well as one’s home or even a room (Boym 1994, p. 93).

Conclusion

The Soviet form of institutionalised child care has successfully settled two main tasks – to supervise and to control what was carried out on the basis of the important concepts and symbolic instruments of Soviet civilization. Photographs taken by the professional reporters, as well as by the amateurs, local newsreels, drawings, posters and pictures provide us with the images of Stalin era and times of war developing the cultivation of self-restraint and self-discipline and commitment to the order. However, visual

representations collected in the study were not only produced but are consumed in a social context, one which evokes a resemblance to representations provided by dominant media and/or by social actors who initiate the use and re-use of visual memories. The photo albums were prepared for special occasions, e.g. anniversaries, and they provide information about everyday life and festivals of “public children”, images that work as symbols of the key values of socialist upbringing. The pictures from the orphanage albums represent principles of social hygiene, collectivity, “culture-ness”, and labor participation, which are the cornerstones of the concept of institutional upbringing. The political-ideological context influencing the selection of materials, defines the limits of individual freedoms and subjectivity of the figures, which are represented in photographs in social rather than individual dimensions. However, the narrator makes our journey through the album more personal by naming the persons and telling stories about them.

According to John Grady, visual data are “uniquely suited to inform us about our spatial temporal surround and how we respond to events” (Grady 2008) in several ways, for instance, of describing and accounting of levels of social order and organization of social processes. Working with such non-traditional primary sources in Russian child welfare as photo albums of institutions enables us to develop our powers of observation, to formulate questions and make interpretations in the social constructionist perspective of history. Visual analysis attempts a critical reappraisal of the theory and practice of institutional child care in Soviet Russia from the 1920s to the 1950s. It helps to not only illustrate institutional strategies of collectivist upbringing and individualization of discipline, the order of things in the children’s home as well as the economy of the orphanage but also to reflect upon various factors including the reason why the photo was taken and how it was framed, where it was presented, which information was accompanying it. In this way we can change the focus of our study and receive new data.

The photos not only help activate the narrative work of the informant, but also help to select carefully and classify in the memories such topics and images which were already subjected to censorship by the photographer and compiler of the album. This is micro-level analysis, which makes it possible to understand how the representations reflect and construct specific forms of arrangement of orphanage space, disciplinary practices, ideological intentions of the authors of photographs and organizers of such imaginative work. At the same time, they embody conflict between general

goals of upbringing of the new Soviet individual and the private tasks of the workers in such institutions who were coping with shortages, burdens of warfare, as well as conflicting pedagogical theories and practices.

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Illustration credits

Figure 1: Children's home "Krasnyi gorodok", between 1930 and 1940, privately owned.

Figure 2: Photo from "Krasnyi gorodok" album, privately owned.

Figure 3: Photo from the album of Children's home/kindergarten, 1946–1947, privately owned.

Figures 4 and 5: Photos from the album of Children's home/kindergarten (photos taken in 1946–1947, re-used for the album dated by 1957), privately owned.

Figures 6 and 7: Photos from the album of Children's home/kindergarten, 1947, privately owned.

Figure 8: Photo from the Krasnyi gorodok album, between 1930 and 1940, privately owned.

Figure 9: Photo from Krasnyi gorodok album, between 1940 and 1950, privately owned

Figure 10: Photo from the album of children's orphanage of 1947, privately owned.

Figure 11: A. Komarov 1923, internet-archive.

Figure 12: N. Zhukov 1946, internet- archive.