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- 1 Craig Campbell's book is an erudite contribution to the debate on "troubled (and troubling) relationship between photography and historiography" (pp. XIII-XIV). Based on the archival material of the Tungus Cultural Base (p. XIX), now Tura, Evenkiia, Russia, the author demonstrates that the historiography of early Sovietisation is fragmentary, loose and contingent and that multifaceted readings of history, or rather histories, are necessary.
- 2 The book is divided into two, quite uneven, parts: in the first and longer chapter, "The Years Are Like Centuries" (pp. 9-152), Campbell focuses on cultural critique: through the prism of the Bolshevik *mission civilisatrice* among indigenous peoples in Central Siberia in the 1920s and 1930s, he traces the early stages of the Soviet cultural transformation, including campaigns on health and education, political propaganda (*agitprop*), and social reorganisation. Here he points out the discrepancies between the official history and many parallel histories that have already been well described by Yuri Slezkine (Slezkine 1994). Campbell uses Walter Benjamin's (Benjamin 1999, p. 498) term "constellation of awakening" and Michael Taussig's (Taussig 1992, p. 3) metaphor of "nervousness" (p. 12-13) to describe both an unsettling state of the dominant history and a practice of unsettling directed towards it, when the closed, approved historical

spaces built by the conventional historiography are open and the authority is unmasked (p.11-13). In the depiction of the cultural base – a metonym for the Bolshevik *mission civilisatrice* among indigenous peoples of Central Siberia – Campbell traces incoherent spots in the historical accounts without, however, letting the ethnography of the private stories emerge. His approach to the archival material on *kul'tbaza* fails to offer the anthropological underpinnings of the Sovietisation that we find in Donahoe & Habeck (Donahoe & Habeck 2011), which portrays a successor of the *kul'tbaza*, the House of Culture.

- 3 In the second part, “Dangerous Communications” (pp. 153-210), the contingencies in the historiography of the early Sovietisation in Evenkiia, are expressed through the relationship between photographs and archives; here the author follows up the two main analytical frames that dominate the debate (Morton & Edwards 2009, p. 3) – Foucauldian (archives as technology of rule and production of knowledge; images as a reflection of the gaze and objectification) and Barthes-inspired (linguistically-framed semiotics that recognise contingency of meaning) – and treats photographs as archives in their own right (p. 168). In the experimental engagement with the visual, perhaps counterintuitively, the author brings to the fore Sergei Eisenstein’s theoretical legacy.
- 4 In its scope and intent, the book resembles Eisenstein’s idea of a *spherical book* (Eisenstein 1929), which was, alas, never realised. Designed in a spatial form and made of glass, it was supposed to encourage the reader-spectator synchronically to perceive diverse concepts, assemble them, and unravel surprising associations among them. Looking through the glass, the reader could potentially recognise the unifying idea that stood behind these concepts – montage, while using the montage itself as a tool for learning about it. Similarly, Campbell takes the idea of agitation, understood in the Soviet regime as an active process of cultural reconstruction, and in the form of a “montage of photographic images accompanied by histories, observations, and critiques” (p. xi) makes it a provocative cultural critique turned against the regime’s official history. Such reading against the grain, the author suggests, allows new interpretative spaces to emerge. Campbell, himself an agitator, calls for a new approach to writing about the past, in which rights over knowledge are contested. As the author suggests, in the archival context, such an irritation of the established system is possible by means of photographs.
- 5 Although the book unquestionably contributes to Siberian studies by virtue of the fact that it details early phases of Soviet modernity in Central Siberia, the truly stimulating contribution is Campbell’s attempt to revise the histories on cultural transformations in Siberia through some novel encounters with the textual and photographic fragments. Such an invitation is tempting, considering the burden of certain dichotomies still present in the ethnographies of Siberia, such as a centre/periphery, traditional/modern, and dominant discourse *versus* indigenous knowledge. This is the reason why I would like to focus on the ways Campbell works with the visual material and attaches it, or sometimes loosely juxtaposes it, to his text.
- 6 Despite the promise of the book’s title, the author remains reluctant to approach photographs as an object of study. Even the photo collections themselves have a long wait before they receive any attention (starting on p. 163). When they do finally have their turn, Campbell only skims the surface: he holds onto broad positions over socialist photography, propaganda and socialist realism, paying insufficient attention to the photographs selected for his work. The reason is that for Campbell, photographs

are *agents provocateurs* (p. XIV) – an analytical tool, not an object of study: with their *multi-valency* (Morton & Edwards 2009, p. 9), not only do they undermine the archival logic and the narratives dictated by the State, they also disrupt “everyday consensus” (p. XVI). Although Campbell points out that the photographs can have multiple meanings in different cultural contexts, he only sketches the issue of photographic colonial and Soviet encounters (colonial context pp. 181-190, circulation of the images pp. 201-210). Campbell claims that in the studied collections, indigenous peoples are always on one end of the photographic process, i.e. as photographed objects (but so are many ethnically diverse agents of Sovietisation – teachers, doctors, nurses, veterinarians etc.). Yet the life of photography only begins there; how exactly do the subjects of the photographs participate, if at all, in the social use of the photographs?

- 7 In his field research, Campbell has engaged with over 4 000 images from five archives. Ethnography of the archive is for Campbell a way to explore disciplining practices and relational complexity of artefacts, order, access, and imaginaries (p. 163-173) as well as “the sensuous materiality of photographic documents” (p. 5). He suggests that in the digital era, access to digital copies (that ironically he himself enabled through the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme) channels the researchers away from interaction with the original archival documents. Archival work is not just about seeing but, needless to say, about other senses as well. Campbell reverses John Berger’s statement that “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe in” (Berger 1972, p. 8) by maintaining that images affect the ways we remember, learn and know about the past. The direct contact with the images, ordered, classified, stored but also degraded, manipulated, and damaged, enables Campbell to recognise the indeterminacy and sensuousness of empirical reality, and, moreover, to activate interpretative fields that are typically unacknowledged in conventional scholarly practice. He arrives at much the same conclusions as David MacDougall (MacDougall 1998, p. 82) who calls this domain of exploration “affection knowledge”, as well as Edward Sapir, who urges us to explore “intimate structures of culture” (Sapir 1934).
- 8 This stance would assume a different positioning of the researcher towards the data; instead of making theoretical generalisations that cannot be applied back to concrete individuals, we are to look *through* the data. Campbell does this differently in each of the two parts, with varying degrees of success. In the first part, he makes theoretical generalisations about Sovietisation (“socialist colonialism”, p. 161), omitting complex ethnography of Soviet everyday life in the remote regions, but mingling these generalisations with very intimate photographic portraits and everyday details. In the role tailored by the author, the reader-spectator is to look *through* the images and then trace them as if through a stencil onto the text in order to unravel any discrepancies, unexpected connections, or ruptures between one image and another, and between the images and the words. In the second chapter, he briefly looks *through* the data of archival sensuous experience, only to make us look *at* the collected expeditionary images, captioned by the author; these images act as categories but can still freely extend the text. The reader’s understanding *through* images (not *about* images) is for Campbell a satisfactory basis for the argument that archival reality is not only represented by, but also produced by the photographs.
- 9 Campbell assumes that photographs can as much illustrate the dominant history as “refuse to participate in the production” of it (p. 208). If the closed system is intervened

by the critique, the openings emerge; through them the unmasking of the authority can occur. Campbell suggests that major agitation of the existing system can be done through “visual openings” (p. 226), such as maps and photographs (p. 11), especially the close-ups (p. 13). Let us look at such photographic encounters: In the first part, the author invites us to observe over 200 fragments of the photographs. These are square-shaped images extracted from the original documents, but neither the technicalities of this process, nor the original sources (they are indexed only on his website that, in turn, is not identified either) are disclosed. Enlargement of some fragments of the photos (especially of the scripture, “defects”, or blurred object) follows the logic of non-mimetic (non-cartesian) vision (Yampolski 2001). In my view, the observer ceases to be distanced from the depicted object; s/he is thrown from the distanced position onto the surface of things, and then dissolved into them.

- 10 This is also the case when the encounter involves portraits of Other; the only drawback is that the author, perhaps reluctant to any categorisation, assumes the generic “indigenous peoples” without ever giving any further identification of the portrayed persons. Instead of letting the archival images illustrate a conventional text on Sovietisation in Evenkiia, Campbell accurately uses them to reveal discrepancies in the official history and thus to contest the rights of the dominant majority over such knowledge. Let me demonstrate some aspects of this innovative approach.
- 11 At a first glance, the enlarged photographic fragments seem to serve as David Griffith’s close-ups; as if they were “to show or to present” (Eisenstein [1944/1949] 1977, p. 238), and thus create an illusion of reality (the quantitative principle of connecting the images). The actual use of the images, however, suggests some of Sergei Eisenstein’s approaches to montage. In Russian, the close-up is called *krupnyi plan* (literally big, powerful plan). According to Eisenstein, it is not a regular close-up, enlargement or the viewpoint that makes the image “large”; it is a qualitative leap of “the whole from a juxtaposition of the separate parts” (*ibid.*, p. 238). It represents the value of what is seen, not the viewpoint. Finally, Eisenstein insists that instead of *showing*, the close-up *signifies* (*ibid.*, p. 238).
- 12 Campbell’s placement of the photographs clearly enables such a juxtaposition. One or two such images occupy the top right of each page; in the open book, this creates a space of communication between all three images and the text. Campbell refuses to interpret them on the grounds that archival photographs “mock interpretation” (p. 208). However, what he creates is a space, in which the reader-spectator may cruise freely back and forth; this induces endless “irresolvable processions of signification” (p. 208) that frustrated Campbell in the archive in the first place. His use of photo-fragments to “deprive the history of ideological coordinates” (p. 15) and to “show up the system’s ‘nerves’” (p. 13) might work when the observer focuses on a single image; in a group of images, the desired indeterminacy is replaced by intensive meaning-making. In fact, he gives away all the tools for observation, in which mundane looking turns to a process similar to Eisenstein’s intellectual montage: the meanings of two neighbouring images strike against each other and create a third entity, neither a metaphor, nor a new emergent meaning but an entirely new category that has nothing in common with the depictions of the two images. For example, an image of the wintry taiga and a hunter with a catch may result in a sound of a closing trap. The visual field is perceived by the spectator as a whole entity without necessarily ascribing to individual elements certain qualities to be intellectually processed and put together as

a new synthesised continuum. This is even more vivid in the web presentation that accompanies the book. The author produces a web module that he calls “web archival degenerator” and takes it as “an experiment in surrealist archival science” (http://metafactory.ca/agitimage/3-3_degenate-archives.html, accessed on 2nd March 2017); but he does not explain how exactly it is surrealist. Is the reason randomisation, or a collage of unexpected appearances, or something else altogether? The reader can only guess.

- 13 The ultimate strength of the book, and one that can certainly inform current ethnographic work in Siberia, is to be found in its self-reflexive engagement with the material. The author, the agitator, lets the visual agitate against him. The same photographs that have informed his historiographic work upset the coherence of his own historical narrative. He must know his limits by now. Readers may find themselves disengaged by the experimental mode of the book before they can be immersed in indeterminacy. How much more revealing the quest would be, however, if the photographic indexicality that points towards everyday life were saturated by in-depth ethnographies, in which the natives, not as generic categories but as concrete individuals, received a central position? Such a stance would be an even more valuable contribution to research on Siberia and its peoples.

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