

Neben der Ausblendung alles offen Kritischen im motivischen Bereich und verharmlosenden Bildunterschriften und Begleittexten,<sup>64</sup> hinter denen das sozialkritische Potential einiger Bilder unbemerkt bleiben konnte, ist die Antwort in erster Linie wohl in der Ästhetik der Fotografien und der mit ihr verbundenen ideellen Orientierung zu suchen: Trotz des national-nostalgischen Subtextes der Motive waren die Aufnahmen der „Litauischen fotografischen Schule“ unter dem stilistischen Nenner der humanistischen Reportagefotografie kompatibel mit den Anforderungen des Systems, da diese Fotografien eine grundsätzlich positive und versöhnliche Bildaussage förderten. Letztendlich mögen sie mit ihrer Ästhetik mehr systemstabilisierend als herausfordernd gewirkt haben.

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SUMMARY

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*Between Selling Socialism and Homeland  
Nostalgia: Photographic Books about the  
Lithuanian Coast (1960s and 1970s)*

In the 1960s, when Soviet tourism became a mass phenomenon, the Lithuanian coast was one of its primary destinations. The peninsula of the Curonian Spit, praised throughout the USSR for its unique scenic beauty, and the region of Klaipėda had one major fault: they had previously belonged to Germany.

With the help of photographic books that were published in the Lithuanian SSR from the middle of the 1950s to the 1970s, this article discusses the visual strategies applied in order to adapt this historically contested territory to the representational requirements of the socialist present.

After the incorporation of the region into Soviet-Lithuania, attempts were made to distinguish its visual representation from the earlier 'bourgeois' one. Drawing on the repertoire of socialist iconography, images of work and construction replaced the subjects present in the older homeland photography (*Heimatfotografie*).

Since the 1960s a more liberal political climate enabled a partial appropriation of the past with subjects predominantly depicting historical architecture and elderly people, namely Curonians. Another change was the extension of imaginary to images of leisure and family life in the style of humanist photojournalism, and to pictures presenting an urban lifestyle close to Western advertising photography.

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<sup>64</sup> JURĖNAITĖ, Reclaiming the Salt of the Earth (wie Anm. 61), S. 248.

Aimed at the Soviet public, such pictures of socialist prosperity served as the visual promise of better future living standards. Additionally, in the context of the cultural Cold War, they demonstrated the achievements of socialism to audiences outside the communist block. Nostalgic representations of the old town of Klaipėda as well as portraits of aged Curonian fishermen and peasant women were paralleled in the late 1960s by the fresh interest in ethnography and heritage conservation in Lithuania. Against this background these images seemed to capture the traditional way of life of the declining culture of rural Lithuania, allegedly attacked by collectivisation, melioration and urbanisation processes that were typical of the Soviet system. The enshrinement of village life since the late nineteenth century as a mythic cradle of Lithuanian nationhood invested the photographs with a patriotic overtone. In this respect they served as a counter image to the Soviet iconography of industrial progress and the New Man.

The interest in a national past expressed in melancholic images was in no way exclusive but rather typical for contemporary Soviet cultural life. Since the end of the 1960s, interest in pre-communist history in painting, literature and film grew. Susan Reid described the phenomenon of a stylistic and thematic engagement with the past as 'retrospectivism'. She explains the nostalgic look back as the expression of a loss of faith in the radiant communist future and in political liberalisations that effectuated a corresponding need for moral orientation.

Against this background, the photographs of the 'Lithuanian School' seem to be a component of this union-wide proceeding reflexion of universal human and cultural values. Thus they rejected the modernist promise of technical progress with its ecological, social, and moral costs that in the course of the 1970s would become more and more evident.