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SUBJECTIVE AND PERSONAL, THE DIARISTIC APPROACH IN PHOTOGRAPHY

BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Abstract

The artists dealing with diaristic approach are as varied as their works. What connects them can be described as a highly personal strife for authenticity. In this relation, documentary photography has been under revision and scrutiny since the 1970s by the well-known standpoint of photographer/subject relationship. In this thesis I diverge from this ethical debate of representation and find new ways to analyse contemporary photography and to interpret it in more complex, nuanced and fulfilling ways. Within this context, Lucy Soutter's writings on the notion of authenticity in "*Why Art Photography?*" explains how contemporary photography can be relatable in a way that engages the viewer in an emphatic and intimate dialogue. Without completely avoiding or taking on the critique of authenticity, Soutter's notion is generating space for new ways to create art and interpret contemporary photography in the face of criticism, where contemporary photography has largely retreated from debates. I will prove the capability of photography to have an important place in contemporary art to investigate, explore and address the essential questions of the present day world. In this thesis, I will define the strengths and weaknesses of Soutter's notion with examples by the artists Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov, who are working with the diaristic approach in photography. By the subjective ways through their own personal experience, gender identities and politically oppressive backgrounds these artists approach the depictions and presence of body in order to affect intimacy, recognition and identification.

Abstraktní

Umělci s deníkovým přístupem k tvorbě jsou různí a různá je i jejich tvorba. To, co je spojuje, je výsostně osobní zápas o autenticitu. Od sedmdesátých let byla dokumentární fotografie zkoumána a kritizována skrze vztah mezi fotografem a fotografovaným. Ve své práci se odkláním od této etické debaty týkající se reprezentace a hledám nové cesty, jak analyzovat současnou fotografii a interpretovat ji komplexnějším a nuancovanějším způsobem. Opírám se přitom o texty Lucy Soutter o autenticitě. Soutter se soustředí na způsob, jakým se současná fotografie vztahuje k divákovi skrze empatický a intimní dialog. Nevyhýbá se kritice autenticity ale zároveň její myšlení otevírá prostor novým cestám umělecké tvorby a její interpretace. Současná fotografové i jejich díla čelí kritice, že se vyhýbají debatám o autenticitě a sociální relevanci, která s tím souvisí, já ale poukážu na jejich schopnost zaujmout klíčové místo v současném umění, zkoumat a zabývat se zásadními otázkami současného světa. Slabiny i silná místa teorie Soutter se vyjeví, konfrontujeme-li ji s příklady z tvorby Nan Goldin a Borise Mikhailova, jejichž přístup k fotografii je deníkový. Ve své, velice osobní tvorbě tito umělci uplatňují svou vlastní zkušenost vyplývající z jejich genderové identity a života pod politickým tlakem a soustředí se na zobrazení a přítomnost těla s cílem afektivně zprostředkovat intimitu, rozpoznání a identifikaci.

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1. Introduction

“What matters to me is [...] the certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with a superadded light [...] Hence the Winter Garden Photograph, however pale, is for me the treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, on that day.” (Barthes 1980)

In this thesis I will be dissecting the varied approaches and works of artists dealing with the diaristic approach in contemporary photography. I will especially touch upon how they are exploring and conveying intimacy, recognition and identification through depictions and presence of the body. The diaristic mode can be seen as an alternative to the more theoretical and textual based approaches in contemporary photography, yet it can be hard to define its boundaries. It is better described as a highly personal strife for authenticity with means to affect. It is an approach, rather than a genre and can be seen as a performative one.

Authenticity is in the core of these artistic practices regarding the diaristic mode and the related works are best analysed and viewed within this framework. I will explain the notion of authenticity as causing affect of intimacy and recognition in the context of contemporary photography by the means of writings by Lucy Soutter in her book: *“Why Art Photography?”*. In addition I will address the strengths and weaknesses of the notion of authenticity explained by her.

The artists dealing diaristic mode share a lot of fundamental similarities. They are trying to powerfully explore, examine and investigate the present day questions through an intimate exchange. I am going to concentrate on two relevant artists, Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov; how they have used authenticity, intimacy, and empathy as basis for their work. By analysing their approaches as artists, I’m comparing and establishing a connection between them; how they have used the depiction of human body including their own in their diverse work. The mentioned artists work by using their individual background of personal experience, gender perspectives and politically oppressive environments, still having a similar desire to break the surface tension of intimacy and to convey it into a shared relatable experience.

Typically these artists have been criticized for not always seeing the ethical context of representation, which they are creating the images in. However in this thesis I'm going to diverge from the familiar debate of the photographer/subject relationship. This well-known binary critique between insider/outsider stance was increasingly placed upon especially documentary photography from the 1970's onwards.

The aim of this thesis is to present a more nuanced view additionally to the familiar ethical discourse in contemporary photography by way of examining the approaches and works of artists that are working with the diaristic mode in photography. This helps to further analyse the works of the artists within the context of contemporary photography. I'm basing my analysis on aesthetics, indexicality of the photographic medium and on Soutter's writings on the notion of authenticity as causing affect, which is firmly tied to contemporary photography. Furthermore I am clarifying this connection with the case studies of Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov. I claim the above mentioned ways to read images adds to the means of interpretation and can make possible to understand contemporary photography in more complex, nuanced and fulfilling way.

2. Theory

“A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.” (Barthes 1980)

In this thesis I will be exploring how the medium of photography affects by intimacy and the way it is related to reality through depictions of the body. Firstly, I will look into indexicality that is in the core of the photographic medium and its physical relationship to reality. Then I will explore Soutter’s notion of authenticity, which I will discuss as means to examine the works and practices of the two related artists. Finally I will dwell deeper to the Soutter’s notion of authenticity as causing affect by the case studies of Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov.

2.1 Indexicality

Photography was born for the reason of science and discovery as much as for the fascination of exploring what reality is. From this contradiction an uneasy unity of reality and imagination was formed. Since its beginnings, photography has been faced by the limitless disagreements over the mediums truth-value, validity and origins as well as its ingrained emphatic connection and voyeuristic tendencies. John Tagg explains the historical contradiction:

“[...] characterized by a double momentum: an ever more intimate and exacting attention to bodies, dividing them, apportioning them, observing them, supervising them and, in the same movement, exerting a control over them; and a diverse constitution of space as itself a realm of phantasy and control, submission and consent, a space of the Imaginary and the Ideological [...] Two kinds of longing. Two kinds of subjection. (The gaze has both passion and perspective.)” (Tagg 1988)

There are many theoretical and philosophical notions of how the medium of photography relates to reality. The relationship has never been a simple one, but what all of the theories have in common is the troubled and complex nature of this relationship. The philosopher and scientist, Charles Peirce coined the term indexicality: the photographic medium's relation to physical reality through a chemical process. Furthermore in his seminal book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes added to the notion of indexicality by connecting it to intimacy and the depiction of the body through the example of his late mother. Indexicality is central to the photographic medium and is fundamental for understanding it. It has had a connection to the intimate portraiture and has a long history dating back to the photographer Nadar. He has famously and movingly described this concept by the intimate relationship of the photographer and the subject by his own practice and work, which is still relevant in contemporary photography today. (Dean 2015, 178)

2.2 Authenticity

In this thesis I am going to discuss the notion of authenticity as causing affect of intimacy, recognition and identification in context of contemporary photography basing it on the writings of Lucy Soutter. Authenticity has continuously been disputed regarding to the history and theory of photography, whether it has been about the truth-value, validity or origins of the medium. The mentioned kind of authenticity has been taken head on by semiotics that explains how images function convincingly with signifying and indicating elements, within certain contexts. The post-structuralist theory reveals the power relations within the photograph, questioning whose truth or ideology is in question. Additionally digital turn has been claimed as non-indexical. Taking all these conditions into account, the sense of constructedness or fabrication makes it hard to see photographs as sincere. With these mentioned characteristics a notion of authenticity seems mainly lost or like a naïve humanist dream. (Soutter 2013, 70)

Authenticity is a broad and complex term, with many superimposed meanings, but in this thesis I claim that in the way Soutter has compiled her rendition, it is relevant for interpreting contemporary photography. This notion is according to Soutter is based on interdisciplinary contribution from contemporary literary theory, performance studies and philosophy along with feminism, psychoanalysis and queer theory. I am going to address the strengths and

weaknesses of Soutter's description. Her notion of authenticity is not about previously mentioned truth-value, validity or origins of photography, but rather, it is a counter force to post modernist irony and scepticism. (75) While these following key aspects of Soutter's notion can feel ambiguous and to fit almost all kinds of photography, they still offer a framework to analyse contemporary photography with connection to the diaristic approach. Therefore, I will examine the key aspects further by analysing the works within the case studies of Goldin and Mikhailov.

Initially, I will explain the main points compiling Soutter's notion of authenticity. The kind of authenticity here under examination is more defined as performed, enacted and negotiated subjectivity. It is intricately linked to the diaristic mode. (Soutter 2013,75) First, what these artists and their works have in common is the approach that includes the personal and subjective stance in the first person, along with their intimates. A performative element in the images emphasise "the self" of the artists'. They as embodied subjects within the images guide the viewer to read the pictures through their presence. Green and Lowry explain:

"These two forms of indexicality, the one existing as a physical trace of an event, the other as performative gesture that points towards it, both invoke a relationship to the real that seems specific to the photographic image". (Green and Lowry 2003)

This statement by Green and Lowry takes us to the core of performativity. They let us see an image not only through a text but they place an act of performance in it. The two-way indexicality holds within it a performative element. It is also underlines the body. This kind of authenticity can be seen as an alternative to contemporary photography that is heavily based on interpretations of text, emitting from post modernism. (Soutter 2013, 70) The main claim is that Green and Lowry compare the photography in the diaristic mode to an act of a speech casually announcing themselves inside the world of their own produced work and by this guiding the viewer to recognize them. A photograph is not only sitting there showing, it is a little more active, it is mutely pointing. This pointing is a performative act or a gesture that highlights the body. (74) Second, the works of both artists refer to the body with a strong emphasis, nearing on trauma, following Barthes' notion of *punctum*, which may touch the viewer's sense of self. It can be seen as a side step from seeing the photographs through mainly representation or a tool for analysing contemporary photography. (I will explain the Hal Foster's theory more clearly in the next chapter by analysing the works Goldin and

Mikhailov.) (73) Third, the common similarities in the notion of Soutter's authenticity and between the two mentioned artists can also be defined as permanent decisiveness to explore the definition of the self and into the self. With the artists aspired affect being sincerity. This can be seen well in Nan Goldin's work and her whole persona as she has devoted herself inside and outside of the autobiographical photographs to uphold her artistic work, including presentations, slide shows and public speeches. Fourth aspect of Soutter's description can be seen through the photographer as a narrator. The embodied recognition that the viewer experience is when the narrative elements incite the viewer to project themselves in the picture. Also additionally identifying themselves within it. (72) Sally Mann's *immediate family* series is a good example of the creator as a narrator taking on different roles. Mann depicted her daughters in scruffy and even sensual way, looking neglected with bruises and dirt, playing with the roles of the photographer as a narrator. At first glance it would be easy to see her as just a bad mother. If the work is only seen from the standpoint of the photographer/subject relationship the interpretation of the work will stay on a surface level. When it is seen through a performative and enacted way we can see more nuances in the interpretation. (75) Here it is possible to draw a parallel to Mikhailov's performative and enacted work, mainly to *Case History*, which I will later examine in depth. Soutter encourages the viewer to see this work beyond only the question of agency. All of these mentioned key aspects try to open the debate and move photography away from postmodern critiques of representation, still none of them wanting to describe the conversation as any kind of move backwards to modernism. (74)

The difficulty with the definition Soutter's kind of authenticity is that it can be very elusive. With ever intrusive presence of social media the project of striving for authenticity can easily slip into self-indulgent promotion. It is important to acknowledge that Soutter's notion of authenticity has its down sides and requires constant vigilance from the artist's themselves. In regard to artistic practices, authenticity should be considered more as a process, than a state of being. It is a pursuit of self-knowledge without pretence and posturing. It is about how photography can affect the viewer through intimacy, recognition and identification. With her definition Soutter poses authenticity also as a possible antidote to the inauthenticity of the consumer culture. (89)

2.3 Aesthetics

In post modern culture images can be seen as paradoxes. They can be viewed simultaneously as clichés and as expression of unadulterated feeling, but what causes our relatability to a photograph is the familiarity of the aesthetics of it. (Soutter 2013, 71) In the core of the phenomena are the vernacular photographs of the amateur, which are frequently applied with the label of snapshot aesthetics in contemporary photography. The amateur aesthetics go all the way back in history to the times Eastman Kodak and the famous slogan: "You press the button we do the rest". The ever-present contingency that is ingrained to the amateur photography contains the aesthetics that makes it something familiar and foreign but intimate, that resonates inside of the viewer. The characteristic of the image's ordinariness is in the essence of the everyday aesthetic, that is what makes it affect. (Kotz 1998, 207) This visual code is located in family albums, found photographs, diaries and scrapbooks. Another way to discuss about the diaristic or the confessional mode in aesthetics is the self. It creates a backdrop where the viewer can project themselves onto a body of work and identify with it. The immediacy is heightened by the style: images can be grainy, unfocused and off-colour. Immediacy makes the viewer feel like they are participant within the image. The aesthetics start to trigger a flood of memories, with a flash of recognition. (204) In addition to the two artists and their work that I'm examining in this thesis, there is a very loose group that can be connected to this kind of aesthetics of immediacy. Some of these artists are: Larry Clark, Wolfgang Tillmans, Daido Moriyama, Anders Petersen, Richard Billingham, Nobuyoshi Araki and Corinne Day. What they nevertheless have in common is some kind of a connection to work with photographs as notes in a memo or a diary. They form part of the freely registered list of artists working with the diaristic approach. The works float loosely over the self and take forms such as self-portraiture, portraits, still lifes, interiors and landscapes. Critics view the images some times self-centred, romantic or self-delusional. (Soutter 2013, 71)

Commercialism and the fashion industry have appropriated the snap shot aesthetic of the likes of Nan Goldin. In the 90's it was dubbed the "heroin chic", which was sold onwards under the pretence of being something authentic. Today it is social media that makes the connection between photography and authenticity even more problematic. Some critics claim that subjectivity is automatically connected to the view that what neo-liberalism has sold to us, is

in the form of individualism. Self-expression and commercialism mix together increasingly blurring the lines of the authentic. These kinds of commercial images could not be further away from any kind of notion of authentic. (Soutter 2013, 83) Vernacular photography's tendency to refer to reality with contingency makes it more familiar to our perception of intimate aesthetics. The ubiquitous, but at the same time very personal aesthetic, which for every one of us is familiar, is the root of affecting us with feelings of Intimacy. It is blurring the boundaries between the familiar and the unknown. Together with aesthetics of immediacy they create something very affecting.

3. Case Studies

In the following chapter I will discuss and establish a connection between the backgrounds of artist's are using the mode of diaristic photography. Along with their depictions and presence of the body to explore and share intimacy. When encountering the following artist's work I claim it is important to deviate from the binary debate of photographer and subject, as it is possible to read the works in more complex way and diverge from the ethical standpoint in contemporary photography. As embodied subjects within their work, Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov explore intimacy, recognition and a sense of community with the background of their personal experience, gender identities and politically oppressive environments.

3.1 Nan Goldin

Through her photographs, Nan Goldin lets us glance into her world of forgiving, emphatic, obsessive, and intensive affection. Her work is a personal confession of a colossal kind. She has an established position as a photographer in the canon of artists working with a diaristic mode. Her work is known foremost from her approach, which can be described as fully encompassed and integrated into her own life. Goldin had begun taking photographs of her confidants early on when she was still attending high school. In these early pictures one can already sense a tendency to create a community by creating images of it. This she put into further practice when she first began to display slide shows inside dim clubs and private homes of lower east side of Manhattan. The slide shows simultaneously created a community and a collective consciousness as they represented it. (Ruddy 2009, 349) In these slide shows, with her presence she was kind of a matriarch of the community that she was also part of. In a way the embodied performative element of Goldin's photographs were even outside the images she created. (Soutter 2013, 82) Soutter's notion defines this inclusion as fundamental part of authentic. There is a seamless dialogue between the slide shows and the publications by which her work got more acknowledgment. She redefined a family with her photography, with her own, as an opposite to the hetero normative nuclear family. This perception of family is the core of her work. The most obviously standing out is the use of common and familiar aesthetics of immediacy, but in Goldin's case it's not just empty "snapshot aesthetics", it is very much tied to the content. She is the narrator of the extended family album. She uses the

aesthetics of an amateur, which in Latin is *amare*, the word meaning: to love. The way of loving describes her way to photograph in a precise way. For her it is a moment of clarity and emotional connection, not one that creates distance. (Kotz 1998, 207)

The subjects of Goldin's photographs are as important as the integrated approach. What strikes the viewer is the stark intimacy between her and the photographed. She is willingly depicting her own abuse, addiction and downfall hand in hand with love, affection and empathy with the close confidants she is surrounded by. When viewing the images it is almost like there is a lack of room to breath, as if one would be within the same approximate space with the photographed intimate, whereas sometimes it is the exact opposite. Goldin has a profound sense of presence and absence in her photographs. (Ruddy 2009, 376) Her close circle of friends and lovers keep reappearing in her pictures repeatedly like an extended family album with her included. Goldin has an interdependent bond with the subjects of her photographs. Her most known work was published as a book "*Ballad of Sexual Dependency*", which includes her close intimates, that she calls "the tribe". Deriving from which, she named an exhibition: "*Family of Nan*", after the extended circle of her closest. This was a nod to the Edward Steichen's historically criticized exhibition. This later became problematic for and she has been criticised for it. In her work Nan Goldin has always had an balancing act photographing her extended family, and being one foot away from it, as she states in *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*: "It's as if my hand were a camera". She has persistent need to emphasize camera as her bodily extension. (Dean 2015, 186) This persistent claim allures some critics to view her work, mostly from the fixed position of photographer/subject. In Goldin's images a viewer can experience intimacies of insecurity, uneasiness and indecision with great deal of empathy and loving, that are part of her life embedded in a state of uncertainty. Intimacy can be ambivalent and contain the polar opposites feelings at the same time, empathy and aggression, hidden in the subconscious. Many times intimacy is taken for granted to be an antidote for voyeurism. (179) Ambivalence is in the core of intimate photographic projects, where explicit depictions of the body, are shared and seen as art. (180) Like in the "*Ballad of sexual dependency*" the photograph "*Heart-shaped bruise N.Y.C 1980*", which depicts a bruise mark on a woman's thigh that happens to have formed into a shape of a heart. This image embraces the contradiction as a metaphor in the most simple and powerful way. The contradictions and flaws are in the core of Goldin's work. It is a particular and heart felt aspect of her photographs. One of the most known photographs of Goldin is the ruthless self-

portrait of the artist battered by her lover. It is an autobiographical reminder to herself as it is a publicly shared depiction of abuse. At the same time it is an observation on the power structures between women and men. (Dean 2015, 185) Here two of Soutter's conditions of authenticity come together: the aesthetics of immediacy and the embodied performative element of "I", which leads the viewer to an intimate call to sense her anguish. In the end of the eighties, uncertainty and devastation, hit whole of New York in form of HIV and AIDS. A deep loss hit Goldin's extended family. Her earlier photographs of the vacant rooms and empty beds came into prophecy. (Ruddy 2009, 359) Moreover, the after death pictures change into talismanic substitutes of the bodies of the dead. (Doyle 2013, 138) Soutter refers to Nan Goldin's especially on her work on HIV and AIDS, which struck her closest; the same rupturing quality can be seen in the Boris Mikhailov's later work *Case History*. Here a connection can be drawn together between these two artists not only aesthetically, but also with affecting qualities of intimacy and piercing recognition. Goldin considers her photographs as part of a larger anecdotal sequence where the ability of the photographic medium is to evoke associative patterns through the viewer's memories and projection. (Soutter 2013, 82) In this way her work is very similar to many artist in the canon of diaristic photographers, like Daido Moriyama. A connection between subjectivity of the work and subjectivity of the viewer is present. Daido Moriyama has emphasised the relationship between the photographer and the viewer in the following way:

"[...]the most important thing photography can do is to relate both the photographer's and the viewer's memories" (Daido Moriyama – *In Pictures* | Tate n.d.)

3.2 Boris Mikhailov

Boris Mikhailov is exploring a very different kind of predicament to Goldin, with different means; at the same time, they are together maintaining various similarities in their foundation to affect intimacy and recognition. Mikhailov's background was not of a photographer; he was an engineer in Kharkov under the Soviet-rule until the KGB found some of his explicit photographic experiments. He was suddenly out of work and began to see photography furthermore as his only occupation. (Nordgaard 2016, 89) During the Soviet-era, there was a prevalent affinity for the casual photography as an expression. That affinity was one of an amateur photographer's. Mikhailov's background was in this kind of vernacular photography. Amateur photography under the totalitarian rule was seen mostly benevolent. This was the reason for photography to have been ubiquitous as there were not many outlets for common people, for this seemingly benign self-expression. The background for soviet affinity to the medium is easy to understand. (Compare how graffiti was born in 70's New York as self-expression as a consequence of the creative limits of the impoverished and decaying city.) The air of the amateur has followed him on to this day and is defining part of his aesthetics and work. There are two polar contraries to his work, performative and reflective, although they are not in conflict, despite first seeming to be so. (Misiano and Pilkington 2005, 73) Mikhailov and Goldin, both insert themselves into the images they create, to guide the viewer's seeing into their world of work and affirming that it really exists. Mikhailov's early works have an emphasis on performative, the enactments of the everyday leaning on the humorous. His approach is intuitive and casual. Performativity was a tendency that resonated at large in Soviet society, when people moved into more extravagant ways of expression when they were deprived from engaging in civil action. (76) Later with, one of his most known works: "*Case History*" his conduct is very different, it is much more serious. Mikhailov's approach to photography is spontaneous and at times humorous. His earlier images float around everyday topics, encrypted nudes like in "yesterday's sandwich" where he has superimposed transparent film to create a kind of soviet psychedelia. In "unfinished dissertation" he uses found materials and idiosyncratic texts, with his coloured photographs that combine perfectly into intuitively perceived essence of the everyday. (75) Both of these works use vagueness and hidden meanings, as it was the only way to explore the forbidden

thoughts in the Soviet era. Many times the images look carnivalesque, group of friends performing in front of camera the erotic and comic enactments of friends and lovers. (77)

A big difference can be seen in the earlier works of Mikhailov, and that, which was to come next. It is possible to see his following work as a combination of his styles. The celebration is gone and the performativity has shifted into enactment. This time it is not carnivalesque it is harrowing state of affairs seen through his home city. On Mikhailov's return there he found out, that the city had gained a new growing homeless population, which had been triggered by hyperinflation, neo-liberal reforms, and cut downs in the welfare system. (Nordgaard 2016, 89) The bodies of the *bomzhehs*, as they were known, are projected to the backdrop of the city like tracing its circumvent. There is a resilient similarity between the decaying backdrop and the how the damaged bodies of the *bomzhehs* are drawn against it. These pictures make one uneasy by default. The body of work includes several hundreds of photographs of the homeless. Mikhailov is embodied himself in some of the images. The colour photographs emphasises the socio-economical system in transitional limbo. The glossy and vibrant western advertisement had arrived along readily available colour photography. (Misiano and Pilkington 2005, 75) Mikhailov uses the newly introduced aesthetic to his advantage and it can be seen as a reference to the sudden commercial onslaught. He paid the homeless people of his home city Kharkov to undress and pose as models. An act that seems unjustifiable, but which was not arbitrary. At first glance the images seem like assault on the visual senses by a portrayal of the distorted human physique and misery. The large colour prints of damaged, neglected and diseased naked bodies: many of them posing in uncanny way for the camera, a piercing human reflection mirroring back to the viewer. This is what Lucy Soutter discusses in her writings about emphasising the body as a partly verging on trauma: Hal Foster's theory emphasises the body. It follows Barthes thoughts and his famous term *punctum*, which pierces the viewer like an arrow who claims all photographs are traumatic on some level and Lacan; as we relive the trauma of the missed real because we have entered language. When explicit and abject elements are combined in pictures they "rupture the image-screen of representation." (Foster 1996, 113) This can lead to touch the viewer's sense of self. (Soutter 2013, 73) This is the point of connection with the works of Mikhailov and Goldin. They both share the same harrowing and hopeless depiction of the body with an affecting impact. With Goldin it is her works connected to drug use, abuse and bodies of her close friends on

deathbeds, with Mikhailov it is the *bomzhe*s' dissolving bodies in *Case History*. It can be possible to see the photographs through performativity and enactment, which creates even more contradictory layers of interpretation as in Sally Mann's previously discussed example. The *bomzhe*s were on the outside of the new economically liberal society that was emerging from the Soviet Union. It was divided into new categories: the strong that could integrate and the others, who, as the conditions had given them no choice other than observing from the side-lines of society.

In Mikhailov's own words:

"The rich and the homeless—the new classes of a new society—this was, as we had been taught, one of the features of capitalism." (Boris Mikhailov 1999)

Mikhailov is foraging anything of use to him, with physicality and stamina. The mentality of a scavenger can be seen as a twofold rejection of neo-liberal consumerism and repressive Soviet homogenisation. (Beshty 2005, 85) Inside the former Soviet Union, this type of frugal living was commonplace and popular. Between socialism and late-capitalism, the deformed and damaged bodies are like an evidence of the post-Soviet society's degeneration and failure. Mikhailov interrogates the viewer with questions of the new kind of ethics as the damaged bodies stand in front of the spectator as a parallel of the soluble state. Beshty closes his essay on the importance of Mikhailov's output, which at the same time fits both of the artists mentioned in this thesis:

„[...] far from solving many ethical contradictions, its repeated emphasis on the necessity for an active engagement in these debates provides a viable pathway out of the anomic retreat of contemporary art at a moment when the stakes appear to be unusually high. Photography is still in possession of the potential for emphatic resistance that this 'carnal medium' once wielded so effectively.“ (Beshty 2005)

4. Conclusion

Even if the authenticity of Lucy Soutter does not completely address or avoid the criticism that is placed against it, it offers a powerful antidote to the disapproval that was directed against the underlying motives and idealism of documentary photography since the 1970's. In this thesis by diverging from the standpoint of photographer/subject binary, I have proved that authenticity is a valid tool to analyse and interpret contemporary photography in the wake of post modernism. In addition, it is a counterbalance to irony and scepticism. By striving for authenticity artists working in diaristic approach are exploring varied and meaningful ways to interpret the present. Their depictions and presence of the body are accurately questioning, investigating and examining. I have proven in this thesis that the above mentioned ways to approach images adds to the means of interpretation and can make possible to read contemporary photography in more complex, nuanced and fulfilling way. I have examined the history and theory of the photographic medium by connecting indexicality, aesthetics and Soutter's notion of authenticity. They together can transmit an affect of intimacy that is relatable and identifiable. Although it is important to acknowledge that the notion of authenticity has its drawbacks and requires constant vigilance from the artists themselves to maintain it. The key aspects of Lucy Soutter's description of authenticity mentioned in this thesis are applicable to the artists Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov that are working within diaristic approach as it offers a framework, which they can operate essentially in. The authenticity as performed, enacted and negotiated subjectivity is in the core of these two artists. With these means, Lucy Soutter's notion of authenticity and the diaristic approach of artists like Nan Goldin and Boris Mikhailov can powerfully question, explore, investigate even interrogate. The diaristic approach is much needed in a critical but affecting way of creating and interpreting contemporary photography, where it has withdrawn from many of the key questions defining the photographic medium, following its criticism. Photography still possesses the capability of emphatic opposition to apathy and anaemia in contemporary world by engaging to recognize intimacy and sincerity as a form of dialogue to address the questions and debates in the present day.

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