



**TV Photobooks: “From Siberia
to Cyberia” by Zofia Kulik
and “TV” by Algirdas Šeškus**

Фотокниги о телевидении:
«Из Сибири в Киберию»
Зофьи Кулик и «ТВ»
Алгирдаса Шяшкус

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The present work focuses on two examples of TV photobooks: *From Siberia to Cyberia*, a monumental publication by Polish neo-avantgarde artist Zofia Kulik, and *TV*, the much more modest, but nonetheless intellectually intriguing book by the Lithuanian photographer and poet Algirdas Šeškus. These works treat television as a sort of total experience; moving pictures which, when stopped and recorded in photography, allow better perception and understanding of not only the medium itself, but reality more broadly. Both Kulik and Šeškus deconstruct TV communication. If Kulik focuses on the picture broadcast in Poland at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries, Šeškus concentrates on the institution of Lithuanian television during Soviet times. In both cases, the artists criticise television, perceiving it as a sort of Louis Althusserian ideological state apparatus. On the other hand, the artists remain open to the poetics and beauty in television.

POLISH PHOTOGRAPHY,
LITHUANIAN PHOTOGRAPHY,
PHOTOBOOK, CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY, ZOFIA KULIK,
ALGIRDAS SESKUS, CONTEMPORARY
ART, CENTRAL EUROPEAN ART

В центре внимания настоящей статьи – две фотокниги: *Из Сибири в Киберию*, монументальное произведение польского неоавангардиста Зофи Кулик, и *ТВ*, намного более скромная, но интеллектуально не менее увлекательная книга литовского фотографа и поэта Алгирдаса Шяшкус. В этих книгах телевидение рассматривается как некий тотальный опыт; движущиеся картинки, остановленные и зафиксированные в фотографических изображениях, позволяют лучше воспринять и понять не только само медийное средство, но и реальность в более широком смысле. В своих работах Кулик и Шяшкус деконструируют телекоммуникацию. В то время как Кулик сосредоточивает внимание на репрезентации телевизионных трансляций в Польше рубежа XX-XI вв., Шяшкус интересуется функционирование институции литовского телевидения советских времен. В обоих проектах художники критикуют телевидение, причисляя его к идеологическим аппаратам государства (Луи Альтюссер). В то же время художники не упускают из внимания поэтичность и красоту телевидения.

ПОЛЬСКАЯ ФОТОГРАФИЯ, ЛИТОВСКАЯ
ФОТОГРАФИЯ, ФОТОКНИГА,
СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ФОТОГРАФИЯ,
ЗОФЬЯ КУЛИК, АЛГИРДАС ШЯШКУС,
СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ИСКУССТВО, ИСКУССТВО
СТРАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ

The photobook is an artistic form of presentation, translating the TV experience into still images. As illustrated by the exhibition at the International Cultural Centre in Krakow, Photobooks are an indispensable part of the history of art and visual culture of Central and Eastern Europe (Gorczyca/ Mazur). Among the most interesting examples of TV photobooks, one must point to *From Siberia to Cyberia*, the monumental publication by Polish neo-avantgarde artist Zofia Kulik, and *TV*, the much more modest, but nonetheless intellectually intriguing book by the Lithuanian photographer and poet Algirdas Šeškus. These works treat television as a sort of total experience, moving pictures which, when stopped and recorded in photography, allow better perception and understanding of not only the medium itself, but reality more broadly. Both Kulik and Šeškus deconstruct TV communication. If Kulik focuses on the picture broadcast in Poland at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries, Šeškus concentrates on the institution of Lithuanian television during Soviet times. In both cases, the artists criticise television, perceiving it as a sort of Althusserian ideological state apparatus. On the other hand, the artists remain open to the poetics and beauty in television.

CAPTURING THE STREAM OF TV PICTURES

The book *From Siberia to Cyberia*, published in 2004, is an epic story about the history of the 20th century intermediated by the television. Everything began in a rather banal way. In the 1990s, every week, Zofia Kulik regularly bought a popular magazine with a printed TV programme. The artist used a pen to mark the items she intended to watch. She photographed the most interesting shows directly from her TV set. When she started working systematically on TV in 1998, she captured

particular frames instantly. Later, as she said in an interview conducted by the author for the purpose of this text, she bought a video recorder to record selected shows, and then watched them carefully, stopping and photographing selected scenes. Kulik principally photographed Polish public TV, Polsat, WOT, Polonia, as well as Russian TV. She avoided Western channels, feature films and thematic programmes, which were of marginal importance in the 1990s. Most films in *From Siberia to Cyberia* are documentaries, historical films, and – to a lesser extent – wildlife documentaries.

The world presented by Kulik undergoes feverish political, social, and cultural transformations, as well as changes to the natural environment. Kulik's catalogue refers to a period of systemic transformation in Poland and the collapse of Soviet domination in the region. This has, however, nothing to do with the “end of history” pronounced at the time. On the contrary, Kulik records documentaries presenting the history of 20th-century totalitarian systems and the tensions between East and West, as well as among countries in different socioeconomic strata. Even the environment is presented here as a process, as a certain natural history of the world. What stands out in *From Siberia to Cyberia* is the sequence of images, reminiscent of animation. Kulik reconstructs fragments of narrative from TV shows she found interesting, capturing gestures and concocting situations cut out from a larger story. She thus reduces all grand historical narratives to the micro scale, and then pastes them, already edited, into a new entity. Kulik's photographic passage is astonishing not only through its precision and editing of the images, but also through its form, as the artist arranges photographs into patterns resembling rugs. “I chose sequences where there was some animation of a gesture or story, [arranging them] into three [frames],” the artist admits and adds:

into so many frames as to make the entire sequence fit, for example, into one row; because if it were moved to another row, the narrative would get broken. Unless the sequence involved more than thirteen frames, and there were such sequences, too; sometimes, a sequence occupied several rows, like the one with Witold Gombrowicz. Sometimes, I ask myself the question: Could someone substitute me in the darkroom? Contrary to appearances, this is where the greatest creation took place: the final choice of frames, juxtaposition of particular sequences, both in relation to their content, and the choice of light/dark. Everything was built chronologically, with respect to the viewing order of individual programs, but I introduced some small changes “locally”. The whole was to create a certain vibration that is particularly important to me.

History, as presented in *From Siberia to Cyberia*, has many dimensions (“shows” or “channels”). One of the more interesting aspects refers to photography itself and the history of using technical means to reproduce images of reality. The artist was interested in mainstream media which, in prime time, broadcast “serious” and “historical” documentaries. Interestingly, the book also presents self-referential motifs referring to the photographic medium itself and its history, such as photographs from a show about photography pioneers Muybridge and Marey. By photographing television, Kulik presents the world as seen through the camera lens of both photo and film camera. At the meta level, the sequence of images depicts the entire history of analogue equipment recording the events. In this context, Kulik’s work is also a tribute to the camera operators, to film chronicles and photo documentaries, to all the recording equipment itself. The artist’s translation process begins with an event turned into a documentary, documentary turned into history, history turned into an image, image

into television, television into photography, and photography into a work of art.

Typically for Kulik, the work created in the period 1998–2004 is comprehensive. While proceeding with photographing television, the artist adopted a rigorous and systematic routine. From the very beginning, she thought how to arrange the photographs to assure their appropriate dialogue, while constituting a formally attractive and composed whole. In this way, from a single photograph, she moved on to working on sequences and panels. The first 60 panels were photographed in the period 1998–1999, while the further 108 – after 2000, whereas most were taken during several months of intensive work before the exhibition in Zachęta in 2004. Kulik opted for black-and-white photography so as not to outsource production, which was technically possible at the time – specialised professional photography laboratories operated in Warsaw. At the same time, the colour process is too complicated for the “amateur”, as she called herself. Recording, developing, and making prints was a regular occurrence at the artist’s home, and formed part of everyday life, understood by Kulik as an extension of her work with the technology, with the camera. She had to buy the film, prepare the camera, ensure appropriate capture and take note of the context, develop the film (which then had to dry), and then it was cut, labelled and numbered, as otherwise there would be chaos in the archives.

Zofia Kulik produced *From Siberia to Cyberia* in three formats: a *tableau* of photographs with dimensions: 2.4 x 8.5 m on the occasion of the exhibition at the National Museum in Poznan (17 columns of 4 lines makes 68 panels with photographs); a second larger *tableau* with dimensions: 2.4 x 21 m (42 columns of 4 lines makes 168 panels), and the book publication. The first version of her work was discussed by critics in the exhibition catalogue edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Kulik 1999).

The other, larger version was developed when the artist considered the first version too small, with insufficiently visible details. Finally, the third version discussed in this text is an autonomous book of 344 pages, published on the occasion of the exhibition organised in 2004 at Galeria Zachęta in Warsaw and Bunkier Sztuki in Krakow.

From Siberia to Cyberia is a book of 344 pages, with dimensions 32 x 26 cm, weighing 2.5 kg, which accompanied the exhibition, and was devised as a printed version of the photo composition presented at the gallery. It does not contain any text by critics. Apart from the title page, editorial note and a colophon, it contains exclusively spreads presenting reproductions of author's panels with photographs of television on the right, and detailed descriptions of the photos on the left. The concept of the book was developed by Zofia Kulik, the scanning and graphic layout was performed under the artist's supervision by Aleksandra Polisiewicz, and the entire project was edited and prepared for printing by Rafał Sosin. "The concept of the work was to synthetically record the 'stream' of TV pictures which 'nowadays' scroll before the eyes of most inhabitants of the Earth (including my eyes)", Zofia Kulik writes in the note at the end of the book *From Siberia to Cyberia* and, feeling the need to explain the title of the publication, she adds that Siberia appears here "in the political-historical meaning, while Cyberia is the name of the first Internet café in London" (Kulik 2004). Although Kulik never visited either of these places, her work seeks symbolic poles of the space where she functions (Kulik 1999: 7-8). It is not by chance that the front of the soft cover of the book and the archive concocted by Zofia Kulik presents the artist's house in Łomianki with an entrance which was long overdue a renovation. We enter the TV world through a private house resembling a manor house, thus associated by the Poles with the 19th-century, when opponents of the Russian tsar were deported to Siberia.

Attention must be drawn to the word “panel” consistently used by the artist to describe particular sequences of photos published in the book in the form of whole-page reproductions. Importantly, numbering of consecutive panels replaces standard pagination in the book. Each panel is a sort of photographic template with recorded frames placed in 13 columns and 8 rows (thus each panel includes about three 35 mm negatives of 36 frames each). In total, the project comprises 17,472 numbered and described photographs recorded on about 485 film rolls. “Panel, as part of the work”, Zofia Kulik comments in her e-mail correspondence with the author, “determines one sheet of photographic paper with dimensions: 60 x 50 cm, framed, thus it also means the number of such paper frames comprising the work. This also has an important practical aspect, as this also means the number and size of the boxes where the work was packed for transport. Panel, as part of the book, determines one page, corresponding to the photographic paper sheet, namely exactly the reproduction of such a single sheet.”

The structure and visual quality of the work presented in the exhibition hall allow perception both from close proximity (of each single frame), and from distance (of the ornamental whole). Although viewing the works at exhibitions favours perceiving the monumental nature of the photographic installation and emphasising its material character, it is the book that makes Kulik’s concept fully legible. Each panel is accompanied by a caption with detailed description of each frame (descriptions are also available to the visitors to the exhibition, but identification of particular images is difficult due to the scale of the work). We thus find out what the image presents and what was happening on the TV screen when the shot was taken. By accumulating thousands of frames, Kulik does her best not to lose the meaning or context of the captured image.

From Siberia to Cyberia is a work about watching TV, and at the same time a book and photographic translation of television which can also be “read”. Photography serves here not as much to reproduce reality, but its image on TV. This corresponds to post-modernist theories on the condition of media, such as the “procession of simulacra”. What seems to be most interesting is the book dimension of the project. Television image captured in photography is translated to the seemingly most anachronistic format at the times of triumphant internet and virtual reality, namely a book or rather a unique atlas. The scale of the book remains impressive despite the lapse of time. A fact not altered by the visible limitations of printing capabilities at the time, as testified by the rather austere and inadequate graphics, and the rather poor print quality, that lacks expressive black but is abundant with average grey. It is also visible that the publication was produced at a transitional period: between the application of analogue technology and digital DTP tools for layout and printing. *From Siberia to Cyberia* is a special work and book also for the artist, Zofia Kulik. Soon afterwards, she started applying digital technology. *From Siberia to Cyberia* is a manifestation of the mastery of the classic photographer’s technique to create a hybrid work. The *tableau* presented at the gallery, contrary to the book that offers an inherently different perception, resembles a system of pixels, namely it corresponds to digital sensitivity, despite being created entirely while using analogue photography. In the author’s comment at the end of the book, one can read that, for Kulik, “a pixel [is] the smallest fragment of the image on the monitor screen. Pixels resemble elements of embroidery or loops in a crochet tablecloth or lace” (Kulik 2004). It was a time when pixels – including the ones on a TV screen – were visible with a naked eye.

To conclude, it is worth pointing out that if the rug presented at the exhibitions can be considered an unfinished work, the book features its clear beginning and end in the form of the first and the fourth page of the cover. The front cover presents the artist's house, while the reverse contains a much smaller photo on a black page; a frozen image from a TV show, with dark faces of two Papuan people looking outside the frame, into the sky or far away. The photograph is one of the two embedded in panel three of *From Siberia to Cyberia* (the second photograph, printed next to the first one, includes the face of just one of the men). The caption to the photographs labelled E1-2 reads that "after the departure of American pilots, the Papuan people looked into the sky with the hope to see the airplanes and gods." This both factual and poetic comment selected by Zofia Kulik to describe the frames from a German documentary entitled "Chariots of the Gods" (date of broadcast: 1 January 1993) rather extends than narrows the interpretation of the entire project. Are we looking at the last or the first people? Are we like those inhabitants of New Guinea looking at the sky with mixed feelings of surprise, fear and hope? Or perhaps we are not looking at the sky but at the TV set or image from the TV set printed in the book? One of the points in the author's note ending the publication states that *From Siberia to Cyberia* is "a work understandable to everyone – resident of a metropolis and the province, for the rich and the poor, because all of them (us) watch TV" (Kulik 2004). Perhaps the meaning of the whole project seems to be less understandable to us nowadays in the era of Cyberia and post-Internet. A new world begins; a world announced by television and the internet, captured by Zofia Kulik.

FIG. 1 →
Zofia Kulik, *From
Siberia to Cyberia*.
Courtesy of the artist
and Kulik-KwieKulik
Foundation.

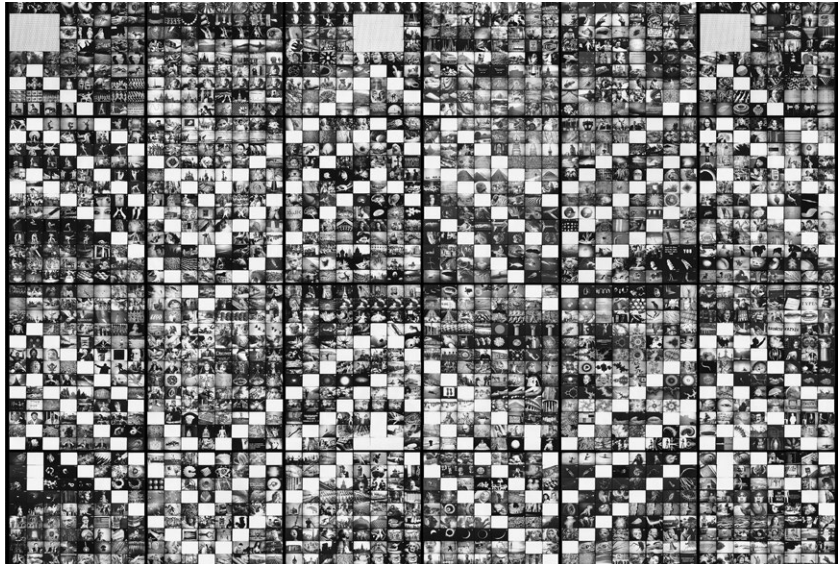
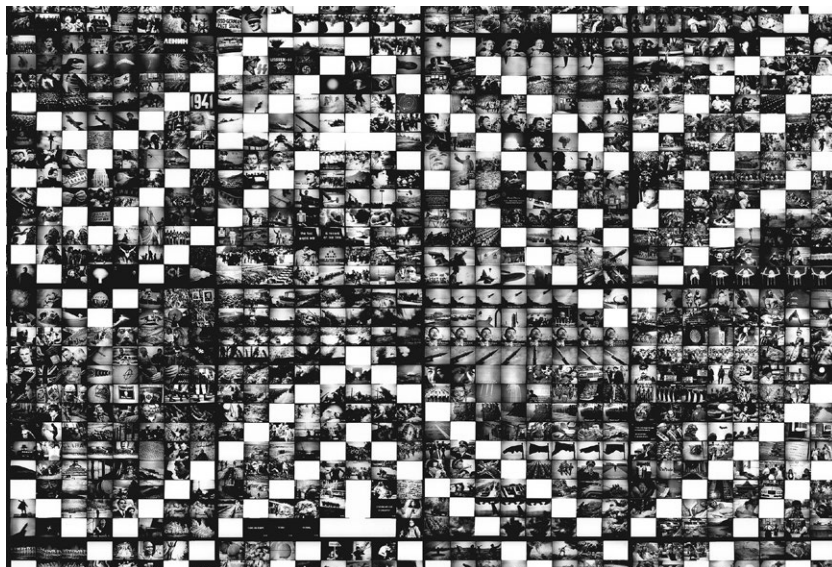
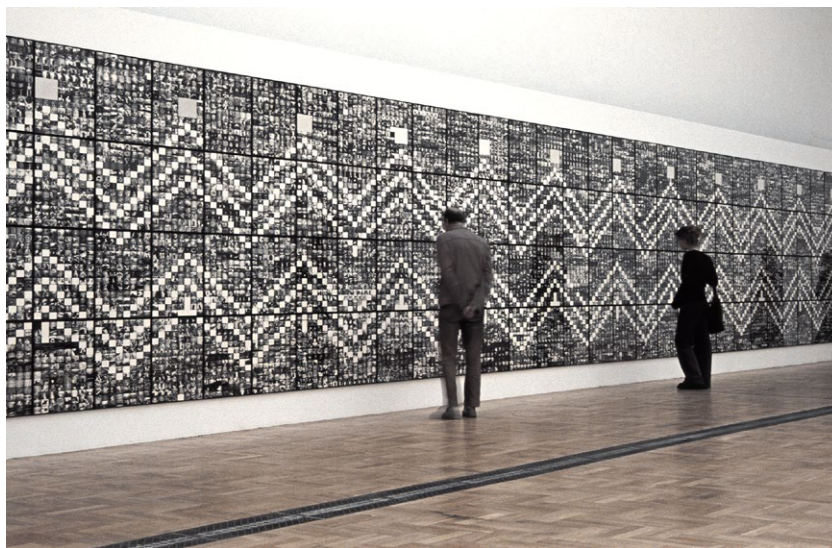


FIG. 2 →
Zofia Kulik, *From
Siberia to Cyberia*.
Courtesy of the artist
and Kulik-KwieKulik
Foundation.





← **FIG. 3**
Zofia Kulik, *From Siberia to Cyberia*.
Courtesy of the artist
and Kulik-KwieKulik
Foundation.



← **FIG. 4**
Zofia Kulik, *From Siberia to Cyberia*.
Courtesy of the artist
and Kulik-KwieKulik
Foundation.

MISE EN SCÈNE

TV, a small book with dimensions 17 x 22 cm, published on the 60th anniversary of the Lithuanian television, was based on the photo archive of Algirdas Šeškus (born 1945). Born in Vilnius, Šeškus worked as a cameraman for the then-only Lithuanian TV channel between 1975–1985. The precondition for employment was to present a portfolio of ten photographs, so Šeškus bought a camera and thus became a photographer for good (Januškevičiūtė). Because the committee did not even take a look at the photos he brought with him, Šeškus believes he got hired because of his origin. The artist's father was a party member from 1936, with both parents fighting during the war on the Soviet side. Far from perfect, too amateur, and poorly developed and recorded in the darkroom, Šeškus' photographs were not appreciated by members of the official Lithuanian Photographers' Association, who praised technical perfection. Rejected by the institutional world of photography, Šeškus tried working in the field of art which, in the late-1980s, was characterised by a much greater degree of freedom, to find his vocation as a poet, healer, and spiritual guide in the 1990s. The forgotten photographer was discovered for the art world in 2009 by Margaryta Matulytė, curator of Šeškus' retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery in Vilnius. The exhibition and publication *Archyvas (Pohulianka) [(Pohulianka) Archive]* open a new chapter in the reception of Šeškus' art. Since then, his career accelerated, with photographs from the archive being presented at many exhibitions and self-published by the artist in the form of *photobooks*. Selected photographs comprising *TV* were also displayed by Šeškus at contemporary art exhibitions, including Venice Art Biennale in 2013. The peak of his fame was marked by the exhibition within the framework of Documenta 14 in 2017. The book *TV*, published in 2016, signals Šeškus' growing

importance on both the Lithuanian and international artistic stage. The publication contains 315 pages of predominantly black-and-white photographs, but one can also find within it a sequence of colour photographs. Šeškus took the photos which would form this visual essay during or after his work at the TV station. It is a subjective notebook of a TV cameraman who abandons his role and looks from a distance at the institution where he works. The photographs, selected years later from the abundant archive, document the backstage of television, showing life at the building and in its immediate neighbourhood. Šeškus presents the TV 'behind the scenes' (the set, office rooms, studios, corridors, and warehouses), while also documenting the very performance recorded by the cameras at the studio, right next to the photographer. His photographs are a casual record, a set of impressions, rather than systematic professional documentation. Many of the photographs selected for publication are motion shots, out of focus, with visible grain. The framing also breaks the conventions of professional photographic documentary. While pressing the shutter button, Šeškus selects fragments, voids, single objects, unimportant moments.

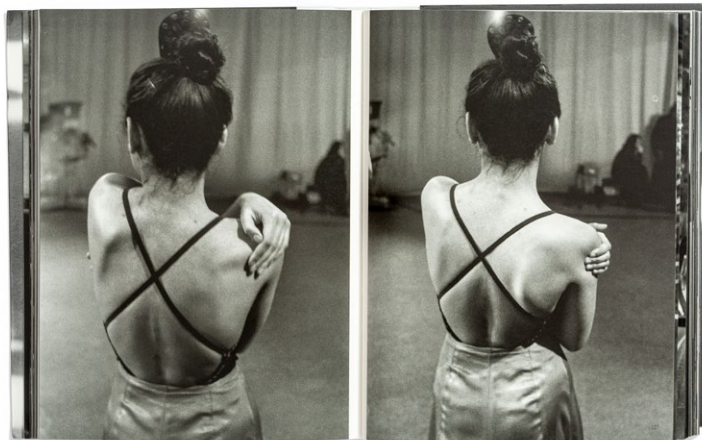
The TV project contains photographs from Šeškus' archive arranged by Gintaras Didžiapetris (born 1985). For Didžiapetris, an artist younger than Šeškus' by a generation, raised already after the collapse of the USSR in independent Lithuania, this is like travelling in time. Didžiapetris' story is his artistic interpretation of Šeškus' history, and the precondition for the artists' cooperation was the assumption that the author of the photographs would not interfere with the autonomy of the editor and graphic designer in charge of TV. Didžiapetris arranges the photographs into sequences, reconstructing a day from the everyday life of a TV cameraman. The story begins with waking up at the hotel, depicting delegates for an unknown event. Further pages include frames from a show with

morning gymnastics and TV news. Next, the TV shows are intertwined with images of backstage, visits to offices, cafeterias, at the canteen. There are also photographs showing people waiting, a break for coffee and a cigarette. Šeškus photographs non-places and non-moments. Sometimes, he captures humorous events or creates humour in his compositions, as if he wanted to cheer his models. Many photographs present attractive young women to whom the photographer has given special attention, tracing their gestures, looks, possibly flirting with them.

In Šeškus' photographs, Didžiapetris perceives a man, reconstructs the view and temperament of the photographer; pointing to his humour, observance, liveliness, but also his sensitivity. Šeškus' abundant archive suggests he was almost constantly taking photographs. The passion for photography is visible in the photographs, in the candid behaviour of models of both sexes, who seem indifferent to the photographer. The weirdest of photos present empty corridors and halls, flat and dull office walls. The anti-photographs included into the narrative by Didžiapetris point to the compulsive nature of Šeškus' photographic routine, as he was not so much documenting all the corners of the television building, but attempting to capture the spirit of the institution. Didžiapetris carries his narration by arranging photographs into short sequences resembling television cuts, paced by blank white pages. The book requires attentiveness, as it meanders and returns to some views. The photographs are usually printed with bleed, but there are also pages printed horizontally, which makes the reader turn the book one way or the other to see the photograph. Didžiapetris decides to include sequences by printing photographs frame by frame, by twos and fours in a spread. This gives an effect suggestive of movement, but also shows how quickly and obsessively Šeškus works. Photographs present many anecdotes, and even situational humour. Some seem dangerous, like the sequence where



← **FIG. 5**
Algirdas Šeškus, TV.
Photobook arranged by
Gintaras Didžiapetris.



← **FIG. 6**
Algirdas Šeškus, TV.
Photobook arranged by
Gintaras Didžiapetris.

Šeškus follows security and military men, probably guarding some VIP from the Party or the government. At such moments, the photographer seems to adopt the point of view of a secret agent. Šeškus abandons the role of a cameraman and turns from an officer into an artist who carefully and sensitively studies the mechanism of the camera. It seems that deconstructing television gives him pleasure. There is more poetry in it than criticism of the system, as pointed out by the shape of the book composed by Didžiapetris.

The small size, soft and thin cover, as well as the layout of the stream of uncaptioned photographs make the book differ from the format of a typical Soviet commemorative album. *TV* presents a bureaucratic but also, in a way, human institution during the process of producing a performance. The performance which is captured in the publication itself to be then scattered into loosely connected sequences of frames. In *TV*, there are actually no references to the socialist era. “The tension between what was official and what we felt and thought was immense,” the photographer recalled on the occasion of his 2017 exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius:

Nobody expected the USSR could collapse. Thus there was no intention to oppose the official ‘speech.’ If there had been such a need, my photographs would be different, they would present a dream about some other form of being. But our mockery was not resistance. So I was happy I had a job on TV, and I also used it for my own work: I traced the shadows of artificial light and minor shifts in choreography. I created something I considered beautiful and what gave me joy. I could share this exclusively with my closest friends – freedom of even professional artists was significantly restricted and fearful. At the time, Kandinsky was not a Russian artist. And Šeškus could not be a Lithuanian photographer.

In this context, it is no wonder that TV does not contain the insignia of power omnipresent during the USSR era: the portraits of Marks, Engels, and Lenin. There is also no hammer and sickle, or the emblem of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. The only time that can be clearly associated with the era of Soviet domination is the sequence of colour photographs from Moscow, where camera operators shot materials from the 1980 Olympic Games. The photographic documentary from the trip to Moscow contains a clear dominant theme of red, visible in the decorations of streets and buildings. Nevertheless, this part of the book does not contain images of Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, or the lower-ranking party officials who appeared on TV on a daily basis at the time. As stated in the text about TV by Agne Narušyte, a Lithuanian viewer remembering the 1970s and the 1980s, one can only recognise individual faces of TV actors, presenters, and singers (Gorczyca/ Mazur: 270–273). “Although one can recognise several silver screen stars from the period, they look rather casual, like regular workers,” Narušyte writes (Gorczyca/ Mazur: 271). For a contemporary viewer not familiar with the persons presented in TV, they are deprived of identity. Similarly, their roles in the TV performance get blurred and forgotten in the distant history. In her analysis, Narušyte interestingly points to the ethical dimension of the jubilee photobook by Šeškus and Didžiapetris. As art historians Gorczyca and Mazur (272) note: “Here, two artists remind the bosses of TV stations about ‘lower rank’ employees who cannot be seen on screen. And yet they are the ones who pull the strings of the television simulacrum, helping the medium to perform daredevil tricks.” In this context, Šeškus’ books can be read as a sort of anti-monument for an institution created by people, but also as an epitaph to twentieth-century television in general.

The final pages of the book mark a return to the television building, with its corridors and recording studios. In the photos, individual persons smoke cigarettes in semi-darkness. “And this is how the publication ends: no climax, no resolution – in this way we see what the cameraman’s work looks like: it is an unending work that does not bring any lasting outcomes,” Agne Narušyte concludes (Gorczyca/ Mazur: 271). Further, from this comment, one can infer how a photographer differs from a cameraman. Šeškus’ work at television ends, but the photographs remain and can be arranged into a personal, even lyrical narrative. This poetic aspect is absolutely evident while reading TV. One can also, like Narušyte, interpret TV as a book critical of the performance and of television:

Šeškus, as a photographer, frames his photographs differently than when operating the TV camera: television, by its nature, shows images such that the work of the camera operator should remain unnoticed, giving the viewer an illusion of observing the scene with their own eyes. Photographs allow Šeškus to unmask this illusion. Yet he does so, not by disclosing the backstage secrets of TV production, but through recording moments that seem entirely unrelated: the moments of suspension, waiting, feeling of meaninglessness. The lens captures what usually remains outside the eye of the TV camera: the sadness and sense of loneliness that the artists experience, as well as the illusiveness of their beauty and charm. Šeškus makes a move backwards, which makes pop culture, shown from a different perspective, lose its usual glitter. As pictured by the artist, the stars turn from colourful icons into simulacra of false luxury. Empty spaces of TV studios become more important than the characters, with emptiness seemingly permeating from the dark corners to devour the protagonists. Television presented in this

way reminds us about the grey Soviet past, nowadays closed in boxes full of old photographic films (Gorczyca/Mazur: 272).

This is an alternative interpretation, which does not exclude an existential interpretation of *TV* where the experience of emptiness is associated with the memory of, and even nostalgia related to, one's youth, even if this happened during the Soviet occupation. *TV* is marked by Šeškus' visible fascination with glitter, transience, and surface, which are focused on and recorded by the photographer against common reason and outside of his duties. From this perspective, *TV* is comparable with other photobooks by Šeškus: equally lyrical as *Love Lyrics* (*Meiles lyrika*), almost as mystical as *Shaman* (*Šamanas*), and almost as beautiful as *A Variation on the Theme of Being Outside* (*Variacija buvimo išorėje tema*).

Formally, *TV* is a publication on the occasion of the jubilee of, and published by, Lietuvos Nacionalinis Radijas ir Televizija (Lithuanian National Radio and Television). Nevertheless, the book was financed by Šeškus himself, while the official publisher's involvement comprised the purchase of half of the circulation of 1,000 copies from the artist. As pointed out by Narušyte in her text, it is unknown what the LNRT did with their copies, but the book was never officially distributed. Most probably, the reminder, even unintended, of the fact that the contemporary national Lithuanian broadcaster had communist roots and had been involved in Stalinist propaganda was too painful or politically risky.

REQUIEM FOR TELEVISION

Both Kulik and Šeškus succeed in the seemingly impossible task of translating television into the format of a photobook. Their extremely

FIG. 7 →
Algirdas Šeškus, TV.
Photobook arranged by
Gintaras Didžiapetris.

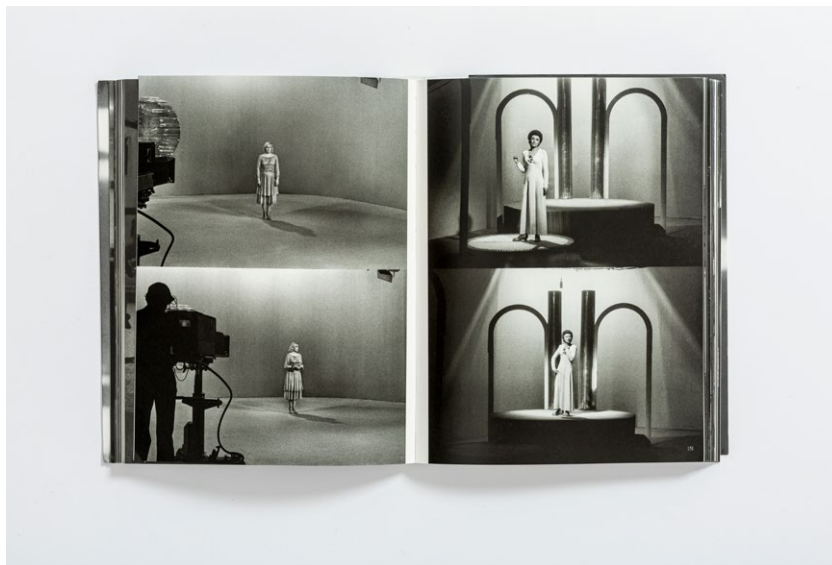
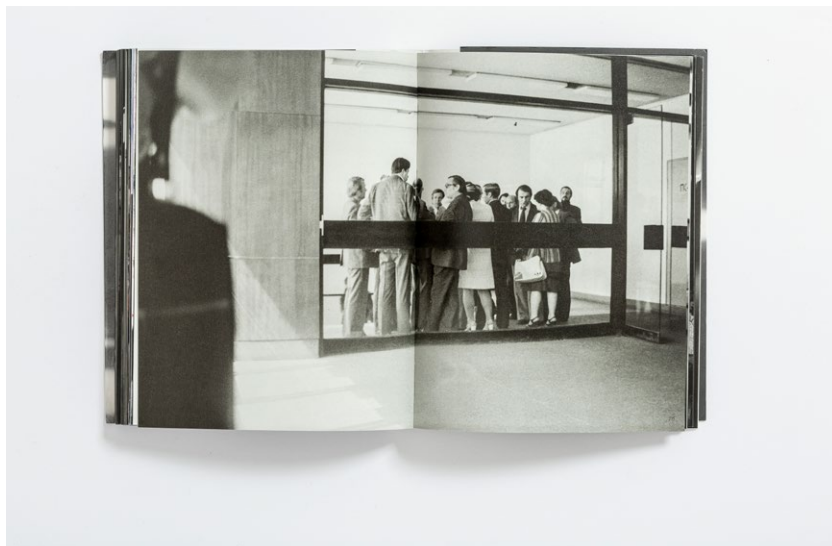


FIG. 8 →
Algirdas Šeškus, TV.
Photobook arranged by
Gintaras Didžiapetris.



original, beautiful and intellectually interesting attempts make both Zofia Kulik's *From Siberia to Cyberia* and Algirdas Šeškus' TV classic examples of Central European photobooks. If Kulik monumentalises the unimportant and everyday experience of watching television, Šeškus points out the personal, and even intimate dimension of an institution aimed at producing a performance. Both artists are interested in the historical process that translates into their personal experience. Where Kulik positions herself outside the apparatus of television, allowing her to perceive herself in the context of the grand and tragic history of the 20th-century, Šeškus moves in the opposite direction, avoiding the pathos of Soviet television and turning it into a small story told from inside the institution, an unimportant anecdote. Both Kulik and Šeškus explore television, not criticising it, but rather attempting to capture its image, with photography as the means to pursue their dream of recording memories. ♡

Translated from Polish by Justyna Piątkowska-Osińska.

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List of Figures

FIG. 1: Zofia Kulik, From Siberia to Cyberia. Courtesy of the artist and Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

FIG. 2: Zofia Kulik, From Siberia to Cyberia. Courtesy of the artist and Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

FIG. 3: Zofia Kulik, From Siberia to Cyberia. Courtesy of the artist and Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

FIG. 4: Zofia Kulik, From Siberia to Cyberia. Courtesy of the artist and Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

FIG. 5: Algirdas Šeškus, TV. Photobook arranged by Gintaras Didžiapetris.

FIG. 6: Algirdas Šeškus, TV. Photobook arranged by Gintaras Didžiapetris.

FIG. 7: Algirdas Šeškus, TV. Photobook arranged by Gintaras Didžiapetris.

FIG. 8: Algirdas Šeškus, TV. Photobook arranged by Gintaras Didžiapetris.

Summary

Jedną z artystycznych form translacji doświadczenia telewizji jest przedstawienie jej w formie książki fotograficznej (*photobook*). Książki są nieodłączną częścią historii sztuki i kultury wizualnej Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej, a do najciekawszych przykładów telewizyjnych *photobooków* zaliczają się m.in. książki *Od Syberii do Cyberii* Zofii Kulik oraz *TV Algirdasa Šeškusa*. Właśnie na tych publikacjach koncentruje się autor tekstu, analizując po kolei te dzieła sztuki, a na koniec porównuje je i wyciąga wnioski z komparatystyki. Zarówno monumentalna publikacja wywodzącej się z kręgu neoawangardy polskiej artystki, jak i skromniejsza, ale niemniej intrygująca poznawczo książka litewskiego fotografa i poety, traktują telewizję jako rodzaj doświadczenia totalnego, ruchomego obrazu, którego zatrzymanie i utrwalenie w fotografii pozwala lepiej zobaczyć i zrozumieć nie tylko samo medium, lecz – szerzej – rzeczywistość. Zarówno Kulik, jak i Šeškus dekonstruują telewizyjny przekaz. O ile Kulik koncentruje się na emitowanym w Polsce przełomu XX i XXI wieku obrazie, to Šeškusa pochłania instytucja litewskiej telewizji w czasach sowieckich. W obu wypadkach artyści poddają telewizję krytyce, widząc w niej rodzaj Althusserowskiego aparatu ideologicznego. Z drugiej strony, artyści otwarci są na poetykę i piękno obecne w telewizji.

Adam Mazur

Adam Mazur, Ph.D., is an art historian, art critic and curator. Since 2013, he has taught at the Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Arts in Poznań (Faculty of Photography). He is the editor of magazines, anthologies, catalogs and author of books, including: “New phenomena in Polish art after 2000” (2008), “Histories of photography in Poland 1839–2009” (2010), “The decisive moment. New phenomena in Polish photography after 2000” (2012), “Depth of field. Essays on Polish photography after 1945” (2014), “After the end of photography” (2018). In 2019, he published the monograph “The Mutilated World. Histories of Central European Photography 1839–2018”. In 2019, he curated the exhibition “Photobloc. Central Europe in photobooks 1918–2018”, also shown in the Czech Republic (2020) and Lithuania (2021). In 2022, together with Łukasz Gorczyca, he opened the exhibition “Photographics. Art photography in Poland 1927–1978” at MUFO in Krakow. He is editor-in-chief of the “Obieg” magazine (2004–11), co-founder and editor-in-chief of the “SZUM” magazine (2013–2018). In 2018, he founded the “BLOK” magazine and edited it until 2021. He cooperates with, among others, the magazines “Frieze”, “Dwutygodnik”, “Fotograf”, “Kwartalnik Fotografia”.