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abstract:

Does History has its own colour? And what about the colour of disaster? Where does it meet with reflection on photography? This essay combines considerations on the use of colours in Boris Mikhailov's photography and their historiosophical role in reflection on the decline of the Soviet Union and the years of transformation, with the question about "Chernobyl effect" in Soviet and post-Soviet society, especially in the context of political visibility / invisibility of radiation.

Tomasz Szerszeń - Born 1981. Photographer, anthropologist and historian. A graduate of the Photography Department of National Film, Television and Theatre School in Łódź and Inter-faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities at the University of Warsaw, recently granted a Ph.D. degree in Humanities. He is also a member of editorial board of quarterly "Konteksty" and researcher in Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. He is an author of dozens of texts published in books and in such a reviews like "Konteksty", "Literatura na Świecie", "Tygodnik Powszechny", "Res Publica Nowa", "Dwutygodnik.com". His artistic projects were presented in Gallery of Foundation Archeology of Photography in Warsaw (You. Me. Things in 2012 and Warsaw / Lives / Ruins also in 2012 - second one with Krzysztof Pijarski) and in Exchange Gallery in Łódź (I Was the First Polish Surrealist. Works From the Years 1929-39 in 2010). His works were shown on Paris Photo 2012.

The Colour of History

Colors spur us to philosophize.¹

Ludwig Wittgenstein

If I lose half my sight, will my vision be halved?²

Derek Jarman

1.

Radiation is invisible – that’s why it evokes fear. The invisible is colorless – or so we usually believe. Sometimes, however, the absence of color affects its optics: it triggers a full range of hues, turning scarcity into surfeit.

2.

The explosion of the reactor at Chernobyl shook up the Cold-War order, thus hastening the collapse of the Soviet empire. Deadly to humans and animals, like desert sand in a storm, radioactive dust is dispersed by wind and rain, and also by irradiated people and things, stealthily penetrating every nook and cranny, every body, tree, and crevice in its path, forming a new, invisible (or belatedly visible) constellation of destruction. This unimaginable catastrophe – as it was largely invisible – became a liminal, extreme experience which raised doubts about socialism and the ideals of progress, but also posed questions about the nature of life in a post-atomic world, the reconsideration of relations between humans and the non-human (“Man’s plight makes you sad, but the plight of the animals is even more pitiful”³), the crisis of knowledge in the Anthropocene era,⁴ and, finally, confronted people with the sheer terror of the end and the uncertainty of the beginning – something witnesses of the event call a new form of history.

Svetlana Alexievich, in *Chernobyl Prayer*, takes note of

this feeling: the sense that something has come to a permanent end; the past has exploded with the force of a nuclear detonation. Those who survived are stripped bare and mute: what has arrived, what continues to arrive, is formless and shapeless, and cannot be grasped by language.

The past suddenly became impotent, it had nothing for us to draw on; in the all-encompassing – or so we'd believed – archive of humanity, we couldn't find a key to open this door.⁵

This muteness, the "impotence" of the archive, the inapplicability of apocalyptic idioms to the post-atomic era, is striking. Discredited by the enormity of the catastrophe and the blatantly obvious lies and manipulations of state propaganda, facts became secondary to feelings and affects. Culture was bankrupted by nature. The logic of human sensations and individual experiences became a counterfactual way of thinking, a type of anti-history⁶ written in opposition to official and ostensibly rational accounts. At the same time, reaching into the past – immersing oneself in the system of the archive – was a deadly trap for those who wished to follow the logic of facts and verify the truth about the catastrophe ("Some important medical files were too hot to touch. They asked for personal dosimeters for archivists and funds to decontaminate archival paper. A medical exam showed that the majority of archive employees had substantial medical problems"⁷), as if the truth about reason, science, and technology, the ideal of progress, the entire legacy of the Enlightenment, which the USSR claimed to continue, had become worthless ballast.

Is it possible to "practice" history in an irradiated archive? After Chernobyl, history as we knew it (and its methodology), like the history of the USSR itself, ended, bursting like a firework, a flare launched into the starry night.

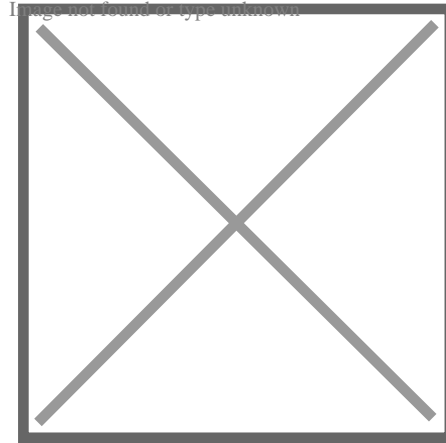
In many testimonies, witnesses describe feeling a sense of the end and seeing an extraordinary spectacle of light – one

that proved deadly to those who approached it for a closer look, seduced by its extraterrestrial beauty. It was an explosion of color, existing as if in defiance of the invisibility and colorlessness of radiation:

The blast tossed up a concrete lid, the size of a cruise ship, flipping it over to expose the molten-hot core inside. A few seconds later, a more powerful second explosion sent a geyser of radioactive gases into the splendor of the Ukrainian night. Plant worker Sasha Yuvchenko felt the thudding concussions and looked up from the machine hall to see nothing but sky. He watched a blue stream of ionizing radiation careening toward the heavens. "I remember," he later reflected, "thinking how beautiful it was."

In their testimonies, survivors of the Hiroshima bombing repeatedly mentioned their astonishment and what can be described as a form of rapture: "I had never seen that kind of light," "I'll never forget the way the sky looked right after the explosion," "my whole body was blanketed in this eerie light," "the cloud changed color from pink to silver to blue," "a pillar of smoke suddenly shot up into the sky [...] spraying orange, red, and blue sparks in every direction," "an orange sun surged toward me with a great roar" ... Similarly, the explosion in Chernobyl was accompanied by the emergence of a new, unknown visual quality. It was characterized by a reversal of established principles and the intermixing of orders: threats became invisible, symbols of human dominance were cast into doubt, a deficient order grounded in emotion rose from the ashes of rationality, and the systems of nature and culture were thoroughly interfused. More importantly, the rules of perception and depiction – our perception of color – were distorted.

Three days after the meltdown of the reactor in Chernobyl, Vladimir Shevchenko was granted permission to shoot footage depicting the efforts of the first wave of “liquidators” sent to mitigate the consequences of the disaster. Some of the shots were recorded from a bird’s-eye view, from aboard a helicopter flying as low as possible over the fire and smoke billowing from the reactor. The images were used in the film *Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*, the first visual recording of the apocalypse that unfolded at the power plant. To the director’s surprise, the developed film stock revealed strange aberrations: visual noise and signs of deterioration. These were not the results of damage to the film itself, but, as was later determined in a moment of startling revelation, the effects of radiation leakage. As Shevchenko recalled:



Vladimir Shevchenko, *Chernobyl: A Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*, Soviet Union, 1986

Radiation is a fatal invisible foe. One that even penetrates steel plating. It has no odor, nor color. But it has a voice. Here it is. We thought this film was defective. But we were mistaken. This is how radiation looks. This shot was taken when we were allowed a 30-second glimpse from the armored troop-carrier. On that April night the first men passed here – without protection or stop-watches, aware of the danger, as soldiers performing a great feat. Our camera was loaded with black-and-white film. This is why the events of the first weeks will be black and white, the colors of disaster.¹⁰

The moment when the filmmaker realized what had been captured on his film is the moment in which the new rules governing the creation of images during nuclear disaster were

discovered. As Susan Schuppli notes, this film suddenly became “the most dangerous reel of footage in the world,” the most “radical imprint”¹¹ of the disaster imaginable:

Arguably what is fascinating about Shevchenko’s film is its transformation from a conventional documentary or benign media artefact into a radioactive fossil through the mysterious intercession of an invisible agent. [...] The retroactive appearance of fallout on the film conjured by these radioactive ghosts still has the capacity to make us feel uneasy and anxious in their presence. [...] However, if we are ultimately to re-read Shevchenko’s film against the exclusive grain of representation, which is to say, to read it radiologically, it must be understood as an early warning system for monitoring the incoming signals from the future-past [...]

This is more than an apocalyptic signal from the “perfective future”; it’s also a warning whose purpose is to discourage the historian from digging into the past, into the holdings of a radioactive archive – its deadly documents and film reels.

Shevchenko incorporates into his story about irradiated film a reflection regarding color: he notes that radiation has no hue, and that the colors of disaster are black and white. This historical observation unites three levels: image, color, and history. Color isn’t limited to images (its absence is invariably significant); it’s also a feature of history and everything it comprises. Disasters included.

3.

“One period is collapsing and other is beginning. It’s a period when we were down to zero. When one thing and the opposite existed at the same time. It was this zero moment that I saw,”¹³ Boris Mikhailov recalled years later. Mikhailov (b. 1938) is a Ukrainian photographer who, in the mid-1960s, began documenting and critiquing Soviet life, and is famous for his

approach to photography as a privileged tool for historiographical reflection. Accompanying the collapse of the Soviet order and the destruction of the imperial vision of history was a parallel collapse of vantage points and an invalidation of the principles governing the photographic image. The photographic medium is a perfect reflection of the formlessness (formless moment)¹⁴ of the historical experience: like a seismograph of time, the camera has the ability to catch “red-handed” the gradual collapse of the horizon of our shared history.

Mikhailov’s work intersects with the “Chernobyl effect” on many levels, not just because of his relative proximity – as a Ukrainian and resident of Kharkiv – to the events that left a mark on the entire region and defined a new kind of imagination. More significantly, his explorations in the realm of photography are evidently intertwined with social, political, and existential shifts, of which the radioactive cloud rising from the ruins of the reactor was merely a symptom (rather than a cause).

In 1986, the year of the nuclear catastrophe, Mikhailov created *Salt Lake*, a series of images depicting people relaxing on the shores of a salt lake near Sloviansk in east Ukraine (the “Soviet Ganges”), taking dips in the brine baths the photographer frequented as a boy. This magical place from his childhood memories, an object of imperial nostalgia, becomes, in the lens of the adult man, a space of post-industrial collapse, the site – we would add today – of an environmental disaster. Mikhailov is of course primarily interested in the sociological and existential dimension of the “Soviet man” and his phenomenology: his gestures, his



Borys Michajłow, *Salt Lake*, 1986. Boris Mikhailov *Forbidden Image*, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, 2019 (exhibition view). Photographs provided by the Pinchuk Art Centre 2019. Photographed by Maksym Bilousov.

natural environment, Soviet bodies and their choreography, the blending moods of fun and melancholic resignation to one's place in the world. At the same time, the images of a "Crimean vacation" in this landscape of utter devastation provoke further questions about the Soviet landscape, its color, the invisibility of its contamination, and the nature of the political practices and routines that force people to live under catastrophic conditions. Finally, they encourage us to think about the deterioration of dreams – be they childhood fantasies or the objects of an ideology – to the point where they are no longer recognizable in the apparent form of things.

One year before the Chernobyl accident, Mikhailov carried out what is perhaps his most famous series, *Unfinished Dissertation*. This surprising artwork contains photographs of everyday life in Kharkiv, pasted into a found university dissertation. The artist annotated the images with comments penned in the margins of the gray notebooks, creating a palimpsest-like essay in which images and words coexist on equal footing. The dissonance between these two elements, like the inflation of words and images appropriated and subsequently abandoned by ideology, reflects the chaos of the USSR in decline; "in the absence of an essence, or an ontologically constant center, humans construct themselves and their world using a language disconnected from the world of objects."¹⁵ *Unfinished Dissertation* is a treatise on the incompatibility of words and things, words and objects; a treatise on a human experience that is "coming unstuck" from language and ideology, as well as a story about the decline of the photographic aura and the collapse of the once-constant rules governing the photographic image.

"It was an in-between period. [...] It was a moment when I realized the importance of what Benjamin said, 'Dreams are transformed into kitsch. [...] Everything has turned gray.' [...] It's about nothing. Nothing,"¹⁶ Mikhailov said, commenting on his

work and the time of Perestroika. The negativity here is more than just the obvious negation of the official propagandist language and vision of the world: more importantly, it is “falling into time,” the process of accelerating history – a new, unknown horizon whose color is no longer only red. At the same time, photography – not unlike the invisible radioactive cloud – is problematized here as a tool that annihilates the very reality it depicts, carrying with it death and ultimate collapse. The affirmation of nothingness signifies not only the photographer’s acceptance of the disintegration of his world, but also the acceleration of that process through the use of photography. However, death, nothingness, and decay are not the end: they are different names for that which is unknown and yet to be described.

4.

“After thirteen years of absence, when I first returned to the Soviet Union in 1988, nothing struck me more than the disappearance of the color red from the streets of Moscow. (...) And with the discoloration of red, other colors emerged in a competition to become ‘the pigmentation’ of the new epoch.”¹⁷ recalls Margarita Tupitsyn. This remarkable

observation shifts the emphasis onto the political and existential dimensions of color, which, it is often forgotten, is a social fact.¹⁸

The inherent paradox of color is that it usually remains invisible: “we so rarely see color unless it hurts us and offends us. Color passes us by in the same way in which we do not notice our own breathing until it stops.”¹⁹ This organic trait of color, its similarity to breathing – which is to say, its direct association with our



Unfinished Dissertation, 1984–85. Boris Mikhailov Forbiddan Image, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, 2019 (exhibition view). Photographs provided by the Pinchuk Art Centre 2019. Photographed by Maksym Bilousov.

being in the world – makes it difficult to see. “Color passes us by” also means that it harmonizes with our emotions, our affects, and is frequently the most intimate form of memory: it is a mood, an impalpable aura left by things and people, but also the constellation of events and times known as history.

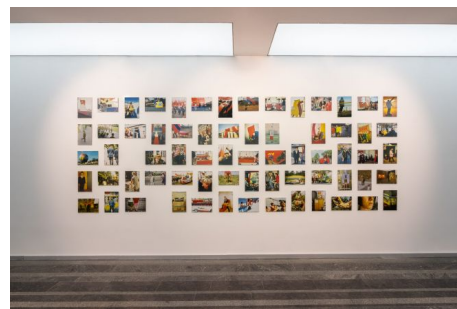
Surprisingly, Boris Mikhailov has devoted more attention to colors than probably any other photographer. From his earliest work, dating back to the 1960s and 70s – for example the gold-colored bust of Lenin found in a quiet corner of a snow-covered park, and the multi-colored superimposed images he calls “sandwiches” – through his *Red* series (1968–75), in which the red hue of the revolution,²⁰ the color of the empire, forms an overarching theme, to the hand-colored found negatives of his *Luriki* and *Sots Art* series, where adding color to the boredom of Soviet life and propagandistic rituals was more than just a gesture of rebellious and somewhat childish subversion, colors have played a decisive role in his oeuvre. In one of his first series, *Color Backgrounds*, created in the late 1960s, Mikhailov pairs black-and white photos of everyday life in the USSR with colored frames. This invasion of color (orange, burgundy, green, etc.) into a reality defined, at best, by red and gray, signifies a change in mood and emotion. It also shows how context and the idiom of description shape and manipulate reality. Color, like an all-pervading emotion or a verbal incantation, circumscribes our world.

One of the first comments opening *Unfinished Dissertation* is a quotation from Walter Benjamin (*Traumkitsch*: “sleep becomes kitsch”): “The dream no longer reveals the blue horizon. Everything is gray now. The dreams have evolved into the road towards banality.”²¹ Benjamin’s archaeology of communal dreams is a vision of disillusionment and burgeoning detachment; it is more than a mere testimony of “falling into time,” the loss of prospects, horizons, and auras, or an attempt to emphasize the dissociative connection between sleep and dust in our perception

of historical experience. By juxtaposing these words with photographs of Soviet life, Mikhailov shows their other meaning: it's also an attempt at a multi-layered interweaving of photography and color, lending this combination a historiosophical meaning. Such a phenomenological reading requires us to understand that color always has meaning and is always political; because it "passes us by" (passing through us), it leaves permanent marks in us, but it also sensitizes us to change, even if that is the slightest shift in color.

Mikhailov appears to imply that every era, every decade, has its own color. It is the photographer's duty to pick out that pattern, because photography, as a medium that is particularly sensitive to light, has the capacity to capture nuances of color. Mikhailov leads us from red (his *Red* project, 1968–1975), the official color of the Soviet empire's visual propaganda, through gray (*Unfinished Dissertation*, 1985), the color of a low-contrast black-and-white photographic print – often poorly developed, with technical imperfections – associated here with amnesia, short-term memory loss, or the inability to see colors ("Gray corresponds to immobility without hope"²²; "The dream ends in gray"²³), and finally to blue (*At Dusk*, 1993), clearly identified here with the post-Soviet, post-imperial melancholy of a time after "the end of history."

The images of human misery and decay in urban Kharkiv that comprise the series *At Dusk* are tinted blue, again producing a dissociated and depressing effect. It is noteworthy that in traditional black-and-white photography, the film emulsion is most sensitive to blue light; thus, Mikhailov's photos quite literally serve as a kind of sensitive seismograph that reveals the "colors



Boris Mikhailov, Red, 1968–75. Boris Mikhailov Forbiden Image, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, 2019 (exhibition view). Photographs provided by the Pinchuk Art Centre 2019. Photographed by Maksym Bilousov.

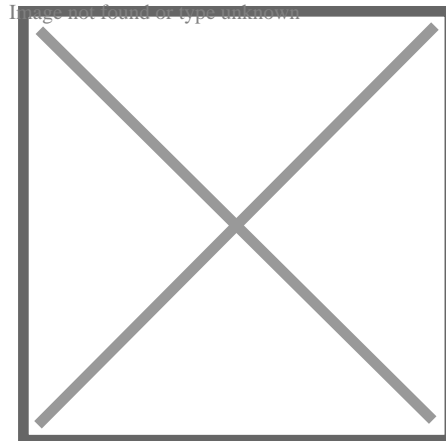
of History” in the darkroom. Naturally, an excess of blue can also be the result of technical error: the underexposure of the image and the absence of other colors; it’s a fundamental flaw that obstructs and distorts our view of the depicted world, an imperfection permanently associated, Mikhailov implies, with the post-Soviet reality.

“Blue for me is the color of the blockade, of hunger and war.”²⁴ But as Carol Mavor reminds us, blue is another form of black. “It is no coincidence that Michel Pastoureau’s first books on color begin with these entwined colors. The punch, according to Pastoureau, is not just metaphorical: ‘For a long time, blue, an unobtrusive and unpopular color, remained a sort of “sub-black” in the West or a black of a particular kind. Thus the histories of these two colors can hardly be separated.’”²⁵

Blue, therefore, is a kind of “in-between color,” a transitional, faulty color. The film director Derek Jarman, who moved into a cottage just outside the Dungeness nuclear power station after he was diagnosed with HIV in 1986, gradually lost his sight while he was dying of AIDS-related complications, and in the end saw everything in shades of blue.

This triggered in him a particularly acute sensitivity to color; it was then that he wrote *Chroma: A Book of Color*. Blue: the last color he could discern, his final mood, the color filter of death. A kind of monochromatic transition to “the other side.”

Like Mikhailov, his blue-tinted world contained echoes of the afterlife, and certainly something of the in-between space haunted – as in his retrospective book *Yesterday’s Sandwich* – by specters that cannot break free of the aura of the place



Derek Jarman, *Blue*, Great Britain, 1993 (a fragment)

in which they are forced to live, irradiated by a peculiar sensitivity to color.

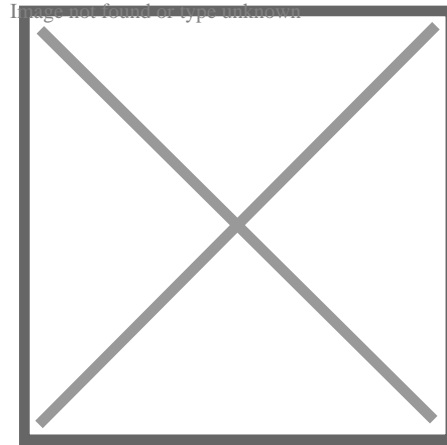
5.

Jacques Aumont, in his writings about cinematic journeys through landscapes of destruction, likened²⁶ the afterworld depicted in Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* to the Zone visited by the characters in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979): both are spaces in which one can lose or regain memories. The Zone – a restricted, semi-real area where apocalyptic destruction and miracle are two complementary aspects of the same experience – is a poetic repurposing of the post-atomic space created by the Soviet cover-up of the 1957 incident at the Mayak nuclear power plant near Chelyabinsk, foreshadowing the events that took place several years later in Chernobyl. The technical difficulties involved in the production of the film – systemically similar to the serial negligence that precipitated the Chernobyl disaster – resulted in the deterioration of the quality and color²⁷ of the film stock, which was damaged by prolonged storage or improper development at the Mosfilm laboratories. There are also anecdotal reports that the director had difficulty obtaining Kodak color film – a problem characteristic of the Soviet Union's final years.

The unspecified yet unambiguously Soviet world of *Stalker* is depicted in sepia tones, which means that it bears traces of a color defect; it is a space of absence. To achieve a sepia effect in photography, the print must first be bleached of its colors (black and white). Next, silver sulfide is precipitated from the solution, giving the image its characteristic brownish tint. Tarkovsky's technique, which so closely resembles Mikhailov's strategy, is to portray this world through its aura, as a monochromatic space of absence in which colors have been washed away.

The opposite of this "external world" is the Zone, an inaccessible time-space of the extraordinary and the irrational; a deserted area in which post-industrial and post-catastrophic ruins have been overrun by flora and fauna governed by their own set of rules. It is a place of internal transformation, one in which the regime of facts is bankrupted by the regime of affects. The difference between the Zone and the characters' everyday space is marked by a change in color; departing the world inhabited by people – a journey into the unknown, "beyond the horizon" – is synonymous with an explosion of color. Interestingly, the filmmaker assigns color to a space uninhabited by people, the site of a past disaster. A return to this world involves re-immersion in a monochromatic sepia tone, bleached of black and white. There is, however, a moment of color in the final scene: we witness a minor miracle performed by a child; her extraordinary, supernatural sensitivity comes with the ability to see colors and overcome the all-encompassing aura.

Color changes more than just the rules governing perception of the world: it also establishes alternative regimes of remembering



Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*, Soviet Union, 1979 (a fragment)

and feeling. Amnesia, the loss of memories, sometimes makes it possible to recover them and the sensations erased by previous regimes. This is perhaps a political paradox of Chernobyl and its effect on Soviet society: the disaster contributed to the “erasure of memories,” a revision of people’s attitudes toward the past, while simultaneously helping to recover those memories and create a new configuration of what was remembered and felt. This is also what the so-called “radioactive miracle” is about.

6.

Concurrently with his “blue” series (*At Dusk*), Mikhailov realized a series of black-and-white portraits titled *I Am Not I*. In this 1992 work, created mere months after the collapse of the USSR and the birth of independent Ukraine, the artist theatricalizes or “performs” himself; the 33 images show him naked, assuming a variety of strange and grotesque poses with various props. The photographer, a witness of history, someone who observes and recounts, using color as commentary, is himself caught *in flagrante*, humiliated and demystified, while the truth of his identity (“I am not I”) and the truth of the image are called into question. Perhaps these two series ought to be viewed in parallel, within a single order, like the obverse and reverse of the same image; building meaning, as Tarkovsky does in *Stalker*, on the contrast and transition (back and forth) between two differently colored spaces. The private and the public, the documented and the performed, color and the absence thereof would all come together in a kind of arcade, adding one more element to the collective visual autobiography of a specific place, people, and time that Mikhailov has been compiling for several decades.



Boris Mikhailov, *At Dusk*, 1993. Boris Mikhailov *Forbidden Image*, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, 2019 (exhibition view). Photographs provided by the Pinchuk Art Centre 2019. Photographed by Maksym Bilousov.

Case History (1998), a later piece created after the artist had spent several years abroad, comprises “pornographic” images of some of Kharkiv’s homeless residents: naked, old, ill, defenseless against the oppressive camera, they ineptly imitate poses seen in famous artworks. In this series, homelessness and disability become metaphors of the entire post-communist era as well as a real and sensual description thereof: the dual, overlapping legacies of the period of systemic transition and the “Chernobyl era.” The artist’s combined use of documentary and staged photography (“Documentary cannot be truth. [...] For *Case History*, old documentary methods weren’t possible – it was important and necessary for me to find new methods to show this life”²⁸) illustrates the problematic nature of employing photography as a means of talking about “facts.” In contrast to the historians who side with facts as a matter of principle, the photographer, due to his choice of medium, seems to be constantly intermediating between “facts” and “affects,” belonging to an ostensibly impossible space, a “zero point.” From this perspective, he talks about the color of History rather than History itself.

In *Case History* Mikhailov returns to traditional, “realistic” color reproduction. This collective auto-photo-biography requires a new chapter to be opened. Dreams make their way toward the realm of the banal.



Borys Mikhailov, *Case History*, 1997–98.
Boris Mikhailov *Forbidden Image*, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, 2019 (exhibition view).
Photographs provided by the Pinchuk Art Centre 2019. Photographed by Maksym Bilousov.

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 66.
- 2 Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Color* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 109.
- 3 Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future*, trans. Anna Gunin and Arch Tait (London: Penguin Random House UK), 37.
- 4 See, for example, Aleksandra Brylska, "Fotosynteza pamięci. Roślinna pamięć o katastrofie," *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* no. 22 (2018), <http://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/22-zobaczyc-antropocen/fotosynteza-pamieci>.
- 5 Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 30–31.
- 6 Monika Żółkoś observes: "Alexievich's perspective prompts us to ground our reflections on Chernobyl in anti-history. The category of memory, so central to her writing, enables us to challenge the logic of facts, dates, and statistics with the fabric of human and non-human experiences," in: *Poetyki ekocydu. Historia, natura, conflict*, eds. Aleksandra Ubertowska, Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka, and Ewa Kuliś (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2019), 144.
- 7 Kate Brown, *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* (London: Penguin Books Limited), 57.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 15–16.
- 9 *A-bomb Drawings by Survivors* (Hiroshima: Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, 2007).
- 10 Susan Schuppli, "The Most Dangerous Film in the World," in: *Tickle Your Catastrophe*, eds. Frederik Le Roy, Nele Wynants, Dominiek Hoens, and Robrecht Vanderbeeken (Ghent: Ghent University, the KASK [Ghent Royal Academy of Fine Arts] and Vooruit, 2010), 127.
- 11 Schuppli, "The Most Dangerous Film in the World." Cf. also: Susan Schuppli, "Soviet Defectors: Reading Radiological Film," *Site* no. 28 (2009), 14.
- 12 Schuppli, "Soviet Defectors," 14.
- 13 David Taboul, *Boris Mikhailov: I've Been Here Once Before* (Munich: Hirmer, 2011), 377.

- 14 Cf. Hayden White, "Literatura a fikcja," trans. Dorota Kołodziejczak, in: Hayden White, *Proza historyczna*, ed. Ewa Domańska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 64–65.
- 15 Tamara Hundorova, "Czarnobyl, nuklearna apokalipsa i postmodernizm," *Teksty drugie* no. 6 (2014), 255.
- 16 Taboul, *Boris Mikhailov*, 413–414.
- 17 Margarita Tupitsyn, "Descending onto Red," in: *Boris Mikhailov: A retrospective / Eine retrospective* (Winterthur: Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2003), 42.
- 18 Cf. Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, trans. Mark Cruse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- 19 Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 243.
- 20 One Polish photographer who takes an interesting approach to the color red in a similar context – namely, the collapse of the old order and systemic transition – is Anna Beata Bohdziewicz with her series *Fotodziennik – wybór czerwony* [*Photojournal – A Red Selection*]. Another artwork that problematizes the political aspect of this color in the Polish context is *Odmiany Czerwieni / Drogi Edwarda Gierka* [*Shades of Red / The Roads of Edward Gierka*] by the KwieKulik duo (1971), <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/kwiekulik-odmiany-czerwienidroga-edwarda-gierka>.
- 21 Boris Mikhailov, *Unfinished Dissertation* (Zurich – Berlin – New York: Scalo, 1998), 6.
- 22 Wassily Kandinsky, *O duchowości w sztuce*, trans. Stanisław Fijałkowski (Łódź: Państwowa Galeria Sztuki, 1996), 93.
- 23 Jarman, *Chroma*, 53.
- 24 Taboul, *Boris Mikhailov*, 421.
- 25 Carol Mavor, *Black and Blue: The Bruising Passion of Camera Lucida, La Jetée, Sans soleil, and Hiroshima mon amour* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2012), 13.
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