

CONTENTS

Time Hunter. LAIMA SLAVA	7
The Sea	11
The Land	97
The Town	191
The Capital	281
Politics	453
 Uldis Briedis and some aspects of documentary photography. ALISE TĪFENTĀLE	 623
 In conversation with Uldis Briedis. LAIMA SLAVA On photojournalism	 643
About the sea	665
A photojournalist in Liepāja	671
Aesthetics and ethics	675
 Stories about Uldis Briedis Faithful to the sea. OLAFS GŪTMANIS	 681
The photography of U.B. as a fragment of the yearning for freedom, the illusions and the comedy of an age. ARMĪNS LEJIŅŠ	695
Stories with pictures and without. EGĪLS ZIRNIS	707
 Short Biography	 719

Uldis Briedis and some aspects of documentary photography

ALISE TĪFENTĀLE

In presenting this selection of photographs by Uldis Briedis, photographs created during a period of more than four decades, it is necessary to mark out the most significant points of reference that permit us to consider these documentary photos in the context of the history of photography in Latvia and in the world. These points serve to sketch in the thematic and ethical foundations of documentary photography that the documentary photographers of the first half of the 20th century in the USA and Europe established through their own example. The first documentary photographers in Latvia in the post-war period worked in a similar manner, and Uldis Briedis, who took up photography in 1966, has also continued this worldwide tradition. Another equally important point of reference is the growth of interest in documentary photography on the part of the art world during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These key developments allow us to discover new dimensions in the photographs through which Uldis Briedis expresses his view of the "great" and "small" events of the second half of the 20th century, and the people involved in them.

The unwritten tradition. Cartier-Bresson, Brauns and Briedis

As a background and context for discussing 20th century documentary photography, we must mention at least some of the foundations and cornerstones of documentary photography in the first half and middle of the last century, those that have given rise to present-day ideas about what constitutes good documentary photography. Latvian documentary photography, too, is closely connected with the directions and ethical approaches that they had established.

One of these is the US government's FSA¹ project for assisting destitute rural people during the Great Depression, in the frame of which photographers were contracted to document the poor country folk just as they were. These photographers included Walker Evans², Dorothea Lange³ and others. These

¹ Farm Security Administration.

² American photographer, 1903–1975.

³ American photographer and photo-journalist, 1895–1965. One of her most famous works is *Migrant Mother* (1936).

photographs, created in the period from 1935 to 1944, have now become a textbook source for all who are interested in documentary photography, and are also sought-after additions to the photo collections of aficionados.

The creative activity of photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson⁴ and the *Magnum* photo agency, which he founded together with his associates in 1947, is just as significant. The work of Cartier-Bresson and the photographers of the *Magnum* agency was based on interest in the individual, "The Little Man", caught up in events of a super-human scale. *Magnum* has become a byword for high-quality, politically independent photojournalism. It could be said that those same post-war years saw the beginnings of this type of photojournalism in Latvia, too. "In 1947 Cartier-Bresson and his associates established the *Magnum* photo agency, and his first project was devoted to people. In his self-portrait of 1948, Uldis Brauns, with a camera in his hands, is seen next to a bicycle which he has been riding from house to house to take pictures of his neighbours."⁵ Here mention must be made of the insufficiently appreciated, idealistic, selfless and humane achievement of photographer, film director and director of photography Brauns (born 1932): the documentation of the reality of Latvia after the war. In the period from 1957 up to 1963, travelling throughout Latvia, Uldis Brauns created an extensive collection of photographs. Only in 1989 was a small part of it published⁶, but in terms of its significance for the 20th century history of Latvia, this collection can be compared with the role of the FSA or Cartier-Bresson in the West.

Another important cornerstone of world photography in the 20th century was the international photo exhibition *Family of Man* (1955) put together by American photographer Edward Steichen⁷. This exhibition, consisting of 503 photographs (by 273 photographers from 68 countries, 163 of them Americans), can justifiably be regarded as the standard, classic example of 20th century documentary photography, and has to a large degree shaped ideas as to what constitutes good photojournalism. After it opened in 1955 (at MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York), the exhibition toured the world until 1961, and was seen by an estimated nine million people⁸. Particularly significant is the fact that the *Family of Man* exhibition was also accessible to Soviet citizens, since it was included in the major *American National Exhibition* in Moscow in 1959, and subsequently information about the exhibition and its catalogue also reached Latvia.

⁴ French photographer, 1908–2004.

⁵ Brūvere, Ilona. Uldis Brauns. Signs of the Era in Films and Photographs. *Foto Kvartāls*, No. 1(15), 2009, p. 86.

⁶ Brauns, Uldis. *Zeme atceras*. Introduction by L. Briedaka, poetry by O. Lisovska. Rīga: Avots, 1989. p.272.

⁷ American photographer, artist, curator and gallerist (1879–1973). After the Second World War he became Director of the Photography Department at MoMA, where he worked until 1962.

⁸ Jay, Bill. The Family of Man. A Reappraisal of "The Greatest Exhibition of All Time". *Insight*, No.1, 1989.

It could be said that Uldis Briedis and other documentary photographers of his generation have continued this unwritten, unrecorded tradition – a tradition of broad humanism, solidarity with the setting or the people being photographed, one that accepts the expression of a healthy sense of humour and places the experience of each and every Human at the centre of attention. This tradition is being continued, with the addition of personal experience and aspects specific to the age. Quite possibly, the tradition is continuing unconsciously – it is common to the world's most outstanding documentary photographers because it is intuitive (here we may disagree with the hypothesis by the British critic David Bate that photography and art from the former Soviet Union is characterised by the fact that "it did not have to go through Western modernism"⁹, and is not characterised by those "modernist values"¹⁰ that can be traced back to Eugène Atget¹¹, Diane Arbus¹², August Sander¹³, Hilla and Bernd Becher¹⁴, Edward Weston¹⁵ and Ansel Adams¹⁶. In fact, some of these values are universal and are fully apparent in the style of the photographers working under the conditions of Soviet rule.)

In the 1950s Brauns photographed a family that had survived the war (and in which only the old people and children were left) amid their simple belongings, or by the stove – the source of life in the home. And he was not working "according to the FSA method" or the "Magnum method". He was conscientiously and sensitively documenting what he saw and found out, and for the contemporary viewer his achievement is of unparalleled value (it is a kind of view that no longer seems possible in the early 21st century).

Uldis Briedis, too, creatively applies a very wide variety of documentary photography approaches, depending on his subject, intuitively selecting the approach that he considers will most precisely reflect what is going on in the picture. Even if the range of themes to be covered by the photojournalists working in a particular period is largely the same, each photographer nevertheless has their own personal style. The "high emotional temperature", in the words of Brauns¹⁷, that is required for good photography, Briedis achieves through his characteristic sense of humour and dynamic view, which sets his photographs apart from those of his colleagues. These characteristics have also been emphasised, for example, by the theoretician of photography in the Soviet age, Atis Skalbergs: "Dynamic tension and inner charge are characteristic of the best photographs by Uldis Briedis from Liepāja. The main

⁹ Bate, David. Kinship with Dream.

Source *Photographic Review*, No. 46, 2006, p. 50.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ French photographer (1857–1927), known for his photographic documentation of the streets of Paris.

¹² American photographer (1923–1971) whose work is characterised by social critique and an interest in social outsiders.

¹³ German photographer (1876–1964) who created a "catalogue" of society in his important series of portraits *People of the 20th Century*. His "scientific" style of portraits was subsequently adopted and further developed by many artists and photographers during the 20th century.

¹⁴ Hilla (born 1934) and Bernd (1931–2007) Becher, German photographers, among the pioneers of the conceptual photography movement in the early 1960s.

¹⁵ American photographer (1886–1958), one of the figures who established the aesthetics of 20th century fine art photography, especially in the genres of the nude and still life.

¹⁶ American photographer (1902–1984), influential as a founder of the aesthetics of 20th century fine art photography in the genre of landscape.

¹⁷ Brūvere, Ilona. Uldis Brauns. Signs of the Era in Films and Photographs. p. 86.

principles behind his work are laconism and truthfulness.”¹⁸ Art historian Laima Slava is of a similar opinion: “The pulsation of life, the visuality of daringly and strikingly captured events and personalities, a humanity that cannot be expressed in words and can only be sensed, personal empathy, delight or simply the taste of what we call “the spice of life.”¹⁹ On the other hand American art historian Mark Allen Svede, discussing the photographs from 1977 in which Briedis documented the destruction of family farms in Latvia, draws attention to a different aspect: “Briedis poignantly conveys the tragedy through animated form, radiant tonal contrasts, luxurious texture, and expansive compositions, underscoring the lost vitality and beauty, much as one might experience phantom pain from a missing limb.”²⁰

A new life for the documentary photograph

The photography of Uldis Briedis must be considered in the context of Latvian culture and art, with a special focus on the period at the turn of the decade, i.e. the late 1980s – early 90s. This decisive period, when Latvia’s independence was restored, is equally crucial in terms of the attitude towards photography in the context of art. It was at this time that photography entered into the field of vision of professional art – and, moreover, the focus was on documentary photography, rather than fine art photography, which had been cultivated over the preceding decades.

“Documentary photography appeared like a new medium in our exhibition practice, on equal standing with paintings, graphic art, sculptures, installations, video, etc.”²¹ wrote art critic and curator Helēna Demakova. The Western art world, too, was at that time particularly interested in documentary photography, something that contributed to a positive assessment of work by several Latvian documentary photographers (Briedis among them) in the realm of visual art in the late 1980s.

When we look over the history of documentary photography in Latvia, we should mention as a significant factor in its flourishing and standing in the late 1980s the traditional divide between “professional” and “amateur” photographers. This divide was established in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Soviet cultural policy. Photography was clearly defined as a functional propaganda instrument or “political document”²² that had to reflect “the life of our people – the builders of communism”²³. (These tenets of Soviet cultural policy created the institutional

¹⁸ Skalbergs, Atis. Uldis Briedis. In: *Latvijas fotomāksla: Vēsture un mūsdienas*. Compiled by P. Zeile. Rīga: Liesma, 1985, p.177.

¹⁹ Slava, Laima. Fotogrāfs Uldis Briedis. *Studija*, No. 22, 2002, p.25.

²⁰ Svede, Mark Allen. On the Verge of Snapping. *Latvian Nonconformist Artists and Photography*.

In: Neumaier, D. (General ed.) *Beyond Memory. Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art*. New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum and Rutgers University Press, 2004, p. 240.

²¹ Demakova, Helēna. *Different Conversations. Writings on Art and Culture*. Rīga: Vizualās komunikācijas nodaļa, 2002, p. 389.

²² Сатюков П. Советский фотожурналист – правдивый летописец великой эпохи, разведчик будущего. *Советское Фото*, № 1, 1961, с. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

basis for photojournalism and a theoretical position that lent an ideological slant to every press photograph, regardless of the subject. As Briedis remembered in a conversation²⁴, the practical everyday work of a photojournalist went on without literal reference to these requirements). The development of photography was in the remit of the Photo Section of the Journalists' Union of the USSR, and the only professional photographers were photojournalists²⁵. All the rest were "amateurs", and this included even those fine art photographers who had gained international recognition (and this is despite the fact that, for example, several of Latvia's most outstanding fine art photographers of the 1960s had been trained as photo-reporters²⁶, while the photojournalists had not). In a way, it was also because of this strict division that in the late 1980s, when the boundaries of the visual arts were expanded to encompass new media, the attention of professionals in art was specifically directed towards the professionals in photography – i.e., the photojournalists. The prevailing negative attitude, in the late 1980s, towards fine art photography as an amateurish (and unsatisfactory) expression of photography was also expressed by Pēteris Bankovskis when he made a critical comment referring to certain "vices" of amateur fine art photographers²⁷. In 1991, Demakova specified the area of photography that was of interest to contemporary art: "Taking into account the contemporary experience in art, when museums of modern art are including photography in their collections alongside painting, graphic art, sculpture and installations, the impressive achievements of our photographers in 1990 deserve mention. Of course, this applies to professional achievements, avoiding any listing of the medals won by amateur photographers in world amateur salon exhibitions."²⁸

A second significant factor is the difference between the demands of fine art photography and photojournalism, which took on a completely new meaning in the light of the great changes that came in the late 1980s. In the 1960s and 70s, fine art photography experienced its "Golden Age" in Latvia, but in the 1980s it continued to devote itself to aesthetic and formal objectives that had largely been achieved already, leading to artistic stagnation. "A period of heightened photo-aestheticism (...) continued"²⁹, and "aestheticised photo-salonism" developed³⁰, as art historian Eduards Kļaviņš points out. Demakova attributed this phenomenon to the "Soviet salon"³¹ movement. On the other hand photojournalism, which has always claimed to be objectively reflecting reality (truth) in its dynamic role as a selfless messenger, continued to be topical and contemporary. In the art world, as in society in general,

²⁴ Telephone conversation with Uldis Briedis, 31 December 2009.

²⁵ Formulated, for example, by Nikolay Drachinsky, who created the Soviet photo exhibition *USSR. Story in Pictures* for the Western audience. See the interview with Drachinsky: Savisko, M. U.S.S.R. Story in Pictures. *Māksla*, No. 4, 1968, pp. 50-51.

²⁶ For example, in 1963 Jānis Kreicbergs and Gunārs Binde graduated from the School for Photo-Reporters of the Moscow Central House of Journalists, and in 1962 Valters Jānis Ezeriņš finished the Faculty of Journalism of the People's University.

²⁷ Bankovskis, Pēteris. Politika kā estētika? *Māksla*, No. 5, 1989, p.70.

²⁸ Demakova, Helēna. Zaudētā "paradīze". Mūsu tēlotājas mākslas gads viņpus robežpostenim. *Diena*, 11 January 1991, p. 3.

²⁹ Kļaviņš, Eduards. The story of Inta Ruka and her photoportrait stories. In: *Stories, Storytellers*: [Catalogue of the exposition of the Republic of Latvia. La Biennale di Venezia, 48th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art]. Ed. by H. Demakova. Riga: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts – Riga, 1999, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Demakova, Helēna. "Let's have a picture taken. When you're dead I'll have something to look at." In: *Inta Ruka*. Ed. by H. Demakova. Riga: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts – Riga, 1999, p. 22.

this was a time of a general reassessment of values. Fine art photography, stagnating at the time, had lost its prestigious and perhaps even avant-garde reputation (which it had in the late 1960s) and, furthermore, it turned out that it epitomised all the negative properties of images. In the eyes of contemporaries at that time, fine art photography “beautified”, “aestheticised”, “dramatised” and “transformed” reality, and so it was associated with lies and untruths, regarded as a typical feature of the *Ancien Régime*. Contrasting with it was *glasnost* and the openness, directness and truthfulness offered by documentary photography. Thus, for example, photographer Mārtiņš Zelmenis, when he assessed the 1987 solo exhibition by Uldis Briedis held in the 4th floor vestibule of the Latvian SSR Museum of the Revolution (the present War Museum), notes that: “Certain works, albeit few (to the credit of the photographer!) pay homage to the tendency of recent years to aestheticise photographic images at all costs, sometimes by burning technique, in order to cover up certain parts of the image and thus achieve a dramatic effect.”³² In an article on Briedis’ solo exhibition *Mēs Latvijā* (‘We in Latvia!’) (1988), screenwriter Armins Lejiņš adds: “In fine art photography, too, there are a variety of techniques that permit endless transformations of the original image. It’s hard to refrain from corrections, enhancements and so forth. It’s those “so forths”, ending with what are known as falsifications of artistic publication, which were so prevalent in the previous decades.”³³ His words and those of other critics of the late 1980s are summed up by poet and current affairs journalist Andris Bergmanis. Although not a specialist in the visual arts, he aptly perceived the spirit of the age (and felt the need to explain why he regarded Uldis Briedis as a photo-reporter rather than a fine art photographer): “For me, fine art photography has connotations with something of the salon, something that is for the most part fake. This kind of work, even that of our finest masters, has a faint whiff of snobbism about it. Uldis catches the moment. Not any moment, but that which seems significant to him. And it’s his choice of which moment to capture that determines its lasting quality in history and thus also in art.”³⁴

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the demand and craving for genuineness, truth and a faithful representation of reality served to admit documentary photographers to the world of professional art. Art historian Laima Slava considers that photography was included among the recognised professional artistic media somewhat earlier, mentioning as a significant turning point the solo exhibition by Andrejs Grants in Riga in 1983: “I would even go so far as to submit that it was precisely through

³² Zelmenis, Mārtiņš. [Untitled].

Literatūra un Māksla, 1987, 1 May, p.7.

³³ Lejiņš, Armins. *Latvijas hronika*.

Māksla, No. 5, 1989, p.71.

³⁴ Bergmanis, Andris. *Visur bijis klāt*.

Liesma, No. 3, 1989, p.35.

the work of Andrejs Grants (followed by the independent stances on photographic thinking taken up by his contemporaries Gvido Kajons, Valts Kleins, Inta Ruka and Mārtiņš Zelmenis) that photography began to flow naturally into the wider Latvian visual arts scene, where it had hitherto been included among the range of means professional artistic expression with some reluctance, with a certain effort.”

As one of the most important events of the 1990s in Latvian art Demakova considers to be the participation by “our photographers (Vilis Rīdzenieks, Uldis Brauns, Egons Spuris, Gvido Kajons, Andrejs Grants, Inta Ruka, Valts Kleins, Mārtiņš Zelmenis, Uldis Briedis, Aivars Liepiņš, Modris Rubenis and Jānis Buls) in the major exhibition of Eastern European photography at the Photography Museum in Lausanne last summer. After Lausanne, the exhibition travelled to Amsterdam. We should also mention the exhibition of work by photographers Liepiņš, Grants, Kleins, Spuris, Ruka and Zelmenis at the Bielefeld Museum of Art (Federal Republic of Germany).” This was followed by a solo exhibition *Laika zaglis* (‘The Thief of Time’) (1991) by Valts Kleins and the inclusion of his series of photographs *Mēs gribam – mēs vēlamies* (‘We Want – We Wish’) in the biennial of art in Rostock (1992), and the exhibition of work by photographer Gvido Kajons in the exhibition *Kvalitāte '92* (1992) together with work by artists Andris Breže, Leonards Laganovskis, Leonhard Lapin and Vilnis Zābers.³⁵ The early 1990s was also the time when the photography of Uldis Briedis began to be appreciated in the art world, moreover in an international context.³⁶

The rise of documentary photography in Latvia culminated in the late 1990s, when documentary photography came to be accepted as one of the means of expression of professional art. From this aspect it is significant that the series of photographs *Mani lauku ļaudis* (‘My country people’) was included in the Latvian exhibition *Stāsti, stāstītāji* (‘Stories, storytellers’) (along with works by Anita Zabiļevska and Ojārs Pētersons) at the Venice Art Biennale (1999).

Another significant result of the processes that began around 1990 was the presentation of archives of documentary work by several photographers at art institutions – for example, the exhibition of documentary photographs from the 1960s by artist Zenta Dzividzinska *Melnbaltais* (‘Black and White’, 1999)³⁷ and the exhibition *Es neko neatceros. 1964–2005* (‘I don’t remember a thing. 1964–2005’) (2005)³⁸, as well as the exhibition of the 1970s photo archive of photographer

³⁵ Demakova, Helēna. *Different Conversations*. 2002, p.389.

³⁶ The solo exhibition of work by Uldis Briedis ‘*We in Latvia*’ was also shown at Lugano (1990), and his work was included in the above-mentioned Lausanne exhibition curated by Helēna Demakova (1990), the travelling exhibitions *Latvian Photographers in the Age of Glasnost* (1991–1993) and *The Memory of Images* (1993); they were shown in the exhibition ‘*Five from Riga*’ curated by Helēna Demakova and Philippe Legros in Stockholm, along with work by Aija Zariņa, Ojārs Feldbergs, Ojārs Pētersons and Ojēgs Tillbergs (1991).

³⁷ Dzividzinska, Zenta. *Black and White*. Text by I. Šteimane, G. Janaitis. Riga: self-published, 1999, p.32.

³⁸ The book of photographs that followed the exhibition includes a much wider range of visual material. See: Dzividzinska, Zenta. *I don’t Remember a Thing. Photographs 1964–2005*. Ed. by Z. Dzividzinska, A. Tifentāle. Riga: Artists Union of Latvia, 2007, p.186.

Māra Brašmane *Manas jaunības pilsētā* ('In the city of my youth', 2002)³⁹. Worthy of note is the album of documentary photographs by fine art photographer Wilhelm Mikhailovsky *Laikmeta sejas* ('Faces of the Time') (1998)⁴⁰, which includes an alternative and sometimes even parallel view of the events covered by Uldis Briedis.

The social gaze of a documentary photographer

In the Western theoretical critique of 20th century documentary photography, two predominating kinds of social gaze are emphasised, taking as a point of reference the social status of the photographer and his or her audience (because "the documentary image is typically intended not for the people depicted, but for those in society who possess authority and influence."⁴¹). The "upward" and "downward" gaze are differentiated.

Looking "downward" are those documenting the life of the lower social strata, emphasising the roles of the victim and the sufferer, thus arousing in the observer an imaginary sympathy. Historically this kind of view is represented in the early 20th century by, for example, Paul Strand⁴² and Alfred Stieglitz⁴³, according to the theoreticians.⁴⁴ We should also mention here the documentary photographers of the Great Depression in the USA (although their aims were noble and their sympathy real, rather than imaginary, so the theory, developed in the atmosphere of late 20th century media cynicism, cannot be applied to the works of another age). In the present-day context, this kind of social gaze is evident in almost all the documentary photography that appears in world galleries of fine art photography. Collectors of photos are very partial to victims of any kind of disaster or violence, the needy, the homeless, the unemployed, rural people, etc., because they see in such images a special kind of "philosophical depth" or "human drama".

On the other hand, the "upward" gaze is evident in photographic works which document the upper social strata (among contemporary photographers, some individual works by Martin Parr⁴⁵ could be considered a typical example), and this kind of gaze is characterised by a critical, sceptical, unmasking attitude. This schematic division, though very useful for finding one's bearings in the flood of material that Western documentary photography offers, cannot automatically be

³⁹The photo album published after the exhibition includes a more extensive range of visual material. See: Brašmane, Māra. *Manas jaunības pilsēta*. Compiled by L. Slava, author of text J. Zvirgzdiņš, L. Langa. Rīga: Neputns, 2005. B. pag.

⁴⁰Mikhailovsky, Wilhelm. *Faces of the Time*. Introductory text by V. Avotiņš. Rīga: self-published, 1998, n.p.

⁴¹Edwards, Steve. *Photography out of Conceptual Art*. In: Perry, G., Wood, P. (eds.) *Themes in Contemporary Art*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 149.

⁴²American photographer and film director (1890–1976). One of his most famous photographs is *Blind Woman* (1916).

⁴³American photographer and gallerist (1864–1946). A large section of his work belongs to the pictorialism movement in photography, but Stieglitz also produced socially critical documentary photographs.

⁴⁴These photographers are mentioned as representing the "downward" gaze in: Kotz, Liz. *Aesthetics of "Intimacy"*. In: Bright, Deborah (ed.). *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*. London; New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 208.

⁴⁵British photographer, curator and photography collector (born 1952).

transferred and applied to the works created in Latvia in the Soviet period. This is also true of the photography of Uldis Briedis. Because his camera (and largely also that of other Latvian documentary photographers of the second half of the 20th century) is pointed neither “upward” nor “downward”. At least not in the sense in which this differentiation is applied by Western theoreticians. The photographer does have a comment to make on what has been observed, but he has regarded with equal respect and a sense of humour his friends and associates (in staged portraits and snapshots), the cultural elite (artists in beautiful and contemplative poses) and politicians (sometimes in awkward situations), along with everyone else.

In 1974 American theoretician Allan Sekula wrote about the assertion of neutrality, characteristic of documentary photography, and critically evaluated the viewer’s trust in photography. Sekula points out that with documentary photography, we are always looking not at the photograph as an image, but at what is depicted in it (people, events, places, etc.) and taking this as an objective reflection of reality.⁴⁶ The photograph as an image thus becomes “transparent” – we are looking through it. The “transparency” of photography has subsequently been discussed at length in the context of the aesthetic aspects of photography by British philosopher and sceptical theorist of photography Roger Scruton.⁴⁷ Semiotician Roland Barthes developed the idea of the “transparency” of photography in his paper *Rhétorique de l’image* (1964)⁴⁸, in which photography is described as *analogon*, the direct representation of a real scene. Later, in the work *La Chambre Claire* (1980)⁴⁹, Barthes describes photography as “literally (...) an emanation of the referent”⁵⁰ and argues that photography “cannot break out of referential language” and is “indivisible from the referent”⁵¹.

This is the way one regards the photographs in which Uldis Briedis reflected the events of the National Awakening of the late 1980s and early 90s, attended by almost all active photojournalists: demonstrations, concerts, the Barricades, etc. The political and cultural elite of that time, and “The Little Man” in a time of turmoil. These photographs cannot be regarded dispassionately and analytically by the participants and witnesses to the events – as “simply” a string of images (i.e., it is not possible to separate the photograph from its referent). Contemporaries see (remember, re-live) themselves in the photos, at the same time comparing their feelings of that time with their present experience.

⁴⁶ Sekula, Allan. On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. In: Goldberg, Vicki (ed.). *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, pp. 452–473.

⁴⁷ Scruton, Roger. *Photography and Representation*. In: *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1983, pp. 102–126.

⁴⁸ Barthes, Roland. *Rhétorique de l’image*. *Communications* 4, 1964. English: *Rhetoric of the Image*. Transl. Stephen Heath. In: Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. London: Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 32–52.

⁴⁹ Barthes, Roland. *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie*. Paris: Gallimard, Le Seuil, 1980. Latvian: Barts, Rolāns. *Camera lucida. Piezīme par fotogrāfiju*. Tulk. Ieva Lapinska, pēcvārda aut. Elga Freiberga. Rīga: Lalkmetīgās mākslas centrs, 2006.

⁵⁰ Barts, Rolāns. *Camera lucida*, p. 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.15.

Thus viewing the photographs can become a very emotional process, in which the recollections of the viewer play an important role. Such photographs express the essence of the “emanation of the referent” described by Barthes: the viewer sees not the photograph, but the event, participating in it and experiencing it once again. In this case, the photographer is “one of us”. The photographs record that which is preserved in the memories of eyewitnesses, and this correspondence allows people to re-live their own presence at the event. This function of photography is also noted by Briedis himself, although he applies it not to the viewer’s perspective, but to that of the photographer: “And it’s often the case that the photographer doesn’t see the picture itself, but instead remembers the event and the atmosphere in which the picture was taken. And imbues the photograph with something that isn’t actually there at all.”⁵²

How does a stranger, a viewer “from outside” regard these photographs? In a review of the ‘We in Latvia’ exhibition of photographs by Briedis, Pēteris Bankovskis gives his own answer: “I imagine that a foreigner, to whom Skulme, Gorbunovs or Vidiņš, and likewise a Popular Front congress or an Interfront march mean little, a foreigner who inevitably confuses information about the Baltic with information about the Balkans etc., will, on regarding these photographs, primarily experience the emotional insight that something significant is happening to these people, this nation.”⁵³ We may agree with this assertion, because a good photojournalist will find the “real” shot that expresses the essence laconically and clearly to both eyewitness and outsider alike. These are photographs that will, eventually, become the symbols of that event or period of time. As pointed out by Bankovskis: “The series of photographs by Uldis Briedis showing the arrest of an old man by the Freedom Monument on 23 August 1987 is also a kind of symbol of the times – shocking and incisive, as is usually the case with such symbols.”⁵⁴

In conclusion we need only add that the photographer himself is laconic about the process and methods he uses. In reply to a question posed by a journalist about the qualities required of a press photographer, Briedis answered in 1987: “To look at life with open eyes, to speak simply, without employing formalist tricks and techniques, to be honest and endowed with a sense of humour. (...) I try to photograph in the style of reporting – to photograph life itself, natural and unembellished.”⁵⁵

⁵² [Untitled]. Fotosalons. *Padomju Jaunatne*, 17 April 1987, p. 4.

⁵³ Bankovskis, Pēteris. *Politika kā estētika? Māksla*, No. 5, 1989, p. 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Тарасевич В. Знакомьтесь – Ульдис Бриедис. *Журналистские новости*, №5, 1987, с. 7.