

Postcards in the National Library of Latvia: Options for the Interpretation of Photographic Materials

Līga Goldberga

This research is funded by the Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia, project “Cultural Capital as a Resource for the Sustainable Development of Latvia,” project No. VPP-KM-LKRVA-2020/1-0003

Keywords: postcards; materiality of photography; photograph collections; biographies of photographs; collecting as a narrative

Real photograph postcards are widely found in private collections and scrapbooks, serving as commemorative objects; in libraries, archives, and museum collections as documentary heritage, memory tools, as testimonies to and proofs of historical events. In the history of Latvian photography, real photograph postcards, their circulation, and their accrual in memory institutions have been little studied and interpreted through contemporary theories. This paper problematizes the question of how to interpret large photographic collections consisting of photographs taken by professionals and amateurs which, in memory institutions, have been reduced to their visual content, serving as reference material. At the center of the research are the 1920s–1930s postcards, produced by photographic techniques, in the postcard collection of the Konrads Ubāns Art Reading Room of the National Library of Latvia (NLL KUMĻ).

The paper is part of the early stage of a larger study, the aim of which is to afford real photograph postcards a role in research into the history and theory of Latvian photography, utilizing the NLL KUMĻ collection as an example. Accordingly, the tasks of the paper are: to introduce the collection and its systematization practices; to appraise the theories current in photography; and to find an interpretative model for a large-scale collection of printed images that treats real photograph postcards produced by both professionals and amateurs equally.

The research methodology is derived from materiality studies of photographs, a field which has developed in the last decades, based on new materialism and post-humanism theories. Materiality studies address the agency of photographs, material aspects and storage conditions, and social circulation, as well as attempt to overcome the hierarchical model for interpreting photographs, which is based on authorship, originality, and art-market value. The research utilized qualitative research methods: research into historical sources; identifying periodical resources from the 1920s–1930s; case studies, analyzing sample postcards from the KUMĻ collection; discourse analysis, analyzing the fluidity of the significance of KUMĻ real photograph postcards in different social contexts.

Real photograph postcards in the NLL KUMĻ collection

The NLL Special Collections Department¹ holds various types of photographic materials — negatives, art, documentary and press photography, albums and postcards, photographs taken by professionals, amateurs, and unknown persons. These objects are classified

1 The photo collections are held in the Aleksejs Apinis Rare Book and Manuscript Reading Room, the Konrads Ubāns Art Reading Room, and the Lettonica and Baltic Reading Room.

according to their historical, artistic, substantive, content worth, etc. The evaluation process is determined by the circulation and functions of the collection as well as by the institution's regulations. Two models for the systematization of the NLL photographic collections can be distinguished. The first involves capturing the stories associated with objects and preserving the linked meanings of objects. For example, in the Aleksejs Apīnis Rare Book and Manuscript Reading Room collection, real photograph postcards, along with other documentary materials, are linked with a person, event, or correspondence. Meanwhile, in the KUML collection, each object is an individual unit, which is systematized by subject, for example, landscapes, Latvian cities, Rīga streets, portraits, plants, animals, etc. Sorting is determined by the demands of the collection's users, which are most often requests for visualizations. Information, stories and histories about the previous affiliations of real photograph postcards are not recorded in the KUML postcard collection, as the postcards are stored as visual text serving a wide range of subject references. The ability to fulfill subject references is this collection's main function.

The responsibilities of the KUML postcard collection are to collect and store postcards and greeting cards — produced by photographic techniques or issued by printing houses — to reflect the changes in Latvian postcard media from the end of the 19th century to the present day, as well as to serve, through its visual content, as informative reference material for specialists in various disciplines. The KUML postcard collection comprises more than 100,000 units in total, and this volume continues to grow.

Typically, printed postcards and greeting cards are acquired by means of legal deposits (LD)². This is printed matter which must be handed over, free of charge, to national book repositories in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law, for the purpose of accruing and making available to the public the national output of printed matter. The systematic practice of acquiring national printed works in Latvia can be considered to have started with the 1919 Decree on Libraries (Limane 2007). However, date stamps, indicating the systematic acquisition of postcards, have only been affixed to the reverse of postcards in the KUML collection since the early 1930s. Most of the backs of older postcards feature correspondence, which rules out LD status — they were acquired as donations. Commercially printed postcards and greeting cards make up the bulk of the collection, and the study only considers the KUML collection in terms of general and comparative features.

Postcards produced by photographic techniques, which are the core of this paper and research,³ have been acquired through donations and purchasing and comprise less than 10% of the total collection. The way the collection is divided by subject, its arrangement in boxes,

2 The history of LD in memory institutions can be traced back to the 16th century initiative of King Francois I of France, and to the 17th century in what is now Latvia. See Limane, Lilija (2007). Legal Deposit through the Ages. *Bibliotēku Pasaule* (Library World), Nr. 38, 01/01, pp. 34–37; see also the Legal Deposit Act [in Latvian] at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=136682> [Accessed 02.06.2021.].

3 As the starting point for the study, the KUML collection imposes its own limits — the paper does not seek to describe the history of Latvian postcards since their introduction into what is now Latvia, but to interpret postcards created by photographic techniques and their systematisation within the KUML collection.

and the typology of its content enable us to suggest that initially, the collecting priorities for real photograph postcards were souvenirs, depictions of vistas and popular people. If the original purpose of the postcard collection was to preserve the evidence of LD and documentary cultural heritage for future generations, then, from a contemporary point of view, collecting principles have been supplemented with the recognition of content and the potential for the images to be converted into a visual complement to research in various fields. In recent years, photographers' and studios' stamps have been taken into account in acquisition categories (not thought relevant previously, but does not change systematization by subject), and anonymous portraits and views of social life recorded by unknown photographers have been considered. These variations in collecting policies are driven by changes in photographic research and curatorial work, as well as by the requests of reading-room visitors and research interests addressing micro-histories and the history of social life. The ranges of visitors and research fields are extensive — historians, art historians, students, researchers into and enthusiasts of the history of photography, artists, curators, etc.

Practice in organizing the substantial KUML postcard collection has not been consistent — it has varied with the scale of postcard circulation and changes in media. In general, it has been structured by subject, but a small part — commercially printed reproductions of works of art — are arranged by the author of the reproduced artwork. Authorship is not considered in the systematization of real photograph postcards, they are arranged by subject — unknown landscapes, Latvian towns and regions in alphabetical order, notable public buildings in the capital city, monuments, artists, actors, writers, politicians, musicians, unknown persons, etc. The division of postcards according to their production technique is ill-defined — each photograph has a bibliographic code (IAt 77) and most are stored in separate boxes, but this system is not consistent. In addition, since the digitization of postcards was commenced, those scanned have been sorted into another separate system — by catalogue-number order,⁴ defining only four subject groups: views, portraits, art and greeting postcards. Digitized postcards are not issued to readers, and they are available on digital collection sites,⁵ while unscanned ones are selected on demand. It is important to note that although online platforms store only the digital surrogate of the original, they allow users to systematize their selection in the digital environment by their own criteria, based on metadata information about authorship, date, geotagging, content keywords, and other aspects. These different examples of changes in collection organization indicate that systematization practices vary with the circulation of the collection, for example, digitization has facilitated the formation of selected collections in the historical collection by other systematization principles. Similarly, some segments of the collection point to a change in media, such as the popularity of photographic paper in the first half of the 20th century, which was replaced by the cheapest publishing model for printed postcards after the Second World War. Unfortunately, since

4 The ALEPH library information processing system is used in the processing of the NLL collection, making the collections accessible in online catalogues. Postcards are assigned a unique ALEPH system number during the cataloguing process. Bibliographers are tasked with identifying postcard content and describing it using a common template. A digital copy of the postcard is attached to the catalogue entry.

5 For example, <https://zudusilatvija.lv/> ; <https://lndb.lv/> ; <https://ainavudargumi.lv/> ; <https://runa.lnb.lv/>

the collection's existence, its collection policies and systematization practices have not been addressed in studies or recorded in reports, so the history of the nearly hundred-year-old collection can only be modeled by generalizing observations from its current physical condition and various traces of systematization.

Definition of a real photograph postcard

The definition of real photograph postcards may vary between memory institutions, depending on the postcards' functions and utilization, as well as the systematization applied to each collection. In this paper, the definition of real photograph postcards is based on the KUML collection's acquisition policy and the circulation of the collection.

The NLL KUML definition of real photograph postcards is broad: all photographs that feature the form of a postcard on their reverse are included in the postcard collection.⁶ This definition is determined by two aspects. Firstly, the collection is part of Latvia's documentary heritage, and it serves as reference material for specialists in various fields of culture and art. Consequently, the usefulness of the real photograph postcard collection is enhanced by the diversity of the range of subjects, allowing the inclusion not only of souvenir postcards, but also anonymous and amateur photographs. Secondly, postcard photographic paper, produced both in and outside Latvia, was popular in the 1920s–1930s domestic market. It was distributed, for example, by the commercial photographer and publisher Mārtiņš Buclers (Figure 1), and from 1935, postcard paper was also produced by the VEF factory ([anon] 1935: 1). Postcard photographic paper was used by a wide range of studio photographers, such as Jānis Rieksts, Roberts Johansons, Vilis Rīdzenieks, Lūcija Alutis Kreicberga, Kārlis Bauls, Mārtiņš Lapiņš, and others who were commissioned to produce portraits of both popular cultural figures and private individuals on postcard paper; souvenir postcard publishers, such as Valdemārs Upītis, Andrejs Saule, Krišjānis Vīburs, Juris and Ģirts Bokumi, etc. reproduced view postcards; amateurs and photography enthusiasts captured their surroundings and experiences in photographs for personal use, for correspondence and recollection (Figure 2); sector professionals such as archaeologists and heritage conservation professionals used photography to document the evidence they required; photographic artists such as Rīdzenieks and Johansons undertook studies, both formal and by subject (Figure 3). All of the above examples can be found in the KUML postcard collection and at present are requested for inquiries by subject. Consequently, the definition of the collection's real photograph postcards is determined by the circulation of 1920s–1930s photographs in history and contemporary research.

6 In comparison, the Latvian Museum of Photography holds souvenir postcards in its postcard collection, but all other photographs made on postcard paper are classified as photographs. In the archives of the National Cultural Heritage Board, the definition of a postcard is not important, because all documentary materials on cultural heritage sites are held in integrated folders — the medium is not relevant to systematization.



Figure 1. 1930s. Velorekords [postcard]. Photographer Mārtiņš Bucīns. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading Room. NBA04-000048040

Problems in researching KUML real photograph postcards

Before reviewing the development of materiality studies, it is important to look at the issues faced by researchers of the KUML real photograph postcards. In the 1920s–1930s, the accessibility of photography encouraged the recording and reproduction of private and public life, creating a database of material objects that, to date, have been accrued in museum and library collections as documentary heritage. Since the discovery of photography, theorists have striven to simultaneously seek and criticize the place of photography in art, drawing a distinction between art (aesthetics, abstraction) and testimony (objectivity and documentary value); later in the second half of the 20th century, postmodernist criticism of formalism sought to place photography between art and politics (Emerling 2012: 22; 41). These theoretical discourses have determined the compilation, systematization, and evaluation of photograph collections, where an object's value is frequently determined by its authorship, originality, and value as an exhibit. In this hierarchy, collections of large-scale standard graphic productions hold a low status — consequently, because it has been compiled by art-history methods based on authorship, the NLL KUML collection also cannot be considered an autonomous unit for research purposes. For example, the KUML real photograph postcard collection — compared with the works of photographers accrued in the NLL Rarity Collection (Roberts Johansons, Vilis Rīdzenieks, Mārtiņš Sams, etc.) — has no direct agency in the art discourse. In other cases, the work of curators and artists with archives⁷ can provide such agency for large-scale image collections,

7 For example, exhibitions: *Pazudis arhīvā* (Lost in the Archives), 2016), curators Inga Lāce and Andra Silapētere; *Tev pienākušas 1243 ziņas. Dzīve pirms interneta. Pēdējā paaudze* (You have received 1243 messages. Life before the Internet. The Last Generation, 2017), curators Kaspars Vanags, Zane Zajānčauska and Diana Franssen; *2020: Mūžības perspektīva* (2020: A Perspective on Eternity, 2020), curator Anete Krūmiņa in partnership with the *Orbīta* text group; as well as artists who use archives in their works, such as Andrejs



Figure 2. 1930. Woman on horseback [postcard].
Photographer unknown. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading
Room. NBA04-000058714

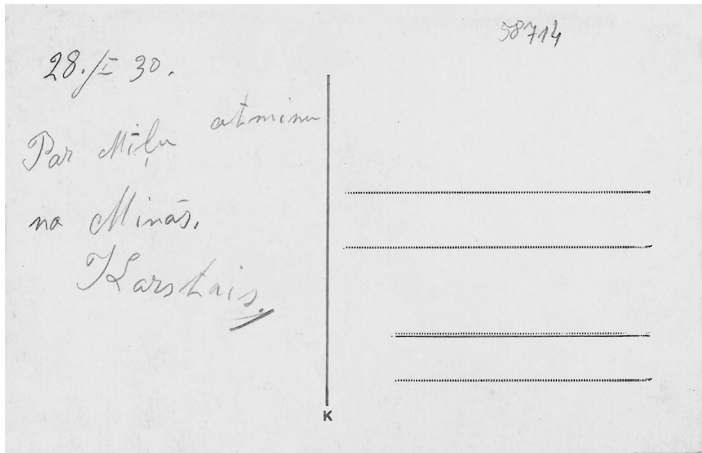


Figure 2. 1930. Woman on horseback [postcard].
Photographer unknown. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading
Room. NBA04-000058714



Figure 3. 1930s. Rural landscape [postcard].
Photographer Roberts Johansons. NLL K. Ubāns Art
Reading Room. NBA04-000053094

but, to date, the KUML real photograph postcard collection has not been considered in art discourse, in authorship and aesthetic categories, nor has it been presentably used in practice in contemporary art projects. Similarly, research into the artistic practices of individual photographers within the KUML collection would not be fruitful, as the real photograph postcards available cannot provide sufficient information about the creative activity of photographers, as a monographic study looking beyond the collection would. For example, some twenty real photograph postcards by Roberts Johansons in the KUML collection, which are kept under various landscape subject keywords, or studio portraits by Jānis Rieksts, placed under subjects covering representatives of cultural professions, are very narrow facets of these photographers' activities, providing only a very small perspective for research into their legacy. Also, considering the history of the real photograph postcard medium itself, a review of the KUML collection by subject cannot provide complete information on the circulation of all real photograph postcards, as the postcards reproduced as photographs have not been acquired as legal deposits and therefore the collection does not provide a complete representation of the medium. Only a comprehensive study, including analyses of both private collections and archive, library and museum collections of various profiles — the subject range of real photograph postcards in museums dedicated to war, medical history, also memorial and local history museums, is subordinate to the recollections each institution is relating.

Until now, in the acquisition, systematization strategies, and reader service practices of the NLL KUML postcard collection, a postcard's value has been determined by how the diversity and recognizability of its visual content — lost manor houses, portraits of musicians, writers, actors, politicians and other famous people, railways, cityscapes, the aftermath of wars, etc. — fits in with the discourse of photographs as testimony. The collection has not yet been studied as an autonomous unit, as postcards in research areas based on vertical authorship and originality have low status. However, the move toward studies on that has developed in the last decades allows new layers to be uncovered in the interpretation of large-scale photograph collections.

Studying the materiality of photographs

Materiality studies in the research of large-scale photography collections and archives became popular at the end of the 20th century. The historiography of this movement includes the changes in the methodologies of art history and theory since the end of the 19th century; the discussions of the actual discoverers and practitioners of photographic processes about the technical aspects of photography, its role in art and culture (Emerling

Strokina, Inga Erdmane, Kristaps Epnars, Viktorija Eksta and others. For the use of the archives in art projects in the Baltic region, see Skuja, Anete (2020). The utilization of archive materials in contemporary art in the Baltic region. Master's thesis. Art Academy of Latvia.

2012); cultural and social anthropology studies addressing material culture and post-colonial criticism; as well as debates about relationships between popular culture and authority, institutional criticism in the disciplines of philosophy and cultural theory (Caraffa 2020).⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, a researcher of English visual and historical anthropology, finds the origins of studying photographic materiality in the field of Marxist feminism theories, which, from the second half of the 20th century, looked at the relationships of photography in private and public spaces, also encompassing body representation issues. This course did not yet articulate the materiality of photography and social biographies; nevertheless, it was an important turning point, as it examined the relationship of photography with the environment and its recipients (Edwards, Hart 2004: 8). And that is where the interest in representation fits into the new direction of materialism and in post-humanist methodological practices. These no longer consider humans to be the center of world cognition, but rank them as one of the agents, and articulate the agency of the material world in similar fashion (Neimanis 2018: 242).⁹ The agency of inanimate objects is their ability to create an affect, or in other words, the object world encourages us to interpret it according to our experience and knowledge of the world as a whole and the object we are examining. Thus, in studying the materiality of photographs, the meanings of objects are not fixed, but change in different contexts — in the hands of owners, collectors, and researchers.

This study's theoretical framework is formed by a group of authors who are expanding research into criticism of colonial anthropology,¹⁰ into interpretations of postmodernist

- 8 Costanza Caraffa's historiography *Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space* (2020) summarizes the genesis of materiality studies of photographs, which is based on colonial anthropological and institutional criticism, the reassessment of the role of photography in power relations, and applying the concept of agency to hitherto rarely interpreted museum, archive, and library collections. See also J. Emerling's essays *The Thing Itself* and *The Archive as a Producer* (2012), in which the author views photography as a discourse and offers critical readings of frequently cited texts, at the same time interpreting the history of photography and changes in theoretical methodologies. Emerling discusses the reflections of Charles Baudelaire, W. H. F. Talbot, Benjamin's texts on photography, as well as important works by Michel Foucault, Allan Sekula, Geoffrey Batchen and others.
- 9 The new materialism is mentioned in this paper as one of the frameworks for photographic materiality studies. For more information on the new materialism, see Neimanis, Astrida (2018). *Material feminism*. Braidotti, Rosi, Hlavayova, Macia (eds.). *Posthumanist Glossary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 242–243; also, for photography and body representation, see Brettle, Jane, Rice, Sally (1994). *Public Bodies: Private States: New Views of Photography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- 10 Colonial anthropology used photography as a documentary tool in research on indigenous peoples. Today, these practices are being reviewed in the discourse on power relations. See, e.g., Porto, Nuno (2004). *Under the Gaze of Ancestors. Photographs and Performance in Colonial Angola*. Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (eds.). *Photographs. Objects. Histories. On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge. pp. 113–131. The rise of Latvian identity and national self-consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century can be seen as a local example of self-determination. Local organizers of the photography scene used the photographic press to call on amateurs to engage in photographic ethnography rather than entrusting local culture to foreign interpretation. See, e.g., [Anon] (1913). *Latviešu fotogrāfiskās dzīves kārtējā sapulce 30. aprīlī* (Regular meeting of the Latvian photographic scene on 30 April) *Stari* (Rays), Nr. 5, 152. lpp.; Mednis, A (1921). *Pašceņa* (Self-respect). *Fotogrāfijas Mēnešraksts* (Photography monthly), Nr. 6–7, 147.–151. lpp.; Sams, M. (1921). *Par etnogrāfisko fotogrāfiju* (On ethnographic photography). *Fotogrāfijas Mēnešraksts*, Nr. 1, 17.–18. lpp.

and poststructuralist texts on power relations, institutional criticism, social biographies of things, and the visual economy. One of the principal authors in the photographic materiality field is the already-mentioned Edwards, who studies the representation of photography in museum and archive collections. Edwards and her collegial authors are guided by the works of philosophers, anthropologists, and photography theorists of the second half of the 20th century. For example, Michel Foucault's¹¹ ideas on relationships between archives, institutionalization, and authority allow us to see the bureaucratic processes of collections as part of changes in the materiality and significance of photographs (Edwards 2004: 50). In Pierre Bourdieu's ideas, people's relationships with the material world are embedded in social practices.¹² How photographs should be taken, aesthetic expectations, and attitudes towards artifacts are socially taught (Caraffa 2020: 84). In Allan Sekula's considerations, an archive comprises a link between knowledge and power and constructs significance, functions, and values.¹³ Sekula examines the relationships between photography, the economy, and culture (Emerling 2012: 123, 124). The theoretical basis of this and other authors' works enables materiality study researchers to interpret large-scale photograph collections, opening up a more nuanced photographic media landscape and overcoming the hierarchical view of dualities between the categories of content and technology, art and documentary. Addressing materiality means including not only formal, authorship, and originality aspects in research, but also collection systematization practices, the subject framework and retention practices, the institutional context, and utilization or circulation. Thus, if to date the KUML real photograph postcards have been used solely as reference material, visualizations and sets of instruments, then in materiality studies the whole collection and its circulation becomes the object of research and interpretation.

In the last decade, researchers and curators of photography in Latvia — for example, Katrīna Teivāne-Korpa, Pēteris Korsaks, Lauma Lanceniece, Alise Tīfentāle, Šelda Puķīte, Evita Goze, Anete Skuja, Kārlis Vērpe, Liāna Ivete Beņķe, and others — have conducted significant studies on the history, theory, and curatorial practice of Latvian photography. Micro-histories and broader historical processes in Latvian photography have been illuminated and an important research base created in the hitherto fragmented sphere of the history of Latvian photography. Nevertheless, the photographic materiality discourse remains relatively little-studied. In art-based research, among others, amateurs' photographs, anonymous archives, and large-scale photograph collections have been utilized, for example, in projects by Viktorija Eksta, Andrejs Stokins, Inga Erdmane, the *Orbīta* group, and other artists, revealing the authors' conceptual vision and selections. Baiba Tetere, on the other hand, in recent years has addressed the missing theoretical basis in research on the institutionalization of photography.¹⁴ Similarly, curatorial practices have shown an

11 See Foucault, Michel (1989). *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.

12 See Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

13 See Sekula, Allan (2003). *Reading An Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capitalism*. Wells, Liz (Ed.). *The Photography Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 443–452.

14 See Tetere, Baiba (2020). *Top pētījums: Fotogrāfija un atmiņas institūcijas* (A Study being launched:

interest in institutional activities, for example, in the exhibition organized by the ISSP Gallery in 2021, reproductions from the Strenči collection were exhibited together with records from the Joint Catalogue of the National Holdings of Museums in the installation *Stikla Strenči dažos vārdos* (Glass Strenči in a few words); the KIM? Contemporary Art Centre exhibition *Es neko neatceros: ienākot ZDZ izvairīgajā arhīvā* (I Don't Remember Anything: Entering ZDZ's Elusive Archive, 2021) featured the archive of artist and photographer Zenta Dzividzinska, which was systematized during the exhibition, displaying the invisible work of the archivist to visitors. Consequently, in the photographic materiality discourse, research into memory institution collections is still an open field in terms of academic research. In the remainder of the paper, case studies of the KUML real photograph postcard collection provide insights into the potential for materiality study methods in the research of large-scale photograph collections, considering the evaluation, systematization, and curatorial practice of collections, as well as digitization and object biography aspects.

Values and biographies of photographs

Acquiring and managing collections is a hierarchy-producing process — the work of collection specialists is to evaluate objects in various contexts, make choices about their inclusion in the collection, restoration, and digitization, and to promote content of use to researchers. Valuation in collections is largely determined by authorship, market value, and originality. As KUML holds high-quality and unique works of art¹⁵ alongside its postcard collection, real photograph postcards stand low in this hierarchy. In order to find a place for large-scale image collections in the history and theory of photography, researchers of materiality propose that collections and archives should be viewed as ecosystems. This model does not emphasize the value of individual objects over others, but looks at all collection management practices, including the work of the collection manager, institutional and subjective factors, as well as the materiality of the objects, their classification, and other aspects as a whole (Edwards, Lien 2014). This analogy is also used by other researchers of materiality, referencing the theoretical works of Elizabeth Edwards. For example, for art historian Costanza Caraffa, the ecosystem concept enables research to encompass not only the objects themselves, but also work with the archives and the infrastructure created around them; also, another essential principle of the ecosystem view is that it breaks down the vertical hierarchical view based on authorship. (Caraffa 2017: 134). Visual arts researcher Teopisti Stylianou-Lambert, on the

Photography and Memory Institutions). *Creative Museum*. Available (in Latvian): <http://www.creative-museum.lv/lv/raksti/dienasgramata/baiba-tetere-top-petijums-fotografija-un-atminas-institucijas> [Accessed 10.07.2021.].

- 15 In addition to the postcard collection, the KUML repository holds a variety of collections, including Latvian posters, Latvian and foreign graphic art. The Aleksejs Apinis Rare Book and Manuscript Reading Room collection has works by photographers, such as Roberts Johansons's art photographs.

other hand, argues that, just as ecosystems are dominated by certain life forms, collections also have dominant objects. This predominance is largely determined by usage practices. (Stylianou-Lambert 2019: 380). Of course, the ecosystem view does not exclude the evaluation of the authorship, aesthetic, originality, or other properties of objects. It forms an inclusive overview of both the dominant photographs currently in circulation and the invisible part of the archive and the work related to it.

In the case of the KUML collection, the value and dominance of objects is determined by the recognizability of their content, and this surpasses authorship, artistic value and originality. This can be seen in the systematization of the collection — authors' photographs are not stored together, but sorted by subject. Similarly, the recognizability of the displayed content is crucial in acquiring the collection — if the town, building, or person shown in the real photograph postcard is not known, this significantly reduces the postcard's potential circulation. In recent decades since postcards have been catalogued and digitized, there has been no consistent methodology for deciphering and describing their content. On the one hand, the scale of keyword usage, or subject indexing,¹⁶ is changing, ensuring that the image can be found on digital platforms. Similarly, the detailed elaboration of the image-content description field differs from reading room to reading room and depends on the expertise, initiative, and other factors of the person writing the description of a graphic production. For example, one description writer will create a detailed historical summary for the Alūksne fortress island postcard, including information about the location's cultural history, which is not visible in the image itself, while another will record information about the post-office stamp, correspondence, or photographer's stamp. Consequently, the circulation and useful capacity of real photograph postcards is largely determined by the subjective factor of bibliographers' work. Subjectivity also influences collection policy — for one bibliographer the recognizability of content is important for a postcard to be included in a collection, for another it is authorship (although cards are stored by subject on shelves, the importance of authorship has grown in digital databases where images can be selected by metadata). Conversely, in the most recent KUML collections, selection paid equivalent attention to storylines that illustrate the diversity of postcard media, such as portraits of wedding groups, portraits of unknown persons in nature and interiors, scenes from military history, and various views of social life.

The turn to materiality emphasizes that photography's role, functions, and the significance it is accorded in the discourse on art and culture; its aesthetic expectations, evaluation, and status are not fixed categories in memory institutions, but change with context and research directions. Art historian Glen Willumson describes the fluidity of this significance as photographs' trajectories — it is the movement of objects over time, in cultural processes and changes in assigned significance in the institutional framework (Willumson 2004: 65). For

16 Subject indexing is the selection of records from an authoritative database when preparing a postcard description for the ALEPH cataloguing system. Authoritative database records are unified headings, such as persons, places, events, classifiers. For the NLL, a separate structural unit — the Institute of Bibliography — is responsible for subject-indexing methodology. The Institute compiles these unified headings and data systems in line with international bibliographic standards.

example, the KUML postcard collection recently added a postcard with a view of the castle ruins in Cēsis, which was acquired as part of a consignment from an antique shop in Germany. The reverse features correspondence with an addressee in France; the postcard was sent from Latvia. It is not known how it came into the German cultural space — sold, donated, or through the activities of a private collector. However, through the acquisition practices of the NLL, it returns to the Latvian cultural space as documentary heritage. Other examples of real photograph postcards relating to an earlier period include the sale of greeting cards published abroad in the domestic market. Postcard publishers' logos can be traced back to France, Germany, England, Spain, and other countries. Sometimes local distributors printed greetings in Latvian, German, and Russian on the obverse. It should be noted that the KUML postcard collection holds relatively fewer items imported during the interwar period than souvenir postcards from local publishers. Currently, real photograph postcards issued in Latvia are the most actively circulated part of the collection, and their trajectories are expanding with the potential of digital collections. Although the physical objects are stored in the repository, the postcards' digital surrogates have the potential to gain wide circulation.

A related term used by curators and materiality study researchers, such as Elizabeth Edwards and her followers, is the case of anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's social biographies. The trajectories mentioned above relate more to how the significance of photographs changes within certain structures and institutional frameworks. For its part, the biography concept includes the aspect of objects' social agency. Kopytoff sees this as the alternation of commodity and singularity status in different cultures and systems. A single object can have several biographies (Kopytoff 1986: 68); for example, a KUML real photograph postcard possesses historic, artistic, economic, and personal-use biographies, a research-paper biography, etc. These alternate with the perspectives of users and the corresponding values assigned by individual users, as well as by larger or smaller groups. For example, a real photograph postcard's personal-use biography may be its sentimental value that can be read from correspondence in the KUML collection. In the usage of the Library collection, the real photograph postcard has a research-paper biography, which accords it research and information value. This is reflected in its usage statistics. In the same way, a real photograph postcard can be given an exhibition biography, so including it in the art discourse. It should be noted that postcards are not afforded exhibition value to the same extent as, for example, Roberts Johansons's art photographs, which are held by the NLL's Rarity Collection. Most photographs held by memory institutions are accrued as documentary heritage, which is in active usage circulation, but most often interpretation stops at their visual content. Another value of the KUML postcard collection is its ability to inform and diversify, but materiality studies also consider the postcards' biographies, place in different systems (personal, economic, in institutions, etc.), and their ability to embody Latvia's cultural history in a palm-sized object — 9×15 cm.

The biographies mentioned above are part of the singularization process, when a photograph, a commodity, acquires a unique status and the postcard becomes a part of national cultural heritage. At the same time, its economic biography does not end with its inclusion in the collection. It might be assumed that items in the collection no longer have commodity status, but this is revised by at least two more examples. First of all, National Collections must

be valued in monetary terms, as prescribed by the Law on Museums. This practice varies between institutions: for example, the NLL records market value. For their part, the Regulations Regarding the National Holdings of Museums provide valuation guidelines where the value of an object is determined by the equation: the sum of the historical, commemorative, authenticity, antiquity, and material-value coefficients is multiplied by the initial market value (Cabinet Regulation No 956, 2006). This economic value is fully determined by the vertical hierarchy of the valuation — the higher the originality and authenticity coefficients, the greater the economic value. Secondly, returning to the NLL KUML postcard collection, in the circulation of research work, postcards still possess economic value from the frequency of their reproduction — the costs of copyright and library digitization services.

The use of biographical methods in interpreting KUML real photograph postcards has one drawback, owing to the collection's systematization traditions. Performing a reference function does not require objects' legends to be recorded, nor their interrelations. Consequently, the postcard repository enters a state of liminality, waiting for its new significance in the illustration of local history and cultural heritage. The existence of previous biographies is evidenced only by marks on the reverse of real photograph postcards — correspondence, dates, authors' trademarks, postcard-paper producers' logos, and the stamps of private collectors and institutions. In recent years, donors' names have been recorded in pencil on the reverse. This is a new practice — an initiative of bibliographers to capture a small fragment of the lives of objects within their previous collection. More detailed recording of legends is not useful because of the systematization and scale of the collection. In terms of content, correspondence on the reverse may be related or unrelated to the postcard image. For example, one sender's story about the road over the Balvi bridge and falling into the mud was sent to Miss Ž. Kļaviņa on a postcard with a view of the scene (Figure 4). The image in this real photograph postcard serves as testimony to the incident. The photographer is unknown — it could have been the sender themselves or any other distributor of real photograph postcards. In another postcard addressed to Miss Ž. Kļaviņa, the image on the obverse and stories in the correspondence are unrelated (Figure 5): a real photograph postcard on which photographer Jānis Rieksts has captured the scene of the funeral of Latvia's first President, Jānis Čakste, has culturally and historically significant content. Conversely, the reverse has a relatively trivial note: "Since you have a pressing need to submerge yourself in reading, I am just a nuisance, and that reminds me to go and leave you alone." The date the photograph was taken is clear thanks to the event shown, but the time of the correspondence is unknown — the postcard does not have a postmark and the sender has entered a miserly "Here" in the address field.

Researchers of materiality have reviewed Walter Benjamin's essays as well as Roland Barthes's ideas, expressing the criticism that these authors' standard and still frequently cited works placed typical photographic materials at the bottom of the evaluation hierarchy, also reducing photographs to an indexical function (Caraffa 2020: 80). Although Benjamin's concept of the aura is complex and multifaceted, one aspect of it deals with the collapse of the aura in the reproduction process and may be applied to objects in the KUML collection. On the one hand, it could be argued that the reproducibility of a postcard, its commodity status, and unrelated correspondence shatter the Čakste funeral event's aura of celebratory sanctity, as the



Figure 4. 1920s. Bolwa (Balvi) [postcard]. Unknown photographer. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading Room. NBA04-000053644. Obverse.

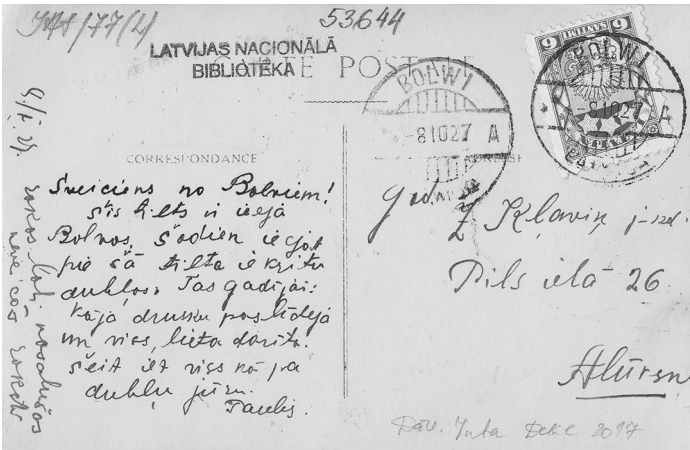


Figure 4. 1920s. Bolwa (Balvi) [postcard]. Unknown photographer. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading Room. NBA04-000053644. Reverse.

photograph's medium is accompanied by repeatability and uniformity in an effort to bring the surrounding world closer to the masses (Benjamin 2005: 159). The real photograph postcards of Rainis's funeral taken by Vilis Rīdzenieks are a related example — the series consists of at least five views, in several copies, from the poet's funeral service in Rīga. Some of them are even intimate moments from his widow, Aspazija's, farewell. One reverse has traces of an album page and glue, indicating the inclusion of the event in a private collection. On the other hand, contemporary readings offer new examples for interpreting the aura concept,¹⁷ where the encounter of social circulation and documentary cultural

17 For example, in Hito Steyerl's interpretation, the aura of poor images is in their circulation and in the social bonds they create, rather than in the category of originality. See Steyerl, Hito (2013). *In defence of poor images*. Steyerl, Hito (ed.) *The Wretched of the Screen*. Sternberg Press, pp. 31–45.



Figure 5. 1927. Funeral of the first President of Latvia [postcard]. Photographer Jānis Rieksts. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading Room. NBA04-000049318. Obverse.

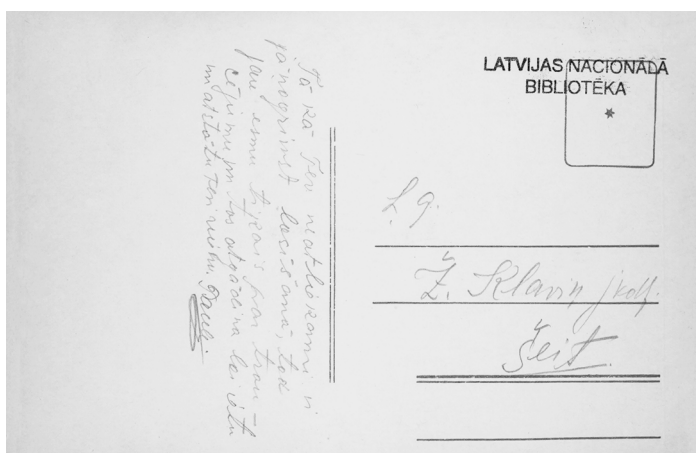


Figure 5. 1927. Funeral of the first President of Latvia [postcard]. Photographer Jānis Rieksts. NLL K. Ubāns Art Reading Room. NBA04-000049318. Reverse.

heritage could be interpreted as the aura of this object and the essence of the postcard's medium. This equivalent significance between photograph and correspondence can be seen in artists' efforts to portray both sides of the medium in their projects. For instance, at the *Izdzīvotāji* (Survivors) exhibition, held as part of the *Marīna 2021* biennale in July and August this year, graphic designer Anitra Eglīte-Poikāne had chosen to reproduce postcards on magnets and affix obverses to reverses, creating an interactive experience for exhibition visitors. In another example, Vienna-based artist Sophie Thun reproduced a postcard by the photogram technique within the *All things in my apartment are smaller than 8×10 inches* project, causing the obverse and reverse to merge into a single plane. These last examples show how real photograph postcards acquire a biography and the capacity to act in artistic discourse, and the focus of artistic interest is on media circulation and the fusion of the obverse and reverse.

Returning to the postcard of J. Čakste's funeral issued by Rieksts, it is currently stored in a box of portraits, because the association of the content with a cultural-historical event and person is more important than the accuracy of the genre in classifying the collection. Digital reproductions of the postcard continue their biographies in various collections and researchers' interpretations, including this one's. For example, putting a digital reproduction of a Rieksts photograph in a web image search engine shows that one history enthusiast has used the postcard as a visualization, to enumerate the cost of Čakste's funeral wreaths. It is becoming clear that after digitization and publication of images in online collections, all the trajectories of digital surrogates can no longer be identified, just as when the postcards came to the NLL previously. In the example of the Čakste funeral scene, the real photograph postcard serves as a tool for social memory, but at the same time includes personal memories. The ambiguity of the relationship between the obverse and the reverse points to the fluidity of significance in an individual communication, as well as to the smaller and larger groups that own the photographs and their reproductions.

Collecting as a narrative

The object of the researcher's interpretation may be the visual content of the photograph, its technology, form, biographies, or history, as well as its collection and/or other aspects. Narrative analysis as a method of interpreting a collection can be viewed in at least two aspects. Firstly, the content's narrative by subject: the KUML real photograph postcard collection reflects the history of Latvian culture, in the historical and technological aspects of postcards and photography. Secondly, collecting as a narrative, which will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs, reflects the institutional framework in which the trajectories of real photograph postcards take place and their biographies are interpreted.

One example of collecting as a narrative is taken from cultural theorist Mieke Bal, who expresses the potential of narratology methods to interpret the object world. Narrative is able to coexist both objectively as reproduced text, for example in a book; and subjectively, as written by the author and perceived by the reader. Bal asks, *Can objects themselves be stories or express them, and can objects be included as elements in a narrative?* (Bal 2006: 270–271). It should be noted that Bal does not view collecting in the sense that objects form a narrative in a certain order, for example, about a historical event. She is interested in the collecting process itself as the narrative — the motives for acquiring objects, assigning significance, systematizing, etc. Bal's interdisciplinary model of interpretation can be viewed in the photographic materiality discourse, as it indirectly involves changing the biographies of objects. Bal's analysis does not touch on objects' own capacity to act, but on the motivation of their acquirers. Nevertheless, her analysis model allows the framework — under which objects are systematized, evaluated, and their trajectories changed — to be understood.

To align the Bal model with the example of the KUML collection, it is important to briefly look at the author's analysis, which defines the narrator, looks for the beginning of the collecting narrative, and interprets viewpoints and the end point. In her judgment, Bal interprets the activities of private collectors. She argues that when using narratology methods, it is difficult to define the beginning of the narrative — at which point does the acquisition of objects become collecting. Bal argues that on the one hand, this can be determined retrospectively — the beginning is not the first acquired object, but the moment when the gathering of objects acquires the import of collecting, and collectors become self-aware of being narrators who disclose certain events and their sequence through objects. On the other hand, the beginning of collecting is explained by man's relationship with the material world, which is inherited culturally and has been relevant since childhood. For Bal, collecting is an essential human characteristic — stories are reproduced through the objective world. However, Bal notes that one important category is socio-economic status, which determines the motivations for collecting. Bal refers to a list of motivations compiled by museologist Susan Pearce, which includes 16 categories such as rivalry, aesthetics, risk, prestige, community awareness, and perfection. For each category, motivation culminates in the attainment of immortality. Bal combines the entire list under one motivation — fetishism, which enables her to interpret collecting with psychoanalytical and Marxist theories (Bal 2006: 275). Freudian collecting is based on visual experience and underpinned by endeavours to return to wholeness through accumulating objects. Conversely, Marx's fetishism views objects as the products of human labour, the objective appearance of public relations. In Marx's story, the collector is an agent of history, and the collecting impulse is created by being part of a capitalist society (Bal 2006: 277–281). Borrowing the toolset of Bal's analysis, memory institutions' collecting aligns with the Marxist motivation for collecting, where in the case of state institutions, the narrator would be the state and the viewpoints would be the interpreters of the institution's acquisition policy and history — the developers and users of the collection.

The majority of museums, archives, and libraries, more or less, cite the same mission, where the accumulation of objects is the preservation of national cultural heritage for future generations. It has already been mentioned that the focalization concept could be applied to institutional acquisition policies — in narratology, the function of focalization on the author's writing is to manipulate the reader by changing the viewpoints through which events are revealed in the story (Ozoliņš 2021). This shift in viewpoints, referencing Bal's analysis, can be attributed to the fluidity of the meanings of real photograph postcards as they fall into the hands of different custodians and interpreters. On the one hand, this is revealed at the level of object biographies. In a hypothetical example, in 1930, someone bought a real photograph postcard with a view of Rīga and sent it to relatives with greetings. Ninety years later, this postcard does not evoke a sense of belonging in those relatives' grandchildren, and the postcard is donated to the Library. At the Library, this real photograph postcard reaches the KUML collection, where the connection with the correspondents is not relevant, but a new connection is created — in the mutual relationships between objects in the collection. This change of significance is an event in the collecting narrative that includes a violent dimension, as in order for an object to become part of a collector's story, some of its original significance is taken away (Bal 2006: 282). It could be said that this "violence" in change of significance

also continues while the collection is being used intensively. Each time a postcard is used in a reference, its significance changes in relation to other objects in the collection and its previous significance.

Another example of a change of viewpoints that can be considered is the acquisition and systematization of memory institution collections affected by a change of government. For example, the KUML postcard collection still shows traces of the Soviet occupation, which, in terms of collection content, was determined by the publishing culture of postcards in that period. For several decades, through legal deposit, the collection received postcards with references to the political system of the time. This can be seen, for example, in the subject boxes: Greetings on Victory Day, Greetings on Soviet Army and Navy Day, etc. Similarly, the imprint of the occupation period has also remained in the design of the boxes — some subject dividers are still in Russian. In these examples, the materiality of the KUML collection still retains a 50-year-long viewpoint of the collecting story.

Although Mieke Bal's analysis does not touch on materiality, interpreting the collection as a narrative allows us to look at an important aspect in the study of photographic materiality: the institutional frame in which postcards are classified is in flux, and, in the collecting narrative this can be interpreted as focalization or changing viewpoints. If in terms of content, the-subject-oriented postcard narration scene reflects the postcard medium and the history of Latvian culture, then addressing collecting itself as a narrative shows how memory institutions organize the discourses on collective memory and history.

The last category listed in Pierce's collecting-motivation inventory is the attainment of immortality. In some ways, this resonates strongly with museums' missions — to preserve cultural heritage for future generations. Bal explains that the end of the collecting narrative is death, which is a completed collection or the attainment of perfection. The end of the overall NLL collecting meta-story would possibly mean a fundamental turning point, such as the end of the institution's existence. However, certain parts of the KUML collection have possible endings; for example, the 1920s–1930s real photograph postcard collection can only include as many objects as the number of photographs that were created during this period. Although this is a significant number, it is a scale with limits. Another turning point in the collection's story is the change in postcard media. For example, postcards are no longer produced on photographic paper; they are printed and reproduced in printing houses. They are also losing popularity as a correspondence medium, and in our time, postcards are often produced as advertising handouts — on the reverse, the space for a postage stamp remains, but open space for a letter is replaced by advertising text.¹⁸ These examples show that the end of the postcard collection's story is dependent on the aspects of changes in the medium's social circulation and its reproduction technologies.

18 Examples include the *Bad Dog* advertising agency's postcards, as well as those for exhibitions and concerts.

Conclusion

The paper problematizes the research opportunities of large-scale photograph collections with a case study of the NLL KUML postcard collection, based on the study of photographic materiality. This trend has emerged as a criticism of the hierarchical view of circulation and art history in museum collections, which largely judges photograph collections by their authorship, aesthetic, and formal features. Documentary heritage photograph collections make up the bulk of museum, archive, and library collections. In essence, however, they perform invisible work and are not seen as autonomous research objects, although they are in active circulation and serve as reference material for researchers in various fields.

The paper is part of an early stage of a larger study, the aim of which is to make real photograph postcards relevant in research on Latvian photography's history and theory, examining the case of the NLL KUML collection. The paper set out to develop the fundamental basis for such research: to characterize the real photograph postcard section of the KUML collection; to define real photograph postcards on the basis of the circulation of 1920s–1930s real photograph postcards, as well as with regard to compiling the KUML collection; to formulate research issues posed by the KUML collection; and to expand the examples of interpretation based on photographic materiality studies.

The KUML definition of real photograph postcards is broad — they are all postcards produced by a photographic technique, featuring a space for correspondence on the reverse. During the 1920s–1930s period, postcard photographic paper was widely available to both professional and amateur photographers, and consequently the collection consists of both souvenir postcards and amateur photographs. The KUML real photograph postcard collection is evaluated and systematized by usage function — it is documentary heritage of Latvia's cultural history and serves as visual material for a broad range of references by subject. However, to date the KUML real photograph postcard collection has not been considered a self-contained research object, because it occupies a low place in the hierarchical view of the collection, which is based on authorship and originality. In order to get an idea of the overall history of real photograph postcards, the activities of specific publishers and photographers, and the historical circulation of real photograph postcard media, any study should include a number of memory institutions that accrue this type of material. Unlike postcards produced by printing, which have been compiled as legal deposits at the NLL since the 1930s, real photograph postcards have been included in the KUML collection through donations and purchases. Consequently, a review of the KUML collection alone cannot represent the history of the medium. However, the KUML real photograph postcard collection can be interpreted in the discourse of materiality studies. This means selecting the collection itself as the research subject and addressing objects' economic, private-use, artistic-agency, technological, and photographic histories; other biographies and trajectories; systematization practices; and collecting as a narrative.

Materiality studies enable large-scale collections of standard photographs to be studied — collections that are not included, for example, in discourses on art photography research. The direction is based on interpreting the agency, circulation, and representation of objects.

Turning to materiality proposes that memory institution collections be viewed as ecosystems, forsaking the hierarchical view. This interpretative model is interdisciplinary and includes art history and theories and the history of photographic technology, museological, cultural, and social anthropology, philosophical and cultural theories, and other disciplines related to the circulation of photographs. In research on the history and theories of Latvian photography, the study of photographic materiality has only been applied relatively recently; some cases also can be observed in curatorial practice. This paper uses the material approach to consider the evaluation aspects, social biographies, and circulation of KUML collection photographs. In the same way, borrowing terminology and analytical elements from the discipline of narratology, collecting has been considered as a narrative and an institutional framework under which real photograph postcards undergo trajectory changes and experience a fluidity of significance.

The innovation of the paper is in its characterization of the compiling and systematization of the almost century-old KUML postcard collection, as well as subjecting it to interpretation by qualitative research methods — case studies and discourse analysis based on current and interdisciplinary photography theories. The purpose of this study is not to write the history of the real photograph postcard medium, but to problematize research questions about how the photograph collections of memory institutions participate in writing histories

- Bal, Mieke (2006). Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting. Bal, Mieke. *A Mieke Bal Reader*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 269–288.
- Benjamin, Walter (2005). Mākslas darbs tā tehniskās reproducējamības laikmetā (Works of art in the age of their technical reproducibility). Benjamins, Valters. *Iluminācijas* (Illuminations). Translated from German to Latvian by Ivars Ijabs. Rīga: LMC, 152.–187. lpp.
- Caraffa, Costanza (2020). Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space. Pasternak, Gil (ed.). *The Handbook of Photography Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 77–96.
- Caraffa, Costanza (2017). Manzoni in the Photothek. Photographic Archives as Ecosystems. Buddeus, Hana, Lahoda, Vojtěch, Mašterová, Katarína (eds.). *Instant Presence: Representing Art in Photography*. Prague: Artefactum, pp. 122–137.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (2004). Photographs as Objects. Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (eds.). *Photographs. Objects. Histories. On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–15.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (2004). Mixed Box: The Cultural Biography of A Box of 'Ethnographic' Photographs. Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (eds.). *Photographs. Objects. Histories*.
- On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge, pp. 48–65.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, Lien, Sigrid (2014). Museums and The Work of Photographs. Edwards, Elizabeth, Lien, Sigrid (eds.). *Uncertain Images: Museums and The Work of Photographs*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 2–20.
- Emerling, Jae (2012). The Thing Itself. Emerling Jae (ed.). *Photography. History and Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 17–41.
- Emerling, Jae (2012). The Archive as A Producer. Emerling Jae (ed.). *Photography. History and Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 120–158.
- Kopytoff, Igor (1986). The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditisation as a Process. Appadurai, Arjun (ed.). *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–91.
- Stylianou-Lambert, Theopisti (2019). Photographic Ecosystems and Archives. *Photographies*, No. 12(3), pp. 375–394.
- Limane, Lilija (2007). *Obligātie eksemplāri cauri laikiem*. (Legal deposits through the ages). *Bibliotēku Pasaule*, Nr. 38, 34.–37. lpp.
- Cabinet Regulation No 956 (2006). Regulations Regarding the National Holdings of Museums.
- Available: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/148769> [Accessed 02.06.2021.].
- Neimanis, Astrida (2018). Material feminism. Braidotti, Rosi, Hlavayova, Macia (eds.). *Posthumanist Glossary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 242–243.
- Ozoliņš, Jānis (2021). *Fokusēšana, naratoloģijā* (Focalisation, in naratology). Nacionālā enciklopēdija, 5.07. Available at: <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirkliis/125487-fokus%C4%93%C5%A1ana,-naratolo%C4%A3ij%C4%81> [Accessed 10.07.2021.].
- Willumson, Glenn (2004). Making Meaning: Displaced Materiality in the Library and Art Museum. Edwards, Elizabeth, Hart, Janice (eds.). *Photographs. Objects. Histories. On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge, pp. 65–83.
- [Anon.] (1935). *Jauns mūsu rūpniecības pasākums* (Local industry takes a new step). *Rīts*, 25.07., 1. lpp.

Pastkartes Latvijas Nacionālajā bibliotēkā: fotogrāfisku materiālu interpretācijas iespējas

Līga Goldberga

Atslēgvārdi: atklātnes, fotogrāfiju materialitāte, fotogrāfiju kolekcijas, fotogrāfiju biogrāfijas, kolekcija kā stāstījums

Fotopastkartes ir plaši sastopamas gan privātās kolekcijās un atmiņu albumos, kalpojot par piemiņas objektu, gan bibliotēkās, arhīvos, muzeju krājumos kā dokumentārais mantojums, atmiņas rīks, vēstures liecība un pierādījums. Tomēr līdz šim Latvijas fotogrāfijas pētniecības laukā to aprīte un uzkrāšana atmiņu institūcijās ir maz pētīta. Raksts problematizē profesionāļu un amatieru radītu liela apjoma attēlizdevumu kolekciju interpretēšanas iespējas. Pētījuma centrā ir Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Konrāda Ubāna Mākslas lasītavas (LNB KUMĻ) atklātņu kolekcijas 20. gadsimta 20.–30. gadu pastkartes, kas izgatavotas fotogrāfijas tehnikā.

Raksts ir daļa no plašāka agrīnas stadijas pētījuma, kura mērķis ir aktualizēt fotopastkartes Latvijas fotogrāfijas pētniecībā, pievēršoties fotopastkaršu sociālajai aprītei, nozīmju plūstamībai un materialitātei. Raksta uzdevumi ir: iepazīstināt ar KUMĻ atklātņu kolekciju un tās sistematizēšanas praksēm; apzināt fotogrāfiju teorijas un rast interpretācijas modeli liela apjoma attēlizdevumu kolekcijai, kas pamatā kalpo tematisko uzzīņu izpildei, taču autorībā un oriģinalitātē balstītā fotogrāfijas pētniecībā paliek neredzama.

Šajā rakstā vēsturisku avotu izpētē apzināti 20. gs. 20.–30. gadu periodikas resursi, gadījumu izpētēs analizēti KUMĻ kolekcijas pastkaršu piemēri, kā arī diskursa analizē interpretēta KUMĻ fotopastkaršu nozīmju plūstamība dažādos sociālos kontekstos. Raksts sniedz ieskatu fotogrāfiju materialitātes pētniecības piemēros, aktualizē krājumu pārvaldīšanas hierarhizētājus procesus un to vietā piedāvā skatījumu, kas neizceļ atsevišķu krājuma priekšmetu vērtību pār citiem, bet veido iekļaujošu ekosistēmas modeli.