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Forgetful and Drowsy: The Affective Atmospheres in Contemporary Latvian Photography

Abstract

In the article, we advance the notion of an affective atmosphere for analyzing the works of art by two contemporary Latvian photographers—Aija Bley (b. 1967) and Arnis Balčus (b. 1978). The spatial relations of bodies and environments and the photographed subjects' facial expressions and postures negotiate a sense of postsocialist affectivity that we describe as forgetful and drowsy. In the selected images, the affective atmospheres enact the ambiguities of the Soviet legacies, along with the challenges of neoliberal rationality affecting today's Latvian society.

Keywords

Affective Atmosphere, Postsocialism, Latvian Contemporary Photography, Forgetting, Sleeping

This article draws from feminist affect theory to analyze the affective atmospheres in the works of two Latvian photographers—the series *Amnesia* (2008–2009) by Arnis Balčus and *Sleepers* (2014) by Aija Bley. Both artists employ a method of staged photography to enact situations relevant to the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Latvia. Affective components of their works proceed from the spatial relations of the bodies and environments and the expressions of the faces and postures of the photographed subjects. In the article, we argue that these images negotiate a sense of postsocialist affectiv-

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ity that we describe as forgetful and drowsy. While there are different scholarly approaches to thinking through affective atmospheres (Anderson 2009, Böhme 2017), in the article, we view it as a collective and transpersonal phenomenon capable of traversing between people and spaces, ideologies, and epochs. The affective atmospheres we are interested in are forgetfulness and drowsiness and corresponding clusters of affects like disillusionment and doubts, apathy and estrangement, dizziness, and a sense of absurdity and loss. These atmospheric patterns we encounter in the works of artists Arnis Balčus and Aija Bley are "shaped by the contact zone," in Sara Ahmed's terms, between the viewer of the photographs and the photographs themselves (Ahmed 2004, 194). Thus, postsocialist affectivity does not reside in the photographed people or represented environments, nor in the materiality of the images or the viewers. Instead, the affective atmosphere inhabits the relational in-between space encompassing both the photographs and the audience, potentially also the readers of this article.

Affective Atmospheres: The Haze in Photography

After the so-called "affective turn" that emerged as a response of critical theory to ongoing political, economic, and cultural transformations, introducing "a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter" (Clough 2007, 2), the study of the role of emotions in culture has become of paramount importance in the humanities. In this inquiry, affects are often referred to as a bodily capacity to affect and be affected, i.e., the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect, such that affectivity is associated with the "the self-feeling of being alive (…) aliveness or vitality" (ibid.). Likewise, affects are often perceived as "pre-individual bodily forces" (Clough 2010, 207). They are unpredictable and autonomous (Massumi 1995), fostering new insights into embodiment, investment, and emotion. While some authors tend to locate the affective in the preconscious, pre-social, pre-linguistic, and pre-discursive realms, a feminist reading of affect embraces its value for registering and promoting the awareness of social meaning (Hemmings 2005, 565). From this point of view, the pre-individual character of affect is attributed to the visceral bearing of ideologies inscribed histories and cultural configurations into bodies. They continue to orchestrate their movements, experiences of spatiality, and identities (Pedwell, Whitehead 2012; Parvulescu 2019). By claiming that affective moods are conditioned by the relations of power (colonial pasts and neoliberal futures), we expand the idea of personal being political, offering this feminist mantra a visceral reading.

Fig. 1. Arnis Balčus, from the series *Amnesia*, 2008–2009.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Arnis Balčus, from the series *Amnesia*, 2008–2009.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3. Arnis Balčus, from the series *Amnesia*, 2008–2009.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4. Arnis Balčus, from the series *Amnesia*, 2008–2009.
Courtesy of the artist.

As noted by various scholars, affects not only attach to bodies and objects but are contiguous; they slide into each other, stick, and cohere (Ahmed 2010b, 32; see also Berlant 2011; Anderson, Ash 2015). This view underpins an understanding of an affective atmosphere, which can be perceived as "a plane upon which certain affects circulate and commingle" (Wall 2019, 4). It presents the air of a space, its mood, and its ambiance. The atmosphere seems to fill the space with a feeling of a haze (Böhme 2017, 12). This haze might blur the precise outlines of bodies, objects, and events, affectively wrapping and unifying them. In turn, the subjects enveloped by this haze generate particular bodily responses. However, their bodily movements and reactions can also interact, respond or alter the atmosphere since the bodies are not just *in* the atmosphere but are also a *part of* it—atmospheres do not exist independently (Shyldkrot 2019, 149). From this point of view, the transpersonal character of the atmosphere is explained: it transcends individual emotions and biographical details yet is, to a certain degree, dependent on them. A feminist reading of the affective atmospheres is motivated by the interest in the manifestation of a visceral set of relations, an entanglement of embodied experiences and political feelings, and the transfer of emotive energies that orchestrate bodies, binding them in the affective dynamic and animating historical subjects (Khanna 2020, 1–7). These histories consist of socially and politically enacted inequalities, bodily vulnerabilities, rituals of remembering and forgetting, and the underlying value systems, desires, and dreams, inciting a particular sense of place and time.

Despite its overall impact in the humanities, affect theory, with a few noteworthy exceptions,[1] is still not widely used in the analyses of visual art, especially in post-Soviet contexts. In art criticism and histories, overlooking of feelings often concur with the marginalization of feminist, queer, and racialized perspectives. As Susan Best emphasizes, considering affect is not yet a part of any critical methodologies deployed in art history. Hence, we have a limited descriptive vocabulary to reason with (Best 2014, 7). Similarly, the prevailing tendency in photography criticism has been to avoid "personal thoughts and feelings" to provide a more precise exploration of the photographic meaning and its interaction with ideological and cultural contexts (Brown, Phu 2014, 2). Yet, embracing the affective dimension in art is rewarding since affect disturbs and subverts already established meanings, promotes artistic innovation, and enacts new "beginnings" (Best 2014, 3-5). Attending to affect in art interpretation amounts to discovering a "new

[1] See Pollock 2013; Brown, Phu 2014; Best 2014, 2016; Olin 2012; and Zelizer 2010—to mention a few recent examples.

ingredient" of an art object, even if its interpretation might seem opaque or ambiguous. Likewise, acknowledgment of feeling is central to addressing difficult, disturbing, and distressing images and overcoming trauma, revival, and healing. Adopting the perspective of affect encourages the development of reparative practices (Sedgwick 2003; Best 2016) that often employ complex, post-critical aesthetic strategies to engage the audience in an affective way, seeking pleasure and surprise. Yet, attending to "less affective" affects is helpful—those monotonous, seemingly inexpressive, and "dull" emotions. In the works of art, these feelings, according to Sianne Ngai, are explicitly *a*moral and *non*cathartic because they offer no satisfactions of virtue nor produce any therapeutic or purifying release. These "less dramatic" affects are weak but nasty. Defined by flatness and ongoingness, they have a remarkable capacity for lasting and tend to interfere with the outpouring of other emotions (Ngai 2005, 6-7). In her analysis, Ngai refers to affects like envy, anxiety, animatedness, stuplimity (a mixture of boredom and shock), paranoia, and disgust. We would like to embrace even flatter and more insipid affects like forgetfulness and drowsiness.

In the works of Arnis Balčus and Aija Bley, these affects enact atmospheres of standstill and emptiness, a sense of absurdity, detachment, desolation, hopelessness, and estrangement. In our inquiry, we use the terms "forgetful" and "drowsy" as gravity points, yet, the structure and arrangement of affects invoked in this article are not clearly defined, and we perceive them as clusters that can freely float, circulate and blend. In what follows, we attempt to attend to their post-Soviet socio-cultural significance in the context of the selected artworks while acknowledging that postsocialist affectivity presents a broader spectrum of affective states. In the article, guided by the selected works of art, we focus only on a few of them. Likewise, it should be noted that, while testing the potential of an affective atmosphere in the analysis of photographic works, neither works of art nor the article provide definitive answers to the questions evoked by such an inquiry. Instead, while making sense of postsocialist affectivity, we aim to grasp its potentiality for further critical inquiry.

Forgetfulness and the Sponge: Collecting Fragments

The works of photography by Arnis Balčus and Aija Bley provide a possibility to approach the affective atmosphere of (post)Soviet conditions. While in scholarly research, there are various framings of postsocialism, in the article, we will use a narrower meaning of the term that delineates how the cultural

situation in Latvia, like other countries in the region, is still, to a great extent, influenced by socialist legacies, which also determines its current struggles with neoliberal capitalist politics. The notion of the postsocialist condition allows accounting for how beliefs, dispositions, behaviors, and personhood of people proceed from their own or their predecessors' life in socialism (Gallinat 2022). In Latvia, it amounts to embracing a half-century from the Soviet occupation in 1940 until the restoration of independence in 1991. According to Madina Tlostanova, within the global neoliberal modernity/coloniality, East European countries were interpreted in a progressivist manner, i.e., "they were considered reformable and eventually subject to European assimilation, but always with an indelible difference" (Tlostanova 2018, 4). The "indelible difference" often marked the secondary status of the region, which was further strengthened by social, economic, and political transformations. Nevertheless, the term "postsocialist" does not suggest that countries are merely "stuck in the democrato-capitalist transition" and that the situation is temporal but instead invites to explore the embodied practices and affective patterns experienced by those in the region (Stenning, Hörschelmann 2008). These explorations can be carried out not only in the academic field but also in contemporary art.

In the visual arts in Latvia, a reflection or critique of the postsocialist engagements is not a very common subject. Instead, it tends towards a particular interpretation—"mostly taken up by chance or treated ironically, in a kitsch-like way" (Lāce 2013). The reasons for this tendency are several: an inclination in Latvian society to let the Soviet past "merge and disappear," a general underestimation of this cultural heritage due to its ideological and traumatic charge, as well as a risk of "sinking in a semi-sweet nostalgia of the "good old days" when everyone had a job, and the big mother state took care of us" (ibid.). Like in other postsocialist countries, in Latvia, after the end of the Soviet Union, the Soviet legacy was often dismissed for being replaced with Eurocentric visions based on the narrative of progress, liberation, and the return to Europe. However, it soon turned out that the visions for a brighter future were saturated with the premises of cruel optimism, to borrow a term from Lauren Berlant (2011)—an embracement of neoliberal capitalism, instead of happiness and freedom, caused anxiety and increased social inequality. Although people had expected a much higher "Western" level of prosperity, they soon discovered themselves in an impoverished periphery with a declining quality of life and loss of dignity and self-worth. Widespread unemployment, new class differences, poverty, corruption scandals, and economic disadvantages are among the factors that promoted disil-

lusionment and skepticism (Svašek 2006). An important reason for the social and economic downfall was the massive depopulation of rural areas, which limited people's capacity to imagine and plan for a future (Dzenovska 2012) and generated the affects of emptiness and desolation mimetic to the closed factories and deteriorating landscapes.

Balčus and Bley are among the few contemporary photographers in Latvia that have addressed these topics by creating atmospheric images to evoke certain postsocialist affectivity features. Balčus' interpretation of the Soviet legacies includes resorting to living memories and often conflicting attitudes towards this period. These motives also appear in other works (e.g., *Beyond the Blue River*, 2015, *Victory Park*, 2012–2016, etc.). While Balčus' approach can often be considered to be anti-aesthetical, and one could argue that his photographic gaze might lack compassion towards the photographed subjects, his photographic framing of the marginalized groups of people exposes social vulnerabilities produced by neoliberal capitalism, which was introduced to Latvia at the beginning of the 1990s and negotiated associated affective states, like disillusionment, a sense of non-belonging, and a feeling of failure. Likewise, Balčus' subjects often disclose symptoms of nostalgia which, in line with Svetlana Boym, can be interpreted as longing for another time or a better life and a commitment to the visions of the future that have become obsolete (Boym 2001, xvi). The subjects of Balčus' photographs might appear out of sync with time, expressing a sentiment of loss, displacement, and disorientation. They are stuck in the past, failing to come into the present.

The photographic series of *Amnesia* (2008–2009) consists of staged photographs—a somewhat atypical method for the artist, combined with an unusual level of the aestheticization of the images—the artist had attempted to make these scenes look rather "beautiful."

According to Balčus, the series performs various rituals that have died out from the daily life of Latvians due to social and political changes. These rituals are subject to "collective amnesia—forced or voluntary suppression of memories (…) for both to deny the Latvian Soviet identity and get over recurrent political and economic failures" (Balčus 2008/2009). By uncovering the suppressed memories presented as a ritual, the images expose a kind of forgetfulness sustained by the pattern of represented situations, bodily postures, and environments. Forgetfulness is an affect that comprises arresting confusion, disappointment, and an estrangement from the self. It emanates from the act of forgetting, which Ahmed aptly calls "a repetition of the violence or injury" (Ahmed 2004, 33). This repetition can be embedded in

racist, sexist, postcolonial, and post-imperial practices. For Ahmed, to forget means to continue the oppression by surrendering to the "fantasy of reconciliation" that invites us to leave behind the histories of pain and injustice (Ahmed 2010a, 148). However, escaping one's memory will not undo but only intensify the harm by closing oneself off, withdrawing from proximity, staying silent, and numbing one's sensations to "learn not to be affected or to be affected less" (Ahmed 2017, 24). As a result, that which is not revealed becomes a burden or a secret.

Meanwhile, remembering indicates a willingness and courage to acknowledge the social and political changes and face the unresolved pain that goes along with them. Ahmed's paradoxical comparison of memory to a sponge might be helpful here. Although the sponge seems to be a metaphor for erasing memories, for her, to remember is to put the pieces together, holding and waiting to see what "gets mopped up." Therefore, memory work is not only about recalling what has been forgotten but also allowing memory to become distinct, to acquire a certain crispness and clarity when things become more than half-glimpsed. Ultimately, one acquires a fuller picture by highlighting the connections between different experiences (Ahmed 2017, 22). In *Amnesia*, the selected scenes of the extinguished social rituals get mopped up to present a fuller understanding of the Soviet past, acknowledging its legacies and drawing connections between the scattered scenes. A fuller picture can function for negotiating the oppressed features of today's identities that are inscribed into Soviet legacies, comprehending the indelible difference of a postsocialist country, as well as providing a potential for a critique of eurocentric neoliberalism.

The rituals of Balčus' photographs start from early childhood and lead to an elderly age: a little girl in a pink dress on a tricycle and a boy in a checked shirt and a "kepka" (soft, billed hat) on a pedal car. The toys and clothes can be recognized as Soviet ones. The scene evokes a myth of a happy childhood which unfolds in a fairytale-like atmosphere with encoded gender roles: the girl looks like a doll, but the boy's clothes resemble a worker's. (Fig. 1). A schoolboy holding an empty bottle in his right hand looks at another one on the ground before him. A "perhaps bag" (a string bag called in Russian "avoska") popular in Soviet times is full of bottles—perhaps the boy is gathering empty bottles to earn some pocket money. His Soviet school uniform is too big for him, causing a sense of discrepancy and exposing his vulnerability, also enshrined by the unwelcoming look of the long row of silicate brick sheds characteristic of Soviet-era construction in the background (Fig. 2). Another picture with an even more explicit air of absurdity shows an office:

behind the "director" (man), that is, the official representative of the organization, is a portrait of Lenin, while in front of him is a worker (probably a woman) in a gas mask, which can be interpreted as a reference to the Cold War. The power relations between the Soviet ideology (symbolized by Lenin's portrait) and the "ordinary human being," official administration, and the workers, as well as between man and woman, appear to be accurate for the time. In this physically and ideologically restricted space, the ritual encounter fosters self-humiliation and social alienation (Fig. 3). Finally, the series addresses retirement and old age: in the image, an older woman is sitting in an armchair and looking at the empty screen of the TV set. Her tiny room in a Soviet-era block of flats allows minimal variations of standard furniture. At the same time, the only way to interact with the outer world—the television—is likewise suspended (Fig. 4).

In these works, the atmosphere of forgetfulness is created by the bodily and spatial practices of the depicted subjects. In contrast, the constraints of the environment translate into the limitations imposed by ideological control and social and economic circumstances, inhibiting the capacity to act and their aliveness or vitality in a more broad sense. The photographed subjects appear to close themselves off, to withdraw from reality, numbing their bodies and sensations. In the interview with Madina Tlostanova, Estonian artist Liina Siib, who likewise researches Soviet legacies, concludes that "Our bodies are trained under the Soviet discipline (…) Even if the bodies survived, the souls are corrupted by the conformity to reality" (Tlostanova 2018, 69-70). These bodily disciplines include kindergartens, schools, universities, working places, and private environments, such as the pocket-sized flats of the Soviet people. Tlostanova interprets these bodily constraints in the conceptual frame of "spatial history," where "space becomes a palimpsest" of overlapping traces left by "the rhetoric of dictatorships, totalitarian regimes, and colonialist states" (Tlostanova 2017, 98). For Liina Siib, the representation of these disciplining practices can be achieved due to the capacity of the space to bear witness and thus become a "telling space" that makes "invisible social structures visible and present" (Tlostanova 2018, 67). In Balčus' photographs this aim is achieved by the introduction of a "telling atmosphere" which exposes the disciplining and life-inhibiting practices. Bodies are put at a standstill and appear unable to look back or move forward. Although the photographs do not explicitly address the issues of violence and injury of the Soviet regime, nor attempt to unpack the burden or the secrets of the photographed people, the series acts like a sponge—it collects ritualized affective fragments in a fuller whole, inviting to overcome the state of enforced amnesia and retrieve vitality and liveliness.

Fig. 5. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 6. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 7. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 8. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 9. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014.
Courtesy of the artist.

Drowsiness: Postsocialist Precarity and the Agency of Sleep

Our second example is the series *Sleepers* by Aija Bley, an artist and film director. Guided by an anthropological curiosity, her photographic works research everyday life practices and expressions of the subjectivity of various social groups: schoolgirls, taxi drivers, elderly widowed women, or women participating in an orgasm masterclass. Her photographic gaze comprises irony and empathy, while the images range from documentary precision to poetic interpretation. In the series of photographs, *Sleepers* Aija Bley revisits the Latvian town Līvāni which has turned from a large industrial center in the 1970s into an "underdeveloped province of the European Union where only dreamers have stayed" (Bley 2014). In the images, people are sitting, standing, or lying by a garden table, in a hairdresser's salon, in a sauna, in a bedroom, in a canteen kitchen, on an old ferry, in a waiting room at the bus station, etc. (Fig. 5, 6, 7). The affect of drowsiness is evoked not only by the title of the series but also by the looks of the photographed people: they seem tired, with dazed expressions and aimless gestures, flagging bodies. The eyes are closed, or the vacant looks are directed nowhere. The "empty" faces do not exhibit intense emotions but indicate detachment,

apathy, affective numbness, and estrangement from the situation. The bodily postures in the images are staged so that the effect of a silent standstill is even more emphasized to convey the atmosphere of the disintegration of the economic and social, as well as personal relationships. A telling figure is a half-awake man in a black suit, with an artificial flower in hand, in front of abandoned buildings. He seems to be rather disoriented about his love affairs, confused about the date he is going to (Fig. 8). Yet, the plastic look of the flower attests to the ongoingness of the situation and introduces a perspective of permanence. The situation does not have any expected solution in the near future. The flower will not wither. Likewise, he will not meet his beloved one.

It is easy to recognize the mimetic similarity between the atmosphere of drowsiness and the social and economic reality of Līvāni after the 1990s, marked by unemployment, migration, and the closing of the future for those who decided to stay or were not able to move away. Like Balčus, Aija Bley's staged photographs enact almost absurd scenes to negotiate the loss of hope, the standstill, and the confusion. These flat but nasty affects not only interfere with but inhibit the emergence of others' potential emotions. The sleepers sharply contrast with the happy citizens and active workers of the Soviet Union who were supposed to build a communist future according to the well-known ideological slogans. Nevertheless, they also resist the standard of the neoliberal capitalist subject and the new model citizen introduced to the postsocialist countries. This "newly born man" is supposed to be autonomous, self-mastering, and single-minded, fulfilling the demand of the enterprising self that includes responsibility, self-help, and flexibility (Makovicky 2014). In this light, social vulnerabilities, inequalities, and limitations are often explained as personal failures to develop an enterprising attitude to life and meet the standard of neoliberal rationality, which depends on the particular definition of agency and visibility, as well as a commitment to market-based values.

The immersion of Aija Bley's photographic subjects in the atmospheres of passivity and abandonment enables the artist to capture the sense of postsocialist precarity, the term developed by scholar Jennifer Suchland to accommodate the "the loss of previous lifeworlds upon which symbolic and material forms of living were (re)produced," as well as the hybrid forms of exploitation and social vulnerabilities intrinsic to postsocialism (Suchland 2021, 15). Despite the ongoing "return to Europe" discourse, these territories maintain their "indelible difference" and continue to be presented as Europe's periphery or of secondary importance. Suchland invites us to re-

think how the political desire to get out of the Soviet (and Russian) yoke of power, while in many ways justified and necessary, actually invoked another colonial turn because the eurocentric visions "cannot be seen outside of the imperial projects of European empires" and they continue to establish global hierarchies of economic and political powers. In reaction to postsocialist precarity and the loss of the previous lifeworld, the atmosphere of fatigue and drowsiness emerges. Allowing oneself to become sleepy is a metaphor for the economic standstill and the disintegration of social and cultural life.

However, we would like to end this article with a more energizing perspective. The atmosphere of drowsiness can also be read as a resignment from the fantasies of progress, as well as a critical disregard of the models of the enterprising self and neoliberal rationality sustained by the discourse of the eurocentric orientation. Moreover, sleep tackles the ideas of continuous work and consumption inscribed in the pattern of neoliberal capitalism. According to Jonathan Crary, in its profound social uselessness and intrinsic passivity, sleep "poses the idea of a human need and interval of time" (Crary 2014, 10-11), which cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, nor any other ideological purposes. Thus, drowsiness is "an incongruous anomaly which frustrates and confounds any strategies to exploit or reshape it" (ibid.). While the subjects in Balčus' images seem stuck in time against their own will, the remaining inhabitants in Līvāni paradoxically reclaim their agency by refusing to move anywhere, to do anything, be it work or consumption. Their idleness demands reclaiming the interval of time for rethinking, remembering, and embracing the failures of the never-ending "transition." The atmosphere of drowsiness points to fundamental questions about Latvia's geopolitical situation, policy-making, and the possible futures for those inhabiting the peripheries. The urgency of these questions is further unpacked, yet in a somewhat comical way, by the image of the two side-by-side tattered posters with the stars of the European Union on a blue background and almost illegible information about the implementation of a project, probably supported by some European funds (Fig. 9). On one poster, a carelessly sniffed penis is visible, a sign of skepticism of today's pro-European orientation and proof of a failed attempt of westernization of a Latvian province. In the end, the agency of the dormant provincial town is twofold; it questions the political framing of the postsocialist condition and, by revising the center-periphery preferences, offers the potentiality for debunking geographical and ideological hierarchies.

Tentative Conclusion: The Indelible Difference

The photographic series of Arnis Balčus and Aija Bley consists of partly nostalgic, partly uncanny situations staged in private or public spaces, tracing the prevalence of the often-overlooked Soviet legacies in constituting the environments, spatial histories, and affective moods in today's Latvia. We have found the innovative concept of affective atmosphere to be beneficial for the analysis of these photographic practices since it enables us to account for the lived histories under the Soviet occupation, the aesthetic qualities of the images, together with the affective responses attached to the viewers. This floating, hybrid, and ontologically ambiguous in-between space is the site where the argument of this article develops.

In the images, we sensed affective patterns that we believe could be distinctive of the postsocialist condition. They manifest in the estranged, detached relationships to reality, the loss of previous lifeworlds, and hesitation to embrace the emerging ones. As a result, affects like standstill, dizziness, absurdity, and apathy commingle in an atmosphere whose gravity points in the article are forgetfulness and drowsiness. However, different affective arrangements are equally probable. The affective haze in the works of Balčus and Bley animates the photographed subjects. It unfolds constellations of embodied experiences and political feelings, cultural configurations of bodily practices, everyday rituals, desires, and dreams, as well as strategies of survival and identity-making, the geopolitical location on the periphery of Europe, and the failures to remember the Soviet past in a non-traumatizing and constructive way. Likewise, the atmospheres in the works of Balčus and Bley materialize some of the most pressing issues of today's political and economic situations: unemployment, poverty, inequalities, abandonment of rural areas, migration, along with a set of vulnerabilities resulting from the dominant model of neoliberal rationality and postsocialist precarity.

Although the affective patterns investigated in the article revolve around forgetfulness and drowsiness and might suggest a rather monotonous and disabling view of the legacies of the Soviet period, neither we intend to view people as passive victims with impaired capacity to act, nor do we want to suggest that these were the only or the essential traits of postsocialist affectivity. Whereas in the article, our interest was affected by the selected images, which we found enticing and promising in terms of analysis, we invite expanding the topic and advancing further investigations into the hazy fabrics of the indelible difference of postsocialist affectivity.

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Fig. 1-4. Arnis Balčus, from the series *Amnesia*, 2008–2009. Courtesy of the artist.
Fig. 5-9. Aija Bley, from the series *Sleepers*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.