

The social life of a migrant photo archive: Jovan Ritopečki's images of Yugoslav workers in Austria

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Abstract

This paper examines the photographic archive of Yugoslav photojournalist Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989), who documented the lives of Yugoslav migrant workers in Austria from the 1970s until his death in 1989. Despite the depth and uniqueness of his work, Ritopečki's photographs and archive have remained largely invisible within public institutions and historical scholarship. The paper explores how shifting social, political, and curatorial frameworks have influenced the belated recognition of Ritopečki's work. It analyzes his dual position as a press photographer with media connections and as a member of the Yugoslav migrant community, highlighting how this shaped the production, circulation, and historical impact of his images. Drawing on a corpus of 31 large-format prints from his estate, the paper investigates how his images construct Yugoslav migrant experiences, paying particular attention to their formal strategies and "social life" across different sites of circulation. Ultimately, the paper situates Ritopečki's archive within broader debates on migration, memory, and archival visibility in Austria and beyond, exemplifying how migrant photo archives move from community-based memorial practices into institutionalized settings of cultural memory.

Keywords: Photography; Labour migration; Migrant archives; Cultural memory; Austria-Yugoslavia

Introduction

Over recent years, academic, curatorial, and artistic interest has grown in photographs and photographic archives of migration, owing to their potential to offer new perspectives on migration history and experiences.¹ Scholars increasingly explore not only institutional

¹ Sheehan, Tanya (ed.). 2018. *Photography and migration*. New York: Routledge; Carville, Justin, and Sigrid Lien (eds.). 2021. *Contact zones: Photography, migration and the United States*. Leuven: University Press; Troelenberg, Eva-Maria / Caraffa, Constanza, and Anna Sophia Messner. 2020. *Encounters: Handling, placing and looking at photographs in relation to migration*, in *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 8(1), 1–12; In the German-speaking context see: Dogramaci, Burcu, and Helene Roth (eds.). 2019. *Fotogesichte* 39(151), Nomadic camera.

collections but also what Alma Elisa Kittner refers to as “a whole field of extremely diverse forms of accumulation,” including private photo collections, community-held documents, or collections emerging from ethnographic or artistic contexts.² These archives, often personal or fragmented, challenge dominant historiographies and shed light on the previously overlooked (or unsighted) individual and collective memories of marginalized social groups. As Fiona Siegenthaler and Catherine Bublatzky emphasize, such materials “contain and reflect important knowledge of migrant histories and narratives of individuals, families, and even larger communities regarding their experiences with displacement, movement, and arrival [...], knowledge, meaningful both to individuals and their communities, but also to ‘host societies’ navigating post-migratory realities.”³

As numerous studies on photography in the 20th century have shown, the ordinariness and widespread circulation of photographs as expressions of daily culture “demonstrate[s] the enormous cultural work they perform in creating a sense of self, community, and belonging for their subjects.”⁴ This paper argues that photographic practices, in the context of migration, offer comprehensive traces of day-to-day activities and historical experiences. – As such, they are able to not only document historical events, but also small routine acts, offering glimpses into alternative roles and surroundings, as well as values, lifestyles, and personal worldviews. More broadly, photographs have a significant impact upon how we perceive and engage with history, inviting us, in the words of Darren Newbury, not only to look at objects, but also, to see, interpret, and attempt to understand what is being shown.⁵ As Elizabeth Edwards argues, they have “knowledge effects” – shaping the very ways in which it is possible to think about the past.⁶

Drawing on these debates, this paper begins by examining the photographic legacy of Jovan Ritopečki (1923–1989), a Yugoslav photojournalist, and in particular, his work documenting Yugoslav labour migration in Austria. A transnational press photographer, Ritopečki migrated from Belgrade to Vienna in 1966 – concluding what had been a successful photographic career with Yugoslav state news agencies. From the early 1970s until his death in 1989, he documented the everyday lives and living conditions of Yugoslav migrant workers in Austria like no other photographer. His photographs – published in media aimed at migrant audiences – contributed to the visual self-representation of Yugoslav migrant workers. During this period of his life, Ritopečki’s work enjoyed considerable recognition among Yugoslav workers’ clubs in Austria and the first generation of migrant labourers that arrived in the country in the 1960s and 1970s. Within this community, he attained a legendary status as its *de facto* documentarian.

Despite his remarkable output, Ritopečki’s photographic legacy remained largely unknown, unsighted, and unrecognized within institutional or scholarly contexts for several decades – partly because the material was held in private ownership. A small selection of his photographs

Fotografie, Exil und Migration; Rass, Christoph, and Melanie Ulz (eds.). 2018. *Migration ein Bild geben. Visuelle Aushandlungen von Diversität*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

² Kittner, Alma Elisa. 2021. Objects of migration: On archives and collections, archivists and collectors. *Visual Anthropology* 34(4), (Un)sighted archives of migration – spaces of encounter and resistance, edited by Siegenthaler, Fiona, and Cathrine Bublatzky 385–404.

³ Siegenthaler, Fiona and Cathrine Bublatzky. 2021. (Un)sighted archives of migration – spaces of encounter and resistance. An introduction. *Visual Anthropology* 34(4), special issue: (Un)sighted archives of migration – spaces of encounter and resistance, edited by Siegenthaler, Fiona, and Cathrine Bublatzky, 283–295.

⁴ Camp, Tina M. 2012. *Image matters: Archive, photography and the African diaspora in Europe*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

⁵ Newbury, Darren. 2025. *Historical photographs and photographic histories: Methodological reflections on research in photographic archives of Africa*. YouTube (accessed: 11 June 2025).

⁶ Edwards, Elizabeth. 2021. *Photographs and the practice of history: A short primer*. London, New York & Dublin: Bloomsbury.

was presented to the wider public in several exhibitions between 2016 and 2017.⁷ In 2020, his photographic archive underwent its first comprehensive scientific analysis as part of the *Picturing Migrants Lives*’ project.⁸ Following this, in 2025, the image repository *VISMIG* went online, providing a glimpse into Jovan Ritopečki’s photography concerning Yugoslav migrant workers.⁹ In the same year, a large part of his photographic archive was bequeathed to the Vienna Museum by its caretakers.

This paper explores the reasons for delayed recognition of Ritopečki’s work by various audiences, as well as its historical relevance in the present. It also reflects on the shifting significance of his archive in light of evolving debates concerning the representation of migration history within historical and museological discourses in Austria and in German-speaking countries more generally. It argues that Ritopečki’s embeddedness in a migrant milieu was essential in preserving and ultimately reviving his photographic work and archive. In this context, I discuss Ritopečki’s photography as an effective “instrument of memorializing practice”¹⁰ employed by a marginalized social group within Austrian society, highlighting its role in constructing a visual and affective reservoir of memory for future narratives. Empirically, the paper analyzes a corpus of 31 large-format prints from Ritopečki’s estate that exemplify his work and foreground personal reflections on migration. In this connection, I analyze the formal strategies employed to convey these experiences and examine the socio-political functions of these images, tracing how photographs originally produced for journalistic purposes have been recontextualized as artistic and historical artefacts in different settings of display and use. This shift not only exemplifies Ritopečki’s social positioning as both a professional photographer and community chronicler but also demonstrates how photographic meaning shifts according to its usage context.

In adopting such an approach, the paper addresses three interrelated research questions:

In what ways do Ritopečki’s photographs represent and shape Yugoslav migrant experiences and community life in Austria?

How did his dual role – as a professional photographer with ties to Yugoslav and Austrian media, and as a member of the Yugoslav community in Vienna – inform the production, circulation, and “social life”¹¹ of his images?

And finally, how can we understand the archive’s belated recognition within broader patterns of cultural memory, migration discourse, and visual historiography?

Historical Contexts

A comprehensive understanding of Ritopečki’s photographic oeuvre necessitates examining it within a transnational framework. His work is rooted in the history of Yugoslav labour migration

⁷ A selection of photographs was displayed in 2016 as part of the exhibition *Jugo moja Jugo* on the history of Yugoslav labor migration to Western Europe in the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, as well as part of the travelling exhibition *Unter fremdem Himmel. Aus dem Leben jugoslawischer GastarbeiterInnen* organized by the *Jukus* association in Austria; and in 2017 Ritopečki’s photographs were displayed in the exhibition *Moving history. Viyana – Beč – Wien* at Wien Museum.

⁸ The research project *Picturing Migrants Lives. Jovan Ritopečki’s photographic documentation of Yugoslav Migration in Austria (1970–1989)* was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (project number T 1083). Through this project, a selection of Ritopečki’s photographic work on Yugoslav migration to Austria was published in 2025 in an online image repository, *VISMIG*.

⁹ See Gams.Uni-Graz. *Picturing migrants’ lives* (accessed: 5 January 2026).

¹⁰ Edwards, Elizabeth. 2014. *Between the local, national and transnational: Photographic recording and memorializing desire*, in *Transnational memory: Circulation, articulation, scales*, edited by De Cesari, Chiara, and Ann Rigney. Berlin, München & Boston: de Gruyter, 69–194.

¹¹ Schwartz, Joan. 2020. Working objects in their own time. Photographs in archives, in *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, edited by Pasternak, Gil. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi & Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 513–526.

to Austria, which began in the 1960s as part of a broader European post-war history.¹² The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s quickly led to a shortage of un- and semi-skilled labourers, a gap which western European states sought to fill by importing foreign labour, primarily from southern and southeastern Europe. The governments of the sending countries saw an opportunity to reduce unemployment, generate an influx of foreign currency, and eventually, reintegrate foreign-trained and better-qualified workers into their domestic labor forces. Permanent immigration to the destination countries was not envisaged; labour migration was to be regulated and controlled through intergovernmental agreements.

Austria signed such agreements with Spain (1962), Turkey (1964), and Yugoslavia (1965/66).¹³ While this migration was initially intended to be temporary and strictly regulated, it soon developed its own momentum, leading to enduring social transformations in both the sending and receiving countries. As a direct consequence, Austria, which had previously been a country of net emigration as late as the 1950s became one of net migration.¹⁴ Between 1962 and 1973, the number of migrant workers in Austria grew from 17,700 to around 250,000, of which 78.5% were Yugoslavs.¹⁵ In the decades that followed, these numbers continued to grow owing to both pull factors (economic and social advancement) as well as push factors (the civil wars of the 1990s etc.). Today, migrants and their descendants from what was Yugoslavia remain one of the largest immigrant communities in both Vienna and Austria overall.¹⁶

Furthermore, Ritopečki's personal experience of migration is also significant. Prior to his relocation to Austria in 1966 for personal reasons, he had accumulated over 15 years of professional experience as a press photographer for Yugoslav state news agencies. After his arrival in Austria, he continued to work as a photojournalist in a transnational context, contributing photographs and articles to Yugoslav as well as Austrian periodicals.¹⁷ It can be assumed that Ritopečki brought the photographic techniques and aesthetic concepts he had acquired and honed in Yugoslavia with him and adapted them to his new professional environment.

This transnational dimension also extends to Ritopečki's target audience, Yugoslav migrants, as well as to the photographs themselves and their circulation beyond national boundaries. In this particular context, the medium of photography evolved into a transnational form of communication and cultural transfer—accessible across linguistic and national boundaries, thereby facilitating communication beyond words.¹⁸

¹² Brunnbauer, Ulf. 2009. Labour emigration from the Yugoslav region from the late 19th century until the end of socialism: Continuities and changes, in *Transnational societies, transterritorial politics. Migrations in the (Post-)Yugoslav region 19th–21 century*, edited by Brunnbauer, Ulf. Munich: Oldenbourg, 17–49; Rass, Christoph. 2010. *Institutionalisierungsprozesse auf einem internationalen Arbeitsmarkt: Bilaterale Wanderungsverträge in Europa zwischen 1919 und 1974*. Paderborn, Munich, Vienna & Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh;

Bakondy, Vida. 2017. *Austria attractive for guest workers? Recruitment of immigrant labor in Austria in the 1960s and 1970s*, in *Migration in Austria, Contemporary Austrian Studies* vol. 26, edited by Bischof, Günter, and Dirk Rupnow. New Orleans: UNO Press & Innsbruck University Press, 113–138; Le Normand, Brigitte. 2021. *Citizens without borders. Yugoslavia and its migrant workers in Western Europe*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press.

¹³ Wollner, Eveline. 1996. *Auf dem Weg zur sozialpartnerschaftlich regulierten Ausländerbeschäftigung in Österreich. Die Reform der Ausländerbeschäftigung und der Anwerbung bis Ende der 1960er Jahre*. Unpublished diploma thesis, University of Vienna.

¹⁴ Gächter, August. 2000. *Ausländerpolitik seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg zwischen Assimilation und Ausgrenzung*, in *Österreich. Kultur und Identität – heute und vor 100 Jahren*, edited by Stubkjaer, Flemming Talbo. Odense: Odense University Press, 107–127.

¹⁵ Matuschek, Helga. 1985. *Ausländerpolitik in Österreich 1962–1985. Der Kampf um und gegen die ausländischen Arbeitskräfte*. *Journal für Sozialforschung* 25(2), 159–194.

¹⁶ Mijić, Ana. 2020. Together divided—divided together: Intersections of symbolic boundaries in the context of ex-Yugoslavian immigrant communities in Vienna. *Ethnicities* 20(6), 1071–1092.

¹⁷ Bakondy, Vida. 2024. Ein Fotoarchiv der Migration. *Fotogeschichte* 174(44), 52–56.

¹⁸ Dogramaci, Bureu and Helene Roth. 2019. Editorial. *Fotogeschichte* 39(151), Nomadic camera. *Fotografie, Exil und Migration*, edited by Dogramaci, Bureu, and Helene Roth, 3–8.

The following section traces how, and under what conditions, Ritopečki's photographs have begun to move from community memory to public, curatorial recognition.

Encounters with Jovan Ritopečki's Photography

I first encountered Jovan Ritopečki's photographs in ex-Yugoslav community organizations and personal collections, where they circulated as mementos and documents of shared history. This occurred in the context of the museum collection initiative *Migration Sammeln*, which focused on the history of the first generation of guest workers who migrated to Austria from former Yugoslavia and Turkey starting in the 1960s.¹⁹ The project aimed to address gaps in Vienna's municipal collections by documenting this underrepresented history and integrating migrant perspectives into the city's official memory.²⁰ This collection effort formed part of broader museological and activist debates in German-speaking countries that emerged since the 2000s.²¹ A central criticism arising from these debates concerned the absence of migration history as a self-evident component of national history in multicultural societies and, consequently, its marginal place in institutional archives and collections.

Increasing calls over the past two decades for a sustainable historization and museumization of migration history have been and continue to be accompanied by demands for new representations of this history.²² In this context, a shift from the dominant external perception of migration on the part of the majority population to the self-perception of migrants has been considered essential. Sources created from a migrant perspective, such as photographs, have proven important in expanding the existing body of material in institutional archives – as the latter have hardly collected sources documenting daily and micro-historical perspectives. These private visual worlds, which in the recent decades have received media coverage through socio-historical exhibitions and intervened in the stereotypical external perception of migrants, reveal and document migrants' subjective views and spaces of actions.²³ Within this broader field of initiatives, Ritopečki's photographs stand out as a rare, sustained visual record produced from within the Yugoslav migrant community in Austria.

In the frame of the collection project *Migration Sammeln*, I learned that the eldest of Ritopečki's three daughters had been taking care of her father's archive in her Viennese apartment since his sudden death in 1989, gradually reorganizing it over several years.²⁴ The archive primarily documents Ritopečki's work as a freelance press photographer and community documentarian in Austria from 1970 to 1989. To a lesser extent, it also includes his photographic activities in Yugoslavia prior to his migration to Austria in 1966. Around 19,000 35mm black and white negatives, which Ritopečki cut into strips and stored in photographic envelopes, relate to

¹⁹ For an overview of the project see: Akkılıç, Arif / Bakondy, Vida / Bratić, Ljubomir, and Regina Wonisch (eds.). 2016. *Schere, Topf, Papier. Objekte zur Migrationsgeschichte*. Vienna: Mandelbaum.

²⁰ Bakondy, Vida, and Regina Wonisch. 2016. Vom Rande ins Zentrum. Der überfällige Blick auf die Geschichte der Gastarbeiter. *Stimme. Zeitschrift der Initiative Minderheiten* 99, 21–22; Bakondy, Vida. 2018. 2018. Objekte der Erinnerung – Erzählungen zur Migration. Ein Sammlungsprojekt und eine Ausstellung zur Migrationsgeschichte im Wien Museum. *ÖZG* 31(3), special issue: *Biografien und Migrationen*, edited by Gehmacher, Johanna / Löffler, Klara, and Katharina Prager, 189–201.

²¹ For an overview, see: Wonisch, Regina, and Thomas Hübl (eds.). 2012. *Museum und Migration. Konzepte, Kontexte, Kontroversen*. Bielefeld: transcript.

²² Motte, Jan, and Rainer Ohliger. 2004. *Einwanderung – Geschichte – Anerkennung. Auf den Spuren geteilter Erinnerung*, in *Geschichte und Gedächtnis in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft. Migration zwischen historischer Rekonstruktion und Erinnerungspolitik*, edited by Jan Motte and Rainer Ohliger. Essen: Klartext, 17–49.

²³ See e.g. the exhibition project: gastarbeiteri. 2004. 40 Years of Labor Migration. Vienna Museum (Gürses, Hakan / Kogoj, Cornelia / Mattl, Sylvia (eds.) 2004. *Gastarbeiteri. 40 Jahre Arbeitsmigration*. Vienna: Mandelbaum); or more recently the exhibition *In situ: Photo Stories on Migration* at the Museum Ludwig Cologne in 2021 (Kačel, Ela, and Barbara Engelbach (eds.). 2021. *In situ: Photo stories on migration (= exhibition catalogue, Museum Ludwig Cologne)*. Cologne: Walter König.)

²⁴ In 2020, I conducted an interview with her, focusing on the transmission history of the archive. Interview with Slobodanka Kudlacek Ritopečki, conducted by the author, Vienna, 20 June 2020.

Yugoslav labour migration. The estate contains only a small portion of developed positives. In addition to photographic materials, Ritopečki's estate also contains newspapers and periodicals featuring his photographs and articles, as well as correspondence, documents relating to his professional life, and other printed materials, such as invitations and exhibition posters relating to his activities within the Yugoslav community in Austria.

The Community Documentarian

Starting from the early 1970s, Jovan Ritopečki was an active member of the Yugoslav community in Vienna. He was a founding member of *Jedinstvo*, a Yugoslav workers' club established in Vienna in 1971 and played a key role in developing its information section.²⁵ From the club's founding onward, he documented its activities and displayed his work at the club's premises, alongside photographs of other Yugoslav clubs and associations established in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁶ This insider position gave him access and insights unavailable to Austrian photojournalists. Moreover, Yugoslav migrants were the primary recipients of his photography. From the 1970s on, Ritopečki's clients also included periodicals marketed towards Yugoslav migrants in Austria, such as *Yu Novosti*, *Naš List*, and *Danas*.²⁷

Ritopečki's community photographs primarily depict the activities of Yugoslav clubs and their members in the 1970s and 1980s: the founding of the organizations, their weekend gatherings, annual festivities, celebrations of Yugoslav national holidays, as well as various cultural and sporting events. The photographs of club life bear witness to confident self-representations of a marginalized social group in a new social and cultural environment, its organizational power, and subjective self-positionings. As such, Ritopečki's community photographs developed a more generic visual narrative regarding the self-organization of the Yugoslav migrant community in Austria, both in terms of content and style or aesthetic.

Figure 1: Privately owned collection of Ritopečki's photographs, Vienna..



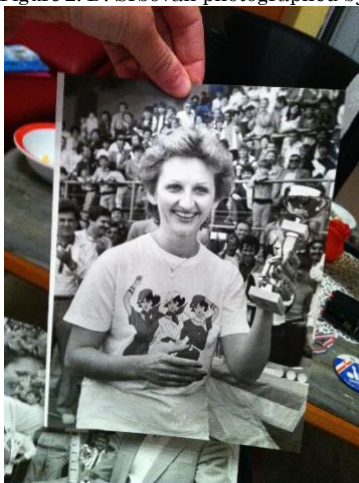
Source: Photo by the author.

²⁵ Belovuković, Miodrag / Miloradović, Zlatko / Mijatović, Niko, and Goran Novaković (eds.). 2001. *Klub Jugoslovena "Jedinstvo" – Beč 1970-2000* [*Klub der Jugoslawen "Einheit" – Wien, 1970-2000*]. Vienna: Jedinstvo.

²⁶ This is documented in several photographic negatives and photographs in the archive that depict *Jedinstvo* over the years.

²⁷ For more info see: Bakondy, Vida, 2024. On the margins. Jovan Ritopečki's photographs of migrant housing in 1970s Vienna. *Zeitschrift für Migrationsforschung* 4, 53–89.

Figure 2: D. Srbovan photographed by Jovan Ritopečki, Vienna around 1980.



Source: Photo by the author.

Figure 3: 5th anniversary of the Yugoslav club Kostolac in Vienna..



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Figure 4: Football cup, Club Hajduk, Vienna 1986.



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum

From a formal perspective, many of Ritopečki's black-and-white prints – often in 18 × 24 cm format – echo the aesthetics of contemporary press photography. From the 1980s onward, he added captions noting the event and date, which emphasized their documentary value and facilitated their use as records of collective life. According to contemporaries, he sold these images to individuals and organizations, serving both as documentation and personal mementos.²⁸ This circulation suggests that those depicted viewed his images as meaningful representations of themselves and their social realities and actively chose to acquire and share them.

The photographs' material and aesthetic properties, along with their widespread dissemination, lent both the images and the events they documented an aura of officiality. However, this aesthetic came at a cost and owning such images was perceived as a small luxury, particularly for workers with limited financial means. Niko Mijatović, who – like many other members of the Yugoslav community in Vienna – purchased photos and also sent them home to his family in Yugoslavia, remembered that relative to his personal financial circumstances in the 1970s, the photographs were expensive.²⁹ This insight adds another layer of meaning to Ritopečki's photographs: they not only documented people, places, and events, but also, economic transactions. Indeed, Ritopečki had made it his business to cover community activities systematically over a period of two decades, thereby producing a dense visual archive that bridges personal memory, community representation, and the politics of documenting migration.

Marianne Amar argues that photographs rooted in self-representation can document and reinforce community-bonding processes that emerge during migration.³⁰ Within this context, Ritopečki's photographic documentation of Yugoslav community activities likely strengthened communal ties and fostered a sense of identity and belonging – not only through their consistency, but also by making these moments visible and shareable. At the same time, his photographs both further legitimized community activities and articulated a sense of community as can be seen in the group shots, physical proximity, and joint posing.³¹

The images also depict a community whose sense of belonging transcended national boundaries. This is most clearly seen in the documentation of events affirming continued loyalty to the homeland – such as the celebration of national holidays and festivals, as well as sporting and cultural events according to socialist-Yugoslav principles – and the prominence of national symbols in the pictures, such as portraits of state president Tito, the Yugoslav flag, and pop-cultural products like posters of Yugoslav music stars. These visual markers reinforce emotional, cultural, as well as ideological ties to Yugoslavia, and probably helped maintain a sense of collective orientation in a new environment. At the same time, the presence of symbols evocative

²⁸ Interview with Niko Mijatović, conducted by the author, Vienna, 18 June 2021.; Interview with Lazar Bilanović conducted by the author, Vienna, 5 March 2025.

²⁹ Mijatović recalled paying 5 to 10 Austrian Schillings per photo. Interview with Niko Mijatović, Vienna. This recollection is echoed by another witness, Slobodan Jovanović, who owns a collection of Ritopečki's photographs and had also commissioned him to document private events—such as the baptism of his daughter; Memo conversation with Slobodan Jovanović, Vienna, 20 November 2015.

³⁰ Amar, Marianne. 2009. *Die Einwanderung (nicht) sehen. Immigration und Fotografie in Frankreich 1919–1939*, in *Fremde? Bilder von den „Anderen“ in Deutschland und Frankreich seit 1871*, edited by Beier-de Haan, Rosmarie, and Jan Werquet. Dresden: Sandstein, 76–18.

³¹ A particularly revealing example is an album that *Jedinstvo* gave Tito in 1972 to mark his 80th birthday. For a detailed analysis see Bakondy, Vida. 2024. An album for Tito. Belonging, transnational unity, and social critique in a photo album by the Yugoslav worker's club Jedinstvo Vienna. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 11(2) [= Visual Studies in and on Southeast Europe: Representation, power, memory and gender in photography and film. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 24], 14–34.

of Austrian statehood (the national flag, portraits of the state president, etc.) suggests multiple belongings.

Figure 5: Final match of the Football Cup 25 May, Prater, Vienna 1975.



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Figure 6: New Year's Eve celebration at Club Jedinstvo, Vienna 1971.



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Figure 7: Club Požarevac in Vienna, 19 November 1983.



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Figure 8: Day of the Republic celebration, Vienna, 1984.



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Ritopečki also encouraged others in the community to document their activities and personal history in Austria.³² Initially, these efforts were primarily directed inward, serving as self-documentation within the migrant community. Over time, as migration from former Yugoslavia became permanent, the intended audiences gradually expanded.³³

Figure 9: The photographer Jovan Ritopečki at the premises of his club, Jedinstvo, Vienna, around 1985.



Source: Photographer unknown. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

³² One such example is Slobodan Jovanović, who has been archiving activities of the Yugoslav community for many decades and was – until recently – presenting them in self-designed exhibitions. Compare Akkılıç / Bakondy / Bratić / Wonisch, *Schere Topf Papier*, 216-217.

³³ For example, Jedinstvo's 2001 publication marking the club's 30th anniversary was also addressed to Austrian society and published bilingually – in German and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian.

Figure 10: Display of Ritopečki's photographs at Club Jedinstvo, Vienna, 2015.



Source: Photographer: Lisbeth Kovacic, as part of the project *Migration Sammeln*.

Archival Agency from the Margins

In summation, Ritopečki's photographic work documenting the Yugoslav community in Austria can best be understood as an example of archival agency, emerging from within a marginalized social group in the country. Years after this death, and up to the present day, his photographs have been used to create chronicles and small exhibitions, shedding light on migrant memory culture. Around the time of creation, the photographs were part of a bottom-up initiative, even though the Yugoslav state actively supported these endeavors of migrant self-organization in the host country, as studies on Yugoslav labour migrants in western Europe have demonstrated.³⁴

According to Elizabeth Edwards, photographs offer manifold traces which have the potential to illuminate what she refers to as the 'historical periphery', or an 'unofficial historical knowledge' excluded from dominant narratives.³⁵ Yugoslav labour migration to Austria from the 1960s onwards formed this historical periphery, gaining increased academic and curatorial attention only in the past two decades through exhibitions, research, and initiatives advocating for an archive or museum of migration.³⁶

However, as Fiona Siegenthaler and Catherine Bublatzky highlight, discussions about the visibility or invisibility of specific migratory narratives, images, and experiences must also ask: "For whom are these archives and their preservation visible, and for whom are they not?"³⁷ They critique the term "invisibility" for its essentializing assumptions, since what is considered invisible often depends on a dominant, static perspective that assumes if something is unseen by one group, it is universally unseen, thus reinforcing exclusion. Instead, they propose the terms "sighted/unsighted archives," which acknowledge that something may or may not be seen without negating its existence. According to Gaby Fierz, migration-related archives, though real and multifaceted, often remain unsighted – escaping recognition by researchers, institutions, or

³⁴ Le Normand, *Citizens without borders*. For a detailed analysis of the Yugoslav state's interest in and influence on Yugoslav worker's association see Baković, Nikola. 2014. Tending the "oasis of socialism." *Transnational political mobilization of Yugoslav economic emigrants in the FR Germany in the late 1960s and 1970s*. *Nationalities Papers*, 42(4), 674-690.

³⁵ Edwards, *Photographs and the practice of history*, 25.

³⁶ A turning point in the Austrian context was marked by gastarbajteri, *40 Years of labor migration to Austria* an exhibition which was displayed at the Vienna Museum and Main Library. Cemalettin Efe, a first-generation migrant from Turkey who arrived in Austria in the 1970s, conceptualized the project. It was realized by the NGO Initiative for Minorities and an interdisciplinary team, in cooperation with the Vienna Museum and Main Library.

³⁷ Siegenthaler / Bublatzky, *(Un)sighted archives*, 285.

even community members themselves. This, in turn, increases their fragility, making them susceptible to neglect, loss, or erasure.³⁸

In the case of Ritopečki's photographic legacy – particularly his professional, press-photographic archive consisting of negatives, hundreds of prints, newspapers, and other materials – this too remained unsighted for several decades after this death, even among community members who owned some of his photos but primarily knew his work documenting club activities. However, as early as 1983, a brief biographical article on Ritopečki noted his pivotal role in establishing an “archive of economic migration to Austria” through his photography.³⁹ A portrait of Ritopečki, adorned with the epithet “Our Legendary Photographer” appears in the *Jedinstvo* chronicle, along with a substantial amount of his documentation of club life.⁴⁰ Thus, Ritopečki's membership in the Yugoslav community played a central role in preserving awareness of his photographic work in the present. Without his deep engagement with the community, his name and oeuvre as a press photographer might have been forgotten, and I would never have embarked on the search for his archive.

Having examined the broader socio-historical context and Ritopečki's role as a documentarian within the Yugoslav community in Austria, the next section explores a specific collection from the archive that illustrates the ways in which his photographs transcend documentation and photojournalism, revealing artistic vision and thoughtful intervention into the visual landscape of labour migration in 1970s Austria. It was precisely the striking visual and conceptual quality of this particular work that sparked my interest in exploring his broader photographic practice.

Exhibiting Migrants' Lives

This collection comprises 31 large-format black-and-white photographic prints accompanied by commentaries that focus on Yugoslav migrants in Austria. Rather than representing a single cohesive exhibition series, these images are remnants of multiple exhibitions, as can be seen in similarly formatted photographs found among other (private) archives.

This work suggests a deliberate attempt to intervene in public discourse, likely through their exhibition. Small pinholes in the corners indicate that the photographs were once mounted, likely on walls. Based on contextual and material evidence, the series can be dated to the mid-1970s. Within Ritopečki's estate, the material is unique not only in terms of its content and aesthetic approach but also in a broader historical perspective.⁴¹ To date, there is no known or comparable visual-critical engagement with the topic of Yugoslav labour migration in Austria for the period.⁴²

³⁸ Fierz, Gaby. 2021. The blank spots: Making migratory archives visible by exploring photographs. *Visual Anthropology* 34(4), special issue: (Un)sighted archives of migration – spaces of encounter and resistance, edited by Siegenthaler, Fiona, and Cathrine Bublatzky, 368–384. This fragility is exemplified by the case of construction worker and photographer Hidir Emir, who, from the 1960s to the early 1990s, photographed migrant workers in popular public spaces in Vienna on weekends and sold the images. According to his son, Mehmet Emir, he discarded his archive of negatives annually before leaving for holiday, as he had to vacate his company-provided accommodation. Only a few dozen analogue prints have survived. Dogramaci, Burcu, and Mehmet Emir. 2019. From Vienna with love. *Fotogesichte* 39(151), special issue: Nomadic camera. Fotografie, Exil und Migration, 47–54.

³⁹ Unknown author. 1983. Jovincij jubilej. *Glas* 3, 17.

⁴⁰ Belovuković / Miloradović / Mijatović, and Novaković (eds.). 2001. *Klub Jugoslovena “Jedinstvo” – Beč 1970-2000*, 24.

⁴¹ The Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade archives one album that was presented to Tito on his 80th birthday in 1972 by *Jedinstvo*. The album contains photographs taken by Ritopečki as well as press clippings and reports mounted together on the album pages. The album's narrative strategies conform to similar aesthetic and display principles, combining images and text in a sort of archival montage. For a detailed analysis see: Bakondy, Vida. 2024. An album for Tito. Belonging, transnational unity, and social critique in a photo album by the Yugoslav worker's club *Jedinstvo* Vienna. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 11(2) [= Visual Studies in and on Southeast Europe: Representation, power, memory and gender in photography and film. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 24], 14–34.

⁴² In the Federal Republic of Germany Croatian artist and migrant worker Dragutin Trumbetaš created drawings that document and critique the experiences of migrant workers. Trumbetaš, Dragutin. 1977. *Gastarbeiter. Mit einem einleitenden Text von Gerhard Zuerenz*. Frankfurt am Main:

Most of the photographic prints depict various social groups, either individually or collectively, in a variety of places, ranging from accommodations and workplaces to worker's clubs, educational institutions, social meeting points, and public spaces. Broadly speaking, the content of these pictures reflects Ritopečki's documentary focus as a press photographer examining the subject of guest work in the first half of the 1970s. 19 of the 31 photographs have short titles or captions clipped from newspaper reports and subsequently attached as commentary. With the exception of one caption in German, these are entirely in Serbo-Croatian. A comparison with published materials in Ritopečki's estate suggests that these textual elements were primarily sourced from periodicals to which he contributed both photography and reports in the first half of the 1970s.

The captions operate on two levels. On the one hand, they serve to clarify or identify, anchoring the meaning of the photograph in a specific context. For example, *Subotom* ("On Saturdays") accompanies an image of young women visiting a film screening, while *Susret u fabrici* ("Encounter in the Factory") is paired with a photograph of a woman at her workplace.

On the other hand, the combination of text and image generates new, and at times ambiguous meanings and messages, exceeding what is visible in the photograph itself – thus symbolically redefining and re-coding the image. In this process, image and text form a dialogic relationship that demonstrates, as will be shown, the photographer's conscious efforts to reframe and challenge dominant views on migration.

Figure 11: *Subotom*.



Source: Exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Büchergilde. At the same time, Yugoslav filmmakers had begun to critically engage with the topic of migration in the late 1960s and early 1970s, reflecting on its societal consequences and emerging lines of conflict. For a detailed analysis see Le Normand, *Citizens without borders*, 64-95.

Figure 12: *Susret u fabrici.*



Source: Exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Figure 13: *Nigde pare ne leže na zemlji pa ni u tudžini.*

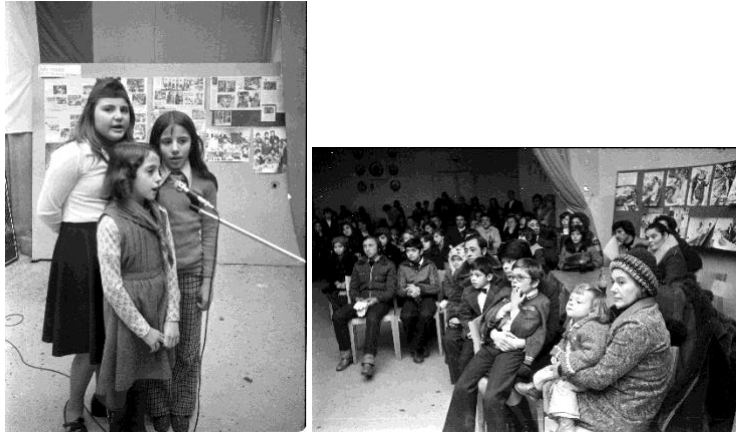


Source: Exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

There is little surviving documentation about the specific use or exhibition history of this material. Apart from a set of negatives documenting a children's event organized by *Jedinstvo* in 1977 (see fig. 14 and 15), the estate includes no further information which might provide insight into the contexts in which the images were originally displayed. However, in several of the negatives, a modular exhibition designed by Ritopečki is visible in the background. This

consists of movable walls displaying some of the surviving images along with others now lost, accompanied by press clippings and thematic montages.

Figure 14 and 15: Photographic negatives of a *Jedinstvo* children's performance, Vienna, 1977



Source: Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

Both the language used and the display settings indicate that the images addressed migrants as their target audience and circulated within specific social spaces, the most obvious of which was *Jedinstvo*. Such traces in the negatives not only reflect how individual images from the series were displayed but also hint at their embeddedness in broader networks of circulation and meaning making.

Images, that take a position

When I first encountered these images several years ago, they immediately impressed me. This was partly because of their aesthetics and material presence as large-format prints, developed on high-quality baryta paper. Producing such prints requires considerable processing and guarantees durability. These material qualities reflect not only a desire for permanence but also what Janice Hart and Elizabeth Edwards term “specific performative desires,” or images made for a reason, for a specific audience, to embody certain messages and moral claims.⁴³

Yet the significance of these images lies not only in their form or material presence. Through the playful pairing of image and caption, Ritopečki's works become visual statements – images that *take a position*. In what follows, I analyze two photographs from the collection to explore how specific migration experiences are visualized, mediated, and rendered intelligible. Methodologically, I employ close reading as an interpretive tool. Focusing on photographic detail allows for the identification of small-scale narratives that are easily overlooked in large-scale historical accounts.⁴⁴ Grounded in the specific experiences of individuals, these narratives can illuminate broader social and historical dynamics. This analysis is further informed by contextual material addressing the production history and dissemination of the images.

The first example depicts a woman at work, seated on a stool in a cluttered factory amidst mountains of textiles or discarded clothing.

⁴³ Edwards, Elizabeth, and Janice Hart. 2004. *Introduction: Photographs as objects*, in *Photographs objects histories. On the materiality of images*, edited by Edwards, Elizabeth, and Janice Hart. London & New York: Routledge, 1–15.

⁴⁴ On close reading and its potential in photographic analysis see: Edwards, Elizabeth. 2001. *Raw histories. Photographs, anthropology and museums*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.

Figure 16: *Krpa po krpa, pa eto kuće i traktora!*

Source: Exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

She holds a piece of fabric taut against a blade protruding from the front of the stool, pausing her task to look directly at the camera, with the hint of a smile on her face. A blanket covers the lower half of her body – likely keeping her warm in a cold environment. Her expression and posture suggest composure and perhaps even a quiet pride amidst surroundings which are unpleasant, messy, and disordered. The subject matter of this photograph differs from that which Ritopečki usually photographed. He typically portrayed men at construction sites, or workers – both women and men – in organized factory settings that conveyed efficiency and progress. Rather than exemplifying a modern, Western European model of labour, this image captures a more precarious, marginal form of migrant work. Affixed to the lower left corner of the print is a clipped newspaper caption: *Krpa po krpa pa – eto kuće i traktora!* (“Rag by rag, that’s how you get a house and a tractor!”). The phrase echoes familiar migration motifs: enduring hardship abroad for the sake of prosperity at home and the dream of return. However, the coupling of image and text generates dissonance between the message which the latter conveys – the promise of humble prosperity – and that which the former evokes – poverty, waste, and working conditions that did not provide social recognition or visibility.

Archival sources clarify the context of this photograph. It is part of a larger series documenting the work of a family of three – Toma Arsić, his wife Dragica, and their son Gruja – employed at a Viennese factory that processed used clothing.⁴⁵ The original black-and-white film comprises 23 images, beginning with group portraits and moving to individual depictions of each family member at work. In the accompanying article, the images and narrative centers on Toma Arsić, smiling as he loads textile scraps into an industrial washing machine.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Source: Photographic negatives *Krpa po Krpa Traktor Beč*, Vienna, around 1973, 23 b/w negatives. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

⁴⁶ Unknown author. 1973. *Krpa po krpa pa – eto kuće i traktora!* *Danas* 8, 9.

Figure 17: *Krpa po krpa, pa eto kuće i traktora!*

Source: *Danas* 8/1973, 9.

Both the title and the caption accompanying the photograph highlight the material rewards of their labour: a house in their home village, a tractor, and other assets. The family's migration story is thus framed as a success, with the man – husband, father, and worker – embodying that narrative. This representation aligns with patriarchal conceptions of male authority and the traditional role of the male head of household as the primary breadwinner. In contrast, Ritopečki's exhibition print has a different focal point: Dragica Arsić, surrounded by masses of textiles. I contend that the montage showcases the ambivalence and tension underlying migrant labour. The commentary's message contrasts with the photograph's visual tone. The chaotic setting, second-hand materials, and menial labour suggest marginalization and invisibility, rather than prosperity. To underscore this contrast, Ritopečki selected the most visually and thematically compelling image from the series for his exhibition print.

Figure 18: *Љубавна Чежња* [*Ljubavna čežnja*]



Source: Exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

The second example features a man standing in front of a wall densely decorated with posters and magazine clippings of nude or semi-nude women. Upon closer inspection, most of the materials appear to be of Yugoslav origin, with some featuring recognizable figures such as French actress Brigitte Bardot. The setting is likely a dormitory or private apartment, reflecting an improvised personal space. The man's body, face, and line of sight are all directed towards the wall. With a seemingly tender gesture, he appears to be adjusting or re-affixing one of the clippings. In the upper left corner of the photograph, a press clipping which reads *Longing for Love* (written in Cyrillic letters) has been added. This textual intervention reinforces the photograph's apparent message: a yearning for female companionship and physical intimacy, which the abundance of images may serve to compensate for. In my reading, the word "longing" evokes a sense of absence or unfulfilled desire. It touches a topic in the history of labour migration to Austria that remains unresearched, namely, sexuality and intimacy. At the same time, the title complicates conventional notions of male sexuality as purely instinct-driven and insatiable, which the sheer number of erotic images might otherwise suggest. However, it also complicates stereotypical representations of male migrants as exotized, eroticized others. This was not only symbolized through depictions of the male body, but also through recurring imagery of migrants posed in front of pin-up-covered walls.⁴⁷ A critical detail on the left margin of the image, visible only upon close inspection, further reshapes its interpretation.

Figure 19: *Љубавна Чежња* [*Ljubavna čežnja*]

⁴⁷ Wenk, Silke, and Rebecca Krebs. 2017. Analysing the migration of people and images: Perspectives and methods in the field of visual culture. Research paper, University of York. Vogel, Matthias / Binder, Ulrich, and Flavia Caviezel. 2006. *Das Menschenbild im Archiv. Untersuchungen zum visuellen Gedächtnis der Schweiz. Ein Forschungsprojekt der Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst Zürich*. Zürich: Limmat.



Source: Extract from an exhibition print, gelatin silver on baryta paper, 30,5 x 41cm. Photographer: Jovan Ritopečki. © Estate Ritopečki, Collection Vienna Museum.

There, it is possible to see several private photographs – likely from an album. These show fully-clothed men, women and children in non-erotic poses, that might represent family members and friends. Similar materials in Ritopečki's estate depict migrants gazing at personal photographs, further underscoring the centrality of photographs in mediating relationships with absent loved ones, symbolizing connectedness despite geographical distance. The juxtaposition of erotic pin-ups and personal photographs may, at first glance, seem contradictory. However, when read through the frame of *Longing for Love*, the coexistence of these two image types reveals a more layered emotional landscape: This print is not simply about sexual desire, but also the desire for recognition as a man, for connection, and for the affirmation of different interpersonal relationships, absent owing to geographic distance. In this reading, the wall is not merely a collage of images, but a visual space where different forms of longing are arranged and negotiated.

Although the original negative is missing from the archive, the photograph's production context is illuminated by a 1973 article published in *Yu Novosti*. In the article, Ritopečki reports on a group of Yugoslavs working in the "Riedlmüller" meat-processing factory in Purkersdorf (Lower Austria). The text portrays the factory as a model workplace, unlike many others, and contrasts its approach with the usual exploitation of Yugoslav workers both by their employers and their landlords. On the article's second page, the same man reappears, standing in front of the postered wall, albeit in a slightly different pose. For the publication, the image was more tightly cropped, hiding the wall's broader context. A caption identifies the man as Miša Hrib from Janošek, and quotes him as saying: "In my spare time, I try to furnish and complete my wall exhibition as beautifully as possible."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ritopečki, Jovan. 1973. Nazdravlje mesari! *Yu Novosti*, 178, 20–21.

Figure 20 and 21: *Nazdravlje Mesari!*

Source: *Yu Novosti*, 178/1973, 20-21.

This editorial choice presents the subject as a passionate and proud decorator of his personal space. In contrast, the exhibition print differs substantially in framing, composition, textual intervention, and ultimately affect. It opens up additional, more nuanced layers of meaning and deeper reflections on the less visible, emotional aspects of migrant life: longing and a desire for connection and vulnerability that remain unexpressed in the journalistic piece.

On the Reception

In summation, this collection of 31 photographs represents a valuable historical source that shows how its author utilized the visual medium to reflect on the experiences of Yugoslav migrants in Austria. It exemplifies Ritopečki's effort to engage with these themes in a more poetic and multi-layered manner than he could in his work as a press-photographer. For this creative work, Ritopečki scoured his photo archive of thousands of negatives and his personal press archive of newspapers and magazines.

The contextualization through additional sources (comparison with original negatives, published materials, and interviews) reveals that Ritopečki drew upon specific biographical and individual encounters with his subjects to highlight broader social phenomena that extended beyond individual life stories. From the masses of archived negatives, he selected single motifs for processing and combined them with text snippets to enable multifaceted readings of the resulting material. These curatorial and compositional choices suggest that Ritopečki rejected – or at least critically questioned – the idea that the “purely visual” could adequately represent the complexity of his subjects, instead foregrounding the constructed, mediated nature of photographic meaning. Newly mounted, the discussed examples visualize lines of conflict that formed an essential pillar of migrant experiences.

Although Ritopečki was separated from his subjects on several levels, most notably by social background, but also, depending on the photograph, by gender or generation, there remained a fundamental communality between him and those he portrayed. They shared a language, a country of origin, and experience as a migrant in Austria, and these affinities shaped both his photographic approach and its outcomes, as well as the fact that Yugoslav migrants were the primary addressees of his pictures whenever they were first published. In this sense,

photography can be understood as a “mediating instance”⁴⁹ within a new social environment, contributing to the articulation of migrant life worlds and forms of belonging.

Yet, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau critically notes, the photographer’s position as insider or outsider vis-à-vis his or her subjects neither guarantees empathy nor inevitably results in objectification; it does not in itself inculcate or exonerate the photographer. “Viewing relations”, she argues, are “also social relations” and what we might make of an image or how we respond to it, “depends on a multitude of factors”, such as “the discursive framing, the context of viewing, a host of cultural assumptions and beliefs, and our own subjectivity, conscious and unconscious.”⁵⁰ Read in this light, Ritopečki’s recontextualization of his images – through selection, image-text montage, and exhibition – becomes central: it is precisely through these strategies that he proposes particular relations between depicted migrants and their viewers and negotiates forms of solidarity and identification, trying to avoid objectification.

Unfortunately, no additional historical sources are known that might allow greater insight into how these images were received and interpreted, respectively, by their contemporary audience. According to sources, Ritopečki regularly organized exhibitions in workers’ clubs: They were simple in design, with photographic prints displayed on walls and accompanied by brief historical notes or commentary. They were driven by an informative and educational impulse, with a proactive, outreach-oriented approach. In line with Jennifer Evans’s emphasis that the crucial question is not what is inherent in the image itself but rather how an image acts in the world – how it shapes “notions of community, subjectivity, political engagement and empathy by bringing to the surface a range of emotions and reactions that reflect the sentiments, fears, hopes and aspirations of the time”⁵¹ – the collection exemplifies how Ritopečki’s photography contributed to the articulation of Yugoslav migrants’ life worlds in Austria. His photographs created and fostered a sense of community and belonging. They offered identification by translating individually perceived experiences into artistic representations that could also be understood collectively.⁵² This is also noticeable in the accompanying comments and captions that relay concise, appealing messages with dense content addressing an audience “from within”.

Viewed from the present perspective, the textual components invite us to activate the historical power of imagination and access deeper layers of meaning beyond the immediately legible. In this respect, Ritopečki’s montage practice can be related to Georges Didi-Huberman’s understanding of montage not only as a representational technique or a means of translating content, but also as an invitation to look at images in a new or different way and to enable critical readings.⁵³ By reassembling photographs produced in specific journalistic contexts into new constellations, Ritopečki reconfigures the viewing relations around them: he shifts the images from serving as illustrations of news events toward acting as nodes in a visual discourse on

⁴⁹ Dogramaci, Burcu, and Helene Roth, 2019. *Fotografie als Mittler im Exil: Fotojournalismus bei Picture Post*, in London und Fototheorie und -praxis an der New School for Social Research in New York. *Zeitschrift für Museum und Bildung* 86-87, 13–44.

⁵⁰ Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 2023. *Caught looking*, in Susan Meiselas. 2023. *History*, edited by Lubben, Kristen. New York: International Center of Photography & Steidl, 90–99.

⁵¹ Evans, Jennifer. 2018. Introduction: Photography as an ethics of seeing, in *The ethics of seeing: Photography and twentieth-century German history*, edited by Evans, Jennifer / Betts, Paul, and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (= Studies in German History, vol. 21). New York: Berghahn, 1–22.

⁵² The significance of this identification is clearly articulated in a letter dated August 9, 1973, in which Ritopečki urged Milorad Marković, the editor-in-chief of *Yu Novosti*, to be more attentive to the perspectives and desires of the readership: “They [Yugoslav migrants in Austria] ask that it be written about them and for them and that they see themselves” (Ritopečki to Marković, 9 August 1973, Estate Ritopečki, Vienna Museum; emphasis in original).

⁵³ Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2014. *Remontagen der erlittenen Zeit. Das Auge der Geschichte II*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink.

migration, conflict, and solidarity, thereby opening up spaces for reflection that extend beyond both the original moment of exposure and the initial conditions of publication.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate how productive it can be to conceive of a photograph as an invitation – an idea I borrow from Darren Newbury, who used it as a conceptual frame to ruminate on photography and its relation to history.⁵⁴ Ritopečki's photographic archive provides valuable and bountiful resources for understanding why his photographs were produced, for whom they were produced, where they circulated, and how these trajectories have shifted over time. In this way, his photographs can be seen as “eloquent objects [...with] a lot to tell us”, so long as we engage with their material qualities/characteristics, their archival trajectories, and current meanings.⁵⁵

At the time they were taken, the photographs shaped a Yugoslav migrant public sphere. They were published in media aimed at Yugoslav migrants, migrants purchased them, and they circulated within the community, all of which suggests that they played a role in shaping how that community saw itself and was represented. This underlines the important role photography can play in processes of self-positioning and identity formation within migratory contexts.⁵⁶ As part of a broader migrant visual culture, Ritopečki's work illustrates how photography serves not only to document, but also as a tool for cultural and socio-political negotiation, and memory-making in transnational lives.

Following Ritopečki's death, his personal press archive remained inaccessible for nearly three decades, a period I refer to as the “dead time”. Drawing on Patricia Hayes, the term denotes an archive that is preserved but neither activated nor engaged with.⁵⁷ As a result, Ritopečki's photographic work did not shape Austria's mainstream visual discourse on labour migration, instead lying dormant, awaiting a shift in societal and academic perspectives that would render its contents relevant. This underscores that a collection's reception depends not only on perceived significance, but also on its ‘visibility, accessibility, and usability’.⁵⁸

Today, Ritopečki's photographic legacy expands the visual corpus on Austria's migration history by adding historically rich, self-authored perspectives that complicate stereotypical representations of “guest workers” as objectified strangers,⁵⁹ instead highlighting migrants as active makers of images and histories. Its recent activation through exhibitions, research, and digitisation has granted the photographs belated recognition, enabling them to circulate beyond their original community publics and to acquire new meanings in dialogue with contemporary debates on migration, memory, representation and archival visibility. Examining Ritopečki's archive as an invitation therefore demonstrates how migrant photo collections can move from

⁵⁴ Newbury, *Historical photographs and photographic histories: Methodological reflections on research in photographic archives of Africa*.

⁵⁵ Caraffa, Constanza. 2012. *Objects of value. Challenging conventional hierarchies in the photo archive*, in *Photo-objects. On the materiality of photographs and photo archives in the humanities and sciences*, edited by Bärninghausen, Julia / Klamm, Stefanie / Schneider, Franka and Petra Wodtke. Edition Open Access (= Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge Studies 12), 11-31; 15.

⁵⁶ See: Kaçel and Engelbach, *In situ: Photo stories on migration*.

⁵⁷ However, as Alma Elisa Kittner cautions, all archives, including those recognized as official institutions, contain countless unpublished and unseen/unsighted documents stored in boxes, folders, and filing cabinets. See Kittner, *Objects of migration*, 387; Hayes, Patricia. 2015. *Compound nation: Migrant worker portraits in the politics and photography of 1980s Namibia*, in *Photo archives and the idea of nation*, edited by Caraffa, Constanza, and Tiziana Serena. Berlin, Munich & Boston: De Gruyter, 279–300.

⁵⁸ Bove, Jens, and Karolin Schmahl. 2015. Fotografische Nachlässe. Sammlungs- und Aktivierungsstrategien am Beispiel des Archivs der Fotografen in der Deutschen Fotothek. *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 12, 336–343.

⁵⁹ Common motifs found in Austrian photo archives on the subject portray migrants at railway stations, workplaces, and in poor living conditions. Guest workers are generally not represented as acting subjects with individual voices and histories, but rather, they persist in a state of anonymity. The prevalent portrayal is of male foreign workers, despite data indicating the significant presence of women, particularly Yugoslav women.

marginal community holdings to central sources for writing more nuanced, relational histories of labour migration in Austria and beyond.

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