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Amateur Photography of Camps in Nazi Germany

The main focus of my research project lies on the visual documentation, representation, and construction of the "Volksgemeinschaft", especially by means of photography in everyday life. Instead of examining photography in the field of official propaganda the material for this research consists mainly of private, occasional, "everyday" photography, of "snapshots". The dissertation thereby focuses on photography as a "private praxis" (Jens Jäger) and discusses the ordinary and everyday practices of communitisation and exclusion by means of their visual strategies and representations, in photographic material from the German Reich as well as the occupied territories.

My research specifically analyzes visual documentation of camps. Camps are often defined through their mechanisms of exclusion of people who were defined as "Gemeinschaftsfremde", as outsiders of national socialist society, and were detained in concentration camps, forced labor camps etc., where they were often tortured and murdered. This research tendency could be characterised as a "semantic bisection" (Kiran Klaus Patel) of the collective singular "camp". A significant part of Nazi Germany's camps addressed the "Volksgenossen" in the form of education camps for the SS, camps for the soldiers of labor, the Hitler Youth, etc. Especially with regard to the visual regimes of the camps for "Volksgenossen" and "Gemeinschaftsfremde", structural similarities come to attention.

The photographic material examined in my research was produced by amateurs, by SS staff of the camps, prisoners as well as participants. The material was often assembled and arranged in private photo albums. The research project concentrates on the mediality of these arrangements. It stresses the microscopic shift of perspective, the raptures as well as the continuities between these pictures and the official photographs taken in propagandistic intention.