1. Frames of the photograph

A male voice reads a letter on the soundtrack: “May 10, 1938. Dear sister, here come some questions you should answer in Swedish and German. 1: name, 2: profession, 3: nationality [...]” Simultaneously, a man approaches the camera in the aisle of a train. He is framed in a frontal silhouette, the shadowy black of his figure merging with enveloping beams of light. As he walks directly toward the camera, the silhouette grows darker. The man stops and turns to look into a compartment, and again the camera frames him from the front, this time in closer proximity. The man, however, is bound to the darkness of the silhouette’s texture, the outlines of his uniform playing with the enveloping light. The camera then turns to the interior of the compartment, slowly sweeping from left to right, and finally stopping at a table on which a Russian tea glass, a passport, and a notebook are laid out. Under the notebook is a partly covered photograph that the camera subtly singles out. On the soundtrack, the male voice keeps reading the list of questions and briefly contends: “I am on the trains this summer and I often have to question foreigners.”

In the photograph (Figure 1), a young man dressed in an army uniform looks directly at the camera. In the following scene, a man holds the official-looking photograph in his hand, letting the camera linger over its details. Touching the edges of the image, the man states in sonorous tones that the black cross of death does not appear in the image; he sees only a clear light. Soon after the assertion, an elderly woman is seen flipping through a photo album. The contents of the album are not revealed, but the woman’s gestures of turning the pages and pasting photos onto them associate to the hands holding the photograph in the preceding scene.

Passing through the hands of many, the photograph is held and looked at from various perspectives throughout the film. From the prologue to the epilogue, Kanerva Cederström’s documentary film Two Uncles (Kaksi enoa, Finland 1991) invites the spectator to look at the photograph and to follow the gazes of others. The shadowy figure in the aisle of the train as well as the letter read on the soundtrack initiate the spectator to the photograph’s centrality in the film.

Two Uncles is an account of the disappearance of Paavo Seetrivuo, the filmmaker’s uncle, in World War Two. He disappeared in the battle of Hästö, an island in the Gulf of Finland on the Hanko front on 18 July 1941 and has not been heard from since. Even though he was pronounced dead in 1961, his figure is still covered in a veil of mystery. Above all, the enigma emanates
So ul of the Documentary
from the fact that his body was never found. The uncertainty caused by
the disappearance created a situation in which the family imagined him
leading a life somewhere else, unharmed but unable to return.

The photograph of Paavo that surfaces several times over the course of
the film is a clue to the mystery surrounding his disappearance. The photo-
graph leads into the equivocations about the disappearance and the various
possibilities of survival envisioned by different people. The documentary
follows the sequence of events that has kept Paavo's life a possibility for
the family and documents the external fields of Paavo's photograph, the
visions of his survival.

Deictic rules of suspense

The introduction of the photograph in Two Uncles is reminiscent of detective
stories and mystery novels. The photograph is provided as a clue, as a sign
for which the referent remains to be revealed. Starting from the mysterious
setting on the train and the partly covered photograph on the table, the
film gradually builds a mesh of accounts around the photograph and thus
proposes possible referents to saturate the sign. The photograph is given as
a starting point for the sequence of events that follow.

Put differently, Two Uncles opens in a deictic manner. It encourages look-
ing at the photograph and following the connections Paavo's image leads
to without sealing the meaning of the image. Mary Ann Doane describes
the deictic function in terms of pointing a finger – an act that could be
expressed verbally as “look at this!” It only asserts a presence by pointing
“there!” The deictic index is a sign that acquires a referent “in relation to a
specific and unique situation of discourse, the here and now of speech.”

Figure 1: Uncle Paavo in his uniform. Frame enlargement courtesy of the filmmaker.
The photograph is introduced as a deictic sign that gets formulated in the particular relations it falls into within the film.

Doane gives Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931) as an example of deictic storytelling in cinema. Lang’s film is structured around the murder of Elsie Beckmann and gradually develops with deictic indices to make its case. For example, the whistled Peer Gynt Suite is heard multiple times during the film. At first, the tune is without a referent, or the referent is uncertain, but toward the end, a blind man notes that he had heard the same tune on the day Elsie Beckmann was murdered. The tune becomes the killer’s referent only gradually.5

Another example of deictic storytelling can be found in the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, Madeleine’s hairdo in *Vertigo* (1958) being perhaps the most obvious example. Hitchcock builds the intrigue of his films with signs that acquire meaning over the course of events. He fashions his films on the promise of meaning. For example, *Strangers on a Train* (1951) opens with a scene of two men getting out of taxis at the train station; only their shoes are framed in the image as they step out of their cars one after the other and walk toward a train. The camera stays at ground level, and the men's faces are not shown before their feet accidentally touch in the train's lounge car. The beginning creates a suspense that feeds the flow of the following events. The Hitchcockian “rules of suspense” often include a deictic opening that sets the tone the rest of the film plays on.6

Over the first minutes of its runtime, *Two Uncles* introduces the photograph within the logic of deictic suspense. The film asserts an imperative to look at the image and suggests relations in which the photograph might acquire a referent. Following the structural dynamics of a detective story, *Two Uncles* proposes weighing the discursive relations in which the photograph gets articulated. The discursive relations follow a chronology that gives them an order of emphasis. The events right after the disappearance are told from the mother’s perspective, then moving on to Paavo’s sisters and finally to his nieces. The order is by no means straightforward, but it provides a sense of the changes that have taken place over time. The perspectives overlap and merge, creating a scale of proximity and distance, in which the film proceeds from those who were closest to him to more distant relatives and acquaintances.

From the start, Paavo’s case is formulated in an almost exhausting variety of discursive relations; several letters from various individuals are read aloud on the soundtrack, where they collide with multiple interviews. In each letter and interview, the bearings of the case get a slightly different formulation. The multitude of perspectives challenges any clear
definitions of the disappearance and its details. The mesh instigated with the photograph proposes an intriguing topography of possibilities and their undulations. The missing uncle permeates the family, changing form on the way.7

Paavo’s mother, who was adamant about her son’s survival, is assigned the first prominent perspective in the flux of letters and interviews. When the film was made, she had already passed away, so her unyielding belief has been re-enacted for the camera. In a particularly striking scene, an elderly woman takes Paavo’s photograph to an office as if she were asking for details about her son’s whereabouts. Shot with rich black-and-white textures, light beams creating shadowy figures reminiscent of the very first images of the film, the scene gives form to the certainty the mother invested in her son’s survival. On the soundtrack, a male voice describes the emotional intensity involved in the mother’s visits to the army headquarters with Paavo’s young wife after the disappearance.

The indexical certainty of the photograph

The mother’s perspective brings another side of indexicality into play in the film. The suspense structure intertwines with the photograph as trace that provides an injection of certainty to the film. Whereas the discourses around the photograph consist of fragments of information, beliefs, suppositions and their variations, the young slender man in his official uniform is the one thing that is certain. To paraphrase Roland Barthes, the photograph would not exist if Paavo had not once been in front of the lens.8 Barthes’ argument is close to C.S. Peirce’s claim that “an index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed […].”9 For Barthes, the reality of the photograph is the reality of the young man’s pose that once took place in front of the camera’s lens. For Peirce, the indexical photograph shares a causal physical connection with its object that is articulated in the moment of taking the photograph.10 For Barthes and for Peirce, the importance is in the existential relationship of an object and a sign. In the case of Paavo’s photograph, there is a certainty that such a pose has existed.

With the mother’s perspective, Two Uncles starts to build on the dual function of the index: the uncertainty of the suspense structure and the existential certainty of the photograph as trace. In the above-mentioned scene, the photograph takes the place of the uncle, so strong is the investment in its reality. The certainty the mother assigns to the photograph resonates
closely with André Bazin’s time-honored analysis of a photograph’s relation to its object:

The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of space and time that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.11

The scene foregrounds the certainty invested in the image, a certainty that emerges both in the way the old woman holds the photograph and passes it to the official in the re-enactment as well as in how the situation is described on the soundtrack.12 The mother’s investment is connected to the reality of the photograph that has taken the place of Paavo. The film documents the mother’s subjective investment in the image, her obsessive insistence in its reality.

The subjective investment coincides with Philip Rosen’s reading of Bazin’s ontology of the image. He argues that any reading of Bazin’s ontology should begin with the subject and particularly the subject’s phenomenological intentionality toward the image.13 Although Bazin’s ontology foregrounds an objective pre-given real, Rosen notes that the real is accessible and objective only through subjective processes. Within the suspense structure of the documentary, the reality of the photograph is weighed precisely in terms of the various degrees of subjective investment in its reality.

Both Bazin and Barthes argue that the relationship of the photograph to its model gives rise to a particular innocence. Barthes in particular foregrounds that the intensive experience of reality encountered in some photographs is “without culture,” in the sense that it is stripped of all codes that tie the image to systems of signification.14 The decoded bind of the pose and the image allows the photograph to be experienced in a unique manner that often escapes words. Approaching the issue from the ontological perspective of the photographic medium, André Bazin continues:

Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love.15

The emphasis Barthes and Bazin place on wiping the object of its cultural weight in the photograph is connected to an ideal of purity. Especially in
Bazin, it is as if the photograph provided a pathway to an essence that was otherwise out of reach. Similarly, the accounts of the astrologer and the mother envelop the person in the photograph with an aura of clear light. In their scope, the official appearance of the photograph is wiped out and a pure essence is brought forth.

The time of the disappearance

In *Two Uncles*, the reality of the photograph – its spiritual essence – is connected to the setting of wartime disappearances. The “clear light” is not simply a question of a directly recorded pose, but fundamentally linked to the specific time of its taking. The suspense storyline emerges from the temporal specificity of the disappearance. In his outline of neorealism, Bazin argues that stripping the object of preconditions is linked to a spiritual attachment to the period in question. In the context of Italian neo-realist film, he foregrounds that the films operate in relation to the specific spiritual circumstances of Italian Liberation in the 1940s. Hence, for example, Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946) has a documentary feel to it – not because of its directly recorded fragments on the streets of Florence, but because the fragments are organized according to a particular spiritual attitude typical to the period.16

The dual logic in Bazin’s thinking is that while Italian neo-realist filmmakers shot extensively on location, documenting its architecture, material conditions and social texture, their films are also marked by a particular sensibility – the spirit of the Liberation. In this sense, the documentary feel Bazin gives neo-realism arises from the combination of footage that is the reality of the location and a temporal experience of the location. In a way, *Two Uncles* displays a similar logic. It relies on photographs and the particular feel of uncertainty involved in wartime disappearances. From this perspective, the key to the documentary value of the re-enacted scenes is not in the spatial referencing of the disappearance but in the way the film takes into account the particular time of the disappearance.17 From this perspective, the imagined scenes hardly diminish the documentary value of the film, quite the opposite: the imagined scenes staged for the camera acknowledge the suspense and uncertainty caused by wartime disappearances.

In *Two Uncles*, one of the strongest moments is precisely the scene in which an elderly woman walks into an office and hands the photograph to an official. The light beams and walls of shadow foreground the mother's
solitary investment in the photograph’s reality and the rather desolate circumstances of wartime disappearances. She walks into a big room where there is only one desk and a man sitting behind it. She places the photograph on the desk in front of the official who takes it in his hands. The face of the man is not revealed. The mother is alone with her belief.

Drawing from Bazin, documentary value is not reducible to preservation in concrete fragments of reality, but it emerges “after the fact” – in relation to the attitude that connects them. Documentary value is positioned between the reality of the photograph and the style of the film that acknowledges the reality the photograph was taken from. Drawing from Bazin’s outline of documentary value in neo-realism. With the re-enacted and imagined scenes, Two Uncles aims at acknowledging the reality of the disappearance, the time of war.

Here, Two Uncles is in close proximity to Péter Forgács’s celebrated archival documentary The Maelstrom – A Family Chronicle (Hungary 1997). In the film, Forgács tells the Peereboom family history before and during World War Two with home movies. Starting from a family celebration in 1934, the film ends with the family preparing for a trip to a “work camp” in 1942. The everyday footage of birthdays, city life, days on the beach, children playing, and adults dancing is juxtaposed with a gloomy jazz score that envelops the family documents. Subtitles are used to identify the family members in the home movies and occasionally the period sound of radio broadcasts ties family events to national events, such as sport championships and regal celebrations, and eventually the rise of the Nazis.

The Maelstrom acknowledges the time of the Holocaust by emphasizing the relationship between everyday family life and the concurrent inescapability of their faith. It thus provides a private perspective on the Holocaust and prompts thinking about the off-screen areas of official histories. Whereas Cederström evokes imagination in relation to the events after the war, Forgács focuses on the events leading to the extermination of the Dutch family. His film imagines family life and everyday activities in the shadow of the Nazis.

Bazin’s outline of documentary value has an intriguing connection to Doane’s description of the specificity of cinematic time. She argues that one of the attractions of cinema is in how it endows singular instants with significance without relinquishing their singularity. For her, cinematic time is a combination of contingent instants and their abstracted duration.
singular instants are an issue of indexicality. In cinema, the instants take the form of photograms and are involved in a temporal tension specific to the medium. On the one hand, the indexical instants assert a presence – they designate a “here” or a “that” – but, on the other hand, they also make a past present. This dual function creates a tension that ties cinema to a doubled reality. According to Doane, an indexical instant designating a presence is part and parcel of an unfolding time. As the instant exists in relation to an unfolding time, it is also tied to a possibility of becoming something else; in this sense, the designating index is on the verge. The other side of indexicality appears as the instant is placed in an organizing framework, when it is used as an element in the recreation of a temporal event. In this case, the index is saturated with content. Doane argues that when a sign is given a referent, it becomes a trace imbued with a lure of historicity – the index as trace is used to rescue a historical instant in its screening.21

Rosen reads Bazin’s ontology in a manner that is strikingly close to Doane’s outline. He argues that the indicating work of the index asserts a gap between the referent and the mechanically produced images, a gap that is overcome in the subjective investment in the image. The mechanically produced images do not promise anything in themselves, but, as they are placed within an organizing frame “after the fact,” they contribute to the subject’s struggle vis-à-vis materiality in the state of change.22 The abstract duration in Doane aligns with Rosen’s subjective investment that promises to “mummify change” in the temporal flow of physical reality. The lure of historicity is thus a lure for the subject faced with uncontrollable change.

In Bazin’s discussion, cinema resists the irreversible flow of time, first by stripping its object of codes and then by organizing it into a new composition. This new composition mummifies change in the sense that it creates a new environment for the objects, a new lifeline so to speak. He declares that “[n]ow, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.”23 For Bazin, the abstracted time of the new lifeline preserves the temporal object for the perceiving subject. The historicity of the image – the image as trace – is tied to an intentional subject.

Whereas Bazin is interested in mummifying the flow of time, Doane argues for cinema’s capabilities of working with change.24 Even though cinema works to organize the unpredictable flow of time and its indices into traces, it still holds on to the promise of contingency inherent in the designated instants. For Doane, the specificity of cinematic time is in the indexically inscribed instants that also mark what could have been otherwise.25 The suspense storyline in Two Uncles depends on the very claim that
Frames of the Photograph

history could have unfolded otherwise: it entangles with Bazin's subjective investments and the tension Doane constitutes between contingency and abstract duration.

Ogonyok and the gleam of “maybe”

The possibility that history could have unfolded otherwise is introduced with an event that took place one day in February 1949, eight years after Paavo had gone missing. On that day, an issue of the Soviet Ogonyok magazine was delivered to the family home in Helsinki from Moscow. No sender was marked on the envelope and the family never found out why the issue was sent to them. It was the only issue of Ogonyok they ever received. On the cover is a reproduction of a painting of a slender young man holding a Soviet emblem above his head (Figure 2).

As the camera moves over the surface of the magazine, a female voice on the soundtrack explains that Paavo’s mother was certain that the young man in the cover was her son. The account on the soundtrack is followed by a scene shot from the ground floor of an apartment building. The same elderly woman walks in front of the large windows of the building, carrying what seems to be a magazine similar to Ogonyok.26 The woman glances through the windows and continues on her way. She seems assured and confident yet rather solitary in her appearance. The woman’s movements are accompanied by the sound of feet walking down the stairs. The walking is punctuated by the sound of a mailbox opening and closing.

The scene emphasizes the mother’s conviction that the Ogonyok cover is, like the photograph, a sign of certainty. The female voice narrating the mother’s sentiments intertwines with an interview with Paavo’s sisters, who were initially more skeptical about the possibility. Paavo’s sisters form a balancing counter-perspective to the mother’s persistence. They look at the cover with a rationale that argues the impossibility of it being an image of their brother. In the interview, one of the sisters clearly states her disbelief.

Despite the initial rationale of the interview, the sisters soon begin to equivocate on the possibility of Paavo’s survival – after all, such stories were not unheard of. Soon, one of the sisters reveals that ever since 1954, every trip she made to Moscow or St. Petersburg was marked by looking around, observing people, with the thought that one of them could be the lost brother. In the short discussion heard on the soundtrack, the signifying powers of the magazine cover change from the very unlikely case of it
being their brother to the high probability that the young man in the image could be him. The magazine cover makes the thought of Paavo’s survival a renewed possibility for the family.

The Ogonyok cover forms a threshold in the flux of the various perspectives because it disrupts the indexical connection with an object and brings
the various takes on the disappearance under a general “maybe.” Unlike the photograph, the cover no longer advocates the certainty that a pose once existed before the lens and therefore it changes the scope of the relations that form around it. Even though the painted cover continues to verify the indexical existence of her son for the mother, it lacks the physical connection a photograph possesses with its object. It disrupts the primacy of technology in the affirmation of documentary value.27

The filmmaker notes that the family would undergo “crazy fits” at regular intervals when the issue of Ogonyok had been misplaced and could not be found immediately.28 The magazine, despite its uncertainty (or perhaps precisely because of the uncertainty), became a sort of a family icon. In a manner reminiscent of Bazin’s statement, the magazine cover came to signify the missing young man, no matter how uncertain its documentary quality was.

The Ogonyok cover and its strange delivery change the tone of the film. For the remainder of its duration, the documentary veers away from investments in the photograph to the possibilities evoked by the painted cover. According to the filmmaker, after Paavo’s mother was no longer there to keep the idea of Paavo’s survival alive, the issue was laid to rest. However, yet another strange event put the uncle back in the family’s frame. In 1988, an old friend of Paavo’s was passing through Moscow and in a hotel lobby, an elderly man dressed in a uniform approached, addressed her in German, kissed her hand, and left. Back in Finland, the woman, Irja Kohonen, contacted Paavo’s relatives and suggested that it was Paavo who had walked up to her in the hotel. The two had known each other in Rajajoki, Paavo’s prewar post, where he had recited aphorisms to her in German. Also, it was a habit of his to include German verses in his letters.

The woman gives an account of the event on the soundtrack, accompanied by images of a hotel lobby. In the beautiful hall, the camera finds an old man sitting in a lounge chair. The mutual implication of the voice on the soundtrack and the visuals of the hotel suggest that this could be the man who disappeared several decades ago. Instigated by the woman’s strange encounter, the missing uncle starts to take form independently of the photographic pose and the varying degrees of investment in the reality of the image. Thus, it adds to the orientation initiated by the Ogonyok cover.

The blind fields of narrative suspense

The suspense narrative is animated by the subjective investments in the photograph and the possibilities evoked by the uncertainty of the magazine
cover. With this narrative, *Two Uncles* documents the possibilities in the photograph's and the magazine cover's “blind fields.” Barthes argues that a blind field is a life external to the photograph, a life that is brought about in the particular relationship formed with the image’s spectator. A photograph can entice the spectator into an adventure in the topos of the blind field; in a topos that is not coded in the image itself, although its limits are set by the image. The blind field is dependent on a point in the image, a point that “pricks” the viewer to think of the photograph beyond its systematized position or cultural codes. Barthes names the pricking point punctum.

*Two Uncles* follows the chronology of events that marks Paavo’s disappearance and represents the case in a manner that puts the emphasis on the fact that history could, indeed, have unfolded otherwise. The detective story is a representative abstraction of the unclear events and varying sensibilities around the disappearance. From this perspective, the suspense storyline aligns with Doane’s insistence on the contingency of an index. She argues that the cut in the abstracted chain of events echoes the verge of contingent moments on another level. The cut restores the sense of contingency to the abstracted chain of events. It makes the narrative resonate with the sense that history could have unfolded otherwise and thus enables the documentary to capture the sensation that Paavo could indeed have survived.

The narrative logic of *Two Uncles* is, however, not quite enough to account for the work of imagination in the documentary. The suspense storyline intertwines with an audiovisual regime of another order. The encounter in the Moscow hotel in 1988 is not only the ultimate incident in the chronology of events but it also prompted the beginnings of *Two Uncles*. The film is based on an identically titled short story written in 1988 by the filmmaker’s cousin, the Finnish author Leena Krohn. The script of the film was co-authored by Cederström and Krohn, uniting the two authors in the events around their uncle’s disappearance.

The authorial touch is foregrounded in the first-person narration that entwines with the photographs, re-enactments, interviews, and archival footage that constitute the film. The narrator’s account is taken almost word for word from Krohn’s short story, and a third woman lends her voice to the narration. The first-person narrator brings the two authors into the world of the film, but her voice does not turn the audiovisual material into screens of subjective memory. Instead, the narrator foregrounds remembering with the audiovisual material. The distance between the missing uncle and the narrating voice turns the documentary’s work from asserting Paavo’s presence with his images to creating an idea of the uncle within the audiovisual
composition. Over the final scene, in which several generations of the family are gathered around a table to go through photographs, the female narrator states: “I remember him even though I never met him.”

**Exceeding referentiality, imagining in relations**

The change of emphasis toward the end puts the audiovisual composition of the film into a new frame. What appeared to be a detective story now emerges as a series of voices, bodies, places, and events where connections and relationships are less definite. Attention turns from represented duration in the series of scenes to the possible relations between voices and bodies, still images and film fragments. For example, the interviews that previously drew attention to the fluctuation of certainty and uncertainty within the family now appear detached from the base narrative. The interviewees are not clearly identified; one may only assume their identity from what they say and how the narrator’s voice resonates with them. The voices and bodies are never synchronized, but the people seen in the images are often silent while their voices hover over the images, often seeping into the next scene.

Moreover, the documentary includes footage from the particular locations that marked the events around Paavo’s disappearance – the cityscapes of Helsinki and Moscow as well as Paavo’s post on the Russian border – but nothing pins the footage down to the specificity of the locations; rather, their specificity appears from how they are perceived within the film. Archival footage mixes with contemporary footage shot in black and white. The camera pans softly over the river that traverses the area where Paavo worked before the war; it frames unidentifiable corners and arcades in Moscow and encompasses wartime footage from the bombings of Helsinki. These images, which admittedly are of actual locations, do not function as signs of the specific locations in the regime of imagination constituted in Two Uncles.

In one scene, archival footage from wartime Helsinki is accompanied by the sound of film going through the projector’s gauge. The sound of a projector underlines the act of perceiving the footage – as if the narrator were watching a film. Scenes of youngsters bathing and parachutists in the sky are followed by people cycling and a city street teeming with cars. The distinct provenances and temporal realms of the scenes suggest that the narrator may remember her uncle precisely by looking at and imagining with images of the past. Remembering the missing uncle is not about
preserving his presence in the face of death, but about imagining a life irrespective of his disappearance.

Imagining a life aligns with what Deleuze calls having an idea in film. An idea created in a film cannot be equated with having an idea in general: having an idea is immanent to the particular form of expression. In this case, the idea of the uncle is indiscernible from the connections fashioned between audiovisual materials from different origins. *Two Uncles* creates an idea that is held together in the act of remembering suggested by the film’s disposition. From this perspective, the idea of the uncle created in the short story that inspired the making of the film deviates from the one created in the documentary. The short story places the emphasis on the *Ogonjok* cover, whereas the documentary begins and works with the photograph. The short story describes the details of the reproduced painting, from the color shades to the expression on the young man’s face. In the documentary, the camera sweeps over the image, silently perceiving its details.

Having an idea in film involves weighing the connections and disjunctions between the speaking voices and the posing bodies, the images, and the letters read aloud. The relations suggested between distinct regimes of images and sounds formulate an idea of the uncle at a remove from the foundational setting of the disappearance. The disappearance and the consequent uncertainties offer the film its starting point, but the created idea is not tied to the investments that belong to the time of the disappearance. The documentary imagines the two uncles in its audiovisual disposition.

**The crystal-image; imagining a life, a death**

A photograph suspends the rhythm of the film – its narrative flow – and creates a time of reflection for the viewer. In *Two Uncles*, the camera that moves on the surfaces of the images occupies the role of the viewer. Returning to the scenes in which the photograph of Paavo (Figure 1) is held or in which the camera moves on the surface of the *Ogonjok* cover (Figure 2), it seems that the camera was precisely simulating a pensive look, one that was contemplating the relations that open up from the images.

The pensive camera that appears in *Two Uncles* aligns with having an idea of the uncle in the documentary. Tied to the movement of the camera, the act of remembering suggests that the idea of the uncle is created in the relations between bodies and voices, images and sounds. The camera-consciousness within the film detaches the documentary from the absolute immobility of the photograph and the certainty of the pose that once existed.
before the lens. Moreover, it diverges from the adventures in the blind fields of the photograph. The pensive camera does not look at the photograph – or any other image – in order to get to the contingency of the time of its making (the past moment of recording); its look foregrounds the photograph itself.  

This resonates with Geoffrey Batchen’s claim that the frame plays a significant role in the memorial powers accorded to photography. The photograph refers to what has been, but the frame foregrounds the image in itself.  

Thus, the photograph is not simply a sign of an external reality, but a powerful assertion in its own right. In Two Uncles, the frame enhances the photograph’s memorial powers by foregrounding the teeming sensation of time immanent to the photograph. In a way, the frame replaces the stillness of the photograph with immanent mobility.  

Framing photographs connects Two Uncles to other documentary works that unfold realities immanent to photographs and archival footage. For example, the Portuguese filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias explores images produced during the 48 years of Portuguese dictatorship (1926–1974) in her documentary film Still Life (Portugal 2006). The filmmaker uses photographs of political prisoners, archival material, news footage, and propaganda documentaries from the era that ended with the Carnation Revolution of 1974.  

There is no guiding voiceover in the film, but a musical soundtrack envelops the archival images and enhances the sensation that there is more to the images than their actual visible form. Particularly striking is a recurring scene of what appears to be a national address directed at the people. The scene occurs three times in the film and, between the occurrences, a number of photographs of political prisoners become associated with it. In the scene, the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar stands on a balcony before an arsenal of microphones. In the first occurrence, Salazar’s slowed down movements coincide with a composition of industrial noises on the soundtrack. The soundtrack takes hold of some of his drawn-out gestures and gives volume to the slowed down movements. The scene is reminiscent of numerous other filmed national addresses and gains in weight as the soundtrack punctuates and elongates the documented gestures of the dictator. In the second occurrence, the dictator’s gestures are more imposing and the composition grows more decisive and ominous. The third and last occurrence of the scene at the end of the film is a prelude to the Carnation Revolution. Here, the musical score is brighter in tone, expectant in spirit. The dictator is allowed a quick bow to the nation, followed by a cut to footage of the old Salazar at the end of his era. The images of the Portuguese
dictatorship become expressive in their association with the music that envelops them.\footnote{42}

When the camera frames Paavo’s photograph for the last time, the photograph becomes expressive of two coexistent layers of time. The suspense narrative has created a feeling that the photograph’s referentiality is not straightforward or clear-cut, but the immanent power of the still image gets foregrounded only when the photograph is suspended from the detective story. When the photograph is stilled from the subjective adventures and investments and the abstracted duration of the story, it becomes charged with a powerful sensation of time passing.\footnote{43}

Stilled from the detective story, the photograph becomes expressive of two coexistent layers of time: the present captured in the image and a virtual duration that produces a sensation of time passing. The time that passes is complemented with a stilled present, and the present coexists with a time that passes. Deleuze calls the indiscernible coexistence of the two layers a crystal-image of time.\footnote{44} In his view, since the past and the present coexist, time must divide itself in two at each moment. Each present splits into two “dissymmetrical jets,” one of which makes the present pass on and the other preserves all the past.\footnote{45} What we see in the crystal-image is time splitting into two directions. What we see in the stilled photograph in \textit{Two Uncles} is a present that passes on and a past forever preserved.

Deleuze’s conceptualization of time foregrounds non-chronological time – “Cronos, not Chronos,” as he puts it – which is a fundamentally different conception of time from Doane’s notion of abstract duration. For Deleuze, Cronos is not the interior in us and thus it cannot be mummified; rather, it is “the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change.”\footnote{46} Documentary imagination must therefore be posited differently according to the two temporal regimes. Following Bazin, Barthes, and Doane, the documentary represents the specificity of the temporal circumstances a film emerges from. What is captured is an immobile slice of time with which the past can be represented; a past made present in its absence. With Deleuze’s crystal-image, an actual present – although stilled – forms a circuit with a virtual past and thus the crystal-image can produce a sensation of time passing and splitting into two.\footnote{47} Here, the past is not forever absent – and thus in need of being represented – but virtually present.

In \textit{Two Uncles}, the framed photograph emerges as a crystal that divides into two jets, one in which the uncle is an elegant elderly gentleman living in Moscow. The other uncle is a young, slender, fair-haired officer forever preserved in the past of the photograph. The two jets that give the documentary its name emerge as the camera frames the photograph for the last
time. The narrator gives a verbal form to the produced sensation: “After this story, I have two uncles.”

The narrator goes on to describe the life of the older gentleman who walks along the boulevards of the bustling city with his soldierly posture and still holds a job. He has his daily routines that he executes with adamant precision. He is stylish and graceful, although outlined with a mysterious and silent fatality. The narrator’s depiction connects with archival and contemporary footage from the streets of Moscow, its subways and facades. Statues, buildings, and hallways become a part of the gentleman’s urban environment. It could be that this is the very uncle that the old neighbor of the family claims to have encountered in Moscow in 1988. The young man who once had the future ahead of him coexists with the elderly gentleman. The narrator notes that the uncle’s “shape changes from the dead to the living in an eye-blink.” He has “a maybe-life and a maybe-death” that are variations of the two jets of time expressed in the crystal-image. With the photographic crystal-image of time, the documentary imagines the two uncles; a life and a death.