

Title: The Photograph as Intimate Space: Late Imperial Russian Ballerina Postcards
Author: Catharine Nepomnyashchy, Columbia University

In this paper I propose to examine the photographic postcards of ballerinas that proliferated in Russia during the late imperial period. I look at these visual “texts” as indices of the construction of the female celebrity during the waning years of the Russian Empire. I take intimate space in two senses here. First, I take the term at its most literal, as referring to domestic space. In this context, I will look at examples of postcards in which ballerinas stage themselves not on the stage, but in the home. I will argue, moreover, that these domestic postcards point to a second, broader and more abstract sense in which the photographic postcard itself represents an “intimate space.” It is a space, limited in size and by technical possibility, in which the celebrity is captured in a form that can literally be brought home by the possessor. The postcard thus becomes a means of domesticating the public sphere, owning a piece of fame. By placing these mass circulation photographs within the context of writings of the times, I will attempt to close this circle, to expose the aesthetics of circulation of these photographs, the principles that guided the poses and props with which female dancers performed themselves for domestic consumption.