THAT HAS BEEN!
-TECHNOLOGY KEEPSAKES
FROM THE PRE-REFORM ERA AND
FAMILY INDIVIDUATION
IN LATE 1990S HANOI

Markus Schlecker
Affiliated Member, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany

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ABSTRACT
We are accustomed to thinking of keepsakes as aide-memoires, as objects that jog our memory, help us recall past experiences stored in the back of our minds. We locate the memories inside the mind of the keepsake owner. But what if people located memories inside the keepsakes themselves? How could such a relation between keepsake owner and his souvenir be imagined? In urban Vietnam in the late 1990s, technologies brought home from Eastern Europe or Southern Vietnam were sometimes turned into keepsakes by families, said to
have memories about those who had brought them home. This paper comprises two objectives. It seeks to explore the transformation of old technologies from the pre-reform era into family keepsakes by considering them in analogy to Roland Barthes’ model of photography, as traces of a life that has been. Subsequently, taking a cue from Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy of mnemotechnics, the transformation of technologies into keepsakes is considered an effort to counteract the consequences of an etatization of time in the pre-reform era, which constituted a violence against the sociability of families and local communities.

Keywords:
Mnemotechnics, Technology keepsakes, family individuation