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**The Boundaries of Art: Soviet Photography from 1956 to 1970**

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

To those who I loved, continue to love, and always will love; Mushi, Pasha, Lucy and  
Karl.

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## **The Boundaries of Art: Soviet Photography from 1956 to 1970**

Jessica Marie Werneke, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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In January 1957, the Soviet Ministry of Culture, assisted by the Union of Journalists, resumed publication of the premiere photography journal of the Soviet Union, *Sovetskoe Foto* after a sixteen year hiatus. The relative openness of the Khrushchev period, also known as the cultural Thaw, fostered a climate of enthusiasm for photojournalists and amateur photographers, who sought to establish photography as an officially recognized art form. My dissertation argues that between 1957 and 1962, this project seemed achievable; the relative openness of the period offered photojournalists the opportunity to discuss their craft and reconceptualize their work in ways that had been impossible in previous decades. In response to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, it is my assertion that the boundaries of viable visual representation were shifting, and that a previously outcast artistic movement could be reexamined as a way for photojournalists and amateur photographers to demonstrate photography's aesthetic properties.

My dissertation examines the connections between documentary and aesthetic arguments made by Soviet photographers and photojournalists, which complicated the relationship between art photography and photojournalism. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, professional photographers returned to these discussions in order to elevate their work, make a case for the creation of a union specifically for photographers. This occurred at the same time that mass media began to incorporate 1920s and 1930s avant-

garde aesthetics in press and illustrated magazine photographs, making them more accessible to Soviet citizens. The reorientation of Soviet life, towards more private contributions to building socialism, as well as the government and Party's interest in expanding and galvanizing the press, meant that illustrated magazines were reaching a wider soviet audience. After 1962, however, professional and amateur photographers confronted the realization that their designs for a photography union and higher education were not gaining official support. Photojournalists and theorists at began arguing not for photography as an art form, but rather something in between art and document. Some amateurs, who had originally desired close correspondence with official photographers and photography clubs, began to turn towards unofficial and nonconformist photography, severing their ties with the official community.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	x
Introduction.....	1
The Soviet Photograph as “Art,” the Soviet Photograph as Document.....	2
The Thaw and its Historical Context .....	19
Chapter 1 Avant-garde Journalism: Illustrated Journals and the Beginnings of Professional Photography in the early Soviet Period.....	29
The RFO, Early Photography Institutions, and Aesthetics .....	32
The Reestablishment of <i>Ogonek</i> and Founding <i>Sovetskoe Foto</i> .....	36
Proletarian Photography and <i>Sovetskoe Foto? Oktiabr</i> and the ROPF.....	44
Silencing Photographic Debates; The ‘United Front’ in 1930s Photography... .....	59
Undoing Avant-garde Photography .....	69
World War II and Documentary Photography .....	71
Chapter 2 Reestablishing <i>Sovetskoe foto</i> : Art Photography and the Artist- Photojournalist .....	86
Documentary Aesthetics and <i>Sovetskoe Foto</i> .....	89
Regulating Photography: The Party, Censorship, and Photojournalism.....	98
Photographic Aesthetics in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s.....	103
Photography and Higher Education in the Soviet Union.....	114
Photography Exhibitions and the SSOD.....	126
The Avant-garde and Photojournalism .....	132
Chapter 3 The Mass Media Away and at Home: <i>Ogonek</i> and International Photography Organizations in the Soviet Union.....	152
<i>Ogonek</i> and Soviet Photography in the 1950s and 1960s.....	156
The SSOD, Foreign Photography, and the Photo Section of the Union of Journalists.....	172
Photography and the Soviet Bureaucracy .....	191



Chapter 4 Amateur Photography, Socialist Realism and Governing Unofficial Culture .....	197
Amateurism and Technical Expertise .....	199
Amateur Photography Clubs and Exhibitions.....	207
Amateur Photography, Aesthetics, and Education .....	211
Amateur Education and <i>Sovetskoe Foto</i> .....	232
Amateurs, Nudity, and the Birth of Unofficial Photography.....	240
Chapter 5 Beyond Soviet Journalism: Photography after the Thaw.....	252
Professional and Amateur Disillusionment .....	255
Another Disappointment: <i>Planeta</i> Publishing .....	260
Photography Between Art and Document .....	263
Photography Clubs in the Late 1960s .....	271
<i>Fotokruzhki</i> and Non-conformist Photography.....	283
Unofficial Photographers in the Late Soviet Period .....	291
Conclusions.....	300
Appendix A Calculated Royalties of the Photography Department of the Soviet Information Bureau.....	306
Bibliography .....	308
Vita .....	327

## List of Figures

Figure 1:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Grinberg.....	34
Figure 2:	<i>Sovetskoe Foto</i> , No. 1 1926, Cover.....	38
Figure 3:	<i>Jump on a Horse</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	66
Figure 4:	<i>Crossing the Oder</i> , Dmitri Baltermants .....	72
Figure 5:	<i>The Politruk Continues the Fight</i> , Ivan Shagin .....	78
Figure 6:	<i>USSR na Stroike</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	87
Figure 7:	<i>Duck Parade</i> , Mark Redkin .....	94
Figure 8:	<i>Night Battle</i> , Dmitri Baltermants .....	95
Figure 9:	<i>Tanks in Action</i> , Dmitri Baltermants .....	96
Figure 10:	<i>The Two Illyches</i> , Dmitri Baltermants .....	96
Figure 11:	<i>Water-A Life 1</i> , Mikhail Kocharian and Vladimir Kharstyan .....	104
Figure 12:	<i>Water-A Life 2</i> , Mikhail Kocharian and Vladimir Kharstyan .....	105
Figure 13:	<i>Manganese</i> , B. Dadvadze .....	107
Figure 14:	<i>Motocross</i> , L. Ustinov and D. Khrenov .....	133
Figure 15:	<i>Youth</i> , Ota Rikhter .....	134
Figure 16:	<i>Skiing</i> , E. Volkov .....	136
Figure 17:	<i>No War</i> , Antonin Gribovsky .....	136
Figure 18:	<i>The Building on Miasnitskaia Street</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	137
Figure 19:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	139
Figure 20:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	139
Figure 21:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	139
Figure 22:	<i>Pioneer Girl</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko.....	140
Figure 23:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	141

Figure 24:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	141
Figure 25:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	141
Figure 26:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	141
Figure 27:	<i>Untitled</i> , I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia .....	141
Figure 28:	<i>Portrait of Mayakovsky</i> , Aleksandr Rochenko .....	143
Figure 29:	<i>Workers Prepare to Blast Rock for Construction of Buildings of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station</i> , Maks Alpert .....	144
Figure 30:	<i>Portrait of my Daughter</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	146
Figure 31:	<i>Construction of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station. Irkutsk Region</i> , Maks Alpert .....	148
Figure 32:	<i>To Live Culturally is to Work Productively</i> , Gustav Klutssis .....	148
Figure 33:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	149
Figure 34:	<i>On a Swing</i> , Valerii Gende-Rote .....	153
Figure 35:	<i>Ogonek</i> , No. 11 1959, Cover .....	160
Figure 36:	<i>Ogonek</i> , No. 19 1959, Cover .....	160
Figure 37:	<i>Untitled</i> , Evgenii Umnov .....	163
Figure 38:	<i>Untitled</i> , Evgenii Umnov .....	163
Figure 39:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Gostev .....	164
Figure 40:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Gostev .....	164
Figure 41:	<i>Untitled</i> , M. Chernov .....	165
Figure 42:	<i>Untitled</i> , A. Kon'kov .....	165
Figure 43:	<i>Untitled</i> , Vsevolod Tarasevich.....	167
Figure 44:	<i>Untitled</i> , Igor Il'inskii .....	168
Figure 45:	<i>Untitled</i> , Nikolai Drachinskii .....	170
Figure 46:	<i>Girl from the Island of Bali</i> , V. Volodkin .....	170

Figure 47:	<i>Untitled</i> , Vsevolod Tarasevich .....	171
Figure 48:	<i>Welder</i> , L. Ustinov .....	171
Figure 49:	<i>Untitled</i> , A. Goriachev .....	172
Figure 50:	<i>Untitled</i> , M. Iakovlev .....	204
Figure 51:	<i>Untitled</i> , M. Iakovlev .....	204
Figure 52:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Gostev .....	225
Figure 53:	<i>Untitled</i> , Rimantas Dichavicius .....	247
Figure 54:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Rodchenko .....	247
Figure 55:	<i>Saturday at Summer Camp</i> , Ain Kimber .....	249
Figure 56:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Rochenko .....	250
Figure 57:	<i>Five-year-old Girl Leads a Deer by a Harness</i> , Aleksandr Shhemliaev .....	254
Figure 58:	<i>Untitled</i> from the series <i>Sots Art I</i> , Boris Mikhailov .....	294
Figure 59:	<i>Untitled</i> from the series <i>Lyriki</i> , Boris Mikhailov .....	295
Figure 60:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Sliussarev .....	296
Figure 61:	<i>Untitled</i> , Aleksandr Sliussarev .....	298

## **Introduction**

Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech "On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences," delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress sent shock waves through the Soviet intellectual, political, and cultural community. What had been interpreted as inexorable truth became opinion, what had been considered fact was now fiction: that the greatest bastion of Soviet power, Stalin himself, was indeed fallible. Not only that, but he was guilty of betraying one of the ideological tenets upon which the Soviet political system was based: he propagated a personality cult, in which he was first among equals.

The period that followed, known as Khrushchev's Thaw, a term drawn from Ilya Eherenberg's 1954 novel of the same title, brought sweeping socio-political reform, a reorganization and reorientation of Soviet life and the relationship between the Soviet government and its citizens. Pardoned prisoners returned home from Gulag camps, the government relaxed censorship of literary and cultural material, and economic attention focused on two issues that had plagued the Soviet system during the Stalin years, access to housing and consumer goods, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad.

My dissertation addresses the role played by the photography profession during the cultural Thaw. The relative openness of this period offered a forum in which photojournalists could discuss their craft and reconceptualize their work in ways that had been impossible in previous decades. Soviet photographers who worked for illustrated journals were able to challenge the notion that photography was simply an ideological tool. They could promote aesthetic interest in photography, and advocate techniques that drew upon the avant-garde of the 1920s, which had been discredited by Stalin years earlier. In response to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, I argue that the boundaries of viable visual representation were shifting, and that a previously outcast artistic movement

could be reexamined by illustrated journals as a way for photojournalists and amateur photographers to demonstrate photography's aesthetic properties. This was particularly the case in the years between 1957 and 1962.

Shifting binaries connected to the idea of photography, of the camera as an aesthetic or technological instrument, characterize photography theory throughout the Soviet period. Photography as art versus document, manipulated (avant-garde) as opposed to direct realism, professional as opposed to amateur, all shaped the post-Stalinist attempts to professionalize photojournalism and photography. Each of these aspects of photography are Soviet forms of classic debates, taking on specifically Soviet meanings that shifted by decade and regime. The resurrection of the avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s is only one of these moments. Photojournalists, and to an extent, amateur photographers between 1957 and 1962, were actively assertive in their desire to reshape photographic aesthetics in the post-Stalinist epoch and redesign photography as a medium worthy of appreciation as an art.

### **The Soviet Photograph as “Art,” the Soviet Photograph as Document**

The theoretical debate about photography as “art” or as a technology (the pencil of nature) is as old as the photograph itself and is central to my argument. A variety of binaries framed discussions of what photojournalism should or could be, but each of these discussions revolved around photography and its relation to art and document. Baudelaire was convinced that photography corrupted art and that it had the possibility to destroy and replace it in its entirety. Aesthetically, photography was useful for documentary purposes, and nothing more:

Photography must, therefore, return to its true duty which is that of the  
handmaid of the arts and sciences, but their very humble handmaid, like

printing and shorthand, which have neither created nor supplemented literature. Let photography quickly enrich the traveller's album and restore to his eyes the precision his memory may lack; let it adorn the library of the naturalist, magnify microscopic insects, even strengthen, with a few facts, the hypotheses of the astronomer; let it, in short, be the secretary and record-keeper of whomsoever needs absolute material accuracy for professional reasons.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, the Soviet government agreed with this assessment by the mid-1930s with an added emphasis on news and press circulation. But photographers in the nineteenth century fell into one of two categories when it came to the relationship between photography and art. Either they believed that photography was a technical process that was useful for professional and scientific purposes (or as Baudelaire also mentions, as a hobby helpful for tourists) or it was something more than a mechanical process. The former, arguing that photographs operated as visual documents, did not necessarily see photography's technical properties as negative, and indeed found them to be strengths of the medium that reinforced its "truthfulness." But, as photographic technology advanced, aesthetic opportunities presented themselves complicating the relationship between photography as a technology and photography as an artistic pursuit. Portable cameras further expanded these possibilities, especially as photographers in the early twentieth century experimented with the alteration of positives and negatives, shooting angles, filters, and focus.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon on 1859," in *Baudelaire, Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, ed. P. E. Charvet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 297.

But photography, despite its potential aesthetic qualities, remains a medium inextricably linked with documenting and indexing. Susan Sontag has argued that photography is useful because it traces reality, providing evidence of an event or experience, providing a document of the past, of actuality. Other theorists, however, have pointed to the importance of contextualization and the photograph's ability to disarticulate and disrupt reality. Max Kozloff has noted the photograph's potential for unreliability while maintaining some measure of authenticity, in which "the main distinction between a painting and a photograph is that the painting alludes to its content, whereas the photograph summons it, from wherever and whenever, to us."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the present reality in which an image is produced, is manufactured, altered and therefore inherently problematic, according to John Tagg.<sup>3</sup> The photograph produces and infuses itself with meaning that may be divorced from, but still connected to, reality.

Photography is also inherently "bound up with the emergence of institutions, practices and professionalisms bearing directly on the social body in a new fashion, though novel techniques of surveillance, record, discipline, training and reform" and in this way could have been utilized by the Soviets who were themselves interested in censorship and surveillance.<sup>4</sup> In the Soviet Union especially, the connection between lived experience, reality, and representation were divorced from each other. Any history of Soviet photography is complicated by the Communist Party's troubled relationship with the photograph. Leah Dickerman's article "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography" outlines the early history of the Bolshevik Party's

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<sup>2</sup> Max Kozloff, *The Privileged Eye*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 236.

<sup>3</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 9.



interaction with the camera. Looking at the egregiously obvious manipulation of press and propaganda photographs, the public nature of state censorship, as well as the reproduction of widely proliferated images into popular paintings, Dickerman notes that photography presented numerous problems for the Soviet government and the Communist Party.

The reworking of the document *rather than its suppression* testifies to the perceived need to offer visual proof of a particular (but false) historical narrative with the strength of photography's power of authentication... It grows out of the documentary demand of the index, that is, an imprint of the real.<sup>5</sup>

Dickerman goes on to explain the precarious place of the photograph in the Bolshevik Party's propagation of mass media. On the one hand, the Bolsheviks evinced a desire, even a need, for authentication, and on the other they distrusted the photograph for its ability to show imprints of the past which may betray the ideological and historical narrative of the present. As a result, the Party both desired and feared mass media culture, and photography in particular, because it had the potential to pose a very real threat to Bolshevik conceptions of history. This relationship between the Communist Party and photography, manifested in the desire to provide visual documentation of history, but only in the "correct" narrative, is a paradox that defines the cultural position of photography in the Soviet Union.

Theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Benedict Anderson have argued that social realities are imaginary forms constructed by institutions like mass media outlets.

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<sup>5</sup> Dickerman, Leah. "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography." *October* 93, no. 3 (2000): 143.

Bourdieu's "collective principle of constructing collective reality" explains that "social realities are social fictions with no other basis than social construction."<sup>6</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, according to Evgeny Dobrenko, most Soviet art "engaged in intensive production of the 'masses of the people' and of 'class consciousness,'" essentially creating social realities out of fictional categories, rendering them real rather than imagined or false.<sup>7</sup> These new categories of people, however, "simply did not exist outside of socialist realism, [and yet]...In creating 'the people,' socialist realism simultaneously de-realized the social field in which real people lived."<sup>8</sup> In terms of Soviet photography, socially constructed identities and the manipulation of historical narratives were coupled with the task of visualizing these identities as well as promoting viewers to see themselves as a part of this reality, either imagined or real. For photojournalists, this involved the incorporation and categorization of identities into images that would help readers and viewers comprehend their place in Soviet society and history. It is my assertion that this project was most successful in the Thaw era, due in part to a relaxation of restrictions on photographic aesthetics but also a shift in how the government and mass media related to their audience. Of equal importance, however, is an overlap of Khrushchev's attempted revitalization of Soviet society, coupled with his active interest in utilizing the press to achieve that goal. Both the administration and photojournalists desired a more active role in society. The government wanted to show how the post-Stalinist Soviet Union had changed for the better, while photographers wanted to reopen debates about aesthetics and expand their role in the press and creative unions.

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, trans. Randall Johnson (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

Foucault's theory of governmentality is an important theoretical component of my project. Though he generally applied this idea to de-centralized, liberal societies, it is applicable to this period when the Soviet press was the most viable and visible apparatus used to disseminate information about Soviet society in the 1950s and 1960s. Foucault utilizes "government" as a verb because it describes the variety of ways that state policies and power are not only political, but also signify self-control, guidance, and management.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the process of governing applies to social control and institutions as well as the production of knowledge. Governmentality can be described as the manner in which power manifests itself in culture and society and in the Soviet Union press agencies were the main source of distributing visual information about and documentation of all aspects of the cultural, political and social terrain. Mitchell Dean expands on Foucault's conception of governmentality by incorporating technologies of power, including institutions like the Soviet press and photojournalism. As an arm of the Soviet government, the press was responsible for participating in the construction of particular identities. Dean explains that these forms of identity were fabricated and propagated, and yet they produced real results.

Forms of identity promoted and presupposed by various practices and programmes of government should not be confused with a real subject, subjectivity, or subject position, i.e. with a subject that is the endpoint or terminal of these practices and constituted through them. Regimes of government do not determine forms of subjectivity. They elicit, promote, facilitate, foster, and attribute various capacities, qualities and statuses to

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at The College de France 1978-1979*, (New York: Picador, 2010).

particular agents. They are successful to the extent that these agents come to experience themselves through such capacities (e.g. of ration decision-making), qualities (e.g. as having a sexuality), and statuses (e. g. being an active citizen).<sup>10</sup>

As an organ of the government, the press had the ability to promote an image of citizens as having particular capacities, qualities and statuses despite, or in spite of reality. As de-Stalinization gained momentum, the press was galvanized to define post-Stalinist Soviet identities, and photographers possessed the technology with the greatest potential to visualize these changes.

Between 1960 and 1970, the number of periodicals purchased in the Soviet Union more than doubled. Because the press and photojournalism were tied to the dominant political institution in the Soviet Union, the press was subject to periodic reorientations and redefinitions, and as Party leaders changed, their interpretations of the problems facing both the Party and the society also changed.<sup>11</sup> But in the moment between 1957 and 1962, journalists “would participate in the governing by supplying the texts and images that would make Soviet readers aware of and a part of the processes through which their society was realizing socialism. They would envision and project a form of person whose thoughts and actions would embody the socialist project; journalists would become technologies of the self,” tasked with discovering who the Soviet person was, and what society and culture was to look like once socialism was achieved.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Societies*, (London: Sage, 1995), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

In their arguments for photography as a form of art, Soviet photographers (both amateur and professional), theorists and critics confronted the dominance of socialist realist aesthetics. Socialist realism itself is a complicated category, as its definition is more exclusive than inclusive because it was never *officially* defined. In terms of the official view on the subject, socialist realist art should be realist in form and socialist in content (though this second aspect was often fabricated). But this definition is vague and carried with it a number of specifications and qualifications. In his recent work on the ways the arts embodied political culture, Boris Groys describes socialist realism *as* a kind of photography: “The goal was to give to the image of the future world, where all the facts would be the facts of Socialist life, a kind of photographic quality, which would make this image visually credible.”<sup>13</sup> But photography could not have lent itself to both the propaganda and artistic demands of the regime with ease. The complication remained photography’s relationship to and reflection of reality, especially in the Stalinist period. While photography as a medium remained desirable to the government and Party because of its reproducibility, photography’s “content” remained outside the scope of the government’s ideal of socialist realism in that it was too rooted in reality. Photography remained necessary for documentation purposes throughout the late 1930s, but socialist realism as it was defined during the Stalin era excluded photography because as a media it was suspect precisely because of its documentary functions.

The relationship of the government to photography was further complicated by the state’s dealings with the Russian avant-garde and its cultural heritage. In many ways, the “avant-garde” is an umbrella term used to describe various modernist movements that sprang up in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Avant-garde

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<sup>13</sup> Boris Groys, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 143-4.

artists wished to discard the cultural heritage of the past. They embraced mass media, industrial design and poster art, rejecting the exclusivity of artistry. In chapter one, I discuss the context of the various ideologies associated with the construction of a new society, and the several styles avant-garde photographers developed. These included incorporating heavy cropping, unusual points of shooting and a focus on details that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. Aesthetic and ideological battles between two loosely associated groups (that had very different ideas about the aesthetic and documentary purpose of photography) characterized avant-garde discussions about photography in the 1920s and early 1930s. The first group, *Oktiabr*, was led by Aleskandr Rodchenko and Elizar Langman, and supported photography as a versatile medium that could surpass its documentary processes to produce new ways of seeing and viewing the world. The second group, the ROPF, instead focused on the documentary aspects of photography. These arguments set the stage for, and complicated theoretical debates about, photography for the following fifty years. By the 1950s and 1960s, photographers, some of whom had participated in avant-garde groups in the 1920s and 1930s, began to reexamine the avant-garde, coming to the consensus that Soviet photography, whether professional photojournalism, art photography, or amateur prints, should incorporate aesthetic elements present in avant-garde photographs from the 1920s and 1930s.

In the 1920s and early 1930s the missions, desires and needs of avant-garde artists and the state were generally in step with one another, which waned as the state became increasingly centralized and politically conservative. Contrary to Clement Greenberg's assertion in "Avant-garde and Kitsch," Russian artists in the 1920s were fascinated with the possibilities of bringing culture to the masses and the technologies associated with it.

The Soviet state was likewise invested in this project. Though avant-garde artists “disapproved of only one aspect of commercial mass culture: its pandering to mass taste,” they were nevertheless fascinated by the possibilities of a mass audience.<sup>14</sup> Despite mass culture’s “pandering” to mass taste, photography appealed to artists like El Lizzitsky, Gustav Klutsis, and Aleksandr Rodchenko because of its reproducibility and ability to reach a wider audience.

For photographers and photojournalists in the 1950s and 1960s, the dominance of socialist realism and the institutional hierarchies set in place during the early 1930s made it difficult to make their voices heard when it came to determining the aesthetic standards for photography. Under Stalin, photography was placed at the bottom of the Soviet Union’s creative hierarchy, a point that was made clear when he removed photographers from the Artist’s Union in 1932, shut down a number of photography journals, and arrested prominent photographers like Gustav Klutsis. Once rejected by Stalin the avant-garde heritage became a difficult topic to discuss. By 1936, socialist realism had become the predominate mode of representation in most visual media, overshadowing other artistic movements such as constructivism and productivism which had been dissolved by law in 1934. Photography’s “truthfulness” was perceived as unreliable and journals replaced photographs with socialist realist paintings and other forms of representation until the war years. But, like so many things, the Russian avant-garde was rehabilitated, though incompletely, during the Thaw. Many photographers chose to emulate *Oktiabr* photographs, incorporating the extensive cropping techniques they had employed.

By the 1950s, the Soviet government tended to view photography either as journalism or an amateur hobby. Photography was officially reestablished in the Union of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 147.

Journalists in 1957, and the photo section of the Union dictated most policies about photography for the remainder of the Soviet Union's existence. But even here, the categories remain ill defined. The distinction between art photography and press photography had been blurred in the 1920s and 1930s by years of debate about what acceptable photographs should look like. By the 1950s a new generation of photojournalists were well acquainted with the work of avant-garde photographers of the 1920s and 1930s, as many of the older generation of avant-garde photographers were still working photographers, albeit for newspapers, press agencies and illustrated journals. This was not unique to photography, as Soviet intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s "...did not belong to a single generation...the oldest of them were born in the 1920."<sup>15</sup>

A burgeoning amateur photography movement appeared in the late 1950s. Some amateur photographers were able to participate in official photography culture by submitting their work to illustrated magazines and local publications. This further blurred the lines between professional and amateur, as well as photojournalism and art photography. This group of pseudo-professionals, by the 1960s, had clear ideas about what photography meant to them, either as a hobby, a part-time paycheck, or as a way to participate in the international artistic community through submitting their work to international exhibitions. The photography club became, in the 1960s, a source of local cultural production, increasingly in dialogue with the professional movement. The heyday of amateur photography followed close behind that of professional

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<sup>15</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2009), 20.



photojournalism, some clubs boasting membership logs that reached three hundred, four hundred, or even five hundred members.<sup>16</sup>

Promoting photography as a legitimate art was a phenomenon encountered not only in the Soviet Union, but in many countries in the post-war period. In the United States, John Szarkowski, photography curator of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was making a similar case for the artistic importance of photography. Unlike the situation in the United States, however, Soviet photojournalists were not only arguing that photography could be artistic, they were struggling to find official support from cultural authorities and institutions that were shaped in the Stalinist political context. As a result, Soviet political and cultural policies required photojournalists to attempt to incorporate socialist realist aesthetics if they had serious aspirations for themselves as artists and their work as art.

The relationship between the photographer-artist and the photographer-journalist is complicated not only by cultural authorities who neglected to recognize any form of photography as “high” art, but also by photographers themselves, many of whom embraced both roles. This continues to the present day, where images of prominent press photographers such as Georgi Zelma and Yakov Ryumkin are displayed in art galleries and museum shows, not in their original format (the magazine photograph), but as art objects. The return then, or rather colloquialization, of avant-garde aesthetics in the 1950s and early 1960s encourages questions about the nature of the Thaw as it was manifested in photography. In what ways did the unique political context of the Khrushchev era alter the landscape of viable visual representation, and what techniques did photographers use

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<sup>16</sup> V. Stigneev, *Fototvorchestvo Rossii: Istoriia, razviti i sovremennoe sostoianie fotoliubitel'stva*, (Moskva: “Planeta,” 1990), 36.

to expand or contract the boundaries of this terrain? What political events or contexts generated these changes? What was the relationship between aesthetics, historical events, and mass culture as mediated by photography? And finally what was the relationship between mass culture, official culture and high culture?

In the 1950s and 1960s, eyewitness photography was privileged because it provided evidence of how the country had changed for the better.<sup>17</sup> The photograph's authenticity and indexical features once again became desirable for the propagation of state sponsored industrial, agricultural, and technological advances. Within this context, photographers were able to provide a more nuanced look at Soviet life, not only in what they photographed, but how they chose to do so. Photographers played a role in constructing a new, post-Stalinist Soviet identity, and similarly the Khrushchevite political context allowed photographers to subvert official culture through official means. Within the context of the Thaw, the shift away from Stalinism encouraged all Soviet citizens to question his legacy. Although the avant-garde had been discredited by Stalin, the fact that it had been forcibly abandoned made it a useful tool for distancing photojournalists from Stalinist aesthetics and elevating photographic standards. A return to (an albeit diluted version) of avant-garde aesthetics in photography was a reaction to the measures of the previous regime, a choice made by contemporary photographers to actively rebuild and redefine Soviet photography on their own terms.

As early as 1955, Khrushchev began advocating cultural exchange programs between various countries, including the United States and Western Europe. These exchanges were open to students and professors, but more importantly journalists, artists, musicians and writers. As part of this program, the Soviet Union began holding and

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<sup>17</sup> Susan E. Reid, "Photography in the Thaw," *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (1994): 33.

participating in numerous cultural exhibitions. For many photographers, it was a period of opportunity, not only to exhibit their work in their home country outside of newspapers, magazines and journals, but also to submit their work to international exhibitions outside the reaches of the iron curtain. Even more notably, Soviet press photographers became essentially international documentary agents: for the first time since the 1930s, they were encouraged to travel not as documentary soldiers (as had been the case during World War II) but as professionals piecing together a picture of the rest of the world for the Soviet public. By actively encouraging photographers to go forth and document, the Soviet government aided in the dissemination not only of avant-garde aesthetics, but of new styles, modes and ideas about photography, particularly Italian Neorealism which resonated with Soviet photographers. By incorporating these foreign styles, influences and techniques into their work, Soviet photographers managed, with official Party and state support, to exhibit photographs that largely subverted official culture (i.e. socialist realism) without necessarily departing from it.

Avant-garde aesthetics remained incredibly important in the ways that photographers crafted debates about aesthetics into the 1950s and 1960s. As such, chapter one addresses avant-garde photography in the 1920s and 1930s as a necessary background for understanding its normalization in the 1950s and 1960s. It traces the growth of professional photojournalism and photography clubs from the pre-revolutionary period to World War II. At the time, arguments about photographic aesthetics focused on the role of photography in the Soviet paradigm. In the 1920s, critics and avant-garde photographers questioned if photography was a documentary or aesthetic media, or somewhere in-between. Mikhail Koltsov's establishment of the illustrated photography journal *Sovetskoe foto* played an integral part in these debates and was a

battleground between competing avant-garde visionaries. By the 1930s, however, the Soviet government brought arguments between fractious avant-garde movements into the fold of the official attitude about photography as a documentary media, though editors at *Sovetskoe foto* were still able to publish dissenting voices. By the end of the 1930s into the 1940s, open debate about the role of photography in art had all but ended, forcibly muted by a regime that choose to focus on other socialist realist genres for visualizing contemporary life. *Sovetskoe foto* ceased publication in 1941, further silencing photographers and photojournalists. This changed briefly during World War II, when the regime once again allowed photographers to wrest limited agency due to their necessity to the war effort.

My second chapter argues that in the years after Stalin's death, photographers were able to reexamine their cultural role, drawing heavily on the aesthetics of the avant-garde. The cultural Thaw and the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto* provided professional photographers a forum to discuss their work, organize exhibitions, and once again publicly discuss photography and its place amongst the arts. The photo section of the Union of Journalists, led by *Sovetskoe foto*'s editor Marina Bugayeva, as well as the journal itself, participated in the restructuring and rebuilding of aesthetic guidelines as they related to photography. The journal also acted as a lobbyist for improved education for photographers and photojournalists, and in the absence of higher education, offered amateur photographers advice on how to improve their work. The journal itself reinforced the idea that photography was an art form, and should be regarded as such. Furthermore, the debates found in the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* are reminiscent of the journal's publications in the 1920s and 1930s, questioning how photography fit into ideas about journalism and art. This period, culminating in 1962, was an era of enthusiasm on

the part of photographers, who saw themselves as participating in building of uniquely Soviet identities to correspond with Khrushchev's reorientation of life in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. This moment, however, much like Khrushchev's political and economic reforms, was fleeting. Photographers would not become part of the established Soviet art world, instead occupying a space that was somewhere between "artist" and "journalist."

Moving away from the niche journal *Sovetskoe foto*, chapter three discusses photography in the mainstream publication *Ogonek*, and the role of photography in the Soviet Union at home and abroad in the 1950s and 1960s. More specifically, in this chapter I investigate the role of photography in a Soviet Union that was opening, for the first time in decades, its borders to cultural influences from around the world. Of particular importance was the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (the SSOD), which maintained control of the influx and outflow of photographs in the Soviet Union. It was also responsible for the planning and management of exhibitions in the Soviet Union and providing photographs by Soviet photographers for exhibitions abroad. Despite the early initiative of dynamic press leadership, such as Anatolii Sofronov and Dmitri Baltermants at *Ogonek*, illustrated magazines in the later 1960s moved away from publishing photographers interested in aesthetics, instead prioritizing journalists who snapped their own photographs.

Chapter four returns to *Sovetskoe foto* and examines the journal's impact on amateur photographers and their creative choices. Amateur photography was becoming increasingly popular in the 1950s and 1960s, owing largely to the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto* and the foundation of a number of photography clubs across the Soviet Union. The journal, initially a publication for press photojournalists, vamped up its

efforts to educate the growing number of amateurs, many of whom, requested technical and artistic guidance. The amateur movement itself testified to the popularity of photography as a leisure activity, and growing numbers of amateurs began exhibiting their work in local, national, supra-national, and international exhibitions. In many ways, amateurs represented a new, truly creative group of photographers who, unburdened by deadlines and journal requirements, could investigate topics and genres unavailable to press photographers. By the mid-1960s, particular Republics, as well as clubs, developed their own unique signatures, probing otherwise taboo topics such as nudity in their work.

1962 represented both the high point and the beginning of the end of experimental photography for professional and amateur photographers. Khrushchev engaged in a public and infamous argument at the Menazh exhibition hall with Ernst Neizvestny regarding the function of art in society, ending in Khrushchev berating Neizvestny as a homosexual and calling his artwork “dog shit.” Chapter five investigates the significant impact this had on the art world, and how photographers took note. While their photographs and debates about photographic aesthetics hardly changed over the coming years, and though avant-garde-esque aesthetics had become firmly ensconced in press photography and accepted by photojournalists, creative debates about the medium began to taper off. For professional photographers, the style established between 1957 and 1962 became the new norm. For amateur photographers, the increasingly hierarchical and elitist environment of photography clubs became stifling, and though club membership remained strong, a handful of amateur photographers turned to unofficial and nonconformist art as an outlet for creativity. These photographers found little aesthetic inspiration in *Sovetskoe foto*, which to them, continued to issue what they viewed as increasingly hackneyed slogans about the status quo.

In many ways, the years between 1957 and 1962 became a watershed moment for Soviet photographers. For a brief six years, the designs of the Soviet government and enthusiastic photographers overlapped in such a way that benefitted the latter, their aspirations and their creative designs. It proved to be, however, a pyrrhic victory for professionals and amateurs alike. Photography and photographic instruction remained outside of higher education, and the Soviet government never recognized photographers as worthy of the same prestige awarded to members of official Artist's Unions. The debates that had begun in the 1920s, and reemerged in the 1950s and 1960s, resulted not in the establishment of photography as an art form but eventually alienated creative amateurs and professionals, and pushed innovative amateurs not into professional careers, but towards unofficial art.

### **The Thaw and its Historical Context**

Historians have tended to focus on the positive aspects of the late 1950s and 1960s with the benefit of hindsight. While it was true that repression and censorship became less prevalent, historians such as Stephen Bittner draw attention to the tumultuous nature of Khrushchev's far flung reforms.<sup>18</sup> Not only were many unsuccessful or incomplete, but Party and government officials generally went about implementing changes haphazardly as evidenced by the Virgin Lands campaign and the uprooting of Party cadres and Gosplan officials from the center to the periphery. Histories of the Thaw tend to cast it as an era of liberalization in contrast to Stalinism and, later, Brezhnev's reversal of Khrushchev's social and economic reforms. As Bittner states, this is "not an altogether unwarranted assessment."<sup>19</sup> This tendency, however, ignores the complexities

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

of the age, which was also characterized by general distrust of Khrushchev's changes and policy reversals, especially those relating to artistic genres and cultural reform. Thus, the "Thaw resists many of the rosy hues that the Soviet intelligentsia [and scholars] retrospectively applied to it. Yet it is consonant with the meanings that Ilya Ehrenburg first saw in the metaphor – impermanence, uncertainty, instability."<sup>20</sup> Historian Miriam Dobson similarly regards the era as unstable and anxiety ridden, rather than a period of "respite and reprieve."<sup>21</sup> As such, the shock of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin yielded mixed results. 1956 proved to be an especially tense year, marked by the Hungarian and Polish revolutions in Eastern Europe and rallies within the Soviet Union to commemorate the third anniversary of Stalin's death that erupted in mass demonstrations. International tensions also plagued the Khrushchev era, and Khrushchev maintained only a tenuous grasp on his post as First Secretary when the Stalinist Old Guard attempted to remove him from power in 1957. Nevertheless, historians have argued that despite these various problems, the cultural Thaw marked a step in the right direction, that it was the rigidity of the massive Soviet state that prevented any real reform from gaining a foothold.<sup>22</sup> These historians argue that had reform continued as Khrushchev intended, it may have produced more concrete results. Yet intentionality proves a poor measure of success, and ultimately, the Khrushchev era instead fostered anxiety about the permanence of reform. Nevertheless, as Katerina Clark has noted, "even if, then, the initial thaws can be seen as less times of radical change than as providing a difference of degree, an intensification of ongoing changes, still in a highly

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of Reform After Stalin*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 15.

<sup>22</sup> See William J. Tompson, *Khrushchev: A Political Life*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).



conventionalized culture, such as one found in the Soviet Union, the slightest degree of modification can be all-important.”<sup>23</sup> The Thaw era, while less radical than the *glasnost*’ and perestroika of the Gorbachev years, still prompted major cultural changes as “demands for greater realism, for an end to purely external, superficial representation of characters” occurred across media and genre.<sup>24</sup>

In recent years, many scholars have confronted the cultural Thaw from a variety of artistic media, including film, literature and architecture. For Soviet intellectuals, including photographers, “remnants of the romantic revolutionary idealism and optimism that had powerfully motivated the founders of the Soviet regime lingered on...This idealism and optimism...still had the vigor to confront conformism and docile passivity” in the Thaw era.<sup>25</sup> Despite the uncertainty of the Khrushchev era, optimism and enthusiasm for cultural change underscored photographer’s arguments for aesthetic innovation. As Vladislav Zubok argues, “the search for a fresh style and individual self-expression” defined post-Stalinist cultural experiments, including photographers interested in rehabilitating the avant-garde.<sup>26</sup> Khrushchev’s cultural policies “contributed to the mood of optimism during the late 1950s...[and the intelligentsia] believed that their expertise and the forces of enlightenment and knowledge would inevitably prevail over the ‘uncultured’ and conservative majority in the bureaucracy.”<sup>27</sup> Searching for individual, fresh and creative styles also led photographers to “other worlds beyond Soviet Russia [that] would play a crucial role in shaping the self-consciousness of the

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<sup>23</sup> Katerina Clark, “‘Wait for Me and I Shall Return’: The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?” *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd eds, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2013), 87.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

Russian intelligentsia during the 1960s. Inadvertently, Khrushchev's policies of peaceful coexistence and cultural competition" led to increased interaction between professional and amateur photographers and the outside world.<sup>28</sup> Photographers participated in this project because of the documentary nature of photography itself.

For the intelligentsia generally, the Khrushchev era offered a glimmer of hope, especially for the generation that remembered the 1920s. The forcible muting of arguments about photography aesthetics was felt throughout the cultural community. "The unresolved confrontation" according to Zubok, "between the artistic avant-garde and its antagonists turned into a festering wound afflicting the cultural and intellectual elites of Moscow." For photographers, this was represented in the rehabilitation of the avant-garde. Rather than "antagonism" or "festering wounds," the forcible silencing of avant-garde debates led directly to its reinvestigation in the 1950s and 1960s, but without the regulatory problems confronted by other media.

In *Reel Images*, Josephine Woll finds that Thaw era cinema "plots and genres reflected the legitimation of private emotions and lives in an emerging focus on ordinary people living everyday lives."<sup>29</sup> The hackneyed heroes of Stalinist cinema gave way to more human representations of Soviet citizens and films, "...whether they promoted officially-sanctioned attitudes, such as criticism of obstructive bureaucrats, anticipated mandated changes, or defied official strictures, filmmakers used the power of their medium to shape the attitudes of their fellow Soviets."<sup>30</sup> The focus on familiar aspects of life in photography, meant that anonymous or "everyman" characters appeared more frequently, and in more human ways, than they had previously. The Thaw was expressed

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Josephine Woll, *Reel Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), xiii.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, xiii.

in film and Photography criticism as well. “Slowly, new buzzwords –authenticity [*dostovernost*’], unvarnished [*neprikrashennaia*] reality – began to punctuate the stale greyness of articles such as ‘Ballet on Screen’ and ‘About Several Painful Issues in Documentary Film-making.’”<sup>31</sup>

The issue of authenticity played a crucial role in how photographers discussed their craft, after the “inauthentic” portrayals of the Stalinist era “documentary” photography. Photographers participated in this project, but from their own perspective, emphasizing artistry. As in film criticism, in *Sovetskoe foto* “liberals and conservatives duelled [sic] on the pages of most periodicals,” over appropriate visual representations in a period of cultural uncertainty.<sup>32</sup> Publications themselves changed. *Sovetskii ekran* (*Soviet Screen*) was revived in 1957 and had the layout of a “Western-style magazine,” with large color publicity photos of film posters and stars. They also published viewer reviews of films. When *Sovetskoe foto* resumed publication, the majority of space in the journal was devoted to photographs, articles for amateur readers, and submissions by amateurs themselves. According to film historian Alexander Prokhorov, “this dialogic model was a major departure from the one-way-street cultural policies of the Stalin era.”<sup>33</sup> Journals looked different as well. By 1960, the *Sovetskoe foto* was being printed on glossy paper, as opposed to newspaper stock as it had been for the previous three years. *Ogonek* revamped its style, with color images and a renewed focus on photographs. The emphasis on photography in illustrated journals and magazines also meant that the Soviet population related to periodicals differently. Photographs had “a

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Prokhorov, “Cinema of the Thaw 1953-1967,” *The Russian Cinema Reader Volume Two: The Thaw to the Present*, ed. Rimgaila Salys (Academic Studies Press: Brighton, MA, 2013), 18.

tremendous impact of the everyday life of Soviet people. They began decorating their apartments and dorm rooms with photos of film stars” and visually appealing photographs from magazines.<sup>34</sup>

These developments coincided with a new Soviet consumer and leisure culture, and “internationalism.” As Susan Reid explains, consumerism “was seen as part of a modern lifestyle, conferring the social status associated with urbanity.”<sup>35</sup> In cities, “modern” Soviet mass housing sprang up offering the possibility of unprecedented and affordable privacy, but also altered the landscapes of cities, particularly Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>36</sup> Polly Jones writes that “increasing numbers of translations bolstered the regime’s proclaimed commitment to opening up to the West and lent credibility to the increasing participation of Soviet writing in international creative organizations and cultural exchanges.”<sup>37</sup> Photography and renewed interest in special interest journals was part of this “modern lifestyle” and the altered layout of *Sovetskoe foto* and *Ogonek* participated in this modern urbanity and apparent internationalism. They “advertised” leisure, modernity, and the opportunity to purchase a variety of different types of cameras and equipment (in the case of *Sovetskoe foto*) and lifestyle possibilities (if not realities).

Similarly, for the first time in decades, travel as a leisure activity became a possibility during the Thaw, if only within the confines of the Soviet Union and Eastern

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Susan E. Reid, “This is Tomorrow!: Becoming a Consumer in the Soviet Sixties,” *The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2013), 53.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Modernity Unbound: The New Soviet City of the Sixties,” *The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2013), 79.

<sup>37</sup> Polly Jones, “The Thaw Goes International: Soviet Literature in Translation and Transit in the 1960s,” *The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2013), 122.

Bloc countries, and contributed to apparent “internationalism.” As Rachel Applebaum demonstrates, the Soviet government advocated cultural exchange and travel at an everyday level: “Soviet cultural exports, the study of the Russian language, and a variety of institutions and programs promoting cultural exchange, such as friendship societies, pen pal correspondences and student exchanges, were to foster mutual understanding...During the ‘revival of Soviet internationalism’ that took place during the Thaw following Stalin’s death in 1953, mass tourism became a key element.”<sup>38</sup>

A key component of Soviet internationalism was the House of Friendship founded by the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies (SSOD), which “epitomized Soviet international efforts of the mid-1950s” and early 1960s.<sup>39</sup> As historian Eleonory Gilbert demonstrates, the SSOD and the House of Friendship helped promote a “democratization of privileged knowledge about foreign cultures as ever more and diverse information became available to ever greater numbers of people.”<sup>40</sup> The public festivals and exchanges sponsored by the SSOD created opportunities for “citizen diplomacy and cultural exchange” but also “a breach in the information hierarchy.”<sup>41</sup> Gilbert believes that this project was most successful in the latter half of the 1950s, but for photographers, cultural exchange through the SSOD and the House of Friendship remained a lifeline to the outside world well into the 1960s. The photo section of the SSOD, as I explain in chapter three, was also responsible for the dissemination and circulation of foreign

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<sup>38</sup> Rachel Applebaum “A Test of Friendship: Soviet-Czechoslovak Tourism and the Prague Spring” *The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2013), 214.

<sup>39</sup> Eleonory Gilbert, “The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s,” *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilbert, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2013), 363.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 363.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 363.

images for exhibition in the Soviet Union and Soviet photographs exhibited outside of the USSR. In this way, the photo section of the SSOD contributed to internationalism and Soviet photographer's exposure to visual styles different from, but not necessarily in opposition to, socialist realism. *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto* contributed to the "advertisement" of life abroad, even if the average Soviet citizen did not have the option of travel outside of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. For those who were unable to leave the Soviet Union, "exhibitions, film festivals, and book fairs" became a part of Thaw culture, bringing foreign cultures closer to home.<sup>42</sup>

The limited openness of the Thaw produced an atmosphere of optimism amongst cultural elite of which photographers were an integral part. As Polly Jones has shown in her work about writers Aleksandr Iashin and Evgenii Evtushenko, even those whose work was subjected to the fits and starts of the Thaw expressed optimism about the future. Iashin wrote that "the 'revitalization advancing in literature was an irreversible process,' as was the 'course of democratization' started by the Twentieth Congress."<sup>43</sup> He and Evtushenko "expressed a surprising confidence in the Thaw. It would win out over its 'dogmatic' and 'ill-disposed' opponents because those opponents were in the minority and were not on the side of history; liberalization was moving forward, buoyed by the support of the majority."<sup>44</sup>

In film, literature, architecture, and even cultural exchanges, the overriding trend of the Thaw (despite anxieties about the future), was optimism, and photographers were

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<sup>42</sup> Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, "The Thaw as an Event in Russian History," *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2013), 46.

<sup>43</sup> Polly Jones, "The Personal and the Political: Opposition to the Thaw and the Politics of Literary Identity in the 1950s and 1960s" *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2013), 253.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

no exception. Visual and material culture supported this trend. This positive, yet cautious outlook, encouraged photographers, professional and amateur, to reinvestigate the arguments made by avant-garde photographers and craft their own assertions about photography's place in Soviet cultural institutions.

Yet, unlike other visual media, where “pleas for boldness, innovation and the elimination of bureaucratism” reigned among liberal cultural icons, lack of official regulation outside of newspaper and journal publications meant that photographers were able to depict the privatization of Soviet life, and question the expressed purpose of photography without much in the way of government intervention.<sup>45</sup> The absence of regulatory structures that covered the gamut of photography genres (scientific, artistic, documentary photojournalism, amateurism), or qualified critics (in the opinion of many photographers), combined with the general upheaval of Khrushchev's cultural program, meant that censorship of photographs that were not widely circulated in the press went unregulated.

In this way, my study falls in line with contemporary historiographical studies that question the “liberal” attitude of the Thaw. Photography, like other cultural media, shows that the Thaw was “not only about the erosion of propaganda. At the heart of the search for new words was the question of reflecting the emotional and experiential universe that the press and literature of socialist realism had failed to depict.”<sup>46</sup> I demonstrate the ways in which photography enhanced this experience. Yet I also show how photography represented a break from other official cultural media in the Soviet Union. Photography, and the freedom afforded to photographers during the Thaw era,

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<sup>45</sup> Josephine Woll, *Reel Images*, 59-60.

<sup>46</sup> Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, “The Thaw as an Event in Russian History,” *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, 50.

was an anomaly, even in the limitedly liberalized Khrushchev era even as it was a medium suited to visualize change. This was partially due to renewed interest in amateur photography (which was helped by government production of affordable cameras) but also due to the arbitrariness and contrariness of Soviet censorship of a media that, in their opinion, “could not lie,” despite previous “false” depictions of Soviet life during the Stalinist era. Thaw-era efforts to open up photography, through debates about art, the revival of the avant-garde, efforts at institution building and professionalization, produced mixed results. Increased censorship (in the form of community of self-censorship) came from within the photography community, as opposed to the Soviet government. While photographers and theorists were able to reopen debates about avant-garde aesthetics, further education and the formation of a union specifically devoted to photography never materialized. Photographers’ partial success and partial failure is representative of the fate of many Thaw era reforms that led to disaffection.



## **Chapter One: Avant-garde Journalism: Illustrated Journals and the Beginnings of Professional Photography in the Early Soviet Period**

In the early 1920s, professional Soviet photojournalism was in its infancy. During the Revolution and Civil War years, journals, new newspapers and magazines, as well as those that remained in circulation from the pre-revolutionary period, rarely published images due to cost and space.<sup>1</sup> By 1922, however, the number of illustrated magazines was growing, not least because the Communist Party viewed the camera as a valuable ideological weapon. The following year Gosizdat, one of the largest publishing houses in Moscow, approved the reestablishment of the journal *Ogonek* under the leadership of editor Mikhail Koltsov. The journal was to contain “stories, sketches, poems, photographs, drawings, caricatures of contemporary life, and announcements.”<sup>2</sup> The first issue was published on April 1, 1923. The reestablishment and success of *Ogonek* paved the way for other illustrated special interest journals such as *Sovetskoe foto*. This chapter investigates the role of the avant-garde and its relationship to photojournalism and illustrated journals. It examines the changes in the leadership and ideological motivation of various photography groups and their relationship to *Sovetskoe foto* between the first years of its publication to its cancellation in 1941. Furthermore, it questions how the journal was galvanized, co-opted, and altered by various avant-garde factions.

*Sovetskoe foto*, intended as a guide for photojournalists, engaged in ideological and aesthetic debates about art photography because of the unique environment in which photography was coopted by the both avant-garde art movements and the press media. As a result, the ways photography and photographic aesthetics were discussed in the

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<sup>1</sup> David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Leonid Maksimenkov, “Mne strogo nakazali,” *Ogonek 5000*, 24 (June 11-17, 2007), [www.ogoniok.com](http://www.ogoniok.com).

1920s and 1930s held significant weight in subsequent decades as art photography and press photography had developed simultaneously. Of particular significance is the general indecision of either movement as to the ultimate “intended” use of the photograph: as art object or indexical document. The Stalinist regime inserted its influence on, prematurely truncated, and silenced debates before any real consensus had been reached about the “correct” categorical placement of photography amongst visual media. As a result, by the 1950s when photographers once again came to explore the aesthetic possibilities of photography, the photograph functioned as an *artistic* object relegated to press media and journalism.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, photographers in the Soviet Union, for the most part, fit in to one of three groups with differing theoretical backgrounds. The first, and oldest, was the Russian Photographic Society (RFO), traditionalists whose main genres were portraits and landscapes. This group aligned itself with the aesthetics of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European photography. The second group, the Russian Association of Proletarian Photographers (ROPF) emphasized the importance of the photograph as document, as a means of capturing reality. The final group was composed of modernist photographers who identified with the group *Oktiabr*, and were supporters of Constructivist aesthetics.

For the sake of brevity, throughout this chapter I refer to art photographers of *Oktiabr* and the ROPF as a part of the avant-garde. This is perhaps misleading as multiple avant-gardes existed simultaneously in the early Soviet era and into the Stalinist period,

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<sup>3</sup> I say artistic object rather than art object here because even photographers themselves were ambivalent about the placement of their work within a visual hierarchy. While many made the argument that photographs could be artistic, these claims were never official recognized and therefore, categorization remained largely undefined.

pursing different aesthetic styles and ideological motivations. Most photographers aligned themselves, or critics associated them, with particular “schools” or “groups,” but these were loose associations. While members of a given group shared broad aesthetic goals, they often formed their own subgroups, or further, their own subgenres within the larger group, as was the case with the Ignatovich Brigade. Though Ignatovich Brigade photographers identified themselves as part of the Constructivist school, they also had their own ideas about art and photography, incorporating aspects of both Constructivist and ROPF documentary aesthetics. Generally, however, despite these differences, Soviet avant-garde photographers were participating in the creation of a *Soviet* identity. They were motivated to design art that prompted action, built communism, and ultimately created a new Soviet person. For the most part, avant-garde photographers viewed the Soviet citizen more as a mechanism for building society rather than an individual with personal agency. Similarly, photographers themselves would sometimes ascribe their work to the group, rather than themselves, removing their individual agency in its creation. Avant-garde art was, by its very design, propagandistic; it should provoke certain thoughts and actions. Initially many factions of the avant-garde at least accepted, if not supported, the legitimacy of the Bolshevik government and the October Revolution.

The main feature of Bolshevik attitudes towards the arts and artists in the years 1918-1928, was of relative freedom so long as they were ideologically compatible with the Bolshevik cause. Thus, the Party tacitly supported experimentation with several different styles in an effort to find a distinctive Soviet form. Though Lenin himself preferred traditional and classical art, he did not discourage the spread of avant-garde art movements. His attitude towards aesthetics was broadly informed by Marxist theory, and his main concern was public accessibility and destroying artistic exclusivity. As a result,

the Party ostensibly favored artistic forms that were available to the masses that could be produced, reproduced, shown and published on a mass scale, leveling the difference between high and low art. Many members of avant-garde circles worked in publishing, editing, set, journal and industrial design, poster production and, of course, photography; all mass reproducible media, many artists operating across media and genre. By the early 1930s, Stalin began his assault on Soviet culture. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet government moved away from using photography as a reliable mode of visual representation, in favor of easel art. Photography, by its very nature, defied the heavy-handed utopianism that underpinned the Stalinist vision of the Soviet Union.

### **The RFO, Early Photography Institutions, and Aesthetics**

The RFO was founded in 1894. It was the largest photography organization in Russia before the 1917 revolutions, growing rapidly in the first decade of its existence, from 40 members in 1895 to just over 850 in 1900.<sup>4</sup> The group was maintained by a small board of elected directors, including a chairman, secretary, and treasurer, and was funded largely by private donations. The board was responsible for planning exhibitions, dispensing funds, and maintaining communications between Moscow, St. Petersburg, and provincial photographers. These figures, however, mask the structure of the RFO, which operated primarily as an informal club. In the prewar period, the organization reported that twenty five thousand cameras and seventy million glass plates were imported annually, though this number accounted for both amateur and professional portrait photographers.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the RFO collaborated with the two leading photography

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers can be misleading as members were required only to pay dues and submit a letter demonstrating their desire to join the organization. This meant that the actual number of members fluctuated year by year, month by month. The organization lost over 100 members in 1900 alone. Thus, in the 1900s the RFO operated more as an informal special interest group, rather than a formal organization.

<sup>5</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii: ocherkii istorii otechestvennoi fotografii 1894-1994*, (Moskva: Knizhni

journals of the pre-revolutionary period, *The Amateur Photographer (Fotograf-liubitel')* and *The Photographic Review (Fotograficheskoe obozrenie)*; the former discussed the technical aspects of photography for amateurs, while the latter was geared towards photojournalists.

It was not until 1906, when the RFO established the journal *The Agenda of the RFO (Povestki RFO)* in Moscow, later renamed *Bulletin of Photography (Vestnik fotografii)* in 1908, that the organization reached a wider audience. For the first time, “non-resident members, having almost no connection with the organization, became closer thanks to the magazine, and the RFO shared information about photography with them.”<sup>6</sup> The *Bulletin of Photography* came to establish the aesthetic standards of the following decade. Editor Nikolai Krotkov saw the journal primarily as a means to “educate photographers and the public in artistic photography.”<sup>7</sup> In many ways, the *Bulletin* provided the basic format followed by *Sovetskoe foto* in later decades. Featured articles discussed portrait photography, landscapes, nude photography, and coloring prints, and the journal held monthly contests in which contributors provided “artistic and technical support” to readers.<sup>8</sup> Apart from encouraging amateur artistry, the *Bulletin* also participated in the organization of both national and international exhibitions, and campaigned for photographer’s artistic rights. In 1908, the journal composed an open note to the State Duma, requesting stricter copyright laws as the editors believed that photographers, like other artists, should retain the rights to their intellectual property.<sup>9</sup>

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Dom “LIBROKOM,” 2009), 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>7</sup> N. Krotkov, *Vestnik fotografii*, no.5 (1908): 133.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>9</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 20.

In 1911, the RFO invited Nikolai Petrov to take charge of the *Bulletin* in a comprehensive effort to revamp the standards of Russian photography. Petrov felt that many photographers and contributors to the journal misunderstood “the goal of photography in general, and art in particular.”<sup>10</sup> He noted that at the International Exhibition in Dresden in 1900, of the 800 amateur and professional works exhibited, the international panel selected only 30 photographs by Russian photographers. In 1910 at an exhibition in Budapest, the organizing panel selected only 22 Russian photographs out of nearly 500. As a result, Petrov began publishing the work of foreign photographers providing his readers with, what he felt, were the best examples of photography of the age. The journal ceased publication during the upheavals of 1917.



Fig. 1. Aleksandr Grinberg, Untitled, bromoil, private collection (c. 1920s)

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<sup>10</sup> N. Petrov, *Vestnik fotografii*, no. 11 (1911): 322.

Though a small group, the RFO established early the connection between aesthetics and photography. Furthermore, the *Bulletin* provided a rubric for other illustrated journals, particularly avant-garde publications and *Sovetskoe foto* in the 1920s. Lifetime members of the RFO included many prominent tsarist photographers, who avant-garde photographers pejoratively labeled as the “old school.” These photographers, B. Podluzskii, Yurii Eremin, Aleksandr Grinberg, Moisei Nappelbaum, Nikolai Svishtov-Paola and Sergei Ivanov-Alliluev, were largely ambivalent to the Bolshevik cause. They enjoyed the relative freedom of the NEP years, indulging in what later photographers would label “bourgeois” photography. “Bourgeois” art, as defined by the Soviets, represented any number of artistic movements separating “culture” and “art” from the masses.

In 1921, members reorganized the RFO into sub-groups for artistic, educational, technical, scientific and general photography. It also became officially associated with the State Academy of Artistic Sciences, or GAKhN (*Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhevennykh nauk*), which provided a formal organizational and educational structure. In 1923, the Academy created a degree program specifically for art photography students. Students took courses in movement, choreography and portrait photography. GAKhN, founded in 1921, approached art photography education as it approached, for example, painting or drawing, studying the human body and its range of movements and expressions (Fig. 1). The academy also sponsored the exhibition *The Art of Movement (Iskusstvo Dvizhenia)*, held annually between 1925 and 1928, underscoring the importance of the human subject in early Soviet photography. The group was reorganized again and renamed the All-Russian Photographic Society in 1928. Before its dissolution in 1930, however, the RFO and GAKhN firmly established art photography as

a category separate from photojournalism, but regrettably, an art form associated with the bourgeoisie and all its vices, and a genre firmly ensconced in the so called indulgences of the previous regime.

### **The Reestablishment of *Ogonek* and Founding *Sovetskoe Foto***

The Bolshevik Party tended to favor avant-garde photography and photojournalism over the work of the RFO, whose photographs represented vestiges of the tsarist past. This was, in part, due to avant-garde artists' proclivities towards support for the Bolshevik cultural program, one of recasting culture as politically versus aesthetically oriented. In opposition to the purely artistic aspirations of the RFO, the Union of Journalists established a professional photography section in 1926, the same year Koltsov founded *Sovetskoe foto* (Fig. 2). Koltsov was born Mikhail Friedland on 31 May 1898 in Kiev.<sup>11</sup> At school in Bialystok, he and his brother Boris, the future artist and cartoonist Boris Efimov, published their own newspaper. Koltsov began attending the Neuropsychiatric Institute in Petrograd in 1915 before abandoning his medical studies for publishing positions. He was an ardent supporter of both the February and October Revolutions, joining the Bolshevik party in 1918 on the recommendation of Anatoli Lunacharski who was Commissar of Enlightenment, and joined the Red Army the following year.<sup>12</sup> In 1920 he began working in the printing department of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and from 1922 to 1938 worked as a correspondent for a

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<sup>11</sup> 12 June by Gregorian calendar dates. I. Kruzhkov, "Mikhail Kolt'sov," *Sovetskaia pechat*, no. 9 (1956): 4.

<sup>12</sup> There is some confusion over Koltsov's status as a party member. Though he joined the Bolshevik Party in 1918, he requested to withdraw from the Party in an open letter to *Kinogazete*, explaining that he did not agree with many of the decisions made by Soviet commissioners. This highly unusual request was never formally recognized, for reasons currently unknown, but most likely because Koltsov atoned by joining the Red Army in 1919. *Ibid*, 4.



number of periodicals, including *Pravda*.<sup>13</sup> In the 1930s he was promoted to head of the foreign department of the Writers' Union and in 1938 he became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1930s, Koltsov was one of, if not the most recognizable figure in publishing and journalism. Over the course of his career, he wrote over 2,000 newspaper articles on “topical issues of domestic and foreign policy,” reestablished *Ogonek*, founded the journals *Za rubezhom* (*Abroad*), *Za rulem* (*Behind the Wheel*), *Sovetskoe foto* and the satirical newspaper *Chudak* (*Oddball*).<sup>15</sup> He served on the editorial board of *Pravda*, founded his own Journal Newspaper Union and publishing house (*Zhurnal'no-gazetnogo ob"edineniie*) in 1925, wrote for the satirical journal *Begemot* (*Behemoth*), and became the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Krokodil*.<sup>16</sup> Between 1936 and 1938 he covered the events of the Spanish Civil War for *Pravda*. Koltsov, however, was unable to escape the later stages of the Stalinist terror. In 1938 he was recalled from Spain and arrested in the early hours of 13 December on charges of espionage.<sup>17</sup> Some have suggested that it was his friendship with Evgeniia Yezhova (Feigenberg), editor of *Illiustrirovannoi gazety* (*The Illustrated Gazette*) and Nikolai Yezhov's wife, that led to the arrest.<sup>18</sup> Koltsov's brother Boris, however, speculated that his brother had witnessed

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>17</sup> B. Efimov, *Desiat' Desiatiletii*, (Moskva: Vagrius, 2000), 292.

<sup>18</sup> Koltsov was said to be witnessed on more than one occasion visiting the Yezhov's at their dacha. Ibid, 290.

secret operations of the NKVD in Spain.<sup>19</sup> He was sentenced to death on 1 February 1940, and shot the following day.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 2. Cover, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 1 (1926)

It is hard to overestimate the importance of illustrated journals such as *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*. First, these journals provided Soviet readers with unprecedented access to visual documentation of their new leaders, their new life, and essentially their new *Soviet* identity. Prior to the Civil War, illustrated magazines and journals, such as the *Bulletin*, were largely special interest publications and maintained only a small readership. Second, the popularity of *Ogonek* spurred the publication of numerous other illustrated journals and magazines, furthering visual access to changes made by the Party. Third, “the development of illustrated magazines and newspapers led to the emergence of a new generation of press photographers.”<sup>21</sup> Finally Koltsov insisted that *Ogonek* remain

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>20</sup> Some Soviet textbooks in the 1960s and 1970s list Koltsov’s execution as occurring in 1938 or 1942. Ibid, 292.

<sup>21</sup> Erika Wolf, “The Context of Soviet Photojournalism, 1923-1932,” *Zimmerli Journal* 2, no. 4 (2004):106.

accessible to the average Soviet reader. As historian David Shneer has noted, however, this did not mean that the magazine refrained from playing a role in the development and spread of avant-garde photography.

Koltsov insisted on a popular, easy-to-read periodical, as opposed to the highbrow journals such as *LEF (The Left Front of Art)* that were becoming popular among the avant-garde in the 1920s. The simultaneous emergence of *Ogonek*, as a mass-produced magazine dedicated to Soviet photojournalism, and *LEF*, which was an outlet for self-defined constructivist artists, writers, and thinkers, led to conflicts among culture makers about the place of art and photography in the Soviet Union for years to come...Although *Ogonek* promoted itself as a “mass journal,” geared, not specifically toward the intellectual elite, but toward the general reader, the images included in *Ogonek* throughout the 1920s and 1930s represented some of the most modernist, experimental, and avant-garde photojournalism anywhere.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Koltsov established the basis for the professionalization of photojournalism in the Soviet Union, but also placed photojournalism in direct dialogue with Soviet avant-garde photography.

The success of *Ogonek* allowed Koltsov the opportunity to expand his small but growing publishing house. In the 1920s, he established just under a dozen journals, eventually becoming the director of his Soviet Magazine and Newspaper Association, a precursor to the Union of Journalists. The first edition of the journal *Sovetskoe foto*, a monthly journal for photo-amateurs and photojournalists, was published by *Ogonek* in

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<sup>22</sup> David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 27.

April 1926, edited by Koltsov and Viktor Petrovich Mikylin. The back cover of the first issue clearly stated the objectives of the editors and the contents of the journal. *Sovetskoe foto* would address the problems of Soviet photography, questions about photographic equipment, the basic composition of pictures, how to photograph for magazines and newspapers, and would include sections for frequently asked questions, reviews of reader's pictures and tips for beginners.<sup>23</sup> The first article from the editors also clearly lays out the purpose of *Sovetskoe foto*. "Artisanal professionals are confined to narrow circles of fine photo-artists that...are active and lively, but...disorganized" and thus needed guidance.<sup>24</sup> This statement placed the journal in direct opposition to the RFO. The "magazine's main strength is the assistance of a wide range of photo enthusiasts and photo-reporters, who, for a long time, have waited for assistance, and who will take counsel from and befriend a Soviet photo-journal."<sup>25</sup> Photojournalism was not only historically important, but also allowed citizens the opportunity to "learn the truth about the changes occurring" under the Bolshevik regime. These changes needed to be documented because "everyday moments reveal a fuller and deeper meaning in life."<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, and especially by the mid-1920s, photography clubs, or *fotokruzhki*, grew in popularity. Members of Trade Unions and Worker's Clubs snapped pictures of local events, the activities of Unions, and other everyday activities organized these clubs. One of the largest was associated with the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema (*Obshchestvo druzei sovetskogo kino*, or the ODSK). Photographers of the ODSK were encouraged to engage in documenting the everyday. The ODSK created

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<sup>23</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1926): Back Cover.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

tutorials, focusing on technical aspects of photography, and attempted to supply photography clubs with photographic equipment and materials (photographic plates, paper, chemicals etc.).<sup>27</sup> By the end of 1926, the ODSK sponsored clubs in Moscow, which boasted 30 small groups of 10 photographers or more, and Leningrad, but also in Perm, Pskov, Kazan, Tver, Tula, Vladimir, and Odessa. By the end of the decade, there were over 1000 clubs with 10 members or more across the Soviet Union. *Sovetskoe foto* acted as both the methodological center of club activities, but also as a trade journal and newsletter, connecting professional, pseudo-professional, and amateur documentary photographers across the Soviet Union. *Sovetskoe foto* and the ODSK also published brochures, albums, and other supplementary materials designed to improve the quality of press and documentary photographs and educate photography club members. Photographers who associated themselves with the photo club movement, and more broadly with *Sovetskoe foto* and the ODSK, were staunchly opposed to the work of the old school of Russian photographers. They found nudes, landscapes and portraits insufficient and inappropriate representations of contemporary life. They believed RFO photographers lacked ideological motivation, were associated with a dying class of bourgeois pictorialists, and were, according to the growing group of amateur and professional photojournalists associated with the ODSK and *Sovetskoe foto*, producing photographic “fluff” pieces.

As such, the late 1920s were punctuated by a sharp division between photographers of the old school, whose work served primarily aesthetic purposes, and photographers whose work was more closely related to the needs of the Party and the

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<sup>27</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 44-5.

Soviet press.<sup>28</sup> Despite its initial message, that *Sovetskoe foto* was a journal for photojournalists, amateur documentary photographers, and not “fine photo-artists,” the journal quickly became a haven for art photographers and photography critics opposed to the work of the RFO. Though the journal claimed to operate above groups like the RFO, the ROPF and *Oktiabr*, contributors frequently wrote about avant-garde photography exhibitions, and increasingly turned towards analytical criticism of these photographs rather than discussing the technical aspects of press photography. Furthermore, by the late 1920s, *Sovetskoe foto*’s editors were not only publishing avant-garde photographs, but had effectively reshaped the journal into another print forum discussing avant-garde art photography.<sup>29</sup> Generally, the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* were less than sympathetic towards the RFO, and felt that exploration of the human form and movement were better left to motion pictures rather than still photography. The editors were particularly lukewarm about the third *Art of Movement* exhibition held in 1927, which they described as “a lot of jumping dancers, and semi-nude female bodies wrapped in plastic and intricate ornaments” and accused RFO photographers of living in the past.<sup>30</sup> Critic Leonid (Lazar) Mezhericher singled out a number of RFO members, including well known portrait photographers Moisei Nappelbaum and Aleksandr Grinberg, of indulging in the outdated past-time of nudity in art.

Nude pictures, I would strongly argue, belong to the heritage of bourgeois painting. This motif is very much sought after by just those photographers

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<sup>28</sup>This “old school” of photographers is representative of the RFO, while the ROPF and *Oktiabr* were more closely associated with the Bolshevik Party and mass media. Though *Oktiabr* and the ROPF were divided about the role of aesthetics in photography, both groups were opposed to the work of the RFO, which they found excessively bourgeois.

<sup>29</sup> This would change after 1928.

<sup>30</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 76.

who continue to move away from the image of all that is modern reality ...  
in any picture we cannot find a realistic interpretation of the naked body as  
good or wholesome...it leaves an infectious primitive feeling.<sup>31</sup>

The “primitive feeling” Mezhericher mentions, alludes to the “feeling” of the previous regime. For Mezhericher, photography that lacked political or ideological motivation had no place in the current revolutionary moment. As such, *Sovetskoe foto* labeled *The Art of Movement* an abject failure. Two years later the RFO was dissolved largely because the content of the group’s photographs was foreign to Marxist-Leninist ideology, and indulged in “bourgeois subjects.” After the liquidation of the RFO, in order to maintain or seek employment, photographers had to prove the requisite proletarian background, a condition that many RFO photographers could not readily meet. The organization floundered in the last decade of its existence not only because it was not designed to meet the needs of the press and mass media, but also because its members either refused or were unable to adjust to the changing political climate.

The differences between the RFO and the Russian avant-garde were especially apparent at the 1928 *Exhibition of Ten Years of Soviet Photography*. Critic I. Sokolov, writing for the journal *Fotograf*, used the exhibition as an example of the divisions between outmoded “art photography” and the new, proletarian Soviet style. His theoretical article “Photography as Art” divided the images shown at the exhibition into two categories, document and fiction. Documentary photography, according to Sokolov, showed life as fact, or what he called “life as it is.”<sup>32</sup> Art, on the other hand, altered fact, and was in and of itself a fiction. Facts could and should be shown artistically, but the

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<sup>31</sup> L. Mezhericher, “Burzhuaznie vliianiia v fotograficheskom zhanre,” *Sovetskii fotograficheskii al'manakh* 2 (1929): 226.

<sup>32</sup> I. Sokolov, “Fotografiia kak iskusstvo,” *Fotograf*, no. 7 (1928): 201.

underlying purpose behind photography was documentation, and therefore the method or style should not undermine the content and meaning of the photograph. According to Sokolov, the work of RFO photographers did not reflect the modern milieu, stating that art photographers “must come to grips with the new way of life.”<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Sokolov praised the work of Constructivist photographers. He found that their images contained “clarity and simplicity of form” and proclaimed Constructivism the “new classicism of the era.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Sokolov’s commendations are contradictory. Though the work of RFO photographers may not reflect the revolutionary environment and culture of the day, Constructivism was itself hardly “life as it is” documentarism.

While he disagreed with Sokolov, Mezhericher was likewise unimpressed with the photographers of the old school who participated in the *Exhibition of Ten Years of Soviet Photography*. Unlike Sokolov, he was less keen to compliment the work of Constructivist photographers, whose attention to style outweighed the ideological content of their images. He and Sokolov did, however, agree that the photographs of the RFO were unacceptable and militantly denounced them as “musty,” “parasitic,” and “anti-social.”<sup>35</sup> Throughout his career, Mezhericher held the view that photography should perform a social task for the Party, that it was, and above all, a propaganda tool.

### **Proletarian Photography and *Sovetskoe Foto? Oktiabr* and the ROPF**

Leonid Petrovich Mezhericher was born on 12 October 1899 in St. Petersburg, but moved with his mother to Moscow as an infant.<sup>36</sup> In 1916 he entered the Medical Faculty of Moscow Imperial University, but left University the following year to join the Red

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>35</sup> L. Mezhericher, “O ‘pravikh’ vliianiakh v fotografii,” *Sovetskii Fotograficheskii al'manakh* -2, (Moskva, 1929): 220.

<sup>36</sup> 25 October by the Gregorian Calendar.



Guard. He joined the Bolshevik party in 1918, and from then until 1922 he worked as a member of the administrative board in the military, supervising reserve regiments of workers, as a military inspector, and the chief of staff of GUVUZa (Main Directorate of Military Science Institutions).<sup>37</sup> After he was demobilized from the Red Army in 1922, Mezhericher held a number of different positions in publishing and at various newspapers and journals. He was a member of the editorial staff of *Krokodil*, *Krasnaia niva* (*Red Field*), the satirical magazine *Krasnyi perets* (*Red pepper*), and the head editor of the Press Bureau department of the Central Committee.<sup>38</sup> In the mid-1920s Mezhericher formed the Association of Soviet photojournalists, and began publishing about photography, photographic theory and photography criticism. The Central Committee appointed him head of the foreign department of the organization *Soiuzfoto* and he was a frequent contributor to the journal *Sovetskoe foto*. Mezhericher was described by his colleague S. Evgenov (a member of the editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto*) as erudite and intelligent.<sup>39</sup> He spoke English, French, and German fluently, and he loved music and poetry. He, like Koltsov, however, did not survive the purges and terror of the 1930s, and was convicted of anti-Soviet crimes in 1937 and 1938.

In 1929, Koltsov was removed from his job as the head editor and director of *Sovetskoe foto*, and throughout the 1930s the journal shuffled through a number of different editors and editorial committees, often changing from one issue of the journal to another.<sup>40</sup> At face value, the editorial board substantially altered the appearance of *Sovetskoe foto* in subsequent years, as the journal was taken over by the publishing

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<sup>37</sup> “Mezhericher, Leonid Petrovich,” *Genealogicheskaia vaza znanii: persony, familii, khronika*, 2 August 2007, <<http://baza.vgdru.com/1/21095/>>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> S. Evgenov, “Entuziast ‘Chudesnogo iskusstva,’” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.2 (1967): 32.

<sup>40</sup>In the 1930s Koltsov joined the editorial board of *Pravda*.

conglomerates *Iskusstvo*, *Goskinoizdat*, and *Soiuzfoto*. The title was changed to *Sovetskoe foto: Massovyi organ sovetskogo foto* in 1931, and again that same year the journal changed its name to *Proletarskoe foto (Proletarian Photo)*.<sup>41</sup> In 1929 and between 1934 and 1935, the journal was published biweekly. It resumed monthly circulation before publication was canceled in June of 1941.<sup>42</sup>

In practical terms, these changes reflected the desires of the various government agencies publishing *Sovetskoe foto*, from *Ogonek*, which originated in a small apartment, to increasingly centralized government publishing houses. As such, the government brought the journals, and Koltsov, closer to the organs of power. Koltsov himself was close to Stalin and initially benefitted from this relationship. These choices, however, represented the ideological transition to Stalinism that occurred during the first five year plan; the end of the power struggle between Stalin and his political opponents and the ideological sparring between members of avant-garde groups who were fundamentally aesthetically opposed to one another. Even by the end of the 1920s, amateur photographers associated with photography clubs were brought further into line with Party activities, which included further government regulation of cameras, papers, and film. Photography as a leisurely activity was abolished in 1928, bringing the amateur movement under the supervision of the Party and government. Only amateurs whose photographs the Party deemed “socially useful in content and artistic quality” were allowed to publish their work and participate in exhibitions.<sup>43</sup> The government and press regarded these individuals as Brigade Press Photographers. Lack of access to

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<sup>41</sup>The journal becomes *Sovetskoe foto* again in the first issue of 1934.

<sup>42</sup>Koltsov was shot in prison in February of the previous year, though no specific charges were issued. This may partially explain why *Sovetskoe foto* was closed down. Lack of resources during the war was also a contributing factor.

<sup>43</sup> *Proletarskoe foto*, no.1 (1931): 2.

photographic equipment and the abolition of hobby photography effectively quashed the photography club movement by 1932 when the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) decreed the restructuring of literary and art organizations. The ROPF blamed these developments not on the increasing arm of government control in photography and news publication, but on groups like the RFO.

The proletarian art of amateur photographers has long been essential in fighting for a creative method of proletarian photography...Bourgeois photographers who went to *fotokruzhki* as teachers and mentors, provided a corrupting influence, challenged *fotokruzhok* aestheticism, and planted in them landscapes, portraits and still-life photography, distracting proletarian photographers from living reality, and the tasks included in the struggle for socialist construction... We managed to tear *fotokruzhki* from the pernicious influence of bourgeois photographers. Slowly we drove out the teaching staff of the circles, gradually replacing them... and later (in 1929) we completely destroyed the citadel of bourgeois photographers - the Russian Photographic Society [RFO].<sup>44</sup>

The author of the piece, photography critic Grigorii Boltianskii, failed to note that without the help of the RFO, the amateur movement and photography circles (which were hardly representative of the Soviet working masses to begin with) would not have existed. Amateur photography activities all but ground to a halt for the next thirty years. After expunging the “bourgeois” elements from universities, journals and newspapers,

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<sup>44</sup> G. Boltianskii, “Na putiakh bor’bi za tvorcheskii metod,” *Proletarskoe foto*, no. 2 (1932): 7-8.

the number of available photographers was startlingly small compared to those who had been a part of the photography club movement, numbering approximately 150 in 1934.<sup>45</sup>

*Sovetskoe foto*, whose articles had been largely apolitical when it was founded, became increasingly politicized, especially after it was recast as *Proletarskoe foto*. The change to *Proletarskoe foto* represented the interests of the Union of Russian Proletarian Photographers (ROPF), who desired a print forum in opposition to the photography section of the *Oktiabr* group, led by Aleksander Rodchenko. This betrayed the journal's original aim to remain above the arguments between various avant-garde groups. In spite of these developments, Rodchenko joined the editorial board of *Sovetskoe foto* in December of 1935, and continued publishing articles in the journal until its cancellation in 1941. Rodchenko's aesthetic nemesis and prominent member of the ROPF, Leonid Mezhericher, was highly critical of any photographs linked to *Oktiabr* and yet the two men worked together on the editorial board of *Sovetskoe foto*, though their relationship was antagonistic at best.

The editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto* and *Proletarskoe foto* was torn between these two competing avant-garde photography groups. The former was led largely by Aleksandr Rodchenko in matters of photography, but Gustav Klutssis, Elizar Langman, Dmitri Debabov, and Boris Ignatovich all identified with the group. The ROPF was spearheaded by Mezhericher, Arkadii Shaikhet, Semyon Friedland (Mikhail Koltsov's cousin) and Maks Alpert and favored "straightforward, supposedly unmanipulated reportage" but also had aesthetic aspirations.<sup>46</sup> Though both groups were committed to documentary representation, they differed in their methodological approach to

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<sup>45</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1934): 3.

<sup>46</sup> Leah Bendavid-Val, *Propaganda and Dreams; photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US*, (Zurich; Edition Stemmler, 1999), 37.

documentary composition. The work of *Oktiabr* was based “on fragmentation and they viewed reality as a disconnected and puzzling space” while the ROPF “leaned toward whole images and saw the world as a concrete and continuous entity.”<sup>47</sup> Rodchenko developed his style in photo-essays published in the mid to late 1920s in *Sovetskoe kino*, *Novy LEF*, and *Sovetskoe foto*. His photographs fragmented the subject, and were often shot from the below or above. They involved heavy cropping and manipulating the depth and angle of the image. Rodchenko described this as factography.

To the ROPF, members of *Oktiabr* were more interested in innovation than documentation. *Oktiabr* itself was established based on the premise that its members “felt that the new era required new media and as yet untried processes and they wanted to apply mass production to art.” Part of this experimentation “involved the tearing down of walls between media, so that one artist could learn from another.”<sup>48</sup> Years later, when asked about *Oktiabr*, photographer Mark Markov-Grinberg (who identified with the ROPF) stated that though he admired Rodchenko’s initiative and innovative style, he did not care for the stylized approach taken by other members of the group: “Usually their strange angles did not appeal to us realists; how can you walk on a diagonal horizon? You’d have to be a mountain climber.”<sup>49</sup> Generally, though, aesthetic differences between the two groups stemmed from fundamentally different ideas about the purpose of the camera. Markov-Grinberg’s main objection to *Oktiabr* was that form and style overtook content in their photographs. “Chasing after the shot dominated content,” he said. “We, in the opposite group, photographed for a reason, for a purpose. Art for Art’s

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<sup>47</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 67.

<sup>48</sup> Leah Bendavid-Val, *Propaganda and Dreams*, 36-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

sake is nothing. But still, initially Rodchenko was our teacher and we were friends.”<sup>50</sup> Though Markov-Grinberg does not recall his interaction with Rodchenko as openly hostile, by the 1930s the relationship between the two groups was extremely volatile, with much higher stakes.

Discussions about the role of photography as artistic or documentary remained imperative to discussions both within and between avant-garde groups. Arkadii Shaikhet proposed a campaign to introduce more documentary images in the press. “Magazines should make the reader see things from a new, different ‘perspective’” and despite his connections to the ROPF, he encouraged photographers to find interesting points of shooting.<sup>51</sup> As the two most prolific photographers for *Ogonek*, he and Semyon Friedland believed that in documentary photography, “the presentation of a fact should be simple, easily reaching the mind of any viewer and at the same time it should be most impressive.” He specifically chastised the “small group” who forgets “the close relationship of form and content” and pursued “originality for the sake of originality.”<sup>52</sup> Others, however, clearly sided with *Oktiabr*. Photographer Aleksandr Ivanov-Terent’ev, who began his career in the 1910s, approved of Rodchenko’s initiative in 1929.

A. Rodchenko is completely original, his new and unique work differs from all the other artists. He already has a lot of imitators, professing their faith and who often imitate him blindly. All the works of this interesting artist awaken one’s thoughts and enhance artistic sensibility. Their main feature is the search for a different perspective... no critic can deny him the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>51</sup> A. Shaikhet, *Sovetskoe foto*, no.12 (1929): 713. In the year 1929 issues of *Sovetskoe Foto* kept a running page number from the first publication in January, quotes appear in the original text.

<sup>52</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 82.

importance of living through his creative thoughts and continuous movement forward, away from the stagnant, swampy routine.<sup>53</sup>

Two years later, in 1931, the photo-section of *Oktiabr* organized its own exhibition titled *The Five Year Plan in Four Years*. All of the prominent members of *Oktiabr* exhibited their latest work: Boris Ignatovich, B. Bogdan, Leonid Bach, Aleksandr Shishkin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, A. Shternberg, Elizar Langman, L. Smirnov, D. Shulkin, Olga Ignatovitch, Viktor Ivanitskii, Boris Kudoiarov, Dmitri Debabov, G. Nedoshivin, B. Iablonskii and N. Shtertser. They participated in the exhibition, to largely positive critical reviews. Despite critical success, *The Five Year Plan in Four Years* was the last photography exhibition organized by *Oktiabr* before the group was dissolved the following year.

As with so many institutions in the Soviet Union the period between the revolution and the 1930s, photography organizations saw the progressive bureaucratization and centralization of the medium. In the early 1920s photography distribution was managed by three separate agencies: the Bureau-Cliche was responsible for providing regional press with photographs; the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) provided images for national newspapers, magazines and journals; and *Russfoto*, a branch of the All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), controlled the flow of press images into and out of the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> In 1931 each of these branches was merged under the umbrella organization *Soiuzfoto*, which absorbed photography distribution and commissioning duties from TASS and VOKS, and also

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<sup>53</sup> A. Ivanov- Terent'ev, "Molodoe iskusstvo," *Fotograf*, no.3 (1929):150.

<sup>54</sup> The All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), founded in 1925 would become the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD) in 1958. See chapter three.

controlled publication, replacing the institutional behemoths the Amalgamation of State Publishing Houses (OGIZ) and the Magazine and Newspaper Amalgamation (*ZhurGaz ob"edinenie*). The basic organizational structure of *Soiuzfoto* consisted of an "editorial department with internal photo-information sectors for foreign, mass work, special orders, mass media, as well as a circulation department and production department...provincial and regional centers opened offices and bureaus were established abroad."<sup>55</sup> By the mid-1930s, *Soiuzfoto* was responsible for all photographic images published in the Soviet Union, with the exception of scientific and technical photographs, and manufactured its own paper and chemicals.

As head of the foreign department of *Soiuzfoto* until 1937, Mezhericher held one of the most powerful positions within the Soviet photographic industry. Despite his sharp criticism of *Oktiabr* members Elizar Langman and Rodchenko, he encouraged editors to allow photographers the freedom to pursue their own ideas and styles.

Editors must unbind the hands of creative workers and expand their opportunities to alter their creative thought... It is not, of course, the editor's place to tell you how to take pictures in a new style. Only your creative sense, your understanding of life, can tell you that, and an editor should not interfere with your search. What can help you in your search is an editor working more "liberally," if we may use that word, than he has acted until now.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 92-3.

<sup>56</sup> Lazar Mezhericher, "Nemnogo ogromnoe vospitatel'noe vlasti," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1930): 5. From here on, I cite Mezhericher as he listed his name in his publications, as he published under the names "Leonid" "Lazar," and "L."



This, however, was with the understanding that photographers followed the appropriate documentary style.

Perhaps more than any other photography critic at the time, Mezhericher was incredibly vocal and militant in his stance about photography as an ideological weapon in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. The supposed authentication and authority of the photograph contained the ability to persuade and could and should be valued as a propaganda tool, which was the case by the 1930s. But there were limitations, especially in the genre and style of photographs. For instance, though advertising photography could be persuasive, it was most certainly bourgeois and identified with the RFO. Photographers could, more importantly, use photography as a tool to undermine bourgeois ideals, which Mezhericher saw as part of the class struggle.

We are fighting against the expression of bourgeois ideology by means of photography: here are “artistic” pictures of naked women; blurred landscapes imbued with the mood of languor and inactivity or discouragement, or enigmatic mystery; pictures in which the life and work of people is dumbed down... and finally, the vulgar desire to perpetuate themselves, relatives, friends, their pets and even their things.<sup>57</sup>

In keeping with the ideas of the ROPF, *Proletarskoe foto* sought to establish a firmly proletarian, documentary style. This was in opposition to what they perceived as the outmoded abstraction of the *Oktiabr* group (which was interpreted as an artifact of the previous decade) and the similarly antiquated RFO, who not only did not engage in the

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<sup>57</sup> L. Mezhericher, *Sovetskoe foto*, no.9 (1929): 226.

process of building socialism, but completely ignored the political and ideological potential of photography.<sup>58</sup>

On April 23, 1932, the Party published the decree on “Restructuring Literary and Artistic Organizations,” which called for the abolition of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), and the creation of a Union of Writers and analogous actions for the other arts. For photographers, this effectively abolished both *Oktiabr* and the ROPF in a government effort to regiment and cement a particular style of press reportage and documentation. The decree ostensibly favored the work of the ROPF and dissolved *Oktiabr*, the apparent loser. The Soviet government tightened its regulations in an attempt to end cut-throat criticism and factionalism, and create the appearance of a more unified cultural program. In a way, this is exactly what the ROPF had wanted, to eradicate what it perceived as overly aestheticized and ideologically “neutral” photography.<sup>59</sup> Photographers themselves were trying to fasten their hold over the acceptable blending of aesthetics and political and ideological content. When *Sovetskoe foto* changed its name to *Proletarskoe foto* in 1931, the first order of business for the revamped journal was a discussion, led by Leonid Mezhericher and Semyon Friedland, about the failures of *Oktiabr* photographers at the exhibition *Five Year Plan in Four Years*.

By the 1930s, however, many ROPF photographers had adopted, or at least accepted, Rodchenko’s propensity for cropping and tilting the camera even as the Soviet

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<sup>58</sup> The ROPF viewed Constructivists and members of the *Oktiabr* group as artists who engaged in modernist styles, but who failed to change as the country transitioned from NEP to the First Five Year Plan and Stalinism. They found these artists’ work objectionable because they did not fit the current focus on proletarian art, not because they lacked ideological motivation, which was the failing of RFO photographers. Christina Kaier, “The New Woman of Socialist Realism: Women Artists and Images of Women Celebrating Vera Mukhina,” (Lecture, Waiting for...(Archeology of an Idea), Kim? Gallery, Riga, Latvia 12 June 2014).

<sup>59</sup> This of course was not the case, Constructivist photographers were likewise ideologically motivated. For members of the ROPF, however, primacy of form over content was akin to prioritizing aesthetics over political and ideological content, and therefore unacceptable.

government attempted to reign in more radical avant-garde styles. Markov-Grinberg noted that “you could not tell my shots apart from my friends. It came out of the creative discussions that were constantly had.”<sup>60</sup> Even as he publicly criticized *Oktiabr*, Arkadii Shaikhet sheepishly admitted the group’s influence on his own work. He was “struggling against the methods of *Oktiabr*, who while they gave in to formalism, were fashionable” he wrote.

If we reject all that unhealthy ugliness that accompanied our struggle in 1932, it is still necessary in all honesty to admit that the *Oktiabr* photographers gave each of us a lot. I found their works, in and of themselves, interesting and useful. As a result of this struggle, I reconsidered and changed my views on a number of things.<sup>61</sup>

Mezhericher and Friedland recognized the technical skill of photographers in *Oktiabr*. Their concern was that overly stylized and fragmented images distracted and detracted from the ideological and political messages they were meant to convey. *Oktiabr*’s “aesthetic research overshadows the social content of the object,” Friedland claimed, and “in some cases lead to...counter-revolution!”<sup>62</sup> As such, Rodchenko was charged with counterrevolutionary distortion of Soviet reality and Elizar Langman was labeled a fool who gave into political folly.

The first issue of *Proletarskoe foto* contained images almost exclusively created by *Oktiabr* photographers. In the opening pages of the magazine, there was a signed declaration titled “To the Service and Operational Function of the Press” signed by the leading members of the ROPF, including Friedland, Mezhericher, Shaikhet, Alpert,

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<sup>60</sup> Leah Bendavid-Val, *Propaganda and Dreams*, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Arkadii. Shaikhet, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1934): 13.

<sup>62</sup> Semyon Friedland, “Dlia proletarskoi fotografii,” *Proletarskoe foto*, no. 1 (1931): 13-16.

Mikhail Ozerski, Viktor Mikylin, and Evgeni Khalip. The declaration denounced *Oktiabr*, claiming that the photographs in the current issue were “leftist mistakes” and should not be imitated or copied. Furthermore, that “along with a ruthless struggle against the Right deviationists [the RFO], we [the ROPF] must fiercely open fire at the “Left” [*Oktiabr*], which is essentially an emerging faction of petty-bourgeois aestheticism.”<sup>63</sup> In the following issues of the journal, some *Oktiabr* photographers apologized for their aesthetic deviations. F. Kislov’s January 1932 letter to the editor of *Proletarskoe foto* exemplifies the atonement expected from former members of *Oktiabr*.

After completely analyzing the activities of *Oktiabr*, I was convinced that the so-called “creative” method embraced by the group is nothing more than a departure from the nature of Soviet social reality, verging on aesthetic gamesmanship. With its weak ideological basis, weak ties to the masses and to press photographers, it represents a closed, guild organization. A group like *Oktiabr* does not, in general, meet the overall objectives of proletarian photography. Using the pages of your magazine as guidance, I declare that I have left the group and apply for admission to the ROPF, to which, as a creative organization I fully subscribe.<sup>64</sup>

A note printed under F. Kislov’s letter, stated that the ROPF had reviewed Kislov’s application and that the head secretary of the group, Semyon Friedland, had approved his acceptance.<sup>65</sup> Kislov’s note was not alone. *Oktiabr* began a restructuring process that aligned its work more closely with that of the ROPF. Rodchenko, however, refused to

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<sup>63</sup> “Iz deklaratsii initsiativnoi gruppi ROPF (Rossiiskogo obedineniia proletarskikh fotografov),” *Proletarskoe foto*, no. 2 (1931): 14.

<sup>64</sup> “Pismo v redaktsiiu ‘*Proletarskogo Foto*’ fotoreportera F. Kislova,” *Proletarskoe foto*, no.1 (1932): 20.

<sup>65</sup> Kislov’s letter reviewed by the secretariat of the ROPF, which was composed of Semyon Friedland, Maks Alpert, I. Maksimov and Arkadii Shaikhet.

cooperate. “In light of his systematic refusal to participate in the restructuring practice and repeated claims of reluctance to engage in this reconstruction,” the new chairman of *Oktiabr*, Boris Ignatovich, formally expelled Rodchenko, revoking his membership.<sup>66</sup> In the following months, the ROPF dissolved the extraneous departments of *Oktiabr*, and the groups merged, becoming the Creative Union of Press Workers. This publicly concealed the continued artistic disagreements between the two groups.

Despite the arguments between *Oktiabr* and the ROPF, photomontage and particularly works by Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and Gustav Klutssis were popular and the definitive photographic style of the early 1930s. It was associated with mass action, agitation, and propaganda, and overall complimented the government’s focus on industrialization and collectivization. It was “a symbol of creative grandeur of the proletariat,” preserving the inherent qualities of documentary photography while overcoming its “limitations, transforming the abilities of photography.”<sup>67</sup> More than a single photograph, which portrayed only a single event, or a hand-drawn or painted picture, which lacked the authenticity of reality, montage created a distinct narrative of Soviet achievements and success.<sup>68</sup> Previously, this was done through photographic series, or sequences of pictures related to a particular story: this created a visual narrative for the viewer. Montage, however, created a “qualitatively new form which compounded individual frames.”<sup>69</sup> For cost purposes, photomontage was highly desirable for

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<sup>66</sup> “Po tvorcheskim gruppirovkam A. Rodchenko iskliuchen iz gruppy ‘Oktiabr,’” *Proletarskoe foto*, no.3 (1932): 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no.3 (1932): 14.

<sup>68</sup> Klutssis was even critical of his wife and fellow artist Valentina Kulagina for mixing hand-drawn images and photographs in her agitprop posters, because he believed that photography was the only media appropriate for mass agitation. Christina Kaier, “The New Woman of Socialist Realism.”

<sup>69</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 103.

newspapers, magazines and journals. One image could construct the same visual narrative that previously required multiple images.

In the autumn of 1932, Langman, Debabov, A. Shternberg and Boris Ignatovich published an article in a Moscow newspaper, calling for the further restructuring of photographers unions, and the creation of a single Union of Photographers to address aesthetic, political, and ideological questions related to photography.

Since its inception the magazine *Proletarskoe foto* conducted a systematic persecution of individual workers in Soviet photography (Lev Ermin, Rodchenko, Ignatovich), contrasting their work, without disguise, to the works of members of the ROPF (Friedland, Alpert). As a result, the journal broke away from the main mass of workers in Soviet photography... We, the undersigned employees of Soviet photography, in keeping with the decisions of the Central Committee, believe it is necessary to promptly clean up the ROPF, begin radically restructuring the journal *Proletarskoe foto*, to reveal all its mistakes, and organize of a union of Soviet photographers.<sup>70</sup>

This last gasp of *Oktiabr*, as an official organization, fell on deaf ears. Members of the former ROPF had no intention of giving in to the demands of discredited artists, and furthermore, held powerful enough positions within *Soiuzfoto* that there was no need for compromise even as *Oktiabr* appealed to the Central Committee of the Party. Despite repeated attempts to organize a union specifically for photographers over the following decades, the Creative Union of Press Workers firmly established that photography, no

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<sup>70</sup> "O fotofronte pismo v redaktsiiu," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, (Moscow) Sept. 28, 1932.

matter what its aesthetic value, was first and foremost documentary, and therefore was confined to journalists unions for the following sixty years.

### **Silencing Photographic Debates; The ‘United Front’ in 1930s Photography**

Late in 1932 Elizar Langman was publicly sanctioned for his lack of concern for matters that were of “political significance.”<sup>71</sup> The denunciation of other photographers, including Rodchenko and Klutsis, became increasingly commonplace, and the term “formalism” stood in for any manner of artistic school or style that the ROPF deemed aesthetically unacceptable.<sup>72</sup> Mezhericher continued to be particularly critical of Rodchenko and Langman, whose style distracted from the content of their photographs, even though the three of them worked together at *Sovetskoe foto* and other illustrated journals.<sup>73</sup> Anyone, Mezhericher wrote, could be a “vulgar philistine with a camera” with photographs, “enthusiastically pasted into their own little album portraits of ladies and sleepy editorial sentimental landscapes.”<sup>74</sup> Real photography was about agitation and the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Margarita Tupitsyn has written at length about the shift from 1920s avant-garde to the totalizing images that have come to represent Stalinist photography of the mid-1930s.

In the end, just as Stalin succeeded with his campaign of the purges because thousands of informers from the public were willing to cooperate with him, the avant-garde succumbed to socialist realism because the masses, for whom dismal living conditions and harsh labor were a daily reality, were no longer captivated by the ambivalence of the fractured

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<sup>71</sup> “Obshchestvennoe poritsanie fotozhurnalista Langman,” *Proletarskoe foto*, no. 5 (1932): 1.

<sup>72</sup> See Clement Greenberg, “Taste,” (Lecture, Western Michigan University, January 18, 1983).

<sup>73</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 84.

images of the avant-garde. Instead, the public found comfort in the “therapeutic” socialist realist representation that successfully neutralized the pain of their reality by overtly heroizing their life and work.<sup>75</sup>

Tupitsyn asserts that as a result of this shift, “the representational strategies of the photographic avant-garde were infected by the virus of overtly politicized iconography and initially forays into socialist realism did not escape the application of avant-garde methods.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the avant-garde style was in essence hijacked by the Soviet political machine, which then used violence and terror to destroy the cultural community that had created that very photographic style. Numerous scholars, however, including Boris Groys, have stressed the role of the avant-garde in helping to create the tenets of socialist realism. *Sovetskoe foto* was not immune to politicization, especially after the mid-1920s, as mentioned above. From the very beginning, one of the purposes of the journal was to educate readers in how to interpret ideologically charged photographs so that they could be recreated at home with the appropriate subject and in the appropriate style.<sup>77</sup> It is important to note that socialist realism, photography, and the avant-garde were all expressly tied to the Soviet government, and inextricably so. The history of Soviet photography is not about the hampering or tempering of avant-garde movements, as Tupitsyn claims, but rather, about the continual and constant negotiations that occurred between individuals (i.e. photographer-artists and photographer-journalists) and the Soviet government over what was deemed visually acceptable.

After the completion of the First Five Year Plan, and the 1934 Writer’s Union declaration of socialist realism as the only official style of Soviet art, artists began

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<sup>75</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 174.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>77</sup> V. Mikylin, “Kak fotografirovat dlia zhurnalov i gazet,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1926): 13.



pursuing more glamorous and whitewashed portrayals of Soviet life, as opposed to the grit, dirt, steel and construction of proletarian art. These subjects were appropriate for depicting the galvanization of labor and resources that occurred between 1928 and 1932, but they were considered outmoded and inappropriate for depicting the Soviet Union by the mid-1930s. As a result, the heyday of proletarian photography, and *Proletarskoe foto*, was short lived. The journal was re-christened *Sovetskoe foto* in 1934. The Stalinist government favored “proletarian” photography and art only as a transitional style. Once Stalin declared the First Five Year Plan a success, a more idyllic (what contemporary critics called lyrical), socialist realist model was required of artists.

In the art criticism of the time, and later in the 1950s and 1960s, lyricism was often employed as a term meant to describe the art of being socialist. As the “art of socialist feeling” or being, lyrical art and photography were meant to help the soviet viewer “feel” socialism, and were also used as analytic components of successful works: art should act upon viewers, providing them internal enrichment.<sup>78</sup> This language was also applied to photography and discussions about its role in art. Arguments between former members of both *Oktiabr* and the ROPF hinged on this aesthetic distinction. Where the ROPF claimed that art and documentary could be achieved in a single image, *Oktiabr* took the stance that art photography was itself an entirely different entity. In the September 1934 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, V. Griuntal, a supporter of photographers formerly associated with *Oktiabr*, wrote that the style that the ROPF advocated “almost never had anything to do with art” and that at its very best, their work was only “the product of a more or less skilled artisan.”<sup>79</sup> Critics who favored the documentary style

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<sup>78</sup> Christina Kaier, “The New Woman of Socialist Realism.”

<sup>79</sup> V. Griuntal, “Granitsii fotoreportazha,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.7 (1934): 14.

fired back at him in later issues, saying that Griuntal had “put forth baseless charges against our Soviet press.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the members of the two former groups reached an aesthetic stalemate. Increasingly, however, these aesthetic arguments were publicly disguised, exemplified by discussions surrounding the 1935 *Exhibition of the Masters of Soviet Photography*. A sharp departure from the 1928 *Exhibition of Ten Years of Soviet Photography*, in which the attitude between groups was openly antagonistic and combative, the 1935 exhibition masked the underlying controversies between photographers who, despite the formal dissolution of their organizations, remained committed to the principles of their respective methodologies. Many photographers noted that this falsely conveyed acceptance of aesthetic pluralism.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, at the opening of the exhibition, *Sovetskoe foto* published an article which attempted to explain how and why certain photographers and images were selected by the jury panel.

It has been seven years since the last large All-Union exhibition, and we wish to demonstrate the achievements of Soviet photography. During this period ideological battles and creative competition have made significant progress in Soviet photography. Restructuring the ranks of Soviet photo artists is not entirely complete, but it is undeniable that Soviet photographers are already on the road to mastering the style of socialist realism.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1935): 3.

<sup>81</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 115.

<sup>82</sup> G. Boltianskii, “Novyi etap v fotoiskusstve, k otkritiiu vystavki masterov fotografii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1935): 8.

Four hundred and fifty works were included in the exhibition, mostly organized into small personal exhibitions of the works of 23 photographers from the ROPF, the RFO and *Oktiabr*, though the exhibition coordinators did not identify which photographers were a part of each group.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the works of RFO and *Oktiabr* photographers that were selected by the exhibition panel were meant as examples of reorientation and re-education, to showcase the success of the abolition of factionalism in photography. But the decision to include photographs by Rodchenko, Langman, and photographs by RFO photographers was highly contradictory. Rodchenko himself wondered why the exhibition organizers had included works accused of left formalism, as the Party made it clear it did not want open debate between artistic groups.

Tupitsyn draws two conclusions from Rodchenko's speculations about formalist photography and the 1935 exhibition.

First, the general public and most artists (including Rodchenko) believed that the cultural conflicts of the period were generated by various artistic factions rather than by Party policies. Second, the surprising willingness of the Party to tolerate formalist works as late as 1935 indicated that the struggle - hitherto on the level of aesthetics - had now shifted to a political project whose aim was to simulate, at any cost, an atmosphere of creative unanimity. Hence, what was exhibited in 1935 was less important than the status of the artist in relation to the Party's political interests.<sup>84</sup>

While it may be true that the cultural conflicts of the period were the result of debates between artistic groups, these debates fundamentally shaped the nature of discussions

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<sup>83</sup> The ROPF was represented by the largest number of participants: Arkadii Shaikhet, Maks Alpert, Semyon Friedland, Roman Karmen, N. Petrov, M. Petrus, Mikhail Prekhner, I. Skurikhin and Ivan Shagin.

<sup>84</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 144-146.

about art and documentary in photography until the 1970s. Furthermore, the second conclusion Tupitsyn draws, ignores the nature of the exhibition, which separated photographs by artist rather than simply presenting the photographs as a collective whole. Putting an end to debate between groups did not necessarily translate to creative unanimity. Instead, this is how some, but not all, photographers interpreted the selection process for the exhibition. For example, as a result of what they regarded as a disingenuous misrepresentation of aesthetic unity (or lack thereof), Boris Ignatovich and his brigade of photographers refused to participate in the exhibition.<sup>85</sup> “How is it” Ignatovich asked, “that our rich, diverse Soviet photography, which not so long ago passed through a period of heated creative disputes and fights at exhibitions suddenly lost face and made both form and subject anemic with little substance?”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the Ignatovich Brigade was highly critical of the exhibition panel and organizers who, in their opinion, were pandering to Party politics, and “disagreed with the selection of participants, and strongly criticized the artificial atmosphere of unanimity.”<sup>87</sup> Ignatovich’s open criticism demonstrates that even as late as 1935, “it was still possible both to exhibit formalist photography and to express overtly controversial opinions about it in public.”<sup>88</sup>

Tupitsyn presupposes that the Party was not concerned with what the exhibition photographs looked like. If the Party did not approve of the works of certain photographers, Rodchenko for example, it was under no obligation to allow him

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<sup>85</sup> The group of photographers the Ignatovich Brigade included Boris Ignatovich's wife, Elizaveta Ignatovicha, and his sister Olga Ignatovicha, as well as Y. Brodskii and L. Bat'. Langman was also loosely affiliated with the group.

<sup>86</sup> Boris Ignatovich, “Ob odnoi opasnoi tendentsii,” *Obsuzhdenie vystavki masterov sovetskogo fotoiskusstva v 1935 g.*, (Moskva: 1935): 1.

<sup>87</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 146.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

exhibition space. It would have been far easier to bar him and other members of *Oktiabr* and the RFO from showing their work. Ultimately, then, the aesthetic decisions of the early 1930s, as represented in the 1935 exhibition, were the result of both Party policies and the desires of photographers themselves. This demonstrates an interaction between governing politicians, artists, and aesthetics. While the artist's relationship to the Party did not *create* aesthetic differences and animosity, the Party and government did have a hand in guiding these arguments.

Nevertheless, most photographers were not pleased, or were at very least, confused by the selections made for the 1935 exhibition participants and jury panel.<sup>89</sup> Mezhericher was openly vocal about his disappointment with the intermingling of true reportage with right (former members of the RFO) and left (former members of *Oktiabr*) formalists. But following the 1935 exhibition, photographers and critics alike grasped at straws to explain why elements of both right and left formalism had been chosen for the exhibition, when only years earlier the same decisions would have carried significant official consequences.<sup>90</sup> A confounded Mezhericher wrote in 1935 that socialist realist photography “represented a unity that bound the world community of artists through a variety of creative shapes, styles and personalities.”<sup>91</sup> This was a rather self-perpetuating, insoluble argument. Socialist realism, as Mezhericher saw it, was composed of various “shapes, styles and personalities,” and yet these multifarious elements could only become

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<sup>89</sup> The jury panel consisted of the following: Mark Markov-Grinberg, secretary of the Union of *Kinofotorabotnikov*; Critic and head of the foreign department of *Soiuzfoto* Leonid Mezhericher; Photographers Aleksandr Rodchenko, Aleksandr Grinberg, A. Sternburg, and I. Bokhonov (the later three were all former members of the RFO); Photojournalist Semyon Friedland; Film director Sergei Eisenstein; Georgii Boltianskii, Chairman of the *Fotoseksii* Union; And Anatoli Golovnia, a camera operator.

<sup>90</sup> Photographers, editors and organizers would most likely have lost their posts at journals, newspapers and magazines, or offered fewer and smaller assignments.

<sup>91</sup> L. Mezhericher, “Tvorcheskie problemi fotografii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1935): 4.

a cohesive unit through socialist realism. Thus, the editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto* appears to have accepted the illusion of a “united front” of socialist realist aesthetics in photography even if they did not agree with this fabricated unity. The journal published a barrage of articles by prominent critics, demonstrating that the “reductive elements of the formalist method had become mere ornaments for the embellishment of the new socialist realist content.”<sup>92</sup> In a featured article about former *Oktiabr* member Dmitri Debabov, critic V. Sergeiev noted that over the past year his work had improved by leaps and bounds, conforming to the new regulations about photography, toeing the line between ROPF and *Oktiabr* aesthetics.



Fig. 3. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Jump on a Horse*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 6 (June 1936)

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<sup>92</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 144-146.

Debabov was not infected by intolerance and, despite the hostile camps, did not hesitate to adopt the best practices of the best representatives of the various groups. He studied his works, which had long lacked independence...And in the light of the new requirements for photography publication, it turned out that on top of the situation were people who know how to do things, not people who limit themselves to a few formal methods or political slogans. Debabov, we see, is among the former.<sup>93</sup>

The irony of Sergeiev's statement was certainly not lost on photographers of the day. Rather than gaining their independence, photographers were being brought into the fold of socialist realism.

In "About Formalism and Naturalism in Photo Art" and various other articles published in *Sovetskoe foto* following the 1935 exhibition, theoreticians, photographers and critics grappled with how to characterize formalism, naturalism, and socialist realism in photography. Critic Sergei Morozov struggled to compliment Rodchenko and Langman on their submissions to the exhibition. About Rodchenko's contemporary photographs, Mezhericher commented that Rodchenko was not yet immune to formalism, but that his work had improved.

I cannot say that he is fully freed from the formalist remnants. Among the works that were hung...there are two in which we see Rodchenko's sharp and characteristic methods of composing a still photograph; but at the same time, we cannot really classify these works as formalist. One of them [*Jump on a Horse*, (Fig. 3)] shows a jump over a barrier. If we look closely at the photograph, we can see that it is significantly titled; but this

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<sup>93</sup> V. Sergeiev, "Profili masterov - Dmitri Debabov," *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1935): 22.

is not a trick but a technique brought about by a need to strengthen and to underline the elasticity of the horse's movement over the obstacle...in each case however, Rodchenko's formalist impulse is subordinate to the content while raising its impact.<sup>94</sup>

Mezhericher's appraisal of the photograph is itself confusing; though he attempts to critique the photograph he focuses on the title and elasticity of the horses movement, underscoring his reticence to praise Rodchenko's work. His argument is unclear, rhetoric rather than actual critique. The inclusion of formalist aspects in documentary photography represented the solution to the aesthetic bickering that occurred between the ROPF and *Oktiabr*. Rodchenko in particular was confused by the about-face in Mezhericher's criticism.

It was beneficial to involve me in a provocative "discussion" to cover material that was left formalist. And now when these comrades offer to print my photos and a creative profile about me in a magazine, I look at them suspiciously and I can only wonder what they want to do with this profile...I do not respect them, do not trust them. Is this what the Party wants, should there be this sort of relationship among critics, editors and photography workers?<sup>95</sup>

Rodchenko did not care for the disingenuous deal struck between the advocates of the two aesthetic schools fundamentally at odds with one another. Rather than looking at his work for what it was, Rodchenko felt as though his photographs were being paraded as examples of left formalism, while simultaneously cited as evidence of the (false)

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<sup>94</sup> L. Mezhericher, "O trekh opasnostiakh," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1936): 32.

<sup>95</sup> Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Master i kritika," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1935): 4.



rapprochement between *Oktiabr* and the ROPF, a conclusion that is in no way unwarranted.

By selecting and approving of certain aspects of both methods, theoreticians reinforced and advocated what Tupitsyn called the “staged photo picture,” or socialist realist photography. This style of staging was “equally hostile” to the ROPF’s emphasis on documenting reality and the everyday, as well as *Oktiabr*’s commitment to snapping stylized photographs of particular fragments of reality.<sup>96</sup> Mezhericher threw up his hands and asked: “Is photo-reportage art or not?” The demand for “a beautiful artistic snapshot that is pleasant to the eye has grown above all else” in spite of the aesthetic arguments of the previous decade.<sup>97</sup> Friedland similarly noted that “readers were not satisfied and demand that they be shown the face of their wonderful country with maximum expressiveness.”<sup>98</sup> This style which emphasized simplicity, *partiinnost’*, *narodnost’*, and *ideinost’*, did not discourage staging, and was the mandated aesthetic ideal during the period between 1936 and 1941. According to Friedland, the new socialist realist style was based on “maximum expressiveness, overt theatricality, and careful staging and resulted from strictly defined commissions with specific political aims.”<sup>99</sup>

### **Undoing Avant-garde Photography**

In 1937, Mezhericher was arrested for alleged saboteur activities. His first conviction, on 12 June 1937, earned him 5 years forced labor at the mines in the Kolyma region.<sup>100</sup> Mezhericher was accused of being a Trotskyist, spreading anti-Soviet

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<sup>96</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 144-146.

<sup>97</sup> Leonid Mezhericher, “Kak dolzhen byt’ fotoreportazh,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1935): 25.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>100</sup> Mezhericher was sentenced under Articles 58-10, 58-11 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. “Mezhericher, Leonid Petrovich,” *Genealogicheskaja vaza znanii: personsy, familii, khronika*, <<http://baza.vgdru.com/1/21095/>>.

propaganda, contributing to the spread of anti-Soviet photographs abroad, and possessing illegal weapons. Six months into his sentence, he was again arrested by the NKVD for alleged participation in a counterrevolutionary Trotskyist group and organizing counterrevolutionary sabotage.<sup>101</sup> He was sentenced to death and shot on 7 February 1938.<sup>102</sup> Some photographers, like Rodchenko, lost their jobs or were demoted to positions of relative obscurity. Others, like Mezhericher and Gustav Klutis were arrested. Former member of the RFO Aleksandr Grinberg, who was arrested on January 15, 1936, was charged with distributing pornography and was declared an enemy of the people. He was sentenced to five years in a labor camp.<sup>103</sup> In 1941 Grinberg wrote to the Commission for Private Amnesty, a committee of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, asking that his criminal record be redacted because his indictment was unfounded and that he had been arrested before head the NKVD Yagoda was declared an enemy of the people himself. According to Grinberg, this meant his conviction should be overturned. Despite his later attempts to repeal his conviction, after serving his sentence, the charges remained on his record. Overall, however, the purges and the Terror affected those who were directly culpable for what material was printed, rather than individual photographers who were either removed from their posts or retreated from public life of their own volition, like Rodchenko who turned to set design by the late 1930s. Klutis' arrest and execution were seemingly unrelated to his work as a photographer but rather because he was ethnically Latvian.<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, it appears that editors like Koltsov and

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Sentenced to death under Article 58.

<sup>103</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 308-309.

<sup>104</sup> Klutis was accused of being a Latvian nationalist and was executed in 1938.

Mezhericher suffered because they were responsible for the publication and circulation of images.<sup>105</sup>

Government publishing houses ceased distributing the only two remaining avant-garde photography journals, *SSSR na stroike* and *Sovetskoe foto*, in 1941.<sup>106</sup> Yet, socialist realism in photography was not uniform or unchanging. Tupitsyn characterizes the late 1930s as a period of “totalizing” photography. But this does not adequately explain the transition from avant-garde photography to Stalinist and Soviet wartime photography, or the reemergence of avant-garde influenced photography in the postwar and Thaw periods. For photographers, the changes of the following decades offered opportunities, but also uncertainty. The results of the debates, denunciations and arrests of the 1930s meant that after around 1932, art photography’s development (as separate from documentary photography) was stunted. The war only reinforced that photographers were first and foremost documentary soldiers.

### **World War II and Documentary Photography**

This is not to say that iconography and “overtly heroicized” photography did not exist, but rather the transition to socialist realism in photography was patchy and incomplete. Dmitri Baltermants’ “Crossing the Oder” exemplifies the heroic idealization of the Red Army and the Soviet Union, succeeding in “neutralizing” the pain brought on by war (Fig. 4). During the war, many of the photographs circulated in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* were perfunctory inclusions, proof that the Soviet Union was at war. They fulfilled the purpose of an informative document: newspapers and Red Army magazines did not have the space to publish many images, and those that were chosen for

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<sup>105</sup> Koltsov was rehabilitated in 1954.

<sup>106</sup> *SSSR na stroike* resumed publication in 1949, before changing its name to *Sovetskii soiuz*. *Sovetskoe foto* resumed publication in 1956.

publication were subject to strict guidelines and the demands of editors who often outlined topics and ideas for staged photographs before photojournalists even arrived on location. Thus, the iconic and “heroicized” photography of the Great Patriotic War did not emerge until the postwar period, when photographers had the time to crop, tone, and essentially professionalize the images they chose to submit for publication.



Fig. 4. Dimitri Baltermants, *Crossing the Oder*, gelatin silver print, 1945. Collection Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Gift of Richard and Linda Parins

In the immediate pre-war period, many photojournalists held posts at military newspapers, and military themes were popular with editors at illustrated journals and magazines throughout the 1930s. Favorite topics were tank and airborne exercises, paratroopers, and infantry drills. In 1935, Iona Yakir’s Kiev Maneuvers provided a select group of photographers with valuable experience photographing military operations. At the behest of the Red Army, a team of photographers was assembled to document the

operation, including Arkadii Shaikhet, Dmitri Debabov, Ivan Shagin and V. Griuntal.<sup>107</sup> Other journals and newspapers also assigned photojournalists to document the operation, including Georgii Zelma and Aleksandr Solov'ev from *Krasnaia zvezda (Red Star)*, N. Petrov from *Izvestiia*, and Mark Markov-Grinberg from *Soiuzfoto*.<sup>108</sup> Red Army photojournalists also participated in documenting the Winter War, and in 1940 *Sovetskoe foto* published a compilation of photographs titled "TASS Photojournalists at the Front" containing a detailed analysis of front-line photojournalism.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, the first days of World War II demonstrated that while photojournalists were prepared to photograph military exercises, they were less than prepared for actual wartime photojournalism. In the difficult conditions of the first days of the war, photographers went to the front with instructions to document what they could, but particularly military action itself. This was easier said than done, however, and as Soviet regiments retreated, photojournalists moved in small groups between various military units attempting to stay as close as possible to active military engagement.<sup>110</sup> Apart from the obvious dangers associated with documenting activity on the front, photojournalists also faced suspicions from Soviet troops as they moved between divisions. But the general chaos of the first days of war meant that newspapers and illustrated journals were hungry for any images available of the war, and photographers, who had yet to receive strict guidelines about what to photograph, were able for the first time in decades to photograph what they wanted, in any way they chose.<sup>111</sup> This produced mixed results, as photographers wrested some limited agency from the restrictions editors

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<sup>107</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 142.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>109</sup> "Fotokorrespondenti TASS na fronte," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1940): 2.

<sup>110</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 145.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 145.

placed on them, while the circumstances of war were limiting in terms of equipment, and photographers were often unable to crop or edit their own work.

Despite this initial freedom, the question of what to photograph was addressed by the political and military leadership within the first few months of the war. Taboo subjects were photographs of retreat, refugee evacuations, and military defeats.<sup>112</sup> Photographs of Soviet soldiers in battle, Red Army victories, broken German tanks and equipment, and dead and defeated Nazi soldiers were encouraged. Under no circumstance were photojournalists to submit photographs of any “defeatist” subjects that could raise doubt about the Soviet Union’s military prowess. Furthermore, whenever possible, military officers kept photojournalists from Soviet defeats, ordering editors to station photojournalists elsewhere, to help strengthen a narrative of Soviet victory. This reinforced the idea that the Soviet government viewed photojournalism as a mechanism to boost civilian, and more importantly, troops’ morale because of the priority placed on including photographs in military newspapers intended for distribution at the front. During the war, photojournalists were not meant to document war atrocities, but to buttress Soviet ideological slogans. Still, some photographers agreed with this bottom line. Years later, when questioned in the 1970s about his war photography, Dmitri Baltermants lamented that he should have photographed the war differently. Rather than shooting images of war atrocities, he would have more readily conceded to government demands, if only to help (or save) the Soviet populace from the gruesome reality that was World War II. “God forbid, if I ever again had to photograph the war, I would have shot it completely differently.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>113</sup> In the 1970s, as head of the Photography Section of *Ogonek*, Baltermants’ comment may have been associated with his prominent position. This could also have been related to his reticence to relive his years

A few photographers, including Arkadii Shaikhet, Evgenii Khaldei, Maks Alpert, G. Sanko, Mikhail Trakhman, and Ivan Shagin, were able to document the atrocities of war. For the most part, however, photographers stayed away from gruesome subjects and tended to focus on rather tame depictions of the circumstances during the war. Historian David Shneer's *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* questions what possessed young Soviet photographers (specifically young Soviet Jewish photographers) to capture Nazi atrocities during the war, particularly atrocities against Jews, which they did frequently towards the end of the war.<sup>114</sup> While there are many poignant exceptions, as a rule the majority of photographs published in the Soviet press on a daily basis were not concerned with war crimes or atrocity. This is not to say that photographers did not capture these crimes. But the Soviet government was wary of publishing this sort of material, and when these images were published, they followed a set narrative of Nazi criminal activity, highlighting German immorality and ruthlessness. In the everyday press, however, these photographs represent a drop in the proverbial ocean. Typically, the central press only distributed and officially recognized images that showed the fallibility of the Soviet army or the grief of war years after World War II ended. This was a concerted and deliberate government effort after Stalin's death to combat heroicizing images of war with photographs that demonstrated the imperfections of Stalinism.

During the Battle of Moscow, Ivan Shagin photographed wounded soldiers tended by nurses, boarded up shop windows, partisan militia men, and empty streets with wounded soldiers as the Soviet military began liberating villages around Moscow after

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as a war photographer. It seems, however, that Baltermants legitimately lamented his role in documenting war atrocities. D. Baltermants, *Fotografiia*, no. 2 (1972): 19.

<sup>114</sup> David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 2.

the offensive. His 1944 image *Politrak prodolzhaet boi* (*The Political Instructor Continues the Fight*) shows a wounded soldier from the political workers division (*Prolitruk*). It is not immediately clear what is happening in the image (Fig. 5). Rather than a simple photograph of a wounded soldier, Shagin intended to show the heroism of the political activist for urging his comrades to fight, despite his own injury. Rather than succumb to the pain of his wounds, the soldier instead lead his compatriots into battle. But the content of the image also shows a physically disabled man and likewise the fallibility of the Soviet citizen. This sends a seemingly contradictory message. The man is a hero in his own right for fighting through the pain of his own suffering, for the good of the country. In doing so, he (the subject) symbolically achieves a greater understanding of the common good that the Soviet Union is fighting for. But his sacrifice also shows physical weakness, a broken and beaten veteran whose presence the government would soon try to remove from the public eye. It was necessary to fight for your country, but part of your duty was also to allow able-bodied men to represent your struggle.<sup>115</sup>

Much of the documentary material from the war, however, captured how mundane life at the front was between battles.

Mandatory subjects for newspapers appeared under the heading “In between Battles”... These pictures took on special meaning for readers.

For a short time they returned to their peaceful pursuits, and the obligatory ritual of such events seem important and necessary.<sup>116</sup>

These types of images were obligatory because they were unassuming and normalizing. Soldiers may fight, but they also played cards, smoked cigarettes, and laughed at each

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<sup>115</sup> See Liliya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press), 2008.

<sup>116</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 158.



other's jokes. Furthermore, newspapers and journals favored images of soldiers performing everyday tasks for a number of reasons. First, for practical purposes, this made up the majority of the documentary records of a given photographer. Second, newspapers encouraged images of combat only within very specific parameters, as mentioned above, which were often difficult to meet, and frankly dangerous. Third, journals and newspapers preferred particular types of combat images, principally tank and aviation combat. For photographers like Mikhail Trakhman who spent several months of the war documenting partisan military maneuvers, obtaining these types of shots was impossible. In many ways, then, socialist realist aesthetics in wartime photography took a back seat to what a photographer could actually hope to document. Moreover, without the ability to edit or crop their photographs, photojournalists ultimately were concerned with the documentary features of photography, rather than aesthetics.

Yet, the demand for images of life at the front could overrule the desires of editorial staff. Of primary importance was obtaining photographs from the front, even if the images themselves were not exactly what editors had requested. Photojournalist B. Manevich recalled one of his assignments. He was asked to document Soviet troops attacking German torpedo aircraft. After submitting his prints to the editor, Manevich received a note about his photographs. Though the editor found them adequate and "very interesting," it was an incredible "pity that the attack was filmed on a cloudy day."<sup>117</sup> Though this could be corrected in print (increasing or decreasing the amount of ink when transferred into print) or with filters and layering negatives, many photographers lacked

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 158.

the equipment, time, or both to make these corrections before they submitted photographs for publication.



Fig. 5. Ivan Shagin, *The Politruk Continues the Fight*, black-and-white photograph, 1944

Nevertheless, images snapped by Soviet photographers of the grief and horror on the Eastern Front were few and far between, and photographers risked their reputations, employment, and freedom by shooting illicit photographs with cameras and film paid for

by government funds. In 1942, while working for *Izvestiia*, Dmitri Baltermants was accused by the newspaper of falsifying photographs of the Battle of Stalingrad.<sup>118</sup> He was demoted and a military tribunal sentenced him to a military penal company, battalions that were stationed in the most dangerous areas of the front lines. Baltermants was lucky. Shrapnel wounded his leg; he was rescued, and sent to a hospital in Moscow before returning to the front as a photojournalist for a military newspaper after his recovery. Film director Alexander Dovzhenko learned a similar, yet seemingly paradoxical lesson. When shooting his 1943 film *Bitva za Nashu Sovetskuiu Ukrainu (The Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine)*, Dovzhenko first and foremost wanted to show “the truth of our difficulties...and heroism in overcoming them.”

Do not hesitate to show suffering, tears, death. For this huge force is affirmation of life. Show a wounded soldier on the field, his suffering. Show soldier hard work. Remove the mystery of the death of a soldier. Do not hesitate - Weep for yourself, but show it... Let yourself be sorry, let the tears will fill your eyes, but show it. Let all see how and why he died...show the battlefield nurse who is just a fragile young girl, when she pulls herself to overcome the burdens of fear and terror....Shoot people for their hard work, their hard-breaking, exhausting labor and suffering to create the future world.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> In fact, according to his daughter, Baltermants was not responsible for the publication of the image in question. One of his photographs of German prisoners of war, taken in Moscow, was substituted for his image of soldiers in Stalingrad at the last minute, without his knowledge, with a caption about Soviet military successes. The error was immediately noticed upon publication, and Baltermants was blamed for fabricating information about military operations. V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 152-3.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 161.

The following year, the Politburo sanctioned Dovzhenko, declaring that his film contained grave political errors. He was censored and banned from producing any further films. Dovzhenko described his summons to meet with Stalin. “January 31, 1944 I was brought to the Kremlin. There I was hacked to pieces.”<sup>120</sup>

During the war, photojournalists published their images in one of the 18 front or 110 military newspapers, each of which employed at least one photojournalist. Though newspaper distribution was sporadic during the war, publication never ceased. A new publishing and press outlet, GlavPUR oversaw the publication of these newspapers, and established the monthly (later bimonthly) photo gazette *Frontovaia illustratsiia* (*Frontline Illustration*). Other photographers were employed by TASS, which distributed photographs to numerous military newspapers, and the Sovinformburo whose photographers took pictures that were sent directly to the government. Photojournalists who worked for TASS and the Sovinformburo, generally, avoided the harshest wartime conditions. They were sent on short term assignments to the front, and returned in Moscow to develop and print their film. Photographers who worked for military newspapers developed film and printed news at the front. Some photographers, in addition to documenting the war, also served in the military. Arkadii Shishkin served as a private in the infantry until 1944, Robert Diament, Georgii Lipskurov and N. Kubeev entered the militia, and Mark Markov-Grinberg served as a railroad signalman for the first two years of the war. Photojournalist Olga Lander, described conditions for photographers on the front lines in her 1986 memoir. While other correspondents traveled with printing equipment, photographers were constantly searching for places to construct makeshift darkrooms.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 161.

The newspaper staff was usually stationed about 15-20 kilometers from the front line. We, the correspondents, believed that we were at the rear. When we were sent to the front, we received travel orders... correspondents were sent with a printing machine and typesetting machine. But I had no darkroom. Wherever I went, I had to “build” one. In the villages I used closets...in the cities – I looked for dark basement corners.<sup>121</sup>

Photojournalist Sergei Kosirev of the military newspaper of the 1st Moscow Proletarian Division described similar conditions, digging out small shelters to develop film in a portable development box.<sup>122</sup>

There are many examples of photographers who made names for themselves during the war, some of whom had circulated in avant-garde circles. By the 1950s many of the older generation of avant-garde photographers were still working photographers. For example, Maks Alpert, who had photographed for the journal *SSSR na stroike* under El Lissitzky and Aleksandr Rodchenko, was a TASS correspondent during World War II, and later, worked for Novosti press. In this case, Alpert was keenly aware of the work of his fellow avant-garde photographers, as his direct superiors at *SSSR na stroike*. Furthermore, he had participated in denouncing the work of Rodchenko in the early 1930s. Though Alpert considered himself first and foremost a photojournalist, his photographs testify to his knowledge of and proximity to avant-garde photography circles in the 1920s.

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<sup>121</sup> O. Lander, *Frontovymi dorogami*, (Moskva; 1986), 14.

<sup>122</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no.12 (1981): 18.

A second example of the photographer-artist is Mark Redkin. A longtime friend of Arkadii Shaikhnet, he started his career working for the small local newspaper *Kommunist* in Astrakhan after his father, a fisherman, bought him a glass plate camera.<sup>123</sup> He studied at the Leningrad *Fotokinoteknikum*, choosing photography over more popular courses in cinematography or projection work and completed his studies in 1932.<sup>124</sup> He then worked as a welder before joining the crew of a whaling vessel and traveled the English coast, Cuba, Jamaica, through the Panama Canal to Hawaii. Upon returning to Vladivostok in 1933, he was called up for military service, and was offered a position at the military newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda*.<sup>125</sup> Redkin became one of the first military photojournalists to experience World War II, and was promoted and sent as a special correspondent to an aviation division of the front.<sup>126</sup> After an injury kept him hospitalized for two months, he began working for the magazine *Frontovaia illustratsiia*, which also employed Arkadii Shaikhnet and G. Sanko. Redkin was stationed in Krasnodar and Kerch, and also documented the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945 before arriving in Berlin. After being released from his Red Army position, Redkin began working for the magazine *Sovetskii soiuz* (*Soviet Union*), formerly *SSSR na stroike*. He later worked as a traveling correspondent for TASS and the Planeta publishing house in Moscow, photographing the Arctic Circle, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Siberia.

Other press photographers, such as Dmitri Baltermants, began their careers in the immediate prewar period and made names for themselves during the war.<sup>127</sup> Baltermants

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<sup>123</sup> Mikhail Zaborsky, *Mark Redkin: Izobranie Fotografii*, (Moscow: Planeta Publishing, 1978), 2.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>127</sup> Baltermants was largely self-taught when he began his career working at *Izvestiia*. During the war he worked for *Izvestiia* and the Red Army journal *Na razgrom vruga* (*To the Enemy's Defeat*).

worked as a printer for *Izvestiia*, before studying mathematics at Moscow State University. He was then hired by a Military Academy where he taught until 1939, when he returned to *Izvestiia* as a war correspondent. Despite complications over his chosen themes and the political content of his war photography, Baltermants went on to work for *Ogonek*, where he became one of the most prominent photojournalists of the post-war period.<sup>128</sup> Primarily, his photographs in *Ogonek* are of Soviet and international diplomats, Party Congresses, People's Deputies, parades, and Soviet holidays. In other words, Baltermants held a politically sensitive position at *Ogonek* which required him to be acutely aware of the ideological implications of his work, especially since many of his assignments required permission to attend private Party and diplomatic meetings.

Photographs of World War II were first exhibited the exhibition *The Great Patriotic War in Art Photography*. Up until that point, images of the war were circulated in the military press, which was regularly available to soldiers. But supply shortages and disruptions for civilians meant that access to newspapers was sporadic at best for many Soviet citizens, even in large cities. The exhibition of *The Great Patriotic War in Art Photography* opened at the Central House of Artists in the late 1940s and featured 360 photographs by 88 military photographers.

Margarita Tupitsyn's argument about avant-garde photography in the 1930s may explain the working condition of photographers in the four years between the *First All-Union Exhibition of Photo Art* and the beginning of the Soviet Union's involvement in World War II. But it fundamentally ignores the reality that the war had a profound effect on Soviet photography, because its reportage "broke through the stylized and ritual

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<sup>128</sup> During the war, Baltermants was chastised for submitting photographs that did not comply with or conform to the themes and subjects he was assigned by his editor, and was fired from his post, though he was rehired by a military newspaper. See chapter one.

representations on the pages of Soviet newspapers to represent a collectivity engaged with its own initiatives, emotions and actions.”<sup>129</sup> Photographers were bound by government restrictions and demands from editors, though this was not unique to wartime. Ultimately, despite the strict ideological guidelines photojournalists had to follow which bound them to particular subject matter, they were also able to wrest limited agency from the grip of the Party and government at this time. This was because they had the ability to make “visible, and thus offered to the imagination, an unscripted and unpredictable event whose intensity, development, and duration” was not as easily supervised.<sup>130</sup> Though regulations continued to exist and the stakes for ideological “misinformation” were higher, the Soviet press experienced its first glimpse of de-Stalinization during the war because it was no longer simply a mouthpiece to “promote Stalin’s vision of what it would mean to be loyal to Soviet power.”<sup>131</sup> The next official exhibition featuring war photography was not held until 1965. During this time, the political life of the country has undergone a number of changes, and much of its history, particularly in the history of Stalinism and World War II, was reassessed.

Redkin, Alpert, and Baltermants were all documentary photographers with strong aesthetic interests beyond simply getting a shot, even if they were not as experimental as Rodchenko and other avant-garde photographers. By the 1950s, however, these three photographers, along with Marina Bugayeva, helped reopen the debate about the nature of art photography, once again engaging in heated discussions about the artistic and documentary features of photography. As the government loosened its grip on journal circulation and image publication, photographers once again confronted questions about

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 32.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 28.



photographic aesthetics, arguing for similar visual principles their predecessors had deliberated twenty years earlier.

## **Chapter Two: Reestablishing *Sovetskoe foto*: Art Photography and the Artist-Photojournalist**

In the 1950s, photographers and photojournalists were wrestling with the possibilities of representing the new and challenging environment. The images that were to define the era in illustrated magazines and newspapers were made by a relatively small and tight-knit group of photojournalists. Many of these photojournalists photographed the Great Patriotic War from the front like Dmitri Baltermants. Others, like Marina Bugayeva, future head of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, began their careers during the Stalinist period. A third group of photographers, like Maks Alpert and Mark Redkin, had retained or regained posts that they held before Stalin's consolidation of power and centralization of photography groups. Working for various press agencies, organized in a highly centralized hierarchical structure managed by the government and Party, ultimately these photojournalists were responsible to the Central Committee and the Politburo. Nevertheless, the Thaw environment allowed these photographers opportunities and the limited ability to dictate their own aesthetic standards and choices.

*Sovetskoe foto* was reestablished in 1956, and began publication in January of 1957, after being shut down during the war. Published by *Iskusstvo*, one of the publishing houses of the Ministry of Culture, it became the primary setting for photojournalists and amateur photographers to view and discuss each other's work. From January 1957 to December 1959, the journal was published monthly on newspaper stock, featuring only black-and-white images, and each issue was approximately sixty pages long. Beginning in January 1960, and for the remainder of the Soviet period, the front and back covers, as well as color inserts, of *Sovetskoe foto* were printed on glossy paper stock. Initially, though, contemporary color printing technology and *Sovetskoe foto*'s lack of priority as a

special interest journal, meant that most color images (and generally the front and back covers and inserts), were dominated by red-orange, green or blue hues in publication. As of the first edition of 1960, the journal itself was printed on larger paper as well, cutting the number of pages to approximately fifty per issue.

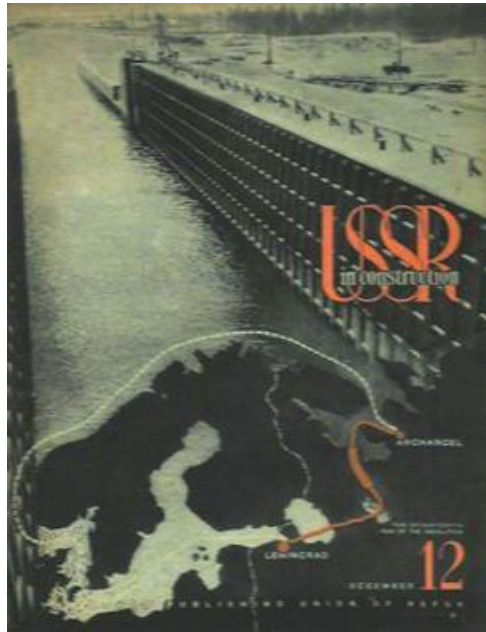


Fig. 6. Rodchenko, Aleksandr. *SSSR na stroike*, Cover, no. 12 (December, 1933), *Belomorskoi* edition

Nevertheless, many photographers found the reestablishment of a journal devoted specifically to all aspects of photography as a step in the right direction for incorporating photography into established professional and artistic cultural communities. As such, this chapter is about the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto* as a forum for photographers and photojournalists to grapple with the nature of post-Stalinist documentary and aesthetic representation. In particular, it discusses the apparent shift, or lack thereof, in photographic aesthetics, and the relationship between photography, art, and journalism. In the ambiguous climate surrounding Khrushchev's cultural Thaw, photojournalists

sought to define their relationship to journalism, art photography, and aesthetics in various ways, sometimes with uncertainty, but more frequently with the conviction that photography was as much an art form as it was a documentary medium. This chapter investigates the conflict between aesthetics and documentary in photography, the relationship between photojournalism and art, as well as the connections between the avant-garde and socialist realism.

Photojournalists were organized, and their craft supervised, by the Union of Journalists, though many photographers, especially those who began work prior to the late 1920s, were trained in the arts. They were largely self-taught and those who received degrees held the equivalent of fine arts diplomas. Yet, photography was removed from the Soviet Union of Artists and was reestablished in the Union of Journalists in 1957. Art photography did not exist as a category in the Soviet cultural system after it was abandoned in the mid-1930s, and artist-photographers who moved in avant-garde circles in the 1920s and early 1930s such as Georgi Zelma and Maks Alpert turned to working as photo correspondents at various journals, newspapers and publishing houses. These photographers' early work was quintessentially avant-garde. Alpert and Zelma had collaborated with Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky on numerous projects at *SSSR na stroike (USSR in Construction)* in the 1930s (Fig. 6). Photographers like Zelma and Alpert, who identified their work as avant-garde decades earlier, now worked alongside university graduates whose degrees were not related to art and aesthetics but specifically to journalism.<sup>1</sup> As a result, self-educated art photographers of the older generation were confronted with professionals whose educational background was journalistic, rather than artistic. What is clear, however, was that sharply contrasting backgrounds informed how

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter one.

photographers shot their pictures and likewise, how they discussed images in the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* and other illustrated magazines.

For this reason, I choose to divide photographers of this period into two groups. I categorize as photographer-artists the generation of photojournalists who held on to their posts into the Khrushchev years. For all intents and purposes these photographers remained informed by their avant-garde roots, however attenuated by the rise of socialist realism in the 1930s. The second group composed of photographer-journalists, who came to their craft in the immediate pre-war period. These men (and occasionally women) were urban professionals and generally held university degrees in journalism. They worked as photojournalists, editors, or in newspaper and magazine design. Their aesthetic concerns were different from those of the older generation. This is not to say that the aims of photographer-artists and photographer-journalists were mutually exclusive. The younger generations of photographer-journalists respected their elder peers, and were not averse to strong criticism. All professional photographers navigated the terrain between publishable material, censors, and government bureaucrats, and desired to publish visually striking photographs to accompany news articles.

### **Documentary Aesthetics and *Sovetskoe Foto***

In the November 1964 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, L. Filipov described the role of the accomplished Soviet photojournalist:

The talented artist moves creativity forward, is lit by the great ideas of a century, and is inspired by the noble mission of service to the people...There is no art outside of time even if it chooses a theme in the past...The mighty force of a photograph, the truth is seen in its conclusive reliability, in the incontestable persuasiveness of its documentary

certification. Documentation does not exclude artistry. The observant pictorialist can embody a vital fact with such a measure... that the ordinary picture becomes a work of art.<sup>2</sup>

Ideologues and professionals with concrete goals desired that photojournalists become more than mere recorders of “facts” or occurrences. Though soviet public discourse was often a collection of utopian goals as opposed to lived realities, dynamic press photographers desired to turn a new leaf in this regard. They wanted to show Soviet citizens more honest images of their lives and what it meant to be “Soviet.” Filipov’s statement, the first words of the first paragraph found in this issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, suggests that the Soviet photojournalist had two very different obligations to fulfill. The first was to present images that provided indexical evidence of technological and other advances made in the Soviet Union, to supply a fact that could support the rhetoric of Soviet state building. The second, more ambiguous obligation was to make pictures that upheld high aesthetic standards. As this article demonstrates, *Sovetskoe foto* required more than mere documentation from its photographers. Consistently, articles supporting, evaluating, and debating the cultural role of the photojournalist-artist and art photography can be found in virtually every issue of *Sovetskoe foto* from the late 1950s through the early 1960s. A clear consensus appears to have been reached: the standard for creating a professional photographic image was that it fulfills the role of document and art simultaneously.

This was no easy task. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, photographers struggled to define the relationship between the photographer as an artist and the photographer as a journalist, as can be seen in the previous chapter. The word *fotoiskusstvo* itself defies any

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<sup>2</sup> L. Filipov, “Rodiksia v oktiabre,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1964): 1.

certain definition. While the literal translation is “photographic art,” its usage is plastic and is liberally applied to both documentary images and exhibition “art objects” in *Sovetskoe foto*. Furthermore, as V. T. Stigneev points out, in the “controversy and debate about the nature of photographic reporting, the artistic quality of the image was not a distraction from the photographic practice, however... it affected the assessment of products and, therefore, the specific job of photojournalists.”<sup>3</sup> In a rather round-about way, Stigneev is referring to the debate surrounding the express *purpose* of photojournalism. It was generally accepted by newspaper and journal editors at the time that artistry and aesthetic interest in press photographs did not detract from an image’s ability to effectively illustrate news topics. Similarly, they recognized that debate about the aesthetics of news photography, between photographers themselves and press employees improved the final product. But, as Stigneev notes, debates about the aesthetics of photojournalism influenced choices about which images were publishable, how they were critiqued (in particular by contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*), and therefore, what was *required* of the photojournalist. These requirements were largely fluid and changed from publication to publication, and from year to year. Further complicating the role of aesthetics in photography and journalism is that any critique of artistic photographs was steeped in the critical language used in appraising literature and painting, which was not always relevant or appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

By 1937, according to art historian Margarita Tupitsyn, socialist realism had become the only acceptable means of representation, overshadowing other artistic movements such as Constructivism and Productivism. Photography’s truthfulness was

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<sup>3</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

perceived as unreliable for depicting the teleological and historical narrative that the Party and government put forth. Photography, precisely because of its documentary features and the photograph's apparent inability to lie, or show what was and was not in front of it, made it a liability. Though this could be rectified by manipulating photographs, either through cropping, airbrushing, or montage, these rudimentary forms of excising what the Soviet government wanted to avoid was less effective than employing other artistic media.<sup>5</sup> When possible, journals replaced photographs with socialist realist paintings and other forms of representation until the second World War. The distinction between art photography and press photography remained ill defined, and the lines between the two genres were blurred in the 1920s and 1930s by years of debate about what acceptable photographs should look like. These debates were cut short when the Soviet government forced the liquidation of the *Oktiabr* group, silencing public disagreements about photographic aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> The 1930s and 1940s saw the gradual replacement of modernism with realism, in all Soviet arts. By the 1950s, these debates resurfaced, as the new generation of photojournalists was well acquainted with the theoretical and illustrated work of avant-garde photographers of the 1920s and 1930s.

Marina Iosifovna Bugayeva was instrumental in reopening arguments about photography as an artistic medium, and was perhaps the most recognizable name associated with photography and photojournalism in the Soviet Union. She was a champion for education and strict standards amongst professional and amateur photographers. Very little information is available about Bugayeva, but she began working in the press in the late 1930s, a career that continued into the 1980s. She was the

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<sup>5</sup> David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia*, (New York : Metropolitan Books, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> See chapter one.



editor of *Sovetskoe foto*, head of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, author of hundreds of theoretical articles about photography and aesthetics, and she had a hand in most major publications about photography in the years between 1957 and 1980. She encouraged photographers to be active observers, implicitly endorsed the reopening of debates about avant-garde aesthetics, and supported their reincorporation into standard Soviet photographic practice. More than any other figure in the photography community, Bugayeva was an energetic advocate for photography as an art and sponsor of photography in the Union of Journalists.

Mark Redkin, from the older generation, as stated in the previous chapter, was a career photojournalist and went on to receive 40 awards between 1940 and 1978 for photographs he submitted for exhibition both nationally and internationally. Of these, 15 were awarded between 1956 and 1964. Redkin, however, submitted his work not only to exhibitions for photojournalists, but “art” photography exhibitions as well.<sup>7</sup> In 1956, he won an award for his submission to the *Exhibition of the Work of TASS Photo-correspondents*. That same year, he received a second award for his submission to the *Exhibition of Photo-Art in the USSR*. In 1960, 1961, and 1962 he received prizes for his works exhibited at the first, second and third *All-Union Artistic Photo Exhibition*. One might think that Redkin’s work as a career photojournalist and his submissions to art exhibitions might differ. But Redkin’s three November 1964 submissions to the editorial section of *Sovetskoe foto* suggest otherwise. One of the journal’s editors was very pleased by the images, explaining that they were perfect examples of how one could mix business with pleasure, revealing his support for this style. He commented on Redkin’s skilled

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<sup>7</sup> As art photography did not necessarily exist as a category outside of exhibitions, this definition warrants further investigation and explanation.

composition.<sup>8</sup> The unusual shooting angle as well as the intense cropping would indicate this image would make, at the very least, an odd choice for publication, especially by a career photojournalist. Yet, the description of how he attained the shot, that he happened to have his camera at the ready when the ducks burst into a march, suggests that his approach was more that of a photojournalist, always ready to grab a shot for tomorrow's newspaper (Fig. 7).<sup>9</sup>

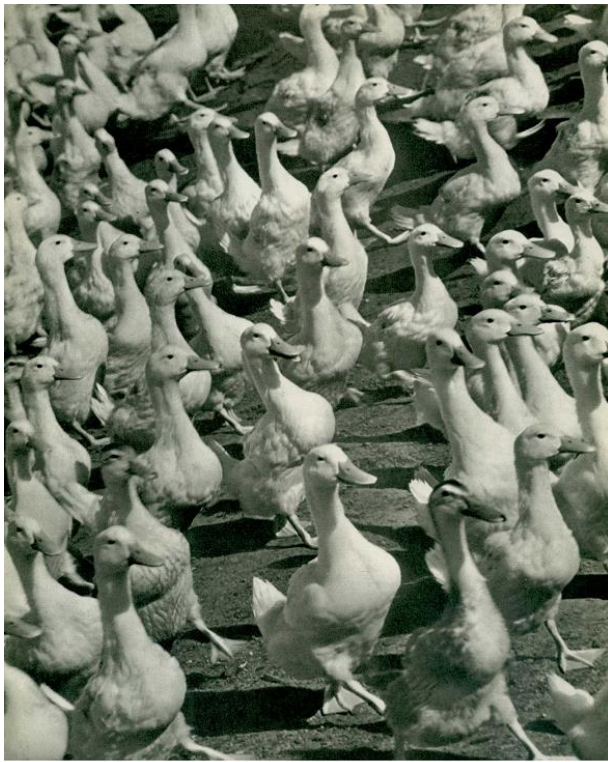


Fig. 7. Mark Redkin, *Duck Parade*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (November 1964)

In 1965, Dmitri Baltermants became the photography editor for the illustrated magazine *Ogonek*. Yet Baltermants also exhibited his photographs nationally and

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Redkin, "Veseli Marsh," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1964): 40.

<sup>9</sup> Redkin came upon the poultry farm while on assignment in Buryatia. Mikhail Zaborsky, *Mark Redkin: Izobranie Fotografii*, 15.

internationally, and held personal exhibitions in Moscow, New York, London and Prague. He also held a number of honorary titles, including Honored Worker of Culture of the RSFSR and Honorary Artist of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP).<sup>10</sup> Baltermants' war photography, though, perhaps is most indicative of his ability to straddle the line between press and art photography, experimenting with shadow and exposure time, though even as photography editor of *Ogonek* he continued to toy with the camera's angles and the location of his subjects (Figs. 8-10).



Fig. 8. Dmitri Baltermants, *Night Battle*, black-and-white photograph, 1942

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<sup>10</sup> Baltermants was also an honorary member of the Czechoslovak Photographic Union and the National Photo Club of Sri Lanka.



Fig. 9. Dmitri Baltermants, *Tanks in Action*, black-and-white photograph, 1943



Fig. 10. Dmitri Baltermants, *The Two Ilyches*, black-and-white photograph, 1971

In short, the distinction between photojournalist and art photographer could be placed on a spectrum, as photographers worked across boundaries: their professional

work was not strictly hemmed in by the categories of “art” or “journalism.” The differences between the two categories are further blurred because the Soviet Union did not officially recognize photographers as artists, classifying professional photographers as photojournalists, despite holding an increasing number of art photography exhibitions throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. To a large extent, working as a professional photographer in the Soviet Union meant being a member of the Union of Journalism. Yet one was also afforded the opportunity to submit one’s photographs to ambiguously titled exhibitions such as the *Moscow International Exhibition of Art Photography* complicating the distinction between indexical document and artistic initiative.

In the months following the Secret Speech, and before the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto*, the journal *Sovetskaia pechat* (*The Soviet Press*) published a report about a photography exhibition at the Central House of Journalists. The author, photographer Y. Prigozhin, noted that at the exhibition’s opening the photographers were largely critical, but open to suggestions.<sup>11</sup> They were acutely aware of staging, an issue that had preoccupied photographers in the 1920s and 1930s because it obscured the documentary nature of photography. Many commentators were still wary of staging, for both dramatic “artistic” or documentary purposes, because it “condemns and rejects the viewer, who is fond of the photo essay for what it realistically and accurately reproduces - the movement of life, of work...” This comment harkens back the debates of the 1930s and would continue throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Prigozhin criticized Dmitri Baltermants’ photographs, finding them of lesser quality than his other work. This, however, did not prevent Prigozhin from commenting that on the whole, the images set a

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<sup>11</sup> Y. Prigozhin would later become a member of the editorial committee at *Sovetskoe foto*.

<sup>12</sup> Y. Prigozhin, “Vetv’ zhurnalistiki; zametki o fotoreportazhe,” *Sovetskaia pechat*, no. 5 (1956): 50.

“visible example of true artistic reportage... and was accepted by the audience with a sincere appreciation.”<sup>13</sup> Prigozhin’s article demonstrates two features of discussions about photography in the 1950s. First, the appearance of staging remained unacceptable. Second, photographers continued to rehash debates about the artistic and documentary features of photography made by photographers in the 1920s and 1930s. Though the issue of art versus document remained the same, after 1957 photographers began discussing their relation to socialist realism.

### **Regulating Photography: The Party, Censorship, and Photojournalism**

The nature of the debate about aesthetics in photography at the time correlated directly to the sorts of questions photographer artists and photographer journalists were asking in the 1920s and 1930s. Photography critiques in *Sovetskoe foto* demonstrate the very ambiguity faced by Soviet photographers in shooting artistic (or even journalistic) photographs: what constitutes too much abstraction, and what style or styles should a successful photograph incorporate? When it was reestablished, as when it was founded in 1926, *Sovetskoe foto* was intended to be a journal for photojournalists, not art photographers. This was clearly stated in an article published in first issue of the journal in 1926 (as well as on the back cover), and was reiterated in the first issue of 1957.<sup>14</sup> Some photographer-journalists who worked for the illustrated journal supported the idea that too much criticism “drowns out the photo journalistic principle” of devotion to documentation.<sup>15</sup> But many disagreed with this point of view, one photojournalist for *Ogonek* stated that there was no reason that “photo art” and “photo reportage” should be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Portions of the aforementioned article were republished in the first 1957 issue. *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1926).

<sup>15</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 221.

mutually exclusive, as there were many examples where art and reportage were combined in single photographs.”<sup>16</sup>

By their very profession, photojournalists were tasked with extensive coverage of Party and government activities. Press photographs of this variety are hardly representative of “art,” however photographers as *Sovetskoe foto* defined it. The Party intended to control these images in particular, and sought an active role in the circulation of “correct” or “successful” images as much as possible in newspapers and magazines. In some cases this involved the careful selection of individual photographs for publication not only in popular widely circulated newspapers such as *Pravda*, but in smaller special interest periodicals as well.

The Party, however, was not only interested in controlling images of politicians and committee meetings. The regulation of art photography, a complicated, semi-official category in the Soviet Union of the 1950s, adds to the conundrum faced by the photographer-journalist and photographer-artist. Since the category was itself difficult to define, photographers could easily explain that they had no knowledge of their deviation from accepted aesthetics if their work was questioned. Photography as a whole represented the interests of “official” or professional photojournalists, many of whom produced press photographs that doubled as art objects. An art image could easily masquerade as photojournalism due to the prevalence of intense cropping and angled photography in illustrated journals. Photographers objected to the fact that “the consideration of concrete ‘errors’ in photojournalism was conducted at such a high level of the party... undoubtedly, the influence of the Stalinist leadership style in art when

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<sup>16</sup> “Uspeshno reshat’ glavnie temi fotopublitsistiki seminar fotokorrespondentov belorussii, latvii, litvii, estonii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 21.

assessing and addressing individual works...”<sup>17</sup> Simply put, if a press photograph came under review, the photographer could easily claim it was an art image, serving a completely separate purpose from a documentary image. Because of the fluidity of the category of art photography, and because photography straddled the line between art and documentary, photographers had a margin of freedom available to them.

Still, these complications hardly prevented criticism at the highest levels of the party, who exerted financial as well as ideological control over news content. On July 26, 1958, a secret decree of the CPSU sharply criticized the illustrated magazines *Ogonek* and *Sovetskii soiuz* for publishing the work of Dmitri Baltermants and D. B. Rukovich. The document commented on the “political immaturity of editorial staff who allowed their publication.”<sup>18</sup> It is unclear why Rukovich was singled out, but Baltermants had been watched closely by the CPSU since his days at *Izvestiia* during the war.<sup>19</sup> Despite the popularity of illustrated journals, the following year the Central Committee of the CPSU reduced the economic allowance of the journal *Sovetskoe foto* from 24,500 rubles to 15,000 effective May 1, 1959.<sup>20</sup> The decree also advised “the Central Committee of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics, regional committees and the regional party committee to revise the rates of royalties to local journals in the direction of reduction.”<sup>21</sup> It is uncertain why the Central Committee slashed *Sovetskoe foto*’s budget, but it appears as though it was an attempt to curb what they considered exorbitant spending. But for a journal that included photographs, the reduction surely had a

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<sup>17</sup> V. T. Stigeev, *Vek Fotografii*, 223.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>20</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 11, op. 1, d. 114, l. 69. (Proekt, Postanovlenie KPSS).

<sup>21</sup> RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 114, l. 64.



deleterious effect. The following year, however, the Central Committee advised that publishers increase the circulation of publications in accordance with subscription rates, and funds were allocated to cover the cost of increased printing.<sup>22</sup> Despite budget cuts to the staff at *Sovetskoe foto* the previous year, its circulation increased from 123,000 issues per month to 130,000.<sup>23</sup> Suffice it to say, that despite attempts to push the envelope in terms of what could be published, photographers and editors at *Sovetskoe foto* were, at the very least, bound by government funds.

Overall, politicians and photojournalists maintained an amicable relationship, and Party members did publicly commend photojournalists for their efforts. In a three-page article published in the January 1962 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, photographers Evgeni Kriger, Yakov Khalip, Aleksei Pakhomov, Semyon Raskin, and Mikhail Trakhman discussed their coverage of the XXII Congress of the Communist Party. Kriger commented that photographers must “never forget the moment when our Masters of Photography were fortunate enough to meet with Nikita Khrushchev. It was nice that, along with other Party leaders and members of the Congress, Khrushchev took the time to be photographed with photojournalists and documentary film makers.”<sup>24</sup> Yakov Khalip similarly addressed the relationship between the party and photographers: “It has become a tradition on days of great historical significance to be photographed with the leaders of the Party and the government... Our comrades in the photography profession...continue photographing groups of participants in meetings and conventions.”<sup>25</sup> At the 1961

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<sup>22</sup> “Postanovlenie Komissii TsK KPSS po voprosam ideologii, kul'turi i mezhdunarodnikh partiinikh sviazei,” 12 April 1960. (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 65, l. 166).

<sup>23</sup> RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 65, l. 166. Note, this figure applies only to private subscriptions and does not include figures for libraries, universities, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Evgeni Kriger, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1962): 6.

<sup>25</sup> Yakov Khalip, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1962): 7.

plenum of the Union of Journalists of the USSR Khrushchev directly addressed photojournalists.

All our country is preparing for the XXII Congress of the Communist Party. Getting ready for this important date, are photojournalists. We [the Party] propose to the Congress to prepare a new photo exhibition, which will explain the life of Soviet people and their progress in industry, construction, agriculture, the achievements of science and culture, our beacons of communism, of the people's Communist Party...<sup>26</sup>

As such, photojournalists operated not only in close proximity to the upper echelons of the government, but served as visual mediators between the Party and the public. Yet, even as photographers such as Baltermants were being investigated by the Central Committee, the Party acknowledged the role photojournalists played in propagating and building Soviet socialism. This was not a contradiction: the Party's need for photographers and photographic "evidence" may well have intensified its desire for ideological control. Especially after 1956, photojournalists were galvanized to document how Soviet life had become better, encouraged by Khrushchev's relative easing of press regulation and censorship.

This is not to say that photographers and photography critics at *Sovetskoe foto* wanted a complete lack of regulation. Professional evaluation cannot be equated with government censorship. During this period articles in *Sovetskoe foto* obsessively critiqued photography exhibitions as well as photographs the editorial staff chose to publish. The distinction, however, is between self or "community" criticism and government regulation: photographers felt that they alone reserved the right to critique photographic

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<sup>26</sup> "Glavnie temi sovetskoi pechati – v tsentr vnimaniia fotopublitsistiki," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1961): 13.

aesthetics, and therefore, it fell to them, and not state bureaucrats, to determine the “success” or “failure” of a photograph. This was perpetuated by the editorial staff at *Sovetskoe foto*, composed of “photography masters,” i.e. those who worked in photography prior to World War II, and representatives of the Ministry of Culture such as the journal’s Editorial Director Marina Bugayeva.

This attitude, however, was complicated in the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* because while photographers wanted their work to be judged by a community of their peers, most photographers also wanted more state support for organizational and union structure. In particular, photojournalists not only wanted a more comprehensive higher education and training in photography, but a unionized organization specific to photographers separate from the Union of Journalists. Thus photojournalists by and large wanted the state to provide financial support for photography institutions, but sought far less state involvement in aesthetic choices. With better education and organized unions, photographers could receive better training, and would therefore be more prepared to professionally critique the work of their colleagues; and certainly more than censors and state bureaucrats.

### **Photographic Aesthetics in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s**

Aesthetics as discussed in the 1950s and 1960s were thus informed by a number of factors in dialogue with past questions about avant-garde and photomontage as well as present questions about government involvement and regulation. In terms of appraising the quality of photographic work, critics often compared visual arts to other genres such as literature. Discussions about photography in the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* made almost no effort to problematize the reality effects of the photograph. Taking photography as a technology that could be harnessed for the purposes of propagating state projects, neither

the Ministry of Culture nor the Union of Journalists appeared to have any interest in the deceptive qualities of photography. Despite very real concerns about avoiding purely documentary photographs, those that were quickly and shoddily shot, and “naturalism,” (an amorphous category used to describe “bad” photographs), government agencies lacked any real language with which to appraise photographs, especially those that straddled the line between art object and indexical document.



Fig. 11. Mikhail Kocharian Vladimir Kharstyan. *Water- A Life I*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (November 1964)

The critiques that emerged from the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* defined the necessary criteria of a successful photojournalistic image. A “good” image should be artistic, give an eyewitness account of an event, and have a structure and aesthetic purpose that was easily discernible to its viewers.<sup>27</sup> Photography critics were fond of making

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<sup>27</sup> As stated previously, photo-art in Russian is particularly convoluted and has many meanings. Art in this particular case, can be taken to mean that it is visually striking, appealing. “Artistry” in photographs was almost never defined by contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*, who avoided discussing what exactly “art” in photographs looked like apart from vague generalizations.

generalizations and often avoided discussing the specific criteria necessary for a successful image. This is not unique to photo criticism by any stretch. It was a feature of socialist realism that all criticism was work-specific because the general guidelines were so vague. In a way this was quite un-Soviet, since the criticism itself did not derive from a set of Marxist-Leninist or dialectical materialist principles, but rather from the work itself.



Fig. 12. Mikhail Kocharian Vladimir Kharstyan. *Water- A Life 2*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (November 1964)

Mikhail Kocharian and Vladimir Kharstyan's two photographs entitled *Water-A Life*, shown at the *Fifth All-Union Photographic Exhibition* held in 1963, were criticized because they provided only an eyewitness account of scorched dry earth and a stream of water shooting up into the air (Figs. 11-12). According to their reviewer, the images lacked a coherent narrative and the photographers acted "more as an eyewitness than as artists and poets."<sup>28</sup> Kocharian and Kharstyan's photographs were compared to a third photograph featured at the exhibition, B. Dadvadze's *Manganese* (Fig. 13). Dadvadze's

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<sup>28</sup> L. Dyko, "Iz-za novikh trebovanii," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1964): 12.

image of manganese being carted out of a Georgian mine was extolled for its artistry, and Dadvadze was lauded for his “creative activities” in the industrial landscape. *Manganese*, as opposed to *Water-A Life*, had captured the “poetry of the preset theme...and reflected the correct decision in the tone and linear figure.”<sup>29</sup> The need to capture in a photograph the narrative qualities of a poem, novel or painting, is a reoccurring obsession of photography critics.

Much like the discussions surrounding the nature of socialist realism in the early 1930s, photographers in the 1950s theorized about a photographic language, though these discussions lacked any mention of a viewer’s interpretive abilities. Furthermore, the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* had very specific ideas about reception and artistic representation. The article “International Communications of Photo-art” published in the December 1960 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, praised the recent international activity of Soviet press photographers, highlighting their participation in the 1960 *Inter-press Photo* exhibition in Berlin, as well as thirty other international exhibitions. These exhibits were successful in extending friendship to foreign nations because “the photograph’s language of truth does not demand translation, it is close and clear to everyone.”<sup>30</sup> This is an important departure from pre-war official paranoia about the ability of the photograph to show the truth, and marks a major change that occurred during this period.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>30</sup> “Mezhdunarodnie kommunikatsii fotoiskusstva,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1960): 1.



Fig. 13. B. Dadvadze, *Manganese*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (November 1964)

Yet, the idea of a single photographic language in any visual representation is overly simplistic. This example does, however, demonstrate how photographers and photo enthusiasts working on *Sovetskoe foto* conceived of photography's contemporary position as a single, utilitarian language which could be channeled into "bright representations about the Soviet Union's public and political system."<sup>31</sup> This artistic "language" of the photograph should be adhered to, and the skilled photographer will shoot subjects in a manner that are easily ascertainable for the viewer. Thus, according to some photography critics at the time, viewers may interpret the minutia of the photograph in a variety of ways but the overall meaning of the photograph is accessible to all. This was a way of observing official ideology (accessible to all) while preserving space (the details) for professional criticism.

*Sovetskoe foto*'s preoccupation with the aesthetic aspects of photography was coupled with discussions about the narrative capacities of photographs. This was inherently problematic because, as a visual technology, photography undermines linear

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 1.

narratives and promotes a particular way of looking at a given phenomenon, “dislocating time and space.”<sup>32</sup> Although this is a recent interpretation of photography’s visual capacities, a photograph is always a representation of a phenomenon that happened in the past. Similarly, as Roland Barthes suggests, the photograph is not a narrative medium: its release and reception are a “matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behavior of these groups to the social totality of which they are part.”<sup>33</sup> To study a photograph is to study a representation of what was significant at the time it was produced by those who produced it. Barthes’ “The Photographic Message” is at times extreme in its argument, but usefully highlights how photographic narrative is limited and supplemented by what the photographer captures and how he chooses to capture it. As such any overarching narrative, such as that proposed by contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*, is hampered both by the singularity of the photograph or photographs (its dislocation), and the interpretation of the viewer, such as what they find “interesting” about the photograph. In short, there are multitudes of ways to view the same photograph and thus any possibility of an overarching narrative is destroyed. This was not, however, taken into account when critics appraised photographs in *Sovetskoe foto*. Instead, and in keeping with Soviet ideas about a teleological historical narrative, critics tended to view photographs as having a singular ideological and aesthetic message. In a successful image, this meaning would be easily and readily apparent to any viewer, whether or not they were familiar with Soviet ideology and photographic aesthetics.

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<sup>32</sup> Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Method.” *Image, Music, Texts*. (London: Fontana, 1977), 15.



Other photography critics at the time often chose to discuss photography in terms of its “poetic” or “lyrical” qualities, associating photography more closely with literature and other socialist realist artistic media. But these critics continued to struggle with how viewers interpreted images. If a single photographic language existed, then there would be no need to interpret photographs for the viewer (or in the case of *Sovetskoe foto*, the reader). In February 1961, A. Zis published an article in *Sovetskoe foto* about the work of Georgian photographer D. Davidov and his previous summer’s exhibition in Tbilisi sponsored by the Union of Journalists of Georgia and the Ministry of Culture of the Georgian SSR. Davidov had been working as a portrait and landscape photographer for thirty years by the time of his exhibition, as a photographer of theatrical productions and for a brief time as assistant to Georgian theater director Marjanishvili. Zis finds Davidov’s photographs “expressive,” and appraises them as true “works of art.”<sup>34</sup> He goes further, describing Davidov’s photograph “Forest” in poetic language. “Here, for example, is a beautiful landscape. Davidov’s ‘Forest’ is a soft and poetic picture of nature,” he wrote. “The photograph is full of light and the atmosphere is clean and transparent. The author of the work managed to express the mood well and to create a meaningful, multifaceted lyrical image.”<sup>35</sup> Zis’ article demonstrates one of the severe limitations of 1950s and 1960s photography criticism. Commentators often did not know how to express photographic aesthetics in language beyond the technical terms of painting and literary criticism. Zis was highly educated, the article expressly points to the fact that he achieved a Ph.D. and appears well qualified to comment on about Davidov’s work. But he also seems hampered in his ability to describe photographs even as he was

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<sup>34</sup> A. Zis, “Master Fotoiskusstva D. Davidov,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1961): 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

writing for the premier photography journal of the time. His interpretation of the image stops abruptly and his lyrical descriptions are in a way “translating” the image. In short, without his explanation, the photographic language was not immediately transparent to the viewer. The contradiction between the need to interpret the image for viewers and the photograph’s purportedly universal language emerges in Zis’ critique.

The difficulty for critics was that photography was still placed precariously at the periphery of the artistic community in the 1950s and 1960s. Though photographers in the 1950s and 1960s were experimenting with avant-garde techniques, their work was by no means as adventurous as the work of 1920s artists who were experimenting with far more abstracted images and severe cropping. Thus, any sort of language of critique that was valid or acceptable in the 1920s was not particularly applicable, but also off-limits to critics who did not want to conjure up the technical terms prescribed to a previously outcast artistic movement (or at the very least were wary of doing so). In an article covering a photography conference attended by photojournalists of various Republics, the head of the Photography Department of *Ogonek* at the time, Semyon Friedland, similarly commented on the lyrical nature of photography. “Mastering the techniques of reportage,” he wrote, “photographers should enrich their photographic language, carefully study and find a means of expression of that language.”<sup>36</sup> In terms of critical appraisals of photography, narrative, artistry, and documentary were all important components of a “successful” photograph. Ultimately, critics lacked sufficient language for talking about photography specifically. While there was a large theoretical backlog about socialist realism, critics struggled to apply this to photography.

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<sup>36</sup> “Uspeshno reshat’ glavnie temi fotopublitsistiki seminar fotokorrespondentov belorussii, latvii, litvii, estonii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 20.

Even without a comprehensive language for discussing photography specifically, critics were able to agree on certain principles that applied specifically to photography. In the early 1960s, *Sovetskoe foto* again began discussing the nature of press photography as it related to art. Soviet press photography should provide an eyewitness account, the focus of previous decades, but aesthetic concerns should be of equal importance to photojournalists. Articles in *Sovetskoe foto* transitioned from discussing photography as distinctively documentary with artistic aspects, to arguing that photojournalism was artistic. In March 1962 *Sovetskoe foto* published a three page article about Alexander Ptitsyn, photojournalist at the journal *Sovetskii soiuz*, and his exhibition at the Central House of Journalists. The author, E. Kravchuk, describes Ptitsyn's work as "fresh, bright, with impressive form." As a photographer, Kravchuk wrote, Ptitsyn possessed "acute observation, the vision of the artist."<sup>37</sup> Kravchuk goes on to say that Ptitsyn's work typifies modern photojournalism.

Ptitsyn's compositions are characterized by dynamism. Even when depicting architectural fragments, the new observatory dome or industrial enterprise, the high-rise building of Moscow State University, or the farm stable, he knows how to show a detail of the characteristic that defines the rational beauty of modern buildings. The informational value of such images is not large, but they get the quality of a work of art...<sup>38</sup>

Kravchuk clearly points out that Ptitsyn's work crosses the line from documentary into art. He also discusses the abstraction, contrasting points, and focus in Ptitsyn's photographs. Ptitsyn, according to the author, was no stranger to experimentation in his

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<sup>37</sup> E. Kravchuk, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1962): 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

work as a photojournalist. “A. Ptitsyn” Kravchuk wrote “is a photojournalist and from the beginning...his work is distinguished by ideology, depth of thought, originality of interpretations, temperament, perfect pictorial form.”<sup>39</sup> Kravchuk draws the reader’s attention to Ptitsyn as journalist, but also pictorialist, and concretely highlights the connection between photojournalism and aesthetics.

A year earlier, in the February 1961 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, Karel Hájek, editor of the Czechoslovak journal *Light in Images* and chairman of the Czechoslovak Section of Photographers, published an article entitled “Our Way – Socialist Realism.” Hájek comments on the state of Western contemporary art photography:

The quest for new forms of expression in itself is natural and logical in every art, but often leads to an empty formalism. This is especially noticeable in modernist trends in representation in the West, some techniques of which over the last few years, in one way or another have had an effect on the development of Czechoslovak pictures. A total blur, graininess, image blur, distortion due to shooting from up close...contrast enhancement, the use of either excessively low or high tone, solarization... occasionally one or another of these methods has caught on. The application of some of them in contemporary art photography seems to me, in some cases quite useful and justified. They immediately draw the viewer’s attention, help the photo-artist disclose a deeper and brighter idea, in other words, are for the benefit of what is called the aesthetics of unity of content and form.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Karl Hájek, “Nash put’ – sotsialisticheskii realizm,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1961): 21.

Hájek alternates between explaining the utility of limited experimentation with techniques familiar to avant-garde photographers of the 1920s, in terms of visual interest, and the danger of pursuing pure photographic abstraction, or formalism. He notes that in striving to reach “novelty and originality of the forms,” this cause can be “easily distorted” and “fall into bad taste.”<sup>41</sup> To achieve unity of content and form, a tenet of socialist realism, the photographer must avoid overt abstraction, though “the distribution of black-and-white or color spots, lighting, and tone, all the elements of graphic forms must be aesthetic” according to Hájek.<sup>42</sup> Hájek concludes that while abstraction may captivate audiences through visual interest, it should not place visual style over representation and betray the purpose of socialist realism in photography: “It is not enough to create truly artistic photographs,” he wrote. “To capture the truth of life in vivid images in perfect aesthetic form, to show people how the story is going on around us - that is the main goal of photography.”<sup>43</sup>

Karel Hájek’s assertions about the aesthetics of art photography waver between acceptance of avant-garde visual styles and limited experimentation and outright rejection of formalism. Interestingly enough, however, he does not insist that experimentation with abstraction exists outside of socialist realism, only that it should not betray the balance between representation and conceptual style. That Hájek is Czech, not a Soviet photographer, makes very little difference. His article about the state of photography and its relationship to socialist realism was approved and accepted by the editorial staff at *Sovetskoe foto*, and thus was pertinent to the journal’s readership because it represented, generally, the point of view of Soviet photojournalists. Still, Hájek was toeing a political

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 21.

line. “Formalism” had become a clichéd word as early as the 1940s. It was used in the 1930s to denigrate, marginalize, and even punish the avant-garde, and while still in use in the 1940s and afterwards, it was already seen as having been overused in criticism. There was a consensus that formalism in art remained unacceptable. It was becoming acceptable, however, to publicly acknowledge that aspects of what critics previously labeled formalist were actually acceptable and thus, mistakenly denounced.

Prominent Soviet photojournalists were also discussing questions of socialist realism and photography. In 1961 at a congress for photojournalists, *Ogonek* photo correspondent Vsevolod Tarasevich stated that in terms of photographic aesthetics “there is only one creative method, that of socialist realism. Reporting is one of the most effective means though which this method is carried out in the photograph.”<sup>44</sup> And a year later, in 1962, Leonid Volkov Lannit published an article about portrait photography, explaining that photographers should not be afraid to “approach light and shadow in non-traditional ways.” “Photography is painting with light. The illusory idea of the terrain and the boundaries of volumetric forms gives us a gradation of light relations. Where else but in the human face, are soft focus and sometimes subtle play of light and shade able to express all the human senses?”<sup>45</sup> Experimentation was a part of this, but subtlety was also key. Too much abstraction or cropping remained unacceptable.

### **Photography and Higher Education in the Soviet Union**

Professionals sympathized with amateur photographers, as many had begun their career as amateurs themselves. Arguments about aesthetics in photography and photojournalism were directly related to photographers’ concerns about access to higher

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<sup>44</sup> “Uspeshno reshat’ glavnie temi fotopublitsistiki seminar fotokorrespondentov belorussii, latvii, litvii, estonii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 20.

<sup>45</sup> L. Volkov Lannit, “O kompozitsii fotoreportera,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1962): 25.

education and the establishment of a Photographers Union that could adequately address questions about photography and its relation to both the press and art photography. D. Sherbakov and B. Stechkin, along with a number of other academics and photographers, published “Photography Needs an Organization” in the December 1957 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*. Sherbakov and his co-authors highlighted the demands of photographers across the country who were in “desperate” need of “photo-technical and creative help.”<sup>46</sup> This “desperation” was the terminology used by Sherbakov, but photojournalists themselves were also interested in guiding the work of amateur photographers. Calling attention to the first Russian technical society, which had been formed over seventy years earlier, Sherbakov appealed to the editors at *Sovetskoe foto* to discuss the possibility of an organization with the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Journalists. This organization, once established, should advance both the scientific and artistic capabilities of photography, as well as provide lectures for amateur photographers. The impetus for Sherbakov’s article is twofold. First, he states that men and women who were already professional photojournalists needed an All-Union photography organization because they continued to work outside of any formal union separate from that of the Union of Journalists. While the Union of Journalists tended to some of the needs of photojournalists, providing jobs, equipment, exhibition space etc., it only served the needs of photojournalists. In a society with greater access to photographic equipment than ever before, amateurs needed training and guidance to do “greater work.”<sup>47</sup> Sherbakov remains vague, but presumably he and his co-authors wanted an organization that would provide the same opportunities to photographers who worked outside of press

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<sup>46</sup> D. Sherbakov, “Fotografi Nuzhna Organizatsiia,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1957): 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

outlets. Sherbakov's second concern, which he found even more problematic, was that amateur photographers did not know how to produce acceptable photographs for themselves. "It is no secret," Sherbakov adds, "that because of the absence of staff and public control, household photos are sometimes slipshod portraits" which "impart bad artistic taste to the worker."<sup>48</sup> Because amateur photographers were able to exhibit their work at special exhibitions, Sherbakov argued that it was important to educate photography enthusiasts about technical skills. A comprehensive educational structure would not only improve amateur photographers' work, but also help create a more centralized and professional generation of photographers and photojournalists.<sup>49</sup> This in turn would enhance the genre's cultural importance. Furthermore, an All-Union institution for the advancement of photo technical education would not only contain branches to show professional and amateur photographers how to channel their creativity into more acceptable photographs, but it would also be the main distributor of all photographic information. Ultimately, a photographer's union would consolidate all aspects of photography and the professions associated with it, from producing photographic equipment to education and organizing exhibitions.

In response to Sherbakov's article, G. Mutovkin, A. Denisin, and I. Mikhailovski published "We are for an Organization for Photographers" in the January 1958 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*. Mutovkin, Denisin, and Mikhailovsky were photographers from the Leningrad amateur photography club, who similarly expressed concern at the Ministry of Culture's failed attempts at establishing an All-Union Photography organization. Previous attempts, such as the Association of Photomasters, as well as photography's

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>49</sup> See chapter four.



inclusion in the Union of Artists in the 1920s and early 1930s, inevitably excluded certain interested groups, particularly amateur photographers as well as those involved in the production of chemicals and camera equipment.<sup>50</sup> Mutovkin and his colleagues at the Leningrad amateur photography club argued, much like Sherbakov, that although they worked together to confront theoretical questions about representation, photographic technology, techniques and composition, they wanted professional guidance. A formal organization including amateur and professional photographers could better address ideological, theoretical, aesthetic and technical questions.

Similarly, G. Sverdlovsk expressed concern over the educational possibilities for professional photographers and photojournalists in the June 1957 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*. Generally, students interested in photojournalism would enter the journalism department of their university or institute, and take two semesters of courses on photojournalism, spending their first semester covering the theoretical background of photography, and their second working with cameras. At the end of their second semester, students were required to turn in only four photographs: one 13x18 sample of architectural photography, one landscape photograph of the same size, and two 9x12 portraits.<sup>51</sup> The possibility for learning technical skills during these courses was minimal, as it was common for hundreds of students to share only a handful of cameras. For Sverdlovsk, this educational background was completely inadequate and left students “absolutely powerless to make a good newspaper picture.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> G. Mutovkin, A. Denisin and I. Mikahilovski, “My za organizatsiei dlia fotografov,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1958): 10.

<sup>51</sup> G. Sverdlovsk, “Vozmozhnosti v fotozhurnalistiki,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1957): 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

Combining photography and journalism into a single curriculum was originally designed to train students to be photographer-journalists, who would be equally competent at both writing articles and snapping photographs. But because the focus of journalism departments in Soviet institutions was on literary, not photographic, education, journalism students felt they were left without the proper skills for positions at newspapers and magazines. Instead, these students were predominantly offered secretarial and managerial positions at newspapers and magazines, while older, more experienced photographers were assigned posts as photo correspondents.

The Journalist's Union was clearly viewed as inadequate in terms of education and providing the institutional support necessary for addressing questions about photography in general, much less press photography and photographic aesthetics. Other institutional bases for photography, such as local clubs, floundered in comparison with tight-knit unionized and state funded organizations such as the Writer's Union and Artist's Union. This was recognized by a special Commission of the Central Committee of the CPSU on the issues of ideology, culture, and international relations in 1959. The committee questioned the efficacy of the journalism program at the prestigious Moscow State University, in particular graduates' ability to find posts, and the quality of their work.<sup>53</sup> What these articles demonstrate is that even in the first issues after its reinstatement, contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*, both amateur and professional, were acutely aware of the educational and organizational chaos that contributed to the confusion amongst the various genres of photography. Significantly, they realized that their readership wanted guidance that higher education was not providing them. Amateurs and

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<sup>53</sup> "Postanovlenie Komissii TsK KPSS po voprosam ideologii, kul'turi i mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii partii," 22 August, 1959 (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 46, l. 152).

professionals alike wanted a set of standardized aesthetic rules and technical education. This would elevate the standards of photography as a whole.

Four years later, Marina Bugayeva, in response to contemporary criticisms of photography, spoke at the 1961 plenum of the Union of Journalists of the USSR about the complications faced by professional photographers. Some of her concerns were practical, such as access to film, photo paper, and letterpress for photo reproduction. First and foremost, however, she stressed that photographers desperately lacked “an organized photographic education” and expertise amongst the “authors, speakers and photography theorists,” particularly at central and Republican press agencies.

Recently, in the newspaper *Sovetskaia kul'tura* (*Soviet Culture*) famous art critic Comrade Kemenov delivered a paper “Abstract Art in Light of Marxist Criticism,” which correctly criticizes abstract painters, but nevertheless commits a number of errors in the evaluation of photographs. Regardless of what Comrade Kemenov says and thinks, the art of photography exists. It is recognized by the entire world.<sup>54</sup>

The article in question, Bugayeva explains, criticized 12 photographs submitted for publication by the photo section of the Committee of Youth Organizations at the International Photo Exhibition in Leipzig. They, therefore, had no bearing on the state of Soviet photography or the talent of young Soviet photographers because the images were not submitted by Soviet citizens.<sup>55</sup> But her real criticism has little to do with Kemenov’s denial of artistry in these particular photographers’ work. Perhaps the photographs themselves were not particularly artistic, but Kemenov should not judge artistic merit of

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<sup>54</sup> “Glavnie temi sovetskoi pechati – v tsentr vnimaniia fotopublitsistiki,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1961): 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

all photographers based solely on this exhibition. These sorts of egregious statements, according to Bugayeva, typified the lack of knowledge, experience and, in this case, interest in fact checking, that art critics had when attempting to tackle photographic aesthetics.

Yet, despite the lack of knowledge amongst critics, *Sovetskoe foto* continued to publish reviews by those who were not necessarily aware of the conditions faced by photographers. Painter Nikolai Zhukov, People's Artist of the RSFSR, published a seemingly laudatory article about the state of photography in the Soviet Union in 1962.

Modern cameras, optics, and film have removed all the technical difficulties that the photographer encountered 20 and 30 years ago. They grant the photographer possibilities and opportunities that at one time were only available to artists.<sup>56</sup>

Zhukov adds that he wished “the editors of the journal *Sovetskoe foto* would always be happy to help photographers and amateurs in their creative growth.”<sup>57</sup> While it was true that camera and film technology had improved over the past twenty years, Zhukov's demeaning article shows his ignorance of photography. In short, he downplays levels of personal creativity or skill, focusing instead on photography as a technology. While transcripts of the meetings of the photo section of the Union of Journalists continued to stress the necessity of better and more accessible equipment and training amongst photographers both amateur and professional, Zhukov a powerful member of the Artists' Union of the RSFSR seems unconcerned with current complaints. Though his commentary itself is unobjectionable, it demonstrates general lack of knowledge about

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<sup>56</sup> N. Zhukov, “Iz rabot, poctupivshikh na bystavku ‘semiletka v deistvii 1962,’” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1962): 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

the photography industry. Just because technological advancements had been made, did not necessarily mean photographers were using this equipment. Furthermore, it ignores the role of photographer themselves. Though Zhukov states that photographers were now assigned tasks previously left to artists, photographers were not afforded the same cultural prestige or access to resources as other cultural figures.

The photo section of the Union of Journalists did attempt to rectify organizational and educational difficulties through a variety of means, but primarily through lectures and workshops open to professional and amateur photographers. In 1959, the Union of Journalists in Georgia began a series of seminars aimed at discussing and addressing problems confronted by press and amateur photographers. Seminar topics included the work of individual photographers and recent photography exhibitions in Georgia and the other Soviet Republics. At many of the seminars, photographers voiced concerns about the poor quality of photographs in print. The editorial staff of journals and newspapers subjected them, repeatedly, to reproaches. Yet the members of the editorial staff, despite many invitations, were not present at the seminars.<sup>58</sup> It seems that for professional photojournalists these workshops proved useful, or at the very least they themselves were willing to take into account criticisms of their work. At a seminar about the work of G. Shuster, given by B. Rusetskii, a member of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, it was noted that “in Rusetskii’s opinion, the reason for the failure of the author [G. Shuster] was inept choice in shooting and the improper use of lenses...” But he also noted that “G. Shuster took criticism into account, evidenced by his photographs published lately in the press.”<sup>59</sup> Many photographers voiced their willingness to work more closely

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<sup>58</sup> V. Ginzberg and A. Balabuev, “Tvorcheskie seminari-skola masterstva,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1961): 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

not only with the photo section of the Union of Journalists in Georgia, but also photojournalists in Moscow, Leningrad, and other Soviet Republics to improve the quality of their photographs.

Similar plans were made for seminar workshops in the following years, particularly at congresses held by the Bureau of the All-Union photo section, a small branch of the Union of Journalists, which was responsible for overseeing press photography. Following the exhibition *The Seven-Year Plan in Action*, in 1961, Moscow photojournalist for *Iskra (Spark)* Vesvolod Tarasevich held a workshop for Uzbek photojournalists.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, at the 1961 meeting of the All-Union photo section, a representative of the Lithuanian photo section of the Union of Journalists, B. Yuodakis expressed excitement at the upcoming photojournalism conference between photographers from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Belarus.<sup>61</sup> Of particular note at the congress was the progress of the photo section in Belarus. Both the Minsk Trade School No. 5 and the Minsk Polytechnic expanded their journalism programs to require submitting photo essays as a necessary component of their degree, and began offering courses in dark room technology and photo printing techniques. Similarly, delegates to the conference noted recent attempts to collaborate between Republican photo sections and photography clubs.

Much attention has been paid to the relationship the photo sections of the Union of Journalists and amateur photo clubs. Participants of the meeting N. Kapelyusch (Gorky), M. Galkin (Alma-Ata), and A. Belogur (Kiev) told how the photo sections exercise social control over the ideological

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<sup>60</sup> “‘Otosiyudu’ v fotosektsiiakh soiuzha zhurnalistov,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1961): 44.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

content of the photo clubs to help amateur photographers. In some cases, where photo sections did control the activities of the club, some wrong practices encourage petty themes. In some cases, ideologically and artistically weak images were sent to overseas photo exhibitions. All this, according to those present, can be avoided if the photo section of the Union of Journalists would routinely assist in the organization of photo clubs...<sup>62</sup>

Though delegates conceded that they had made previous efforts to regulate and participate in the activities of amateur photography clubs, they recognized that regulation was key to aiding in the photographic education of amateur enthusiasts. Furthermore, harkening back to concerns presented in previous issues of *Sovetskoe foto*, photojournalists continued to lament organizational disarray. “During the discussion it was noted that one of photojournalist’s creative weaknesses at present is an underdeveloped knowledge of theoretical problems confronting photojournalism and photography.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, greater education and association between various organizations, professional or otherwise, was crucial to elevating the aesthetic possibilities of photography.

In the summer of 1961, the Seminar of Photo Publishers and Photo Correspondents of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia was held in Vilnius, as scheduled at the Congress of the All-Union photo section of the Union of Journalists of the USSR. Attended by prominent Moscow photojournalists Dmitri Baltermants, Semyon Friedland and Vsevolod Tarasevich, the congress also invited representatives from each of the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 44.

hosting Republics. Bugayeva “urged participants to comprehensively discuss the creative challenges facing photojournalists, to identify ways to further enhance the ideological level and professional skill of newspaper reporters, magazines, wire services.”<sup>64</sup> Much like Bugayeva at previous conferences, Latvian delegate Akmola complained not only about the limited education of photojournalists, but editorial staff as well. “Not every editor and executive secretary can properly assess the merits of a picture,” Akmola explained.<sup>65</sup> He advised closer collaboration between editorial committees and photojournalists. “It may be appropriate,” he suggested, to decide the “publishing of some pictures collectively with the participation of the correspondent.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, for photojournalists and photographers, institutional limitations, lack of theoretical knowledge and coordination between amateur clubs and the photo section of the Union of Journalists all hampered the aesthetic quality of photographs both professional and amateur, predominantly in the Republics but in Moscow and Leningrad as well.

As a result of these meetings, conferences and lectures, *Sovetskoe foto* projected that the ideological importance of photography would benefit from greater education for professional and amateur photographers. The XXII Congress of the CPSU, government reports, and political speeches “repeatedly emphasized the paramount importance of increasing the ideological level and the professional skills” of photojournalists in the year 1961.<sup>67</sup> In terms of seminars and creative workshops, *Sovetskoe foto* noted the progress made at the Seminar of Photo Publishers and Photo Correspondents.

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<sup>64</sup> “Uspeshno reshat’ glavnie temi fotopublitsistiki seminar fotokorrespondentov belorussii, latvii, litvii, estonii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> “Dlia verkhovnogo ideologicheskoi fotozhurnalistiki,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1961): 1.



Suffice it to recall the seminar in Vilnius where press photographers of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia assembled. Important issues raised in the reports of meetings, such as “Photojournalists and Problematic Themes in the Soviet Press,” “*The Seven-Year Plan in Action, 1961*,” “On Form and Content,” “The Photojournalist and Editor,” and others, were discussed in depth. This was good professional training, not only for the participants, but also for many photojournalists throughout the country who were able to read the minutes of the reports.<sup>68</sup>

During the year, similar congresses and seminars were held in various Republics of the Soviet Union.

Similarly, the editorial staff at *Sovetskoe foto* found the lectures sponsored by the photo section of the Union of Journalists successful as well. Not only did they educate amateur photographers about the ideological role photojournalists played in the Soviet Union, but they also provided information about practical skills associated with photography and the press.

Students learned from the lectures about contemporary editorial requirements, for publishing photographs. They met with the employees of the newspaper *Izvestiia* and the magazine *Sovetskii soiuz*, courtesy of TASS. Attendees of the lectures took an active part in one of the creative “Thursdays” in the journal *Sovetskoe foto*. Soviet Photography Masters Yakov Khalip, Dmitri Baltermants, Semyon Friedland, Vsevolod Tarasevich, I. Tunkel, V. Malyshev, Sergei Ivanov-Alliluev and others,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 1.

shared their wealth of experience. Before long the students were art historians and experts on the issue of photography.<sup>69</sup>

Thus the journal's overall assessment of 1961 was that in terms of education and awareness about photography, the efforts of the photo section of the Union of Journalists had largely proved fruitful. Another article by the editors published a few months later found that 1961 was marked by a significant increase in the number of members in the photo section of the Union of Journalists and amateur photo clubs.<sup>70</sup> The fact that photography clubs had grown in popularity over the course of the year was interpreted as evidence that seminars and lectures were at the very least bringing together like minded hobbyists, and at most influencing the aesthetics of amateur photography, which helped to ease the editor's anxieties about education and aesthetics in personal collections and club exhibitions.

### **Photography Exhibitions and the SSOD**

Despite concerns about education, organizations, regulation, and press censorship, the number of photography exhibitions increased substantially in the period between 1956 and the mid-1960s, as did participation in international exhibitions. These included both solo exhibitions by particular photographers, exhibitions based on certain thematic genres, as well as general All-Union and international exhibitions. Between April 1959 and January 1960, archival records indicate that the photo section of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD) approved participation in nine international exhibitions, including *The Salon International des*

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<sup>69</sup> "Thursdays" refers to a section of the journal *Sovetskoe foto* that appeared periodically throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s in which a photographer or photographers would critique the work of amateur photographers. The title referred to the subjects and themes represented in this particular section of the journal, the majority of which were photographs of daily life. Ibid, 1.

<sup>70</sup> "Na vystavku 'Semiletka v deistvii 1962,'" *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1962): 14.

*clubs Photographiques, The Salon International d'art Photographique, and The National Exhibition of Art photography.*<sup>71</sup> Likewise, the Soviet Union hosted a number of International photography exhibitions and photojournalists entered their images in photojournalism and art photography exhibitions alike. For photojournalists and photographers, this meant exposure to Western styles of photography and contributed to the popularity of styles such as Italian neorealism in the Soviet Union.<sup>72</sup>

Initially, solo exhibitions tended to favor “masters of photography,” or those photographers who had been working for over twenty years. For example, in August 1959, the House of Friendship with Peoples of Foreign Countries, hosted an exhibition of work by P. A. Otsup, featuring photo portraits of Lenin, Kalinin, and Stalin, as well as photographs of the October Revolution and the Russian Civil War.<sup>73</sup> These photographs were politically unproblematic and were widely circulated throughout the pre-1956 Soviet Union in newspapers, journals, and books. Other small solo exhibitions, however, featured Aleksandr Rodchenko, Maks Alpert, and other members of Constructivist and avant-garde circles, and were received well by the public.

The photo section of the SSOD took an active role in cultivating international ties. For example, not only did it receive questions from, reply to and correspond with photographers and photography clubs in Western Europe, they often provided sample copies and subscriptions to the journal *Sovetskoe foto* with their replies. In one example French photographer M. Simonne who requested answers to questions about photography equipment, cameras, and secondary education for photographers, the president of the

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<sup>71</sup> See chapter three regarding more information about the SSOD. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, ll. 2, 13, 15-16, 20, 23, 30, 32, 50, 59.

<sup>72</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>73</sup> “Spravka o bystavke fotorabot P. A. Otsupa v dome druzhbi s narodami zarubezhnikh stran,” 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 35).

photo section of the SSOD responded by offering not only answers to Simonne's questions, but also offered suggestions of Soviet illustrated journals and periodicals which would provide examples of both historic and contemporary Soviet photographs.<sup>74</sup> Executive Secretary of *Sovetskoe foto*, Y. Tkachenko, also responded to Simonne's requests for information about photography in the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> The photo section often received letters from photography clubs as well, particularly in England, France and Austria, requesting negatives and prints of Soviet professional and amateur photographers for local exhibitions, which were often granted.

The photo section of the SSOD was also responsible for organizing international exhibitions in the Soviet Union itself, accepting submissions from participations of both socialist and capitalist countries.<sup>76</sup> In 1961 *The International Exhibition of Art Photography* panel selected 550 photos by 422 photographers from 55 countries from over 5,300 photographs that were submitted.<sup>77</sup> At this particular exhibition, the photo section also selected a jury of international photographers: T. Gaunt (a Czechoslovak photo-artist), P. Di Paolo (an Italian photographer), P. Svensson (an amateur photographer from Canada), and Shi Shaohua (Chairman of the All-China Association of Photographic Art).<sup>78</sup> In 1961, Moscow hosted two large international exhibitions devoted exclusively to photography: *The All-Union Photography Exhibition* and *The Moscow International Exhibition of Art Photography*.

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<sup>74</sup> "Pismo, sekretar prezidenta SSSR," 26 February 1959. (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, ll.72-74). Letter addressed to the "Secretary of the President of the USSR" by French photographer M. Simonne, answered by The President of the photo section of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries B. Shakhovskoi.

<sup>75</sup> "Vipolniaia vashu prosbu, redaktsiia zhurnala *Sovetskoe foto* subshaet vam kratkie otveti na voprosi frantsuzskogo fotografa M. Simonne," 30 May 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op.16, d. 47, l 67-74, 76).

<sup>76</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>77</sup> "550 Foto iz 55 stran v mire," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1961): 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

Much like the photo section of the SSOD, the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* were also responsible for international photography competitions, the winners of which were featured in various photography journals across Europe. One of the largest contests of this kind was held in 1962 in which *Sovetskoe foto* collaborated with the journals *Picture* (Hungary), *Photograph* (Poland), and *Czechoslovak Photography*, though the contest itself was suggested by the Fotohemisheverke of the German Democratic Republic.<sup>79</sup> *Sovetskoe foto* alone received 11,885 photographs from more than 2,000 applicants, including a number from Bulgaria and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, *Sovetskoe foto* editors and the photo section of the SSOD collaborated closely in the publication of images submitted to foreign contests and exhibitions. In one letter, Bugayeva suggested a collaborative effort between the staff at *Sovetskoe foto*, the photo section of the SSOD and the photo section of the House of Friendship with Peoples of Foreign Countries in selecting photographs to be submitted in exhibitions in Berlin, Budapest, Brookfield (Illinois), Pilsen and Sydney.<sup>81</sup> International exhibitions of Soviet photography were also frequently held in Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Hungary, Romania and Poland throughout the early 1960s. In 1960, the photo section of the SSOD sponsored and organized a number of international exhibitions featuring foreign photographers, for example, *Socialism Wins* featuring photographs of various socialist countries in Eastern Europe, *Live in Paris* and *Italy Today* among others.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, examples of exposure to Western photography are numerous and

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<sup>79</sup> M. Bugayeva, "Za sotsialisticheskoe fotoiskusstva k itogam mezhdunarodnogo fotokonkursa," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1962): 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>81</sup> "Redaktsiia *Sovetskoe foto*," 21 April 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op.16, d. 46, l. 56).

<sup>82</sup> "Na godichnom otchete v fotosektsii soiuza sovetskikh obshchestv druzhbi i kul'turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnimi stranami," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 46.

widespread, ranging from international exhibitions across Europe to minor university photography exhibits and conferences, such as V. P. Shorovskii's attendance at the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of Photojournalists at Miami University in Ohio.<sup>83</sup>

One of the largest annual photography exhibitions in the Soviet Union was *The Seven-Year Plan in Action (Semiletka v Deistvii)*, which ran from 1959 to 1963. This exhibition was the result of a collaborative effort between TASS, *Sovetskoe foto*, and the Union of Journalists (both the All Union and the Union of Journalists in each of the Republics). In 1961, *The Seven-Year Plan in Action* featured 970 photographs by 390 authors, and the exhibition was attended by about two hundred thousand Muscovites, representatives of the Union Republics, and foreign photographers.<sup>84</sup> Though these numbers may appear small, the exhibition actually reached a much wider audience. After its initial opening in Moscow, the exhibition traveled to Leningrad, Nizhni Tagil, Kuibyshev, Voronezh, Gorky, Vologda and Kriov in the RSFSR, the capital cities of each of the Republics, and abridged versions were held in Eastern and Western Europe. Prize winning photographs were also published in *Sovetskoe foto*, thus reaching subscribers, photographers and photography clubs across the Soviet Union, Germany, France and the United States. Though the exhibition was still dominated by works of Russian (largely based in Moscow and Leningrad) and Ukrainian photographers, prizes were increasingly awarded to photographers from other Republics, particularly Belarus, the Baltic Republics, and Uzbekistan. The annual report of the photo section of the SSOD also made an effort to promote interest in photography not only in Moscow but each of the

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<sup>83</sup> "Komissii TsK KPSS po voprosam ideologii, kul'turi i mezhdunarodnikh partiinikh sviazei," 12 April 1960 (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 65, l. 99).

<sup>84</sup> "Pozdravliaem uchastnikov fotobystavki 'semiletka v deistvii 1961,'" *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 3.

Soviet Republics.<sup>85</sup> In preparing for *The Seven-Year Plan in Action* Republican exhibition in 1962, the editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto* was especially pleased to announce that of the 98 works accepted by the exhibition committee in the Uzbek SSR, nearly half were prepared by amateur photographers.<sup>86</sup> This was attributed to the success of the previous *The Seven-Year Plan in Action* exhibitions the proliferation of photography seminars and lectures offered by local chapters of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, as well as columns in *Sovetskoe foto* that educated amateur photography enthusiasts about new camera technology and equipment.

*The Seven-Year Plan in Action* marked an effort on the part of Soviet cultural institutions to promote photography as art rather than a media useful only in journalism and newsprint. Photographers, both amateur and professional, who were awarded prizes for their work at *The Seven-Year Plan in Action* exhibitions, were addressed by the Minister of Culture of the RSFSR himself, and thanked for their artistic contributions to the building of communism.

Our photo masters and amateurs are not just the people who own modern photographic equipment, they are artists who play a major role in the development of one of the most important kinds of art, the art of photography. Photographs should tell millions of people about our country, about the greatness of the program adopted by the XXII Congress of the CPSU. Photojournalists have to capture for posterity our heroic modernity...They perform a task of the greatest importance sometimes in

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<sup>85</sup> “Na godichnom otchete v fotoseksii soiuzs sovetskikh obshchestv druzhbi i kul’turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnimi stranami,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1961): 46.

<sup>86</sup> “Na vystavku ‘semiletka v deistvii 1962,’” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1962): 14.

very difficult work conditions. They should always remember that their works will educate new generations of Soviet people.<sup>87</sup>

This speech, delivered by Nikolai Kuznetsov in 1961 at the conclusion of the exhibition, recognizes, first of all, that photographers were participating in some form of artistic process, though no exact definition of this method or its interpretation are provided. Secondly, Kuznetsov directly expresses the role of the photographer in picturing the Soviet person of the present and shaping the Soviet citizens of the future.

Thaw era photographers sought to forge effective connections between art and the Soviet public. This project directly confronted the Stalinist past, as photographers were tasked with helping to create new post-Stalinist identities for citizens who were skeptical of both the press and the current regime. Photographers continued to search for ways to make their images accessible, through the very style that exemplified a pre-Stalinist Soviet Union. This cause was taken up by energetic and enthusiastic journalists with the initiative to create active, critical readers. For *Sovetskoe foto*, it offered the opportunity to resume its original goal of showing and describing to readers what was believed to be the aesthetic heritage of Soviet photography as well as showcase its current developments. It was also manifested in the desire to inform the journal's viewers and readers about how to become skilled and intelligent in the aesthetic execution and interpretation of photographic images.

### **The Avant-garde and Photojournalism**

Similar to the rhetoric of artists in the early 1920s, by the late 1950s and early 1960s the Party and state encouraged photographers to participate in visualizing the ideal Soviet man and woman. In the case of the 1960s, as it had been in the 1920s,

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<sup>87</sup> "Vruchenie diplomov uchastnikam vystavki 'semiletka v deistvii,'" *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1962): 45.



photographers were helping to construct a Soviet identity inspired by the Party's insistence that art exists "primarily as an exponent of high ideological and moral principles," wrote Leonid Volkov Lannit.<sup>88</sup> "The formation of the new man" as written in the CPSU Program "is in the process of active participation in the construction of communism" and of utmost importance.<sup>89</sup>



Fig. 14. L. Ustinov and D. Khrenov, *Motocross*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 1 (January 1959)

These instructions are directly related to the employees of photography and photographic art. This is apparent from the success of exhibitions of recent years. The main themes in photographer are the construction of a new human and society. The features of the strong-willed, courageous,

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<sup>88</sup> L. Volkov Lannit, "Stroiteli kommunizma," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1962): 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

and noble character of Soviet people can be seen in the work leading photographers and our best photographs.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, the identities that photographers were encouraged to portray were post-Stalinist in that men and women were no longer defined strictly by their status as worker or *kolkhoznik*. Rather, portrayals of the Soviet person straddled the line between the private and public sphere. They are productive members of society though their personhood was no longer defined by their career. Instead, the Soviet citizen was an active participant in the building of communism, in both their career, but also in the home, in their private and leisure activities, and in their everyday lives.



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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 1.

Fig. 15. Ota Rikhter, *Youth*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (December 1959)

This particular political climate allowed photographers the possibility of investigating avant-garde aesthetics. The influence of the avant-garde on photographers in the 1950s and 1960s is easily identifiable and cannot be underestimated. Photojournalists in the late 1950s and early 1960s adopted Rodchenko's photographic style implicitly, without explicitly stating Rodchenko as an inspiration. This was because Rodchenko's colleagues denounced his work and accused him of formalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Thus, explicitly referencing Rodchenko had potentially damaging implications, and photographers were nervous about drawing attention to this source of inspiration. Nevertheless, Rodchenko's work became a template of sorts for many photographers in the late 1950s, and the return of photographs using the same deframing techniques, unique angles, and experimentation with light is significant (Figs. 14-15). A steady stream of articles about Rodchenko and his photographs had appeared in *Sovetskoe foto* since 1957. In 1961, *Sovetskoe foto* published a four-page article on Aleksandr Rodchenko. L. Volkov Lannit, the author of the piece, explained that "the role of Rodchenko in photography was equal to the role of Mayakovsky in poetry."<sup>91</sup> Volkov Lannit went on to explain that during the 1930s "charges of formalism, at times, reached the point of irrationality...Rodchenko, certainly, was not the militant formalist that some super conformists wished."<sup>92</sup> Volkov Lannit's rehabilitation of Rodchenko's artwork is

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<sup>91</sup> L. Volkov Lannit, "Aleksandr Rodchenko," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1961): 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

more or less in keeping with the cultural policies of the Thaw era. Yet the proliferation of images directly influenced by Rodchenko's avant-garde photography of the 1920s is astonishing, and a number of his photographs were featured at exhibition in Moscow and abroad. The January 1959 issue of *Sovetskoe foto* even included an article demonstrating how one could achieve the desired cropping technique (Fig. 16).

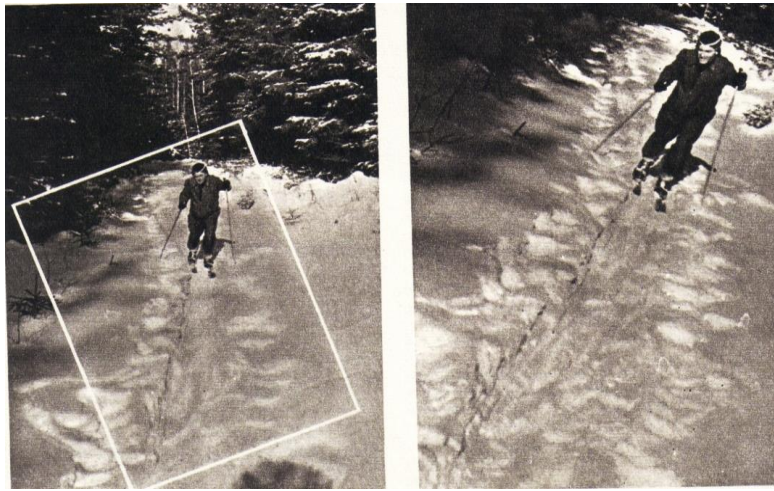


Fig. 16. E. Volkov, *Skiing*, black-and-white photographs, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (January 1959)

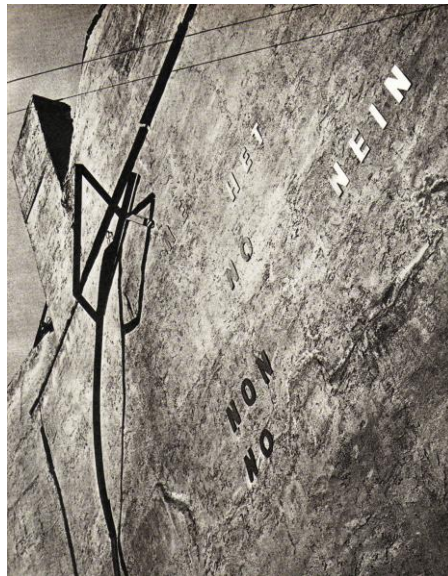


Fig. 17. Antonin Gribovsky, *No War*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (March 1962)

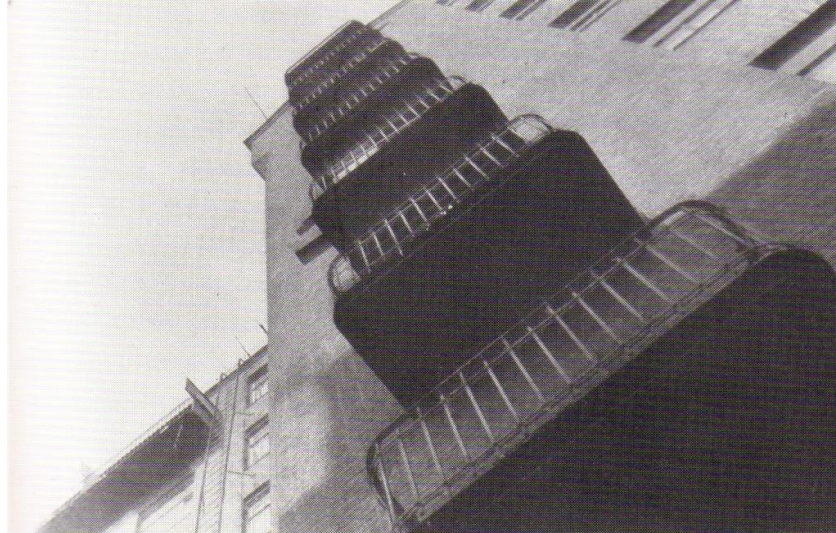


Fig. 18. Aleksandr Rodechnko, *The Building on Miasnitskaia Street*, black-and-white photograph, 1925

Shooting angles were similarly reminiscent of the 1920s avant-garde. In a second article published by Volkov Lannit in 1962, the author states that “if nothing else, it is a conscious effort on the part of the photographer to organize an expressive frame.”<sup>93</sup> He explains that “sharp angles and unusual proportions are sometimes more appropriate” even if it means excessive attention to detail.<sup>94</sup> Antonin Gribovsky’s 1962 photograph, *No War*, replicates the effect of Rodchenko’s 1925 and 1927 photographs *The Building on Miasnitskaia Street* and *Pine Trees in Pushkino*, both of which were denounced by Osip Brik as “easel art” when they were exhibited at the *Exhibition of Ten Years of Soviet Photography* in 1928.<sup>95</sup> Gribovsky’s 1962 photograph, like *The Building on Miasnitskaia Street*, is shot from almost the precisely the same angle, looking up what appears to be the side of a factory building (Figs. 17-18). These two photographs are undeniably

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<sup>93</sup> L. Volkov Lannit, “O Kompozitsii Fotoportreta,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1962): 25

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>95</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 39.

similar. Shooting photographs from non-traditional vantage points, especially from below, was a feature replicated in numerous photographs in *Sovetskoe foto*.

Further evidence of the shift in photographic aesthetics can be observed in the primacy of private portraiture in Soviet photography as both a professional and amateur pursuit. Yet, for many Soviet photographers, portraiture was not about individuals attending studio sessions, unless of course, they were public officials, heroes of the Soviet Republics, or literary or cultural figures. Instead, *Sovetskoe foto*'s interest and instruction in portraiture was far more invested in how to approach the subjects of photographs, for professionals and amateurs alike. The focus was on lighting, cropping, and angles in photographs. The importance of approaching subjects in this manner highlighted the government's interest in the privatization of Soviet life. Amateurs and pseudo-professional photographers should approach photographic subjects as professionals would shoot portraits in studios.

This complemented government ideas about productive leisure. Of utmost importance to *Sovetskoe foto* was the correct way of pursuing photography. If one were to take up photography, whether amateur or professional, they needed to apply standard photographic practices and techniques in their work. In portraiture especially, *Sovetskoe foto* went to great lengths to demonstrate the correct methods, angles, and lighting, as well as the incorrect manner of shooting. In the July 1959 issue of *Sovetskoe foto* I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia published an article about portraiture, including many examples of what and what not to do. For example, the article features three untitled photographs of a woman in a kerchief, taken by the authors (Figs. 19-21).<sup>96</sup> The first photograph, while adequate, was "uninspired" according to I. Romanov and A.

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<sup>96</sup> I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia, "Optika dliya s'emki portretov," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 7 (1959): 41.

Iarinovskaia.<sup>97</sup> The third image, was an example of how not to photograph portraits because the face of the girl was obscured by her hair, shadow, and the kerchief itself. Instead, the second image, reminiscent of Aleksandr Rodchenko's *Pioneer Girl*, taken in 1930 was the "best" of the three options (Fig. 22). The photograph was dynamic, according to the authors, showing the girls face while maintaining the distinction between light and shadow.<sup>98</sup>



Figs. 19-21. I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia, Unititled, black-and-white photographs, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 7 (July 1959)

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 41.



Fig. 22. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Pioneer Girl*, black-and-white photograph, 1930

The authors included further examples. Two images of a girl sitting in front of the entrance to Gorky Park were appraised by their cropping technique (Figs. 23-24). While the first image included “unnecessary detail,” and the second, more closely cropped image, was thus more successful.<sup>99</sup> Three portraits of a woman in a studio were analyzed based on the lighting of the photograph (Figs. 25-27). Though I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia agree all three photographs are successful, the placement of light sources in relation to the subject certainly changed the feeling of the image, the middle photograph being more dramatic and reminiscent of Hollywood glamour shot.<sup>100</sup> Analyses of portrait images were published in almost one of every four issues of *Sovetskoe foto* in the late

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 43.



1950s and early 1960s, thus more frequently than any other singular topic related to photographic aesthetics and technique.



Figs. 23-24. I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia, Untitled, black-and-white photographs, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 7 (July, 1959)



Figs. 25-27. I. Romanov and A. Iarinovskaia, Untitled, black-and-white photographs, *Sovetskoe foto* no. 7 (July, 1959)

The prevalence and praise of images clearly influenced by *Oktiabr* photographers demonstrates that far from putting a decisive end to discussions of avant-garde aesthetics of the 1920s, Stalinist consolidation, and then suppression, of avant-garde photographic

styles may have truncated debates in the mid-1930s, it was certainly did not a permanently conclusion to these debates. Rather, the Thaw offered photographers an opportunity to reinvestigate, reincorporate, and normalize avant-garde photography. Too, though, some portraiture was reminiscent of the photographs taken by RFO photographers and their exploration of human subjects, their emotions, and their movements (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 26). Therefore, the Thaw in general offered photographers the opportunity to push the boundaries of acceptable visual representation, incorporating modernist styles and influences that had been discredited in earlier decades.

In 1962, *Sovetskoe foto* published an article entitled “The Art of Looking Ahead” discussing the opening of an exhibition of Rodchenko’s work in Moscow. In the opening remarks about the exhibition, artist Solomon Telingater “devoted his speech to the innovation of Aleksandr Rodchenko in art, book design and exhibitions.”<sup>101</sup> Accompanying the article, the journal republished excerpts from poet Semyon Kirsanov’s about the general reception of an earlier Rodchenko exhibition. Kirsanov, who was a contemporary of Rodchenko, Mayakovsky, and other revolutionary and avant-garde artists, mused that “for some people, even the name Rodchenko was a novelty and they saw his pictures, his furniture designs, posters, and drawings as contemporary work, admiring its freshness and originality.”<sup>102</sup> He particularly admired Rodchenko’s portraits

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<sup>101</sup> Semyon Kirsanov, “Iskusstvo budushchego,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1962): 25.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

of Mayakovsky (Fig. 28), which he believed “teaches painting and artistic vision...the art of the portrait.”<sup>103</sup>

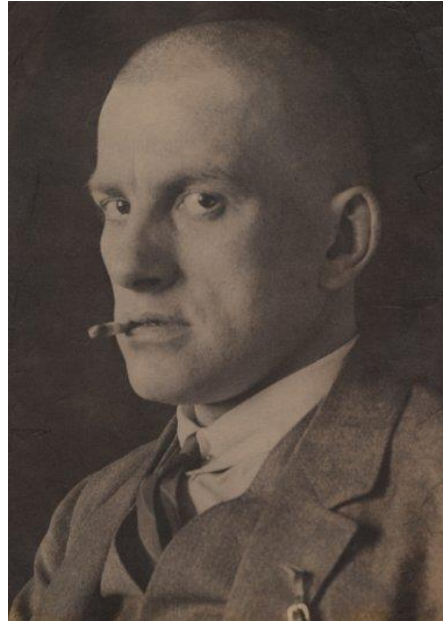


Fig. 28. Aleksander Rodchenko, *Portrait of Mayakovsky*, gelatin silver print, 1924

Kirsanov goes on to explain that as a photographer, Rodchenko’s art had forged a “new relationship between the people in the industrial era and helped established an unprecedented artistic culture.”<sup>104</sup> Rodchneko was not the “formalist” that critics had claimed in the 1930s, but in fact a victim of Stalin’s Cult of Personality.

Unfortunately the harsh events of the Cult of Personality reigned in our art for many years; I would say it was the cult of individual taste. Visionaries in art, like Rodchenko, were replaced by dependent mental development, pompous ceremonies, eclectic forms, especially in architecture, in painting, and in the field of material and consumer culture.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 25.

Kirsanov's appraisal criticizes the excesses of the Cult of Personality, which would have been acceptable by 1962 and in line with Khrushchev's critical stance towards Stalinism. Openly denouncing the defamation of Rodchenko's work is not akin to admiring it as a relic of a bygone age. It is questioning the entire genre of art that the Cult of Personality perpetuated. Kirsanov goes further, to explain that it was not the avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 1930s who created the foundation of Soviet art.

These pioneers of the future of art - Mayakovsky, Eisenstein, Meyerhold, Rodchenko, and Tatlin; their creative search for like-minded people, architects, artists, poets, masters of photography, film, and theater are the pride of the history of socialist art...The path was temporarily cluttered by formalistic bad taste, purple shades, plaster busts, pop-song vulgarity and saccharine gilt-framed pictures.<sup>106</sup>



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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 25.

Fig. 29. Maks Alpert, *Workers Prepare to Blast Rock for Construction of Buildings of the Bratsk*

*Hydroelectric Power Station*, black-and-white-photograph, 1958

Kirsanov's critique of Stalinism is perhaps not surprising as he moved in the same circles as avant-garde poets and artists, but his open indictment of the culture surrounding the late 1930s-1950s and his insistence that the avant-garde was in fact the heritage of the Soviet people is telling. As the upper echelons of the party began denouncing the excesses of Stalinism, so too were photographers able to reevaluate the past.

In May 1962 The House of Journalists hosted a personal exhibition of works by Maks Alpert to honor his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary working as a photographer and photojournalist. The opening address was given by A. Satyukov, chief editor of the newspaper *Pravda* chairman of the Union of Journalists. In his speech, Satyukov praised Alpert's photographs of various industrial projects.

The author's works reflect the essential aspects of the life of the Soviet people. This could only be done by a person who sees the beauty of creative work, who understands the desire and aspirations of the working people of the Fergana Canal, the Dnieper hydroelectric plant, the Bratsk hydroelectric plant - these pictures are full of pathos, struggle, love for humanity. With the force of works of art, Maks Alpert's photographs deserve public recognition and appreciation.<sup>107</sup>

In his speech, Satyukov highlights Alpert's contributions to photojournalism, and likens them to "works of art." But Alpert's work, even in the 1950s, was far more congruent with the work of avant-garde photographers: his ability to play with light, shadow, the

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<sup>107</sup> *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1962): 16.

shape of his subjects demonstrates his familiarity with 1920s and 1930s techniques (Figs. 29-30).



Fig. 30. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Portrait of my Daughter*, gelatin silver print, 1935

But Alpert encountered criticism in the 1930s because of his willingness to stage photographs to enhance their documentary *and* aesthetic qualities. This was against the principles of his membership in the ROPF. As historian David Shneer has noted, “other photographers at the time thought that re-creating the facts undermined the unwritten rules of photojournalism...and Alpert collaborator Arkadi Shaikhet expressed grave concerns about staging.”<sup>108</sup> Even in an era when the government was suspicious of photography, it was important to maintain the appearance of authenticity. Though staging itself was acceptable to a certain degree, it was unacceptable that a photograph look like it was staged. The intentionality behind staging a photograph, i.e. to enhance the documentary or aesthetic features, did not matter if the photograph itself looked as

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<sup>108</sup> David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 55.

though it were an altered document.<sup>109</sup> By 1962, these criticisms, which carried serious implications in the 1930s, were not mentioned at Alpert's exhibition. Instead his work was presented as representative of the avant-garde, and there was no discussion about the various factional differences between photographers like Rodchenko, from *Oktiabr*, and Alpert.<sup>110</sup> Even in his photographs which might be considered to have been taken in the style more appropriate for press or news print, Alpert's shooting angle and positioning of the subject are tamed versions, but remain reminiscent of the cropping and manipulation of the viewer's field of vision that characterized the photographs of Rodchenko and Gustav Klutis's photomontage. Despite his association with the ROPF in the 1920s and early 1930s, Alpert adopted some of the same techniques that Rodchenko was criticized for in 1931 and 1932. (Figs. 31-33).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>This is somewhat ironic considering the 1930s witnessed some of the most pervasive alterations of photographs for censorship purposes. See David King, *The Commissar Vanishes*.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>111</sup> See chapter one.



Fig. 31. Maks Alpert, *Construction of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station. Irkutsk Region*, black-and-white photograph, 1958



Fig. 32. Gustav Klutssis, *To Live Culturally is to Work Productively*, photomontage, 1932





Fig. 33. Aleksandr Rodchenko, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, c. 1931

The rehabilitation and normalization of avant-garde photographic techniques coincided with the growth of amateur photography clubs in the Soviet Union and international photography exhibitions in which photojournalists and amateur photographers were exposed to foreign photography.<sup>112</sup> In 1960, the First Conference of Photojournalists and Editors was held, and established a biannual exhibition *Interpress-Photo. Sovetskoe foto* and photography critics placed emphasis on spontaneity, and staging remained strongly discouraged.

But photographers' abilities to investigate the legacy of the avant-garde was both encouraged and tempered by the bureaucratic filters between the photographer, Party and government, namely the head of the photo sections of various government organizations,

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<sup>112</sup> The first photography club was founded in 1953 in Leningrad.

and the editorial directors of illustrated journals and magazines. Despite her criticisms of magazine editors, Bugayeva herself was frequently unclear about the appropriate aesthetic qualities of publishable photographs.

A true master of socialist realism finds creative inspiration in life...At the same time the graphic form of the photographic product should be of high quality and the Soviet pictorialist should aspire indefatigably to search for it. We see the noble beauty of form in life itself, in its excitement, and we do not need to resort to ridiculous, improbable points of view... A feature of realistic photographic art is a consistent ability to select elements of life, the precious new features and invest them with artistic form.<sup>113</sup>

Bugayeva's verbose description of the role of socialist realism in photography and the choice of subject, is not only plagued by the rhetoric of socialist realist criticism, but is also inherently confusing. She insists that the root of socialist realism as a genre is in reality and everyday life, which would be accepted by any contemporary Soviet critic or artist. For photographers, however, this posed some difficulty. Socialist realist artists were rarely able to portray life exactly as it was in the Soviet Union, owing to the reality of life in the Soviet Union was rather distant from the ideological utopia that the state wished to project. For media like painting and film, the adulteration or at the very least, alteration of everyday life was relatively simple as these genres already "recreate" and "reimagine" the realm of reality. But with photography, at a time when staging was strongly discouraged, projecting ideologically correct images of Soviet life proved challenging.

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<sup>113</sup> M. Bugayeva, "O printsipi partiinost' v fotoiskusstva," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1961): 1.

Similarly, Bugayeva also appears to encourage avant-garde deframing and cropping of photographs. Yet, while she discouraged “inexpressive photos,” she was “against fruitless searches of the abstract, and self-sufficing form.”<sup>114</sup> But as editorial director of *Sovetskoe foto*, she often approved the publication of images, or in some cases, republication of images either photographed by avant-garde artists or contemporary photographs that drew upon the work of avant-garde artists.

These developments occurred at this point in time precisely because of what Stephen Hanson describes as the development of “charismatic” communism, promoted during Khrushchev’s tenure in office. In 1959, Khrushchev jubilantly declared that “Soviet citizens would experience communism in their lifetime” and that “it was no longer a matter of the party leading the people; the people would lead themselves.”<sup>115</sup> For the first time since the 1920s, Soviet citizens were encouraged in participating in the building of socialism in the Soviet Union and formulate their own ideas about what their, not the Party’s, socialist country would look like. For photojournalists, this idea was highly appealing. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, not only were photographers aiding in the process of building socialism, but they had the opportunity to show the rest of the world how that project was progressing.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin.*, 37.

### **Chapter Three: The Mass Media Away and at Home: *Ogonek* and International Photography Organizations in the Soviet Union**

Khrushchev's reorientation of Soviet life focused on more humanizing and everyday representations of Soviet people: the new Soviet citizen may be a worker, but work no longer defined personhood. Whether or not this was actually the case at the time is less important than the image that was being projected. The photographs in *Ogonek* demonstrate the primary role of Soviet photojournalists in mediating governmentality during the Thaw, capturing everyday "personhood." These images represent a branch of socialist realism developed during the 1950s. Still "whitewashing" the realities of everyday Soviet life, the photographs in *Ogonek* are not grandiose or bombastic (with the exception of major holidays) and yet remain teleologically oriented towards achieving socialism. They constitute a type of propaganda that devoted itself to the creation of a particular type of personhood, one that remains ideologically and culturally socialist, in both the public and the private sphere. The implication was that the Soviet people continued this process on a smaller scale, as citizens working towards that goal, while reaping the benefits of the advancements already made (Fig. 34).

Part of the creation of new Soviet identities was the depiction of life outside the USSR and Eastern Europe. *Ogonek* contrasted images of intimate everyday life at home with a barrage of photographs of foreign locales. Weekly, sometimes multi-issue travelogues about foreign countries such as Australia, Morocco, and South Africa, provided readers and viewers a visual record of world events. While articles about the United States contained obligatory passages about inequality in America, and articles about the developing world made clear the hardships faced by millions, the focus was on the cultural traditions of the country, like architecture, art and music. Color inserts about

foreign cities were usually composed of one picture of the city from above, a photograph of local dress either modern or traditional, pictures of sculptures or monuments, and usually only a single photograph of either agricultural or industrial activity, if one appeared at all. Though taken abroad, the images served to reinforce Soviet ideas of self during the cultural Thaw. Emphasis on national society and culture, as opposed to industrial output and growth encouraged Soviet citizens to relate to and value those aspects of their own life, to value a Soviet identity based in both cultural *and* industrial production.



Fig. 34. Valerii Gende-Rote, *On a Swing*, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 22 (May 1960)

The Khrushchev administration was far more committed to opening the Soviet Union to outside visitors and influences than Stalin had been. After operating in a rather closed cultural environment for generations, Minister of Culture of the USSR Ekaterina Alekseevna Furtseva approved a number of international cultural exchanges between students, journalists, and artists, and many of the exchange projects' owed their success to her initiative. In 1964, she reported, the Soviet Union hosted over 30 foreign artistic groups, in addition to dozens of journalists and photographers.<sup>1</sup> This, in her opinion, was the most successful year of cultural exchanges between socialist and capitalist countries since the Central Committee appointed her to her post in 1960.<sup>2</sup> Even then, however, "the Ministry of Culture of the USSR could not satisfy all the requests from our friends in socialist and foreign countries."<sup>3</sup> She does not go into detail, but maintains that with the permission of the Central Committee, programs of cultural exchange should be continued and expanded.

Much like cultural exchange programs, journals and newspapers flourished in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. With one of the highest literacy rates in the world, Soviet citizens hungrily devoured magazines, newspapers and journals. In 1959, the CPSU Central Committee Commission on Ideology, Culture and International Party Relations reported that in the first six months of the year, Soviet citizens had spent 550 million rubles on newspapers, journals, and magazines from *Soiuzpechat* kiosks.<sup>4</sup> It represented a significant increase in purchases by individuals, and increased distribution of periodicals

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<sup>1</sup> "Postanovlenie kollegii Ministerstva Kul'tury SSSR," 12 March 1965 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 68, l. 4).

<sup>2</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 68, l. 4.

<sup>3</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 68, l. 5.

<sup>4</sup> "O merakh po uluchsheniiu roznichnoi prodazhi gazet i zhurnalov naseleniiu," 1 October 1959 (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 49, l. 5).

available for retail sale to the public (as opposed to state libraries and universities).<sup>5</sup> In 1965 the daily circulation of newspapers and journals was projected to be five times what it had been only ten years earlier, and in this case, Soviet figures were not far off the mark.<sup>6</sup> Much of this increase corresponded to the establishment of new special interest journals, many of which depicted life outside of the Soviet Union.

Some scholars, particularly Margarita Tupitsyn, have described post-1930s photography as totalizing, uninteresting, and staged, or the termination of the great experiment in avant-garde photography.<sup>7</sup> Others appraise post-1930s visual culture in the Soviet Union in terms of its propaganda value, and describe it as a mechanism of government interests, offering a therapeutic alternate reality that essentially created social realities from fictional categories, rendering them real rather than imagined or false.<sup>8</sup> In a certain sense, this was indeed the mandate of Soviet socialist realism. But the idea that photojournalists of the Thaw were willfully misinforming their viewers simplifies their relationship to the government and ignores their own aspirations. Instead, they interpreted their jobs in terms of building socialism through their images, and showing their viewers what achievements the Soviet Union had accomplished thus far. While photojournalists had professional tasks, deadlines, and often assigned themes, they also had desires of their own separate from government interests, including better education and more aesthetic control over their press photographs. For contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*, press photographs should be “not only artfully executed, precisely comprehended, and truthful,

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<sup>5</sup> RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 49, l. 5.

<sup>6</sup> “Predstavliaiu perspektivnyi plan goskomiteta na 1959-1965 gg.,” 1958 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, l. 15).

<sup>7</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 183.

but... also understood by those for whom they were intended.”<sup>9</sup> These tasks were supported by photographer Semyon Friedland, who began working as a photographer for the journal in the late 1920s, and joined the editorial staff in 1959. He and the former editor of the journal in the late 1920s and early 1930s, S. Evgenov, were frequent contributors to the journal throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. The two often submitted critiques and photoessays to *Sovetskoe foto*, as well as book reviews and photo histories of some of the masters of the avant-garde, including Aleksandr Rodchenko. Maintaining the legacy of avant-garde artists was as crucial to *Sovetskoe foto* at the time as promoting the “correct” aesthetics of the era.

### ***Ogonek* and Soviet Photography in the 1950s and 1960s**

As *Sovetskoe foto* became a venue for the artistic ventures of Thaw era photographers, *Ogonek* remained more representative of and shaped by the mainstream. As a mainstream outlet, however, *Ogonek* continued to influence how photographers snapped pictures. Yet, the editorial committee of *Sovetskoe foto* was invested in teaching amateurs and professionals how to photograph artistically, whereas the editorial staff at *Ogonek* had other concerns. Particularly, *Ogonek* editor Anatolii Sofronov supported photography as an illustrative device, but was not overly concerned about the aesthetic merit of photographs that accompanied articles. Instead, most issues of *Ogonek* featured one or two “artistic” photographs tucked inside the front and back covers. Most other photographs in the magazine served as documentary evidence to support their accompanying articles. Thus, as Koltsov had initially envisioned, *Ogonek* continued to be a periodical for the masses and was closely tied to the governmentality of the Soviet regime. More and more, the magazine became an illustrated catalogue of the world both

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<sup>9</sup> S. Rubtsov, “Fotografiia- ne samotsel,” *Sovetskoe foto* no. 3 (1958): 8.



inside and outside the Soviet Union, less invested in aesthetics and more interested in mass circulation of easily discernible images that conveyed government interests and goals. This chapter will address how illustrated magazines, newspapers, and union organizations represented the Soviet government's renewed concern in introducing its citizens to life in and outside the Soviet Union.

In basic form, *Ogonek* during the 1950s and 1960s remained much as it had in previous decades. It contained reproductions of paintings, short stories, songs and short musical scores, cartoons, and of course, photographs. But at this moment, the magazine took up the cause of creating the new Soviet person of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Unlike issues published in the 1930s, which documented and praised construction projects, or those published in the 1940s, which were largely about the war and reconstruction, the *Ogonek* of the 1950s was much more intimate. While photographs of party congresses, diplomatic meetings and ideologically anti-Western political articles remained, the magazine began to present itself as more representative of the everyday. Photographs depicted women styling their hair, a boy drinking from a glass, or cross country skiers enjoying a winter holiday in the mountains. Articles about industrial projects and five year plans were replaced by detailed descriptions of a day in the life of a factory or textile worker, focusing as much on their work as their personal life and leisurely activities.

Yet this did not exempt illustrated journals from criticism. Though readers adored *Ogonek*, its popularity also led to increased government scrutiny. In the early and mid-1950s, up until the last issues of 1957, *Ogonek* contained very few photographs by comparison to later issues, and these images were usually relegated to the front and back covers. In the early months of 1958, editor Anatolii Sofronov began incorporating more

photographs, overlaying various images in the side columns of the journal, providing *Ogonek* with a very new and updated look. In September 1958, the Central Committee Commission on Ideology, Culture and International Party Relations issued a serious warning to Sofronov. In each issue the Central Committee noticed there were articles that lacked “aesthetic and educational value.”<sup>10</sup> They specifically singled out aesthetic inconsistencies, inattention to detail, and the editor’s choice of photographs.

There are serious shortcomings in the decoration of the magazine. Your editorial staff has lost all sense of proportion, publishing dozens of pictures on foreign topics without showing the necessary initiatives or artistic taste when selecting illustrations of Soviet life. Many of the photographs that appear on the covers and inserts, are primitive and inexpressive in their execution and are of minor importance on the topic of the article.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, the Central Committee was not disappointed with the choice to incorporate more photographs. Instead, they took issue with the editorial staff, who favored certain topics and journalists. Ultimately, the Central Committee decided that Sofronov should seriously reconsider both the content of articles published in *Ogonek*, and expand its ranks to include journalists and photographers who would generate more “vibrant” and “exciting” material. It decided that *Ogonek* should:

Improve the ideological and artistic level of the external design of the magazine. Be more strictly selective of illustrated material, to prevent the pages of the magazine from random, incoherent or irrelevant and slipshod

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<sup>10</sup> “O ser’eznykh nedostatkakh v sodержanii zhurnala *Ogonek*,” 9 September 1958 (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 20, l. 2).

<sup>11</sup> RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 20, l. 3.

photographs and drawings...We oblige the editorial board to do away with the practice of improper preferential treatment by the publishing staff. Expand the circle of authors, to involve more employees in the magazine industry. Draw material from agriculturalists, prominent scientists, writers, artists...conferences in enterprises, collective and state farms, and educational institutions.<sup>12</sup>

Sofronov took these criticisms into account. He shifted his focus to a mixture of articles about travel coupled with illustrated articles about various cities in the Union Republics and the Soviet Union outside of the capital cities. Information about Soviet political figures was paired with articles about industrial, agricultural, and scientific work, the everyday lives of families, as well as information about exhibitions, artists, musicians and sports. He promoted Dmitri Baltermants to editor of photography and divided photography assignments by genre, for instance, assigning particular photographers to sports, others to theater, etc. Under Baltermants' leadership, the journal began publishing images that were influenced by avant-garde angular composition and cropping techniques.

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<sup>12</sup> RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 20, l. 4.



Figs. 35 -36. Cover of *Ogonek*, March 1959, no. 11(left) and May 1959, no. 19 (right). According to the demands of the Central Committee, Sofronov's reorientation of the magazine prioritized photographs of the "everyday" Soviet experience.

The Central Committee maintained a relatively strict hand in the dissemination and planning of illustrated journals like *Ogonek*. While photographers for illustrated journals and magazines were generally spared harsh criticism, editors and magazine staff were not. This was partially because Soviet government officials were not particularly acquainted with the technical aspects of photography and photojournalism. They may, as seen above, make references to aesthetics, but generally their criticisms focused on the visibility of ideology and party-mindedness (or lack thereof) in press photography. Thus, as long as editors like Sofronov complied with Central Committee directives, the majority of decisions about the aesthetics of photography were left to photographers themselves, so long as they had the support of the editorial staff.

Sofronov encouraged the incorporation of photographs as the main sources of illustrated material his journal. In addition to the front and back covers, the editorial staff of *Ogonek* made the decision to predominantly illustrate three distinct types of articles with photographs. Journalists writing articles about everyday life in the Soviet Union, the feats of the Soviet people (particularly in the periphery of the Soviet Union) and everyday life outside of the Soviet Union were encouraged to utilize photographs as a documentary evidence, as a way of adding authenticity to their claims. By the late 1950s, then, *Ogonek* presented its readers a range of articles about Soviet life at home accompanied by photo essays. One such article, in the newly revamped *Ogonek*, was about recently married young workers searching for housing, entitled “Two Hundred Newlywed Couples” (“*Dvesti molodozhenov*”). As the article explained, Sasha and Tanya Martianov were accomplished young workers, who desired to move from their factory dormitories into an apartment together. When the young married couple went to the factory housing and municipal department, they were initially turned down. “The newlywed Martianovs were not given an apartment. Why? There was a compelling explanation: Included in the list for housing were some who had worked at the plant for a long time.”<sup>13</sup> The story concludes happily, as one might expect. Despite some hiccoughs in the initial construction of housing for newlyweds, the apartment block was completed in seven months, five ahead of schedule.<sup>14</sup> Sasha and Tanya received apartment number 13, the author of the article taking the time to poke fun at Americans, whose superstitions about the number might have prevented them from receiving the rooms so gladly.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ts. Solodar’, “Dvesti Molodozhenov,” *Ogonek*, no. 5 (1958): 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

story represents the type of slice of everyday life that the Central Committee wanted from *Ogonek*.

Rather than illustrating this type of article with hand-drawn sketches, as might have been done in earlier years, “Two Hundred Newlywed Couples” features not one but five photographs of Sasha and Tanya, their neighbors, and the completed apartment building. Not only did the photographs focus on Sasha and Tanya, but none of the images documented their role as workers or, alternatively the construction of their new home. Instead, photographer E. Umnov showed the newlyweds reading a magazine (a copy of *Ogonek*, as we are told by the author), and Tanya embroidering a table runner with friends from the apartment bloc (Figs. 37-38). The subject of the article, and the accompanying photographs, is the couple, not construction. Photographs of the interior of their finished apartment show a simple yet comfortable space. Put together, the article and photographs speak to readers who may be experiencing their own problems with housing, reinforcing the idea that while there may be delays (just like there were for the Martianovs), socialism was building houses. Furthermore, photographs lent authenticity. Here were Sasha, Tanya and their home. Here they were enjoying themselves. Photography underscored the validity of this ideal, whether or not it was the everyday lived reality of Soviet citizens.

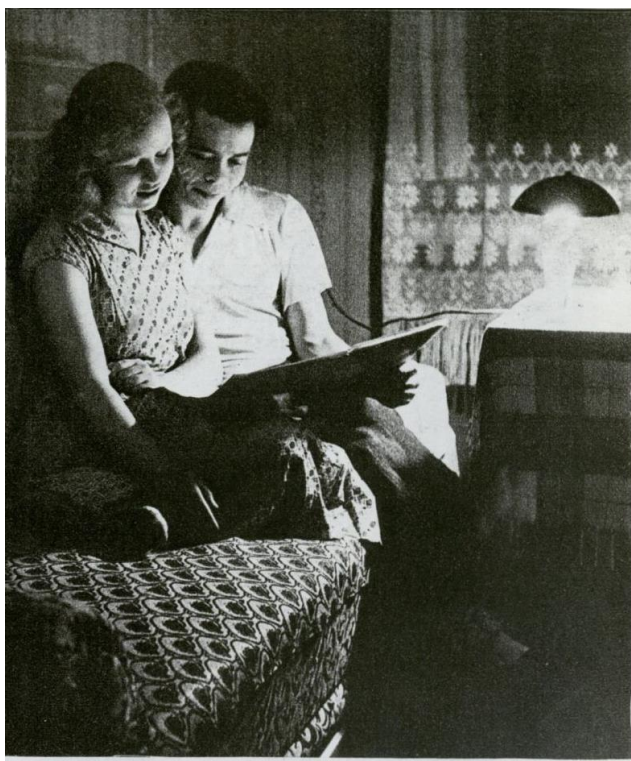
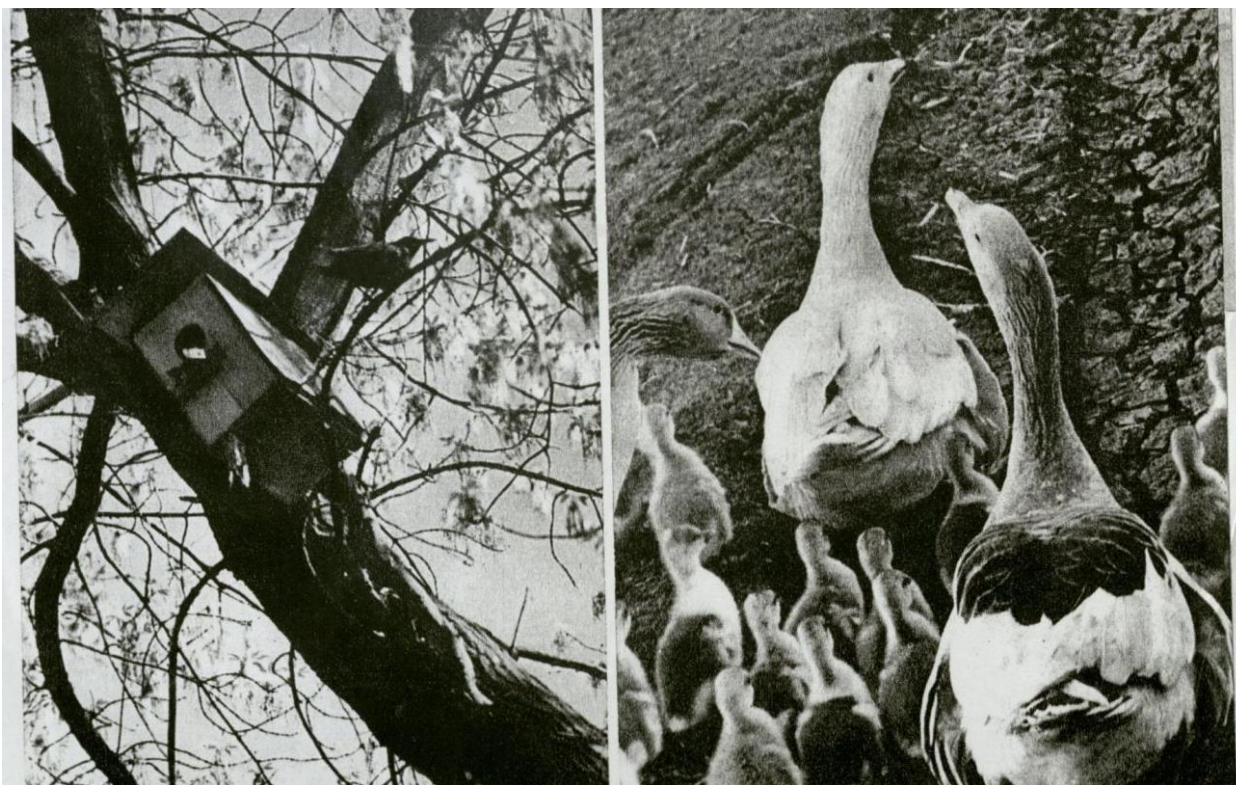


Fig. 37. Evgenii Umnov, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 5 (February 1958)



Fig. 38. Evgenii Umnov, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 5 (February 1958)

Photo essays like that about Sasha and Tanya could be found in every issue of *Ogonek*. Increasingly, however, *Ogonek* began including photographs that look as though they were lifted from the avant-garde journals of the 1920s and 1930s. A 1961 photo essay by Aleksandr Gostev about spring in Krasnodar contained numerous photographs that had been heavily cropped and manipulated by the photographer (Figs. 39-40). While these avant-garde-esque photographs were common place in *Sovetskoe foto*, their presence in a national illustrated magazine, not a special interest journal, testifies to their pervasiveness in Soviet print media.



Figs. 39-40. Aleksandr Gostev, *Untitled*, black-and-white photographs, *Ogonek*, no. 19 (May 1961)

Beginning in the late 1950s nearly every issue of *Ogonek* contained a small section devoted specifically to photography. The subject and type of photography varied



by issue, but two of the more frequent sections were titled “Photographs Tell Stories” (*Fotografii rasskazyvaiut*) and “Day after Day” (*Den’ za dnem*). Both featured photographs from around the globe, though predominantly from the Socialist bloc countries, and the latter would also occasionally print amateur photographer’s work in addition to the work of photojournalists. Generally, however, these sections featured “slices of life” and covered a wide range of material, from museum exhibitions, to soccer matches to children playing in parks. Photographs about the construction of an aluminum plant in Stalingrad were placed alongside photographs featuring couples figure skating in the park, a portrait of actor Mikhail Astangov and models of the new Moskvich automobile. The general feeling of these sections was that the socialism was as much about aluminum plants as it was about young couples enjoying leisure time (Figs. 41-42).



Государственный театр имени Евг. Вахтангова показал премьеру трагедии В. Шекспира «Гамлет». Постановка Б. Захавы, художник — И. Рабинович. Гамлета играет народный артист СССР М. Астангов.  
Фото М. Чернова.



Малолитражный автомобиль «Москвич» модели 1958 года скоро появится на дорогах страны. Он оснащен двигателем с верхним расположением клапанов мощностью сорок пять лошадиных сил. Сочетание двух измененных агрегатов — мотора и заднего моста — сделает «Москвич» более долговечным. Изменяется внешняя и внутренняя отделка машины. Начало массового производства нового «Москвича» намечается на вторую половину этого года.

Фото А. Конькова (ТАСС).

Figs. 41-42. Photographs from the section *Photographs Tell Stories*. M. Chernov and A. Kon'kov, Untitled, black-and-white photographs, *Ogonek* no. 8 (February 1958)<sup>16</sup>

Articles about family and everyday life tended to focus on Moscow and Leningrad, but were accompanied by other illustrated stories about the peripheral areas of the Soviet Union. Often, these articles featured a narrative of overcoming natural obstacles. Articles about conquering the wilderness (and their corresponding illustrations) were an extension of, and demonstrate, the lasting pervasiveness of what Katerina Clark describes as the Soviets' "struggle with nature."<sup>17</sup> Part of the master narrative of Soviet literature after 1931 incorporated scenarios in which people triumph over their environment to overcome immeasurable odds, and "taming" the wilderness. Iterations of this theme in Soviet literature can be observed time and time again in *Ogonek* articles. A January 1958 issue of the magazine, for example, featured a lengthy piece about the Altai Mountains, in which Dr. Genadii Pospelov and photographer Vsevolod Tarasevich documented the felling of trees in the mountainous region to regain the territory for cotton farming and iron ore extraction. "On the eve of construction, at the height of exploration" of this region, Tarasevich captures smiling loggers and construction workers.<sup>18</sup> His photographs, however, are reminiscent of the avant-garde. Shot from below, his photograph of construction workers is fragmented, angular, and bears resemblance to Rodchecko's factographic works of the 1930s (Fig. 43).

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<sup>16</sup> The captions read as follows. "William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* premied at the State Theatre of Evg. Vakhtangov. Presented by director-artist I. Rabinovich. Hamlet is played by the People's Artist of the USSR Mikhail Astangov." "The 1958 model of the small car the 'Moskvich' will soon appear on this country's roads. It is equipped with a forty five horsepower engine with overhead valve capacity. The combination of two modified units – a motor and rear axle – make the 'Moskvich' more durable. Changing internal and external finishing machines. Mass production of the new 'Moskvich' is planned for the second half of this year. "Den' za dnem," *Ogonek*, no. 8 (1959): 8.

<sup>17</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 101.

<sup>18</sup> Genadii Pospelov, "Altai zheleznyi," *Ogonek*, no. 4 (1958): 4.



Fig. 43. Vsevolod Tarasevich, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 4 (January 1958)

Similarly, *Ogonek* journalists embraced the socialist realist trope of arctic exploration. A feature of Stalinist literature that remained a major theme throughout the Soviet period, humanity's subjugation of nature (particularly the far north), was trotted out at length in novels, short stories, and the press media alike. The conviction that "man alone, unprovisioned, in conditions of extreme cold and in constant danger of attack" reinforced the underlying ideology of the period.<sup>19</sup> "In conditions of extreme cold, scientists say that man must die. But these stories suggest that an exceptional man can defy that inevitability," particularly the Soviet man, strengthened by the might of the Soviet system and its underlying ideology.<sup>20</sup> A 1961 article about a group of scientists on

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<sup>19</sup> Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

a geological survey followed this model to the letter. Above the Arctic Circle, they were hoping to find gold and other valuable mineral deposits. Yet, the article itself was not concerned with the success or failure of this aspect of their exploration. Instead the author of the piece focused on geography, and the geologists' ability to carve out a miniature civilization in spite of the rugged terrain. In three weeks they had put "up a town: tents, storage, a dining room, a bath. The bath was our pride: chopped wood, it was warm as a 'nuclear reactor' and there was a stove made of barrels and lined with stones."<sup>21</sup> Photographs that accompanied articles of this nature likewise followed a sort of template. The emphasis was on creating a livable environment out of that which was unlivable (Fig. 44). The article was not about the results of the geological findings, but providing indexical proof that these expeditions were not only possible, but that the "explorers" were able to live well even in the harshest conditions.



Fig. 44. Igor Il'inskii, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 47 (November, 1960)

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<sup>21</sup> B. Il'inskii, "Iz zapisok kollektora," *Ogonek*, no. 47 (November 1961):22.

Despite criticisms from Central Committee members, Sofronov was committed to showing the outside world to his readers. Though he increased the number of articles about life and work in the Soviet Union, he continued to prioritize articles about exotic locations to his readers, primarily through writing about countries where the SSOD maintained good relations. The content of many of these descriptive articles ranged from verbosity to diminutive. In an article about Jakarta, journalist and photographer Nikolai Drachinskii described “spicy flavors of the rainforest” pouring through open windows, “green giant trees crowding around the white buildings with columns,” and “diamond dew drops hanging on the flowers of orchids.”<sup>22</sup> Photographs of areas outside of the Soviet Union tended first to emphasize otherness, Orientalizing local people and customs, followed by images of locals in modern dress, casting off their otherness in favor of modernity (Figs. 45-46). Nevertheless, the number of articles about foreign countries suggests that Sofronov and the editorial staff of *Ogonek* thought it was imperative to show readers what life was like in places such as Indonesia. Though they were discriminatory and teleologically oriented towards demonstrating how backwards peoples were becoming more modern, the presence of articles about people outside the Soviet Union (however heavily draped in slogans and propaganda) gave the average Soviet citizen a look at what their life might have been like had they been born outside of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>22</sup> Nikolai Drachinskii “Kuznets mira,” *Ogonek*, no. 10 (1960): 2.



Fig. 45. Nikolai Drachinskii, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 10 (March, 1960)



Fig. 46. V. Volod'kin, *Girl from the Island of Bali*, color photograph, *Ogonek*, no.18 (May, 1962)

Photographs of everyday activities, interspersed with pieces about exotic locales, dominated the pages of *Ogonek* in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is not to say that photographs of industry, construction, and machinery were absent from the magazine. These images were likewise present, but tended to be included as glossy inserts or on the inside of the front or back cover. Similarly, the photographs were not accompanied by full stories, but rather by small descriptions written by the photographer. V. Tarasevich's

photograph of welders appeared in a November 1958 edition of the journal: “In Kharkiv [Ukraine], the country’s largest swimming pool was constructed in the ‘Dynamo’ stadium. In the picture: welders at the bottom of the pool” (Fig. 47).<sup>23</sup> Another photograph, by L. Ustinov, from April of the following year was simply titled “Welder” (Fig. 48). What is remarkable about images of industry in *Ogonek*, as opposed to those of family life, is that they appear to be stylistically reminiscent of the avant-garde style images published in *Sovetskoe foto*. As the photographs below demonstrate, welders were of particular interest to photographers, because of camera’s ability to capture and elongate sparks of hot metal, spraying them across the picture (Fig. 49).

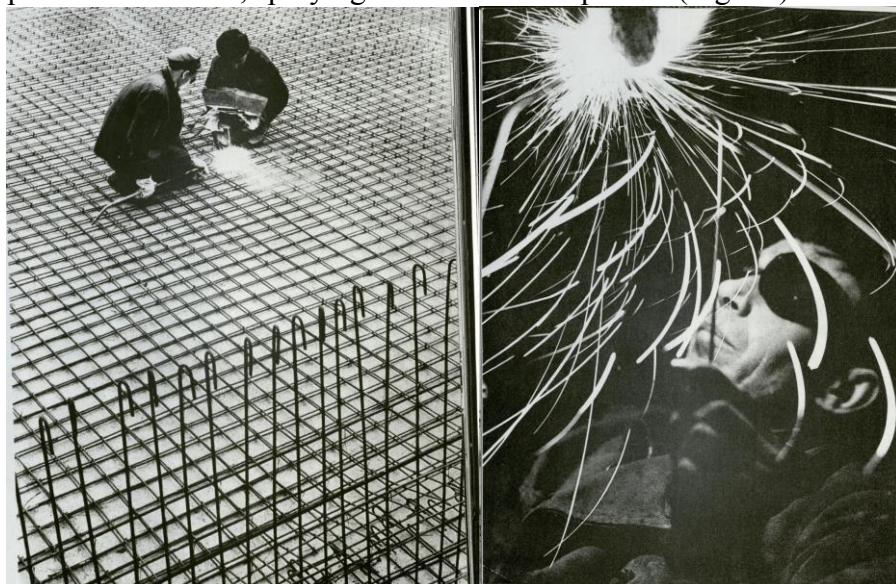


Fig. 47. Vsevolod Tarasevich, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 47 (November 1958)

Fig. 48. L. Ustinov, *Welder*, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 16 (April 1959)

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<sup>23</sup> *Ogonek*, no. 47 (1958): 33.



Fig. 49. A. Goriachev, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, *Ogonek*, no. 15 (May, 1960)

### **The SSOD, Foreign Photography, and the Photo Section of the Union of Journalists**

As the Soviet Union opened its borders to outside influences, too, it sought to show the outside world what life was like in the USSR. It became more important for Soviet journalists to participate in foreign affairs, particularly related to journalism and photojournalism. In 1961, one representative at the Union of Journalists received orders from the government to procure journalists and photographers for the following assignments for international press conferences. Three representatives were sent to Albania for the International Seminar of Journalists, and were asked to write about agricultural topics; Two journalists were sent to Hungary for the annual meeting of the International Sports Press Association, and another three representatives were sent to a meeting of the Executive Committee of the International Organization of Journalists in Budapest; Three representatives were sent to the People's Republic of China for the



meeting of the Executive Committee of the International Organization of Journalists; and finally, three correspondents were sent to Poland for for the International Seminar on The Theory of the Press.<sup>24</sup> Many government and Party requests for foreign press coverage and foreign requests for Soviet images landed on the desks of representatives of the Union of Journalists, which by 1960, had on average 122 members on assignment in foreign countries.<sup>25</sup> These bureaucrats then filed paperwork with the corresponding press agency or newspaper, according to the requests made by the government and Party. These demands ranged from rather open ended suggestions to very specific requests. For example, the 1961-1962 plan for the “development and strengthening of ties between the cities of the Russian Federation and foreign cities” required photographs of Moscow and the Krasnopresnenski area be sent to Paris for an exhibition about urban development, and that photographs of Moscow be sent to Berlin, Helsinki, and Tokyo for photography exhibitions about Moscow.<sup>26</sup> The plan also stated that the Union of Journalists send a variety of regional photography albums and journals about the “Life and Activities of Workers” to Finland, and the government requested that the Union of Journalists begin collecting photographs to send abroad, pending further instructions.<sup>27</sup>

Journals such as *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto* corresponded with government agencies, unions, and international organs, but especially the photo sections of the SSOD.

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<sup>24</sup> “Plan kul’turnogo i nauchnogo sotrudnichestva mezhdru SSSR i zarubezhnimi stranami na 1961 god,” 1960 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 651, l. 109).

<sup>25</sup> “Soiuz zhurnalistov SSSR pravlenie zam. gosudarstvennogo komiteta soveta ministrov SSSR po kul’turnym sviaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami tov. Romanovskomu, S. K.,” 5 January 1961 regarding the year end plan submitted 27 December 1960 (GARF f. 9518 r, op. 1, d. 652, l. 58).

<sup>26</sup> The titles of the exhibitions are as follows. In Paris, *Urban Development of Moscow in Photos and Layouts*. In Berlin, *Moscow*. In Helsinki, *Urban Economy of Moscow*. In Tokyo, *Urban Development of Moscow*. “Plan razvitiia i ukrepleniia sviazei mezhdru gorodami RSFSR i zarubezhnimi gorodami na 1961-2 godi,” 1961 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 653, ll. 6-18).

<sup>27</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 653, l. 22.

The latter became particularly important in organizing international exhibitions inside and outside of the Soviet Union, and generally facilitating correspondence between foreign and domestic photojournalists. The SSOD was established in 1958, formerly known as the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) founded by the Council of People's Commissars in 1925. The official tasks of VOKS were to inform the Soviet public of foreign cultural achievements and promote Soviet culture abroad, most notably through organizing and participating in international exhibitions, competitions and festivals.<sup>28</sup> Despite its ties to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs as well as the secret police, both societies maintained that they were voluntary associations and were officially independent of the state and Party.<sup>29</sup> By 1957 VOKS had established "friendships societies" with 47 countries. This number grew under the new management of the SSOD and by 1975 maintained contacts with 7500 organizations and public figures worldwide, and held about 2000 events annually in the Soviet Union alone.<sup>30</sup>

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto* was collaborating frequently with the photo section of the SSOD in planning and participating in international exhibitions. While the Union of Journalists (and thus by extension *Sovetskoe foto*) were responsible for the circulation of photographs inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, they did not have the authority to approve photographs sent to foreign exhibitions. This responsibility fell to the photo section of the SSOD. For example, in 1959 Marina Bugayeva received letters of invitation for *Sovetskoe foto* to

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<sup>28</sup> Michael David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period," *Contemporary European History*, no. 1 (2002): 10.

<sup>29</sup> This meant Soviet intellectuals, who were not Party members, could participate as well. *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

submit a sample of Soviet photographic work and help to coordinate exhibitions in India and South Africa.<sup>31</sup> As head of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, had this request come internally, from one of the Soviet Republics, she could approve or deny the invitation without consultation. Since it did not she was obligated to apply for permission from the photo section of the SSOD before responding.<sup>32</sup> The photo section of the Union of Journalists and the photo section of the SSOD often collaborated closely. For example, when the photo section of the SSOD was invited to submit photographs to the 1960 *Europaphoto* competition, which offered exhibition opportunities for amateur photographers, the photo section wrote to Bugayeva, asking her for recommendations and how to contact local amateur organizations.<sup>33</sup>

In 1960, the photo section of the SSOD claimed working ties with photography organizations in East Germany (GDR), Hungary, China, Romania, the United States, Britain, France, Italy, West Germany, India, Switzerland and Canada.<sup>34</sup> In the Soviet Union, its membership boasted nearly 200 of the leading photojournalists from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Riga, Minsk, Yerevan, Almaty, Tashkent and other Soviet cities.<sup>35</sup> It regularly collaborated with the photo section of the Union of Journalists as well as TASS in securing images for exhibitions in the Soviet Union and abroad.<sup>36</sup> It also planned numerous exhibitions of works by Soviet photographers who traveled abroad extensively

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<sup>31</sup> "Pismo, Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnymi stranami," 24 June 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 48, l. 125).

<sup>32</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 48, l. 125.

<sup>33</sup> "Pismo, Zhurnal *Sovetskoe foto tov. Bugaevoi*," 20 November 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 233).

<sup>34</sup> "A. Raykov - Dlia Bolgarskogo Fotokluba," 29 March 1960 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 37).

<sup>35</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 37

<sup>36</sup> "Pismo, Nachal'niku upravleniia fotokhroniki TASS tov. Kyzovkinu, N. V.," (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 256).

(particularly those who worked for *Ogonek*).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the Union claimed that it successfully mediated contacts between these prominent members of the Soviet press with their foreign counterparts, not only in socialist countries, but with Canadian, Italian, and British photographers.<sup>38</sup>

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the photo section of the SSOD was led by president Vladimir Shakhovskoi, who was also a photojournalist for the illustrated magazine *Sovetskii soiuz* alongside Mark Redkin and Aleksandr Ptitsyn. Shakhovskoi was born in 1899 in Yuzovka (later Stalino, and then Donetsk in Ukraine) and an amateur photographer in his youth.<sup>39</sup> He continued to pursue photography as a hobby working as a theater and film actor in the 1920s. In 1929 he abandoned his acting career for a full time position as a photojournalist for the journal *Trud*, where he worked for six years, before becoming a freelance photojournalist for a number of journals and magazines.<sup>40</sup> During World War II he worked as a photojournalist in various aviation units of the Red Army before accepting a position as a photography correspondent at *Sovetskii soiuz*.<sup>41</sup> Like most photojournalists at the time, though Shakhovskoi was a press photographer, he did not intend to exclude artistry from his works. He particularly admired Italian photography and neorealism, which held immense influence over his work.<sup>42</sup> The main features of neorealism, documentary, ordinariness, a general lack of ornamentation or obvious decoration, appealed to Soviet photographers like Shakhovskoi. Shakhovskoi embraced the idea of the photographer as an aesthetician and chronicler of the everyday. He

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<sup>37</sup> "Pismo, Dom Druzhby," 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 178).

<sup>38</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 37.

<sup>39</sup> "Biografiia Vladimir Shakhovskoi," 1958 (GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 22, l. 101).

<sup>40</sup> GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 22, l. 101.

<sup>41</sup> GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 22, l. 101.

<sup>42</sup> GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 22, l. 101.

likewise encouraged members of the photo section of the SSOD to follow his example, especially for works sent to international art photography exhibitions, and sought to establish a Soviet neorealist movement. Though the influence of neorealism never really surpassed the impact of 1920s avant-garde in Soviet 1950s and 1960s photography, in certainly fit within the parameters of acceptable aesthetics, and the two styles were not mutually exclusive: many photographers included aspects of both genres in their work.

The photo section of the SSOD itself was not a club and lacked a laboratory or an official newsletter or journal.<sup>43</sup> Shakhovskoi, made this clear in a letter to Bulgarian photography club members in 1960.

A particularly important aspect of the work of the photo section is in the realm of the work of Soviet photographers in international exhibitions and salons of art photography. In 1959, the section took part in 30 exhibitions and salons in 27 countries, sending them more than 1,500 photo works. The performance of Soviet photographers on the international scene is usually accompanied by great success for many members photo section particularly D. Baltermants, A. Bushkin, V. Tarasevich, B. Ignatovitch, etc.). Repeatedly, our photographers won medals, diplomas and prizes. It should be noted, too, that young amateurs often have success in overseas exhibitions.<sup>44</sup>

Of utmost importance to the members of the photo section of the SSOD was facilitating the organization of foreign exhibitions featuring Soviet photographers, and organizing Soviet exhibitions of prominent foreign photographers. Furthermore, membership

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<sup>43</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 38.

<sup>44</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 37.

included some of the most prominent photographers and photography editors, such as Marina Bugayeva and Dmitri Baltermants, who was the vice-president of the photo section. Shakhovskoi and Baltermants regularly received letters inviting members to participate in international exhibitions, for instance, in Milan and Barcelona.<sup>45</sup> They also prepared personal exhibitions of SSOD members abroad. Generally, organizers would prepare around 30 pictures for international submissions, and around 100 for personal exhibitions abroad.<sup>46</sup>

Shakhovskoi's letter and background reveal two features of Soviet photojournalism during the cultural Thaw. First, photographers were increasingly discussing the aesthetic value of their work, asserting that critics should consider photography as both an artistic and documentary medium.<sup>47</sup> Second, that photographers in the Soviet Union were increasingly participating in an international community, bringing the Soviet Union into closer contact with the outside world. This itself is nothing new, but photography played an important role in this process. Photographers provided visual documentation and lent authenticity to claims about what life was like in the Soviet Union (whether or not those claims were exactly verifiable or in fact "true"). Of course, approved photographs of the Soviet Union had been used in the foreign press and exhibitions before. What is unique is the sheer number of images exchanging hands, as well as the spike in Soviet photographers participating in exhibitions abroad with the permission of Soviet governing agencies. The existence of a Union that facilitated these

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<sup>45</sup> "Pismo, D. Bal'termants, Vitse-prezident fotoseksii soiuzo obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnyimi stranami," 7 May 1959 (GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 88).

<sup>46</sup> "Vystavki khudozhestvennoi fotografii v Barcelone," 1958 (GARF f. 9576 r, op. 16, d. 46, ll. 168-9).

<sup>47</sup> See chapter two.

interactions at all, is a testament to the altered cultural environment of Khrushchev's Thaw.

Despite not offering permanent facilities such as dark rooms or laboratories, the SSOD did provide aid and materials to photography clubs. One such request came from a factory photography club in Moscow in 1963, planning an exhibition of its members' work (though there is no specific mention of where their exhibition was to take place) the following year. In response the SSOD stated that in order to receive assistance, the club's current plan needed to expand the subjects photographed for their exhibition, but also attempt to diversify the materials they planned to use such as posters and brochures, as well as the estimated number and cost of the materials.<sup>48</sup> The report estimated that the cost of the exhibition should not exceed 3,000 rubles, posters costing around 4 rubles and booklets between 50 and 60 kopeks.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, foreign photographers who wished to visit the Soviet Union often submitted their plans to VOKS or the SSOD. If the photographer's plan was approved, the SSOD had the ability to expedite visa paperwork and the necessary permits, and provide invaluable support should the photographer have difficulty with local authorities. One such instance involved Swiss photographer and journalist Peter Schmidt who was working on an illustrated book about life in the USSR. Schmidt arrived in the Soviet Union on a tourist visa in 1958.<sup>50</sup> In order to extend his visa, he applied to the photo section of the SSOD, along with an itemized list of shooting locations in Moscow,

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<sup>48</sup> "Pismo, Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnymi stranami foto kombinat" 25 August 1963 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 46, l. 25).

<sup>49</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 46, l. 25.

<sup>50</sup> "Zapic' besedy so shveitsarskim fotokorrespondentom Piterom Shmidtom ," 4 April 1958 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, l. 136).

Tashkent, Astrakhan, Tbilisi, Baku, Sukhumi and Irkutsk.<sup>51</sup> He also expressed interest in visiting Yakutsk, Birobidzhan, Riga and Leningrad if his visa was extended, and promised to provide lists of shooting locations for those areas as well.<sup>52</sup> SSOD representative V. Kuzin, who was handling the request, noted that while he could assist in extending Schmidt's visa in Moscow, the information regarding his travels outside of the capital city needed to be much more specific.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Kuzin stated, "we will be able to discuss the issue of assisting Schmidt in the field only after he agrees to travel routes with the Foreign Ministry (MVD) of the USSR."<sup>54</sup> This was certainly not least due to Schmidt's request to visit the Aleksandrov prison complex while in Irkutsk, along with other politically sensitive areas.<sup>55</sup> While there were limits to the amount of help the SSOD could provide, it proved itself a useful resource for foreign photographers.

The annual reports of the photo section of the SSOD reveal the extent of its participation in and control of Soviet photographic institutions.<sup>56</sup> In a January 30, 1959 summary of their year-end plan in 1958, the SSOD reported that it had prepared and sent the country's nine largest photographic exhibitions abroad from that year, which included 25 complete photo collections, 36 photo essays, as well as countless photo series and

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<sup>51</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 136-7.

<sup>52</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, l. 137.

<sup>53</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, l. 138.

<sup>54</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, l. 138.

<sup>55</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 18, l. 137.

<sup>56</sup> In 1958 the photo section of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship sent around 900 photographs to 24 international exhibitions of art photography in 18 countries (England, France, Italy, Belgium, Scotland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Hong Kong, India, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, China, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Yugoslavia). The works were sent to various international organizations and photography departments and organizers of international exhibitions, including the German Kulturbund (GDR), the Union of Hungarian Photographers, the German Society of Amateur Photographers (Germany), the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, the Photographic Council of the Edinburgh International Festival Art, the Photographic Society of Hong Kong, and many photo clubs in France and Italy. GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 37.



photo displays totaling 531,000 photographic prints.<sup>57</sup> This did not include the additional 480,000 photography prints that the SSOD sent abroad that were not part of a larger exhibition or display.<sup>58</sup> The estimated total number of images exchanged between the Soviet Union and foreign countries in 1959 was to increase by over 24,000 photographs, which included stock press photographs as well as photographs for international exhibitions.<sup>59</sup> The report concluded that the majority of the images sent to international exhibitions depicted “the life and culture of the Soviet people, and the diverse landscapes of the USSR,” reflecting Khrushchev’s orientation of Soviet life. Furthermore, the Union report concluded that its efforts were, for the most part successful overseas, “as evidenced by the large number of requests for Soviet photographs, as well as the number of international awards, diplomas, and medals received by members of the photo section in 1958.”<sup>60</sup>

The minutes of the annual General Assembly of the photo section of the SSOD further demonstrated its importance in the distribution of Soviet photography abroad. In their annual review meeting of 1959 and in discussing the projected plan for 1960, approximately 100 delegates from various illustrated journals presented and discussed a variety of issues, ranging from general topics to detailed minutia. Delegate V. Kuniaev asked the assembly to consider the organization of an international photo exhibition in

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<sup>57</sup> “Zamestiteliu predsedatelia gosudarstvennogo komiteta po kul’turnym sviaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami pri sovete ministrov SSSR, tov. Kuznetsovu, A. N.,” 18 February 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 36).

<sup>58</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Between 1957 and 1958, the Union also managed to trim its budget, despite the increase in photography prints sent abroad, from 3,154,000 rubles in 1957 to 2,740,000 in 1958. GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 36.

<sup>60</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 37.

Moscow.<sup>61</sup> Representative B. Kudoiarov gave a speech about the importance of quality paper for photographic prints.<sup>62</sup> A. Shternberg found “it necessary to conduct a careful selection of obsolete and technically unsatisfactory photographic work...” and that it was essential “to replenish the storeroom section of works from the exhibition *The Seven-Year Plan in Action*” so that prints would be immediately available if requested by domestic or foreign press outlets.<sup>63</sup> L. Grigoriev suggested that the SSOD needed to put forth more effort in announcing foreign exhibitions in both capitalist and socialist countries, because so few Soviet newspapers covered these shows. Others agreed, and suggested compiling a directory of the Soviet works most often shown abroad so that newspapers and journals could reprint these images domestically without issue.<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly, one of the final speakers at the assembly, A. Smolianov, noted that the success of Soviet photography internationally depended very much on the tastes of the foreign audience. This meant that the photo section needed to expand its print stores. Both the Union of Journalists and the SSOD had multiple printed copies of famous and frequently requested images in storage at their office. These images were available by request for smaller photography exhibitions (particularly for workers clubs) in the Soviet Union and abroad. Somalianov insisted that these stores needed to incorporate younger, more experimental photographers.

We need to update our work, to bring into the photo section all the best pictures... It is necessary to actively involve young people in the work of

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<sup>61</sup>“Protokol obshchego sobraniia fotosektsii soiuza sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul’turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnimi stranami, povviashchennogo itogam za 1959 god i zadacham za 1960 god,” 10 February 1960 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 88).

<sup>62</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 88.

<sup>63</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 88.

<sup>64</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 88.

the Union. This idea is not popular in the office section. This is wrong and creates difficulties in meetings with foreign delegations. In this regard, the bureau must vow to actively engage young amateur photographers.<sup>65</sup>

Smolianov, while admitting that the work of photography masters received positive feedback from critics abroad, noted that this work was not enough to sustain interest in Soviet photography. The SSOD needed to have readily available samples of the work of young artists, particularly amateur photographers.<sup>66</sup> Other members, specifically Georgii Petrusov and Valerii Gende-Rote, supported Smolianov's suggestion.

It was not only the SSOD that noticed the importance of updating the photographs approved for consumption abroad. A year earlier, on July 22, 1958 the Union of Journalists, in collaboration with the photo section of the SSOD, sent a delegation of journalists, editors, and photographers to Argentina to meet with Latin American journalists. Representatives at the meeting included head editor of *Ogonek* Anatolii Sofronov and the editor of *Izvestiia*, Aleksei Adzhubei. In his reports to the Ministry of Culture, Union and Journalists and the SSOD, Adzhubei stated that his "trip to Latin America spoke volumes."<sup>67</sup> The quality of photographs that Moscow had sent to delegates from Uruguay for an upcoming exhibition of Soviet photography, shocked Adzhubei. In a conversation between himself and another representative, Adzhubei voiced his displeasure.

He saw the exhibition and the photographs of Moscow were quite outdated. Some of them, in his opinion, were very low quality photos, for

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<sup>65</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 88.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>67</sup> "Vystuplenie v komitete Sovetskikh Zhurnalistov, posetivshikh Latinskuiu Ameriku," 22 July 1958 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 10, l. 58).

example, depicting the streets of Moscow, some of which made them seem deserted. Photographs of Moscow transport were very unsightly. Tram stops showed public overcrowding. Comrade Adzhubei believed that the organizations that provide photographs to Latin America should be more rational, and select photos that illustrate the life of the Soviet people.<sup>68</sup>

Adzhubei's concerns were twofold. Not only were the photographs outdated, but the approved photographs were also unseemly because they were not particularly flattering. The Soviet Union needed standards, according to Adzhubei, for press and exhibition photographs, whether the images were displayed and printed domestically or in foreign countries. This was the main responsibility of the SSOD which, according to the editor, needed to be more discerning.

In an effort to rectify this problem, in the photo section of the SSOD began sending letters to each of its members, inviting them to participate in international exhibitions and encouraging them to pass exhibition information on to colleagues and amateurs. What is curious about these calls for submissions, is that they were not only for press photography competitions, but art photography exhibitions as well. From September 1959 to January 1960, the photo section notified its members of 10 competitions, held in both socialist and capitalist countries.<sup>69</sup> In addition to the call for

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<sup>68</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 10, l. 58.

<sup>69</sup> The photo section solicited photographs for the following exhibitions: *International Photography*, Cape Town, South Africa, October 1959; *International Art Photography*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, November 1959; *Mexico's 8<sup>th</sup> International Art Photography Exhibition*, Mexico City, November 1959; *Untitled Exhibition*, Boston, November 1959; *Untitled Exhibition*, Leipzig, GDR, November 1959; *The 32<sup>th</sup> British International Exhibition of Art Photography* Lincoln, England, November 1959; *13<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Art Photography*, Havana, Cuba, December 1959; *The 19<sup>th</sup> International Studio*, Lucknow, India, December 1959; *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian International Exhibition of Photography*, Warrnambool, Australia, January 1960; *5<sup>th</sup> International Photo Salon, Eastern Cape Port*, Elizabeth, South Africa,

new photographs, the photo section also short listed fifty two photographs from its permanent collections, including works by Dmitri Baltermants, V. Gende-Rote, Yakov Khalip and Mark Redkin.<sup>70</sup> The inclusion of the latter two photographers is particularly indicative of shifting ideas about photographic aesthetics and the 1920s avant-garde. Both began their careers in the 1920s, (and participated in avant-garde circles, though peripherally), served as photojournalists at the front in WWII, and continued to work as photojournalists into the 1950s. The longevity of their career makes them unique, precisely because both their past work from the 1920s and 1930s, as well as their present work was approved for exhibition abroad.

Journal editors received requests to supply images for a number of purposes and received massive lists inventorying image requirements for specific city, region and country (or republic) inside and outside of the Soviet Union from organizations like the photo section of the SSOD. For example, the 1960 inventory of photographs provided to the press in the United States and Canada included the following approved subjects.

1. Science in the USSR - Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, and some other research institutes.
- 2 . Space Exploration - satellites of the Earth, research rockets, interplanetary rockets, etc.
3. Daily life of a simple family of Soviets (in a photo essay), show the typical Soviet family, what each member does for the day: work, going to school, playing in the evening, shopping, cooking dinner, cleaning their room, sports...
4. Schools for gifted children (music school, art and ballet schools).<sup>71</sup>

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February 1960. "Pismo, Fotoseksii soiuzu sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnymi stranami," 1959 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 250).

<sup>70</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 47, l. 252.

<sup>71</sup> "Po tematicheskomu planu vipuska materialov nagliadnoi informa'tsii fotokabineta soiuzu sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnymi stranami," 1958 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, l. 118).

The project explicitly states that the Soviet government is using these types of photographs for propaganda purposes. Subjects one and two follow the standard vein of science and industry. But the subject matter of these images, indeed, corresponded with the overall reorientation of depictions of life in the Soviet Union, especially in the description of topic three. Of course, work and school are included, but other activities documented are playing, shopping, and sports. The depiction of leisure activities in photographs exported to the west of course had an agenda, as much as they did inside the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the focus on leisure activity marks a distinct shift in government ideology that would persist for the following three and a half decades: to show that in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, people are people, and not machines. Therefore, depictions of Soviet citizens at home and abroad should reflect this shift in priorities.

This was not unique to propaganda meant for the West. It was similarly true about images provided to the press of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. A 1959 draft of the 1960 plan by N. V. Popova, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, according to his superior, Chairman Zhukov, had ignored particular areas of cultural, intellectual and everyday life. Zhukov stated that rather than focusing on industry, though it was an important component of Soviet life, Popova should amend the plan, taking into account the weaknesses of previous years. The plan for 1959 did not, “for example...take into account the theme of the life and work of Soviet intellectuals (writers, artists, musicians), which is very important for Poland and Hungary.”<sup>72</sup> This strategy was benefitting the

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<sup>72</sup> “V novom variante ‘tematicheskogo plana vipuska nagliadnoi informatsii,’” 6 February 1959 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, l. 122).

Soviet government. Loosened restrictions on incoming and outgoing photographs, and foreign public interested in the goings on inside the Soviet Union meant that the government was selling near twice as many negatives to foreign press outlets in 1960 than it had been, and that number was steadily increasing. Only five years earlier, the number of images sent abroad increased by 11,670 photographs in 1955 to 22,500 in 1960, and 24,000 in 1965.<sup>73</sup> Though the average price of a negative print had fallen from 48 rubles in 1955 to around 45 rubles between 1956 and 1965, the sheer number of negatives sold by the Soviet government to the foreign press totaled well over 1 million rubles in revenue for Soviet publishing houses in 1960.<sup>74</sup> This excluded actual photo prints, as well as additional fees that Soviet press outlets charged for including descriptions (with translations) of the photographs for newsprint, which amounted to another quarter of a million rubles in 1960.<sup>75</sup> Of course, organizations such as the SSOD preferred to send photographic prints over negatives to prevent foreign agencies from making endless copies of Soviet press photographs.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the propaganda or monetary value of photography to the state and Party, photographers and members of the photo section of the SSOD admitted that the new era demanded a new type of photograph. In her address to the General Assembly of the Union of Soviet Societies on February 10, 1960, Bugayeva stressed the primacy of reorienting photography to fit the new milieu.

Now the task before the masters of art photography is to improve not only the quality but also the ideological level of their work especially that

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<sup>73</sup> “Raschet avtorskogo gonorara po sovetskomu informbiuro,” 1965 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, l. 152).

<sup>74</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, l. 152.

<sup>75</sup> In 1960, the ruble was valued at 4 US dollars to 1 ruble, through this price plummeted in 1961 to 1 US dollar to .90 rubles in 1961 when the currency was re-denominated. GARF f. 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, l. 152.

<sup>76</sup> See above.

which relates to master's work in foreign countries. We have to think about the full implications of the subjects of our works. The audience, including foreigners, is tired of the standard production of images where the foreground is not people, but machines. Now more attention should be given to portraits, genre and reportage shots... we have not developed the theme of the Party's guiding force in our society enough, and we do not shoot such hot topics as friendship of the peoples, the struggle for peace, the life of the working or collective farm family, and advances in science.<sup>77</sup>

As Chairman Shakhovskoi of the SSOD had pointed out the previous year, the most effective means of propagating Soviet success was not through images of heavy industry, but shots of the life of Soviet families, and more importantly, Soviet presence (and influence) outside of the Soviet Union. Photographs in *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto* demonstrate that photographers were not only looking inwards and evaluating the lives of Soviet peoples, but were increasingly looking outwards as well, towards the West and developing nations of Asia and Africa.

Of course, this decision had its own propaganda value. It corresponded with the opening of borders to Western influences, a trend that the government had dabbled with since the mid-1950s. In 1956, the State Department of the United States and the Central Committee agreed to exchange illustrated journals, and *Amerika* and *USSR* were founded by their respective government foreign departments. These journals were created expressly for the purpose of acquainting the Soviet public with American culture, and

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<sup>77</sup> GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 86, l. 89.



vice versa. Though the first print runs were small, the Central Committee recognized the potential of illustrated journals for tapping into foreign interest in the Soviet Union.

The dissemination of a Soviet monthly illustrated magazine in the United States, in the amount of 50,000 copies (and the magazine *Amerika* will be distributed in the same number in the USSR), will give us the opportunity to have an additional means of acquainting the U.S. population with the nature of the Soviet social system, economic and cultural achievements, the governing departments of the USSR and the Union Republics, the lifestyle of the Soviet people, and their work and leisure. This is the positive value of a mutual exchange between the magazine USSR and the USA.<sup>78</sup>

The Central Committee, was wary in 1956. The political implications of allowing American “propaganda” into the Soviet Union meant counter-propaganda in the press, on the radio, in lectures, and in magazines to show the “truth” about American democracy.

There is another negative side. It must be borne in mind that the U.S. government will take any measure to ensure that the magazine *Amerika* promotes the so-called “American way” of life, to praise the “achievements” of the U.S. in economy and culture, and especially, in the production of consumer goods, in the organization of life, etc...The publishers of *Amerika* will make every attempt to show that the American people, including workers, live better than the Soviet people.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> “Proekt pis'ma partiinym organizatsiiam o rasprostraneni v SSSR zhurnala ‘Amerika,’” August 1956 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 11, l. 3).

<sup>79</sup> RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 11, ll. 3-4.

The Central Committee qualified this explanation, noting that agreement to exchange illustrated journals was “only a diplomatic act, showing our commitment to the establishment of contacts with the Western states.”<sup>80</sup>

Though the Central Committee was extremely suspicious of the content of journals like *Amerika*, the government was under no obligation to satisfy the curiosity of its people or the outside world. Despite the effort required to counter the hype surrounding the journal *Amerika* the government did not suppress the journal itself, though it was available in limited quantities. Many of the allotted journal subscriptions to foreign illustrated journals ended up in the hands of newspaper, magazine, and publishing staff. Thus, the decision to provide outside examples of press photography directly to the editorial staff meant that photojournalists, more than the average Soviet citizen, had even more access to examples of foreign photography.

Despite the Central Committee’s trepidation, the number of illustrated journal exchanges between the Soviet Union and other countries grew rapidly. Only a year after the Central Committee approved the *Amerika* and *USSR* negotiations, the Soviet Union sponsored exchange programs with 22 countries.<sup>81</sup> This included countless journals, magazines, newspapers and newsletters. These publications printed an average of “2000 images a month, of which about 75 are color images,” the majority of which were published in “bourgeois” countries.<sup>82</sup> The exponential expansion of illustrated journals about the Soviet Union was welcomed by photojournalists, who were encouraged to

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<sup>80</sup> RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 11, l. 4.

<sup>81</sup> “Spravka o rabote otdela fotoinformatsii Sovinformbiuro,” 28 May 1957 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 92).

<sup>82</sup> The report specifically references England, Latin America, India and Pakistan as “bourgeois.” GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 92.

travel to various foreign locations, and were commissioned to provide editors with an average 50-60 publishable prints per month.<sup>83</sup>

### **Photography and the Soviet Bureaucracy**

The photography department of the Sovinformburo, which was responsible for the printing and publication of these images, employed 30 photojournalists full-time, as well as dozens of part-time photographers, and others with periodic employment.<sup>84</sup> Their main purpose was to provide illustrations for articles sent overseas, and provide photographs for books sent abroad.<sup>85</sup> The bureau itself had been formed in 1941 to provide Soviet newspapers with information about the Eastern Front of the War. By the mid-1950s, however, the Sovinformburo was becoming obsolete. Nevertheless, in 1957 it reported that in the previous three years, the work of photographers had increased threefold.<sup>86</sup> This, however, proved problematic as well. Though more photographers received full time commissions, the Sovinformburo was heavily understaffed and underfunded.

In addition to the 100 photos that are daily sent abroad, not including lab prints or sized photos for magazines, this photographs are finished in small cramped rooms. Pictures are laid out on the floor because there is no place to put tables. I am ashamed to say, but 14 photojournalists share 4 square meters for developing photographs. Every day we receive 30-35 requests from departments for different photographs. Sometimes one application is 25-30 photographs, and sometimes it is 100 photos.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 93.

<sup>84</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 93.

<sup>85</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op 1, d. 75, l. 92.

<sup>86</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 94.

<sup>87</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 95.

Particularly in the photography section, the Sovinformburo found itself overworked and behind on deadlines. One official criticized the Sovinformburo for its “serious shortcomings in providing photo illustrations to of foreign publications.”<sup>88</sup> “The photographs” he noted, were “generally made about uninteresting subjects and are of mediocre quality.” And much like other photography agencies, they desired further collaboration between departments and organizations.

Organizations involved in visual propaganda, are first, scattered and not coordinated, and second, insufficient. Because of this, we are missing a lot of opportunities...Often publishers ask for certain photographs for publications and textbooks, reference books, albums, slide shows and so on, but these requests are sent to, for example, geografizdat [the State publishers of geographical literature] on some days and on others to the Soviet Information Bureau, and on other days to other departments and organizations.<sup>89</sup>

Echoing the arguments made by individual photojournalists and amateur photographers, the Sovinformburo found that its photography and visual propaganda suffered because visual material came from so many different departments and organizations that were not always in dialogue with one another.

These problems continued until the Central Committee dissolved the Sovinformburo in 1961. Despite initial plans to increase the photo department’s annual book publication from ten million copies in 1955 to 13 million in 1965, and annual

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<sup>88</sup> V sootvetstvii s prikazom predsedatel'ia gosudarstvennogo komiteta po kul'turnym sviaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami pri sovete ministrov SSSR ot 20 maia 1957 g.," May 1957 (GARF 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 1).

<sup>89</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 75, l. 96.

newspaper circulation from 4.41 million to 10 million, ultimately the department's responsibilities were absorbed by TASS and the SSOD.<sup>90</sup> The vast bureaucracy governing the influx and outflow of information from the Soviet Union proved to be a serious detriment, especially when attempting to establish any single organization for photographers.<sup>91</sup> As stated above, the photo section of the Union of Journalists was only responsible for images circulated in the RSFSR and the Union Republics in print, as well as some exhibitions, while the SSOD worked at organizing international and foreign exhibitions. Fotokhronika TASS provided images for some newspapers, journals and magazines published domestically and abroad, though its responsibilities often overlapped with those of other Unions and organizations, such as the photo section of the Sovinformburo, hence its ultimate liquidation. Other problems arose as well. If the departments themselves were unclear about their responsibilities, foreign photography departments, newspapers, and exhibition organizers found it nearly impossible to determine who to contact regarding various issues, from obtaining photo prints to exhibition invitations. In 1958, the Union of Hungarian Photo Artists sent an invitation to Soviet photographers to participate in their Congress of Photo Art of Socialist Countries, which was to be held in Budapest at the end of May 1959. They sent this request directly to the Ministry of Culture, incorrectly assuming that it was the ministry to contact regarding Soviet participation in foreign photography exhibitions. The Union of Hungarian Photo Artists received the following reply.

Unfortunately, we have to return the materials the Union of Hungarian  
Photo Artists sent us, about participating in the Congress of Photo Art of

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<sup>90</sup> "Sovet Ministrov SSSR, Predstavliaiu perspektivnyi plan goskomiteta na 1959-1965 gg.," 1959 (GARF 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, l. 15).

<sup>91</sup> See chapter two.

Socialist Countries. The Ministry of Culture of the USSR does not deal with such matters as coordinating the work of photography organizations in the USSR. Currently, the only way our photographers can participate in this Congress is through contacting the photo sections of the Union Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the photo section of the Union of Journalists of the USSR.<sup>92</sup>

This sort of response was by no means uncommon. Because photography was spread over a number of bureaucratic systems, contacting the correct department was incredibly difficult and confusing. The Ministry of Culture actually did have some say in matters of photography, because ostensibly *Sovetskoe foto* was a publication of the Ministry of Culture. Photographs for international exhibitions outside of the Soviet Union, however, fell outside their jurisdiction.

Competition between organizations was a major difficulty and countless plans and resolutions attempted to quash the insufficiencies and overlapping accountabilities, though none were particularly effective. In a document about the 1959 plan of the photo section of the SSOD, official P. Pozdeev wrote that without further explanation, the report itself gave “the impression of chaos and randomness.”<sup>93</sup> Only a few aspects of the plan were “original” and “unique,” because most of the proposal’s points overlapped with the plans of Fotokhonika TASS and the Sovinformburo. Pozdeev also appeared to think that the photo section of the SSOD was neglecting its (ill-defined) purpose as well.

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<sup>92</sup> “Priglasenie, Kongress fotoiskusstva sotsialisticheskikh stran v Budapeshte,” 19 December 1958 (GARF f. 9576r, op. 16, d. 46, l. 78).

<sup>93</sup> “Zamechaniia po tematicheskomu planu informatsii fotokombinata SSODiu,” 1958 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, l. 109).

It is regrettable that the Union did not come up with a solid plan to create a photo exhibition about the seven-year plan. This can only be done by the Union. No other organization but the Union can do this...Identify the specific tasks and activities in your photo illustrations. Specificity and efficiency are necessary, as never before, to meet the requirements of photo illustrations.<sup>94</sup>

Committee Chairman Zhukov of the SSOD agreed, noting that the vast majority of the plan “duplicates TASS pictures and the photo department of the Sovinformburo.”<sup>95</sup> “In general,” he wrote “the thematic plans must be revised and more fleshed out specifically by country...taking into account their unique characteristics.”<sup>96</sup> Pozdeev concluded by stating that the SSOD needed to work more closely with the photo section of the Sovinformburo and Fotokhronika TASS to remove any other overlapping plans for the year 1959.

Much like photojournalist’s attempts to found a single union to cover all photographic material, administrative and bureaucratic attempts and centralization of photography departments led only to the liquidation of certain organizations. Furthermore, the Central Committee neglected to clearly define the roles of each of the photography departments and organizations that continued to function, which resulted, as before, in either chronically redundant responsibilities, or ignorance of directives, with each department assuming that it was the task of one of the others to fulfill the instructions. Both resulted in a lack of accountability. Though increased centralization (or a single union) would increase productivity, the Central Committee never showed much

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<sup>94</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, ll. 109-110.

<sup>95</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, l. 117.

<sup>96</sup> GARF f. 9518r, op. 1, d. 17, l. 121.

interest in a single photography union to cover all shooting, distribution, printing and publishing responsibilities.

At the same time, *Ogonek* encouraged the “professionalization” of photographer-journalists, much to the dismay of critics employed by *Sovetskoe foto*. Nikolai Kozlovski, one of the magazine’s greatest assets, spent the late 1950s and early 1960s almost constantly on foreign assignments, perhaps because he was so willing to both photograph and write his articles. Though the images are not particularly visually interesting or of high professional quality, this type of photography-journalism was precisely the goal of a journalist’s education, saving periodicals time and money. Nevertheless in the early 1960s, all factors indicated that photography was becoming more professional, more artistic, and more international, while still conveying officially approved subject matter. But after 1962, this began to change. As we shall see in chapters four and five, calls for further education went unanswered, and photographers became increasingly disillusioned with the possibility of cultural authorities recognizing photographers as artists. More technically skilled photojournalists, such as Georgi Zelma and Issak Tunkel were marginalized by *Ogonek* and editors assigned them to increasingly smaller projects. As old masters like Semyon Friedland retired from their posts, the editorial staff of *Sovetsekoe Foto* was replaced by less experienced photographers, who were interested not in aesthetics, but a reliable stream of photographs glorifying the status quo. This had a profound impact on amateur photographers, who in the 1950s and early 1960s desired a collaborative relationship with professional photographers and *Sovetskoe foto*.



## **Chapter Four: Amateur Photography, Socialist Realism and Governing Unofficial Culture**

As Soviet life became more comfortable, leisurely, and hobby oriented, photography became a favorite past-time of a public fascinated with documenting their personal lives and interests. For the first time since the revolution, the relative economic stability and focus on consumer products meant that more photo equipment was being produced than ever before, for a public that was increasingly interested in photography. Photography clubs sprang up in large and small cities alike, some groups containing membership lists in the hundreds. The government devoted more funds towards special interest newspapers and journals. Alongside established newspapers such as *Pravda* and popular illustrated magazines, new, centrally published newspapers appeared. This, according to Elena Barkhatova, “prompted the development of photography, now an active part of mass communications. Many professional photographers came from the ranks of the amateur photography movement.”<sup>1</sup>

Amateur photography in the Soviet Union became popular in the postwar period, due in part to the technological advancements brought to the Soviet Union from abroad. Initially, the Soviets removed camera equipment and film from Germany as part of war reparations, and later copied and expanded upon this technology to create cheap mass produced and manageable cameras, film and photographic chemicals for home use. This, along with a general increase in the Soviet material standard of living, meant that for the first time in Soviet history, the camera became available to virtually every Soviet family.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Ekaterina Degot, “The Copy is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 113.

Khrushchev's reorientation of Soviet life focused on more human representations of Soviet people: the new Soviet citizen may be a worker, but their work no longer defined their personhood. Whether or not this was actually the case at the time is less important than the image that was being projected. The photographs in *Sovetskoe foto* and *Ogonek* demonstrate the primary role of Soviet photojournalists in mediating governmentality during the Thaw, capturing everyday "personhood." Photography was one medium where the documentary negotiated and established the broader parameters of Khrushchev-era socialist realism. Still "whitewashing" the realities of everyday Soviet life, the photographs in *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto* are not grandiose or bombastic (with the exception of major holidays) and yet remain teleologically oriented towards achieving socialism. They constitute a type of propaganda that devoted itself to the creation of a particular type of personhood, one that remains ideologically and culturally socialist, in both the public and the private sphere. The implication is that the process is being continued on a smaller scale, through citizens working towards that goal, while reaping the benefits of the advancements already made.

"Amateur photojournalism" was just one part of this project, encouraging photography enthusiasts to document their lives with the purpose of contributing to this reorientation. Yet, it appears that the Soviet government had very little invested in this venture, despite the increasing availability of cameras and the semi-official status of larger photography clubs. The Party and government did not contribute to amateur education outside of *Sovetskoe foto* (funded by government publishing houses), instead allowing local factory and worker's club organization to foot the bill. This was hardly as effective as a comprehensive Photographers' Union might have been, because it left the planning of club activities and the dispensing of funds and meeting halls to factory

managers, local cultural authorities and Trade Union delegates, who may or may not believe that sponsoring photography was a worthwhile pursuit. This left many amateurs frustrated with gaps in education, availability of equipment, and eventually led to a general feeling of unimportance amongst amateurs, because they were attempting, yet unable, to properly carry out the very “productive” leisure activities that the government was sponsoring.

Amateurism explores the breaks in Soviet aesthetic ideology. Neither fully private nor fully public, the category of “amateur photography” instead shuttles between the two. Because amateur photographers blurred the lines between private enjoyment and public display, they became a source of anxiety. As Soviet ideology shifted towards a new focus on the “New Soviet Person,” or moving away from policing public identity and towards the creation of private identity, the discourse around amateur photography took on a new importance, and no form of aesthetic expression offered a greater or more popular technology for the representation of private selves in public spaces. A careful study of responses to amateur photography reveals the ways in which Soviet ideology shifted from the ideational level—that is, the level of what was “appropriate” to be represented—and into the formal level—that is, how something could be best represented. Occurring simultaneously with the Thaw, the growth of the Soviet amateur photography movement negotiated new forms of identity, operating between official ideology and private prerogative.

### **Amateurism and Technical Expertise**

In general, the lack of corporatization or commercialization of film technology and developing meant amateurs and professionals interacted much more frequently than they might have otherwise. Though millions of Soviet citizens snapped pictures and

developed their own film, many did so for personal use only, photographing family members and holidays for personal albums. While these images are fascinating in their own right, for the purposes of this chapter I will, for the most part, discuss photographers who were members of amateur associations whose work was consistently creative (and circulated in the public sphere). Many amateur photographers who interacted with professional photojournalists and trade magazines such as *Sovetskoe foto*, aspired to become freelance photojournalists for local publications. Not only did these amateurs want to gain technical knowledge about their hobby (with the chance of parlaying their skills into a part time position at local newspapers), but journal editors and professional photographers sought to exercise some regulation over the aesthetics of their photographs.

The Soviet government promoted amateurism in most spheres of life. According to Ekaterina Degot, “amateur activity in art, and science had always been promoted in the USSR; workers were supposed to create in their free time... From the late 1950s on, they...created their own life projects, mostly in the arena of family, love, and friendship but also in science, literature, and art.”<sup>3</sup> Because of the availability of cameras and film, many amateur artists were drawn to photography simply because of its accessibility. Anyone could buy a camera, whereas paint, canvas, and brushes were closely regulated and available only to members of official artistic unions. But despite the government’s encouragement of amateur creativity, there were limits on certain activities, especially for amateur photographers. Degot argues that “from the early 1930s up to Gorbachev’s reforms, taking pictures on city streets without the requisite journalist’s identification was a risky business that could result in arrest (even though explicit prohibitions were never

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 114.

published). The authorities were concerned about unauthorized reproduction (especially in the foreign press).”<sup>4</sup> As long as an amateur could claim his pictures were of family, of a vacation, or for personal use only, however, he was relatively safe from prying authorities.

In the Soviet Union, amateur artistry was first and foremost a leisurely pursuit, but many amateurs moonlighted as press photographers. Replication and reproducibility were always closely tied to the idea of Soviet art as well, which made photography the ideal amateur medium. As Soviet slogans and mantras were repeated in the press, novels, and speeches, visual media had its own versions of these reproductions.<sup>5</sup> Many amateurs who turned to unofficial photography in the 1960s worked in other areas of reproducible mass media, such as book design, publishing, newspapers etc. But unofficial photographs were deliberately kept from mass publication, separating them from official culture which was mass reproduced and replicated over and over again for decades in newspapers, magazines, books and albums.

The availability of cameras themselves, however, did not correspond with facilities necessary to develop camera film and thus amateur photography in the Soviet Union was not only delayed, but distinct from amateurism in the United States and Western Europe. Amateur photographers were responsible for developing their own film either in homemade dark rooms, usually in the bathrooms of their flats, or photography labs that were available in some factories and institutes. In the United States, amateur photographers owe their hobby largely to one individual, George Eastman, who founded

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<sup>4</sup> Though foreign press photographers were issued instructions on what they could or could not photograph, for Soviet citizens there was no published source specifically outlining what could and could not be photographed. Ibid, 113.

<sup>5</sup> See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Kodak in the 1880s. Eastman first owned a dry plate developing and manufacturing company in the early 1880s, before he invented roll film in 1885. His invention not only contributed to the development of early motion picture film, but also led to his subsequent invention, the first Kodak camera. Eastman's invention was important for three reasons: First, the Kodak camera and roll film were, compared to previous glass plate cameras, mobile, a feature which proved necessary for photography to become a recreational activity. Second, the first Kodak cameras came with 100 exposures, allowing amateurs the ability to snap pictures without reloading the camera, itself a burdensome task. Finally, by the 1890s the Eastman Kodak company not only offered consumers a number of different cameras and a variety of personal development equipment, but film processing services, as represented by the company's slogan "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest." Kodak's services and products became increasingly mobile and accessible. The first Kodak pocket camera made its debut in 1895 and was relatively affordable at five dollars. More importantly, Kodak continued to offer film development services: hobby photographers did not need to understand the technical aspects of film processing and dark room techniques, only how to point and click.

In the Soviet Union, most amateurs did not have access to film developing facilities, and no mass network or state organization was devoted to processing amateur film. Yet, the Soviet government was committed to producing camera equipment and film and recognized the importance of leisure activity as well as the popularity of photography as a hobby. As a result, the government was committed "to an increased range and improved quality of photo and video equipment, accessories, photographs, and enhanced culture of customer service in the stores."<sup>6</sup> In the Soviet Union in 1956, 186

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<sup>6</sup> P. Krimerman, "Dom fotokinoliubitelia v Moskve," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1961): 22.

million rubles of cameras and equipment were sold (old prices), whereas that number had grown to 300 million rubles in 1960, demonstrating the increase in the production of cameras and film.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of commercial film developing facilities, but the availability of cameras and film, required Soviet amateur photographers to be more technically skilled than their average western counterparts. Furthermore, like their professional colleagues, amateurs often developed and processed their own film.

By the mid-1950s, however, amateur photographers did have a number of options when it came to camera technology. Some of the most popular cameras were quite small and involved narrow film which could easily be removed and replaced. The *FED*, *Zorkii*, *Zenit*, *Kiev*, and *Smena* were all popular portable and easy to use cameras. But official publications like *Sovetskoe foto* recognized that the demand for equipment was far greater than what was available. In response to increasing demand, the journal made sure to address the needs of amateurs:

In the coming years, industry workers and trade organizations will bring about a situation where photographers and filmmakers will be provided with everything necessary for acquisition and processing of materials and will be able to get professional help and advice, which are necessary for the growth of skill.<sup>8</sup>

But in 1957, amateurs were frustrated by the lack of materials available to them. Professionals at journals and newspapers received priority when it came to film and developing chemicals. For amateurs outside of Moscow and Leningrad, finding the appropriate materials was still problematic. G. Georgievskii wrote to the editors of

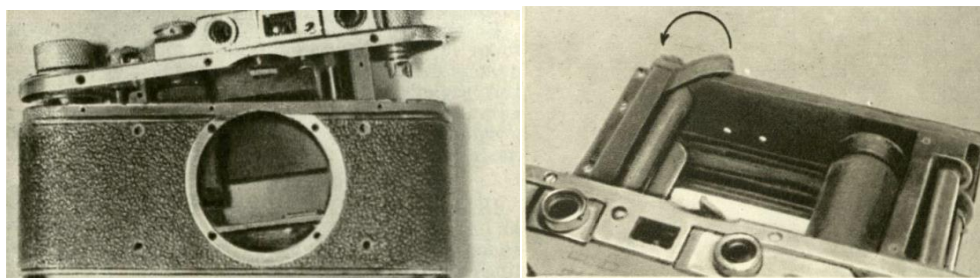
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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 22.

*Sovetskoe foto* in 1957, complaining that without a comprehensive union to help disperse materials, amateurs in the Sverdlovsk region were unable to buy the necessary “film, paper, and chemicals.”<sup>9</sup> “Without them” Georgievskii wrote, photographers were unable to practice, even though their “intention was to improve points of shooting, processing film and developing photographs.”<sup>10</sup> In his town of Krasnofimsk, when developing chemicals were available, the component parts were sold separately, without instructions about how to mix developing salts, hydroquinone and metol (the latter two elements being toxic and relatively dangerous if mishandled).<sup>11</sup> As he pointed out, this posed a potential hazard to beginner photographers who may not yet know how to mix chemicals properly.

*Sovetskoe foto* attempted to combat supply deficiencies in articles about how to mix developing chemicals, use filters and how to repair cameras. For example, the January 1959 issue of the journal offered a comprehensive tutorial on how to repair *FED* and *Zorkii* cameras, complete with pictures (Figs. 50-51).



Figs. 50-51. M. Iakovlev, Untitled, black-and-white photographs. *Sovetskoe foto* no. 1 (January 1959)

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<sup>9</sup> G. Georgievskii, “Bez chego ne obodeis’sia,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1957): 24

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 24.



Each issue of *Sovetskoe foto* included at least two articles devoted to these technical aspects of photography. Though these lessons were hardly a replacement for standard technical education from an informed professional, they offered amateurs the ability to become self-directed in the absence of experienced colleagues.

Though demand surpassed supply, camera equipment was more available to Soviet citizens than ever before by the mid-1950s, and more user friendly development processes were becoming more common. In 1956, the Fourth Paper Factory of the Ministry of Culture began producing the *Moment* camera. Though bulkier than its popular counterparts, *Moment* was the first camera produced in the Soviet Union that did not require a dark room. The film developed itself through an internal chemical process, creating ready-made 3 and 1/8 by 4 and 1/8 inch pictures.<sup>12</sup> While expensive, and with some minor faults, the *Moment* camera made photography a highly accessible hobby.<sup>13</sup>

Some historians have described Soviet photography in the late 1950s as “tightly regimented, fully subservient to the current tasks of the party, and subject to stringent ideological constraints.”<sup>14</sup> This explanation is too simplistic. As early as 1957, when planning for the various festivities associated with the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, photographers complained about lack of accountability, censorship and education. As part of the celebration, the 1957 *All-Union Exhibiton of Art Photography* was to open in Moscow in November. “There is no doubt,” the editorial committee of *Sovetskoe foto* wrote, “that this exhibition will serve as convincing evidence of the quantitative growth of the army of photographers and their creative maturity.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 8 x10.5 centimeters.

<sup>13</sup> V. Ivanov, “Kamera ‘*Moment*,’” *Izvestiia*, 8 January 1956: 2.

<sup>14</sup> Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> “Fotoliubitel’ – aktivnyi obshestvennik,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1957): 1.

Nevertheless, “lack of good governance and public organizations, the lack of specific assistance from Trade Unions negatively impacts our photographers. Even as preparation for the exhibition progresses, amateurs are left on the side-lines, which adversely affects their work.”<sup>16</sup> The editors lamented the quality of amateur submissions to the journal, citing specifically a letter they received from an amateur in Ufa. The anonymous photographer sent *Sovetskoe foto* an image of his dog with a cigarette in its mouth, along with a hastily written note about the type of camera he used and the following confession: “Put simply, I shot this image for no reason.”<sup>17</sup>

This startled the staff at *Sovetskoe foto*. “Because amateur photographers,” they wrote, “do not actually work for anyone, they shoot just for fun and only for fun. Because in most cases amateur photographers are not put to socially useful tasks, they are not looking for the hottest topics.”<sup>18</sup> This was unacceptable. Photographers needed a comprehensive organization. Until that goal was achieved, *Sovetskoe foto* solicited “Trade Union organizations, Palaces of Culture, clubs, and House of Folk Art” to help amateur photographers. “We must make the most of these cultural institutions, we need them to appeal to amateur photographers to direct their energies to socially useful work.”<sup>19</sup> Judging by worker’s clubs and Trade Union’s lack of interest in amateur photography, this appeal for aide was a futile effort. Yet at the time, editors at *Sovetskoe foto* still held out hope that a Photographer’s Union was not only possible, but probable based on the efforts of Marina Bugayeva and the (retrospectively, apparently empty) promises of All-Union, Republican, and local cultural authorities.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 2.

What is remarkable about Soviet amateur photographers, as opposed to their counterparts in the West, was their semi-organized existence in a regime still very much invested in self-criticism: the pseudo-official nature of photography clubs and exhibitions meant that even hobbyists were subjected to judgment by their peers but not by government censors. If they exhibited their photographs, however, they were also critiqued by professional photojournalists and photography editors, therefore placing them in direct contact with official authorities. These authorities, however, were often plucked from the ranks of amateurs themselves, as many photojournalists were self-taught.<sup>20</sup> Some pseudo-professional photographers maintained or held official ties in the Soviet Union and operated between purely amateur and professional categories. This group can be referred to as elite amateurs. The main distinction of this “elite” was their semi-professionalized status. Their skill level did not correspond to the social institution of amateur status, and though they often took on paid projects, they maintained careers separate from that of the professional photojournalist. Even during the cultural Thaw, the Soviet Union remained a state that demanded adherence to particular ideological strictures and methodological approaches to mass culture. Photography, even amateur club photography, was included in this category, if only as a peripheral media that received less official attention. As such the relation between the state, professional, and amateur photography was much less a strict division, than a rather thin line between official culture and unofficial amateurism.

### **Amateur Photography Clubs and Exhibitions**

Amateur *fotokruzhki*, photo circles or photo clubs, started small in the early 1950s but grew rapidly in popularity over the next decade. Clubs were usually organized around

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<sup>20</sup> See chapters one and two.

factories and the local Houses of Culture, which existed in most cities, towns and villages. In 1958, there was only one sizable amateur club in the Soviet Union, the VDK Photo Club, whose meetings were held in the Leningrad Vyborg Palace of Culture. By the early 1960s there were over 150 amateur associations in various cities and Republics.<sup>21</sup> The largest clubs, including Leningrad's VDK, *Novator* (or *Innovator*) in Moscow, and photo clubs in Riga, Minsk, Tallinn and Sevastopol had regular attendance rates in the hundreds, *Novator* reaching over 300 members.<sup>22</sup> Large clubs also had "patronage" benefits or access to publication and state funds. While *Sovetskoe foto*, the photo section of the Union of Journalists, and the photo section of the SSOD organized lectures and courses for photojournalists throughout the 1950s and 1960s, prominent photojournalists often lectured to groups of amateurs about camera equipment, masters of Soviet photography, technical photography, and helped organize exhibitions. Though not generally as well attended as professional exhibitions, amateur exhibitions drew large crowds as well: *Novator*'s annual exhibition in 1964 was visited by over forty thousand Muscovites.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike other Soviet media, amateur photographers, or *fotoliubiteli*, also collaborated with professional photographers in exhibitions organized by state institutions such as the photo section of the Union of Journalists, or at a more grass roots level by club members themselves.<sup>24</sup> Increasingly throughout the early to mid-1960s, amateur photographers exhibited their work alongside professional photojournalists, for example, the 1965 *All Union Photography Exhibition* featured a group of photographs

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<sup>21</sup> V. T. Stigeev, *Vek Fotografii*, 261.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

<sup>24</sup> *Fotoliubiteli* can be translated literally as photography "lovers," but generally the meaning ascribed to the word is photography enthusiasts or amateur photographers.

under the title “Photoclubs” which showcased the work of amateurs. The exhibition *My Moscow* contained thousands of photographs from amateur and professional photographers from the October Revolution through the exhibition’s opening in 1967. Visitors observed “rare and little known snapshots of the formation of our country and the first years of the revolution, the restoration and reconstruction of the economy, of the development of science, culture, art, public education.”<sup>25</sup> Not only did the exhibition contain the documentary and artistic photography of amateur and professional photographers, but it also accepted submissions from foreign photojournalists. In all over 350 photographers from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, the United States, France and Japan participated in *My Moscow*.<sup>26</sup>

Amateurs were also invited to participate in the 1967 All-Union Exhibition of Landscape Photography, submitting works connected to the theme “My Country,” and the international *Interpress-Photo* exhibitions. The fourth *Interpress-Photo* exhibition, *Interpress-Photo 66*, attracted five hundred thousand visitors when it opened in Moscow before going on tour around the rest of the Soviet Union. It was in that year that an amateur Soviet photographer was first awarded a medal. L. Assanova’s “Birches” received a bronze medal, demonstrating the exhibition's dedication to recognizing professional as well as amateur photographer’s work. What makes *Interpress-Photo* unique was that it encouraged amateur participation in an exhibition intended for photojournalists and documentary photography and amateurs received awards for their documentary and artistic photographs.

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<sup>25</sup> Aleksandr Berezin, “S fotovyistavki ‘Moia Moskva,’” *Zhurnalist*, no. 6 (1967): 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

As many amateur photography enthusiasts were interested in the world outside of the Soviet Union, so too were foreigners interested in gleaning a look at what life was like behind the iron curtain. In 1966, for the first time, photographers outside of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union took part in the *Interpress-Photo* exhibition in Moscow. *Interpress-Photo 66* was one of the largest photography exhibitions to date, with 2,182 photographers representing 71 countries, and was attended by more than five hundred thousand spectators in Moscow before touring the U.S.S.R. Later that year, the eighth exhibition of Moscow's *Novator* was held. Interaction between Western and Soviet photographers increased (even if only through photographic images) and by the mid-1960s. It was clear, according to Barkhatova, that photographers in the Soviet Union, like their Western counterparts, sought "to further develop the expressiveness of the language of photography and participate in its renewal...and demonstrated a desire to prove that 'aesthetic information on the contemporary view of the world by the contemporary person.'"<sup>27</sup>

Besides *Sovetskoe foto*, some illustrated journals held competitions and exhibitions for amateur photographers. Two of the largest took place in 1964. *Komsomolskaia Pravda* sponsored the photographic competition "Twentieth-Century Youth," and *Sovetskaia Rossiia* held a competition for the photographic clubs of the Russian Federation titled "Russia My Love." That same year in Gorky Park, an exhibition of rural amateurs called *Russia My Motherland* was organized by Moscow photo clubs. All three competitions received thousands of submissions and *Russia My Motherland* were quite popular amongst Muscovites.

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<sup>27</sup> Elena Barkhatova, "Soviet Policy on Photography," *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 57.

### **Amateur Photography, Aesthetics, and Education**

By the 1960s, then, amateur photographers in the Soviet Union had a number of formal and informal ways to become involved in a sort of photographic community, both nationally and internationally. Between meetings, seminars and photo competitions (in Moscow and Leningrad especially, but also in cities such as Tallinn and Sevastopol) amateurs had many opportunities to discuss their hobby not only with one another, but with professionals, as *Sovetskoe foto* was often involved in the organization or advertising of events on some level. In accordance with one of their original goals, each issue of *Sovetskoe foto* offered a number of articles about amateur photography including instructions on creating one's own art photographs, cropping images and technical aspects of various camera models. Each month there were also articles in which prominent photojournalists would critique photographs of amateur photographers sent to the editorial committee. Many issues also contained editorial sections in which amateur photographers or photography clubs could submit questions.

Historian V. Stigneev makes the claim that officially, *Sovetskoe foto* had very little to do with amateur photographers as it was a journal dedicated to photojournalists.<sup>28</sup> This claim, however, does not actually take into account the pseudo-professionalized nature of photojournalism itself in the Soviet Union. Stigneev finds that because amateurs were not involved in the actual publication of the journal, they were not a part of the community of photographers who submitted their work to the journal. Amateur photojournalists, however, far outnumbered professional photojournalists and thus made up the bulk of the journal's readership. And the majority of articles and photographs in *Sovetskoe foto* relate directly to amateurs, as professionals would be acquainted with

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<sup>28</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 262.

much of the information. Furthermore, *Sovetskoe foto* accepted amateur submissions, questions, and feedback, and many times featured editorial columns with advice related to specific questions. As much as the journal was useful for professionals, it was as committed, if not more so, to amateurs.

When asked about the artistic contributions of amateur photographers in the late 1950s, photojournalist Semyon Friedland found amateurs indispensable. Unburdened by deadlines and editorial demands, Friedland thought that amateurs were afforded the privilege of pure dedication to photography.

There are fans for which photography is a means to meet aesthetic needs, a direct initiation into an artistic education. Merely occasional entertainment, turns into a relentless passion... In choosing topics the author is driven by a tireless effort, the artist and his characteristic sense of creative exploration seeks impressive form. The content of images, of course, becomes deeper and more significant, and the performance is often pleasant in this expressive freshness of perception.<sup>29</sup>

Amateur photographers, unlike photojournalists, obsessively documented their surroundings, creating a representational panorama of not only their own life, but of life in the Soviet Union.

Amateur club photographers cease to be satisfied with the mechanical creation of images using simple techniques of elementary photography. Accordingly, to a degree, there is a trend not only to represent, but also to express the emotional content of one's story - and in this way the amateur inevitably encounters difficult artistic tasks. Inquisitively peering into his

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<sup>29</sup> Semyon Friedland, "Zametki o fotoliubiteliakh," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1961): 32.



own life, he begins to notice and to really appreciate the bright quality of direct motion, gestures, the internal state of the people...poetry subtly conveys space, expressive rhythm, texture and volume...<sup>30</sup>

For Friedland, amateurs, more than photojournalists, were truly devoted to photography as an art form.

Along with professional photographers, then, amateur photographers as a collective group in the 1960 were responsible for aesthetic innovation. Not only did professionals and amateurs exhibit together, but there was also far more interaction between the two groups than in other amateur art enthusiast circles because even the category of “professional” photographer was somewhat loosely based on the educational and technical training available, as discussed in my second chapter. The situation was somewhat paradoxical: though education was unavailable, lack of experience encouraged some amateurs to be more creative than they may have been had they been trained by professional photojournalists or members of the Russian avant-garde. According to Stigneev, when Russian art photography had been eliminated in the 1930s, “photography was farmed out exclusively to photojournalists: reporters of newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and the whole area of photographic art associated with samples of their work” which encouraged the very particular style embraced by photographers and critics at *Sovetskoe foto*.<sup>31</sup> This meant, however, that any amateur photographs deemed unacceptable could be framed by complaints about deficiencies in educational opportunities. It is important to understand that the categories of “professional” and “amateur” were incredibly fluid. The absence of a standardized photographic education,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>31</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 263.

or for that matter, any formal instruction at all, meant that amateurs fell through a proverbial crack in the Soviet system. If their work was criticized, amateurs could blame lack of formal training, while at the same time, any praise their work elicited was credited to their creativity as talented laymen. Nevertheless, amateurs were often hired as photojournalists, especially by provincial newspapers, but in large cities as well, as they had been in the early Soviet period. In Leningrad amateur photographers took a number of leading positions in the press in the 1960s, including V. Jacobson who was a photojournalist at *Pravda*, G. Kopusov and L. Sherstennikov who worked for *Ogonek*, Bogdanov at the *Literary Gazette*, and Makarov who a position at *Novostii Press*. These amateurs turned professionals reinforced the ties between the professional community and amateur clubs, straddling the line between official and unofficial photography.

The editors and contributors to *Sovetskoe foto* sought to control not only what images looked like and how they were talked about, but also what they meant. As John Tagg claims, the photograph is an item from which we cannot “extract some existential absolute from the conscious and unconscious, cultural, psychological and perceptual codes and processes which constitute our experience of the world and make it meaningful.”<sup>32</sup> We must, therefore look to “the conscious and unconscious processes, the practices and institutions through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on meaning, and exercise an effect.”<sup>33</sup> Peer or community criticism was the main form of communication between professional and amateur photographers. This is not to say that advice and criticism were unwelcome. Many amateurs submitted their work to be critiqued, or wrote to the *Sovetskoe foto* with specific questions about how to photograph

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<sup>32</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

certain subjects, use a particular light filter or how to frame subjects of their photograph. Other questions confronted the relationship between documentary and aesthetics.

Amateur photographers confronted many of the same aesthetic questions as professional photojournalists. *Sovetskoe foto*, likewise, treated and critiqued amateur work in much the same fashion as professional photography. Like all visual media in the Soviet Union, if photography was to be circulated beyond the private sphere, in other words, beyond personal and private albums, it needed to conform to the dominant aesthetic, thematic and ideological standards. There was pressure for amateur photographers to photograph like professional photographers, enforced by articles and examples in *Sovetskoe foto*. But there was also the expectation that even within the unofficial environment of the photography club certain ways of photographing were encouraged, while others were strictly taboo. Generally, acceptable photographs should be less radical replicas of 1920s and 1930s avant-garde photography, shot at an angle, perhaps with some play between shadow and light in the composition. This style tended to favor documentary photography and chronicles of everyday life, a sort of amateur reportage. In this way photographers, like many artists, felt the need to conform to a particular set of aesthetic rules if they were to remain a part of their local group.

Some historians, including Stigineev, have claimed that in addition to self-censorship, the state wielded an enormous amount of power over the aesthetic content of amateur images. But for the most part, amateur and professional photographers themselves seemed far more invested in the aesthetics of photography than any government body, committee, or organization. Ideological content, by the 1950s, was not necessarily the only criteria that needed to be addressed. Rather, documentary and aesthetic considerations were of far more concern, and thus more likely to be discussed in

articles about amateur photography. This was true even in the 1950s. According to Barkhatova, “the *All-Union Exhibition* of 1959 was noteworthy for the appearance of young photographers such as Valerii Gende-Rote and Nikolai Rakhmanov, whose works were already almost free of ideological clichés and false official posturing.” It was symptomatic that they received “a qualified green light: ‘They are young, lacking in the inertia of old errors and are the leading and strongest fighters for spontaneity and vital truth in photo art.’”<sup>34</sup>

Photographers themselves were interested in censoring the work of amateurs in order to control content and style. In 1960, the Union of Journalists, collaborating with amateur photo clubs and *Sovetskoe foto*, set up a two year correspondence course in photography and photojournalism, the same year that the first All-Union Seminar of Photojournalists convened. Though the correspondence course hardly provided a comprehensive photographic education, many clubs and amateurs found it to be a step in the right direction. Similarly, though *Sovetskoe foto* devoted several sections of each journal to amateur photography, including articles showcasing and discussing amateur work, as well as demonstrations on how to use particular cameras and equipment, many amateurs found these pieces unsatisfying. As mentioned in chapter two, however, *Sovetskoe foto* remained a journal dedicated to photojournalism. As a result, editors and contributors who critiqued amateur work tended to favor amateur photojournalism: the emphasis was placed on locating visually interesting events that occurred in life, or in other words, that were not visibly staged, as opposed to a comprehensive education about photographic aesthetics.

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<sup>34</sup> Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 51.

The views of prominent photographers fit rather well with Khrushchev's attempt to "privatize" Soviet life. The explosion of press circulation and consumption during the 1950s and 1960s meant images were reaching a wider audience than they had been in previous decades and the growing emphasis on leisure, consumer goods, and the comfort of the Soviet people meant that photographs, both amateur and professional, were not only about steel and industry, but about the people themselves. Dynamic press leadership, such as the editor-in-chief Aleksei Adzhubei at *Izvestiia* and Dmitri Baltermants, head of the photo section of *Ogonek*, stressed the role of photography in documenting the progress of government projects. Of equal importance, however, was depicting how citizens were participating in the building of socialism, a goal that Khrushchev announced would be achieved, with the help of the Soviet peoples, in their lifetime.<sup>35</sup> While journalists could write about how these changes transformed Soviet life, photographers were tasked with picturing these developments and visualizing the new Soviet person of the 1960s.

*Sovetskoe foto* invited a number of prominent photojournalists to review the work of amateurs. In the January 1961 issue, Yevgeny Khaldei, who at the time was the head photojournalist for *Pravda*, published a full page article about amateur photographer Valentina Shkolnovo. Of her photograph "Mimicry" Khaldei noted that this "experienced amateur photographer skillfully used light, focusing on the central figures of the picture."<sup>36</sup> He also complimented another of her images:

One can see the same expressive ease in a different picture, "New Posters." A young father walks with his son, stops, slightly leaning on the

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<sup>35</sup> Aleksei Adzhubei also happened to be Khrushchev's son in law.

<sup>36</sup> E. Khaldei, "Kartinki Zhizni," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1961): 38.

stroller, to read the new posters that are carefully pasted by a girl in a smock. Notice how the posters interest the child. The light in the picture is perfectly executed, and the photograph is not overloaded with details, cleverly cropped and is certainly pleasing to the eye.<sup>37</sup>

In his overall assessment, Khaldei finds Shkolnovo's work "meaningful," and as an amateur, her photographs were devoted to "diverse and complex topics taken directly from life."<sup>38</sup> But he was not universally flattering. Khaldei found some of Shkolnovo's pictures lacking in originality and thought that her photograph "Exams" violated several rules of photographic composition, though he does not specify exactly what he found lacking.

A second amateur photographer featured in *Sovetskoe foto* was Valery Panov, whose work was critiqued by "photo master" and photojournalist Semyon Friedland. Friedland was familiar with Panov's work, but unimpressed with his newest submissions to the journal. He found that they lacked inspiration, and that a true art photographer, professional or otherwise, grasps something more from the world around him, something intangible but moving.

It probably just came to him (the amateur photographer)... a spark in his eyes of admiring life and a tireless desire to tell people about all that is seen...From this time there is a different attitude to the camera. It is an amazingly accurate tool for expressing thoughts and feelings. And if it is commanded with the same accuracy of artistic vision and commitment as other arts, the way to mastery opens itself before the author; sometimes it

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 38

is thorny, unexplored, with blunders and mistakes, but overall fruitful, leading to the heights of true art.<sup>39</sup>

According to Friedland, the true amateur is more than someone pursuing a hobby. They are creative artists, and should devote themselves to their craft whenever possible. Photography should not be pursued for its own sake, but rather as an art form, that can be perfected with practice. Furthermore, Friedland and Khaldei find that amateurs should be held to the same standards as professional photographers, but have the freedom to pursue subjects that interest them, unlike professionals. The implication is that amateur photographers, unburdened by these requirements or deadlines, and with the proper aesthetic education (provided by *Sovetskoe foto*), should produce better, more “successful” photographs precisely because they are unencumbered by editorial demands. This is, of course, simplistic. Yet the idea that the amateur pursued “true” or “pure” art by virtue of their love for photography was repeated in many articles in *Sovetskoe foto*. The pursuit of this “pure” creativity, however, had its pitfalls, and it was the duty of professional photographers to comment upon, and correct, these inadequacies.

One of the harmful temptations lying in wait for the amateur photographer is that the formal hobby becomes an end in itself. The elements of the art form, of course, in and of themselves contain aesthetic attributes. People admire the sometimes bizarre chiaroscuro, unusual combinations of colors, graphic quality, harmony and rhythmic constructions, etc. But all this becomes truly beautiful only when the amateur expresses great ideas, thoughts, poetic feeling. That is when there is a deep inner sense of art.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Semyon Friedland, “O snimkakh fotoliubitelia V. Ponova,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1962): 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

Panov's work, according to Friedland, is not art. Though Friedland finds some merit in a few of Panov's newer photographs, he found that the images appeared to lack the authenticity of reality: They were staged, they resorted to abstraction, and were, by definition, formalist. Unlike Khaldei, Friedland addresses the style, which for him determines the quality, of Panov's photographs. In their work for the journal *Sovetskoe foto* in the prewar period, both Khaldei and Friedland were members of the ROPF, and charged photographers Rodchenko and Langman of formalism, even as they chose to incorporate the very style they were criticizing. For them, the form and style of the image should be subservient to the content of the photograph: the style should not be so overpowering as to detract from the image itself.

Sometimes a gifted person errs, straying from the right path, away from reality, and enjoys a very formalistic kink. It is important to give the photographer a helping hand, open their eyes, turn their face to life, true beauty, true art. We see that Valery Panov is confused in his quest, [he is] seriously wrong. And we, rejecting his formalist pursuits, publish three of these pictures only in order to illustrate the way amateur photography should not be pursued, under any circumstance.<sup>41</sup>

But Friedland uses the term formalism carefully. Though still pejorative, Friedland does not use it to refer to elitist art or aesthetics, its intended meaning when first applied to the avant-garde of the 1920s. Rather he uses formalism as a blanket definition of what was aesthetically and artistically unacceptable, without providing a definition of the term in his article. He is, however, aware of how potentially damaging these charges could be.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 32.



But how do the subjects in the foreground relate to the bizarre image in the depths of the frame which is formless, vague... Feeling is not present. Before us is a purely formal concept unacceptable even for experimentation... The last thing I want is to scare young people with the word “formalist,” which unfortunately, is sometimes used indiscriminately and lightly by some critics who brand the work of those...boldly looking for fresh, original forms. Such searches should be encouraged, but on one condition – that they do not break away from the truth of life and the social significance and beauty of the real world.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these criticisms, Friedland makes it known that he does respect Panov as a photographer and complements his photographs “Blue Bird” and “Melody” for their particularly skillful composition. This rather superficial acknowledgment of two of Panov’s images does not detract from Friedland’s claims that he is a formalist. Panov favored style over substance, which was unacceptable even for amateurs.

By the early 1960s artists were keenly aware that relations between artistic circles and the state were increasingly volatile, or at the very least, difficult to predict. The cultural policies of the 1950s and 1960s vacillated, and by 1962 it had become apparent that Khrushchev’s reforms were neither permanent nor as far-reaching as they initially appeared. There was little guarantee at the time that a reversal in policy would not result in another wave of arrests, purges, and terror. On the one hand, then, it is possible that Friedland was rather patronizingly attempting to steer amateurs away from making mistakes that could become politically (and ideologically) dangerous. On the other, it is possible that he legitimately found the images off-putting. A third possibility was that his

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 32.

criticisms were a sort of ritualistic repetition of the pro forma denunciations that occurred in the 1930s. Friedland claims that he does not want to scare amateurs with the word formalism and that some critics often used the term inappropriately. But Friedland himself, during the late 1920s and 1930s was more than willing to denounce the work of *Oktiabr* photographers, and denunciations made in the 1930s had much higher stakes than in the 1920s. After having witnessed the arrest of his colleague and fellow ROPF member Leonid Mezhericher in 1937, Friedland is aware of the possible consequences of such harsh criticisms.

I hope that Valery Panov will not be offended by this criticism as it is friendly, really. And can you be offended, by and large, by a conversation about what art is? It should be presented to future artists. Sometimes the need for young amateur photographers is underestimated. This is wrong. After all, Valery has shown, his work represents genuine skill...he does not know indulgence, and puts the greatest demands on himself. This path is marked by the perpetual search of new, fresh, expressive ideas, and their discovery is not without, of course, errors and failures.<sup>43</sup>

Friedland respected Panov's attempt at innovation, despite his obvious aesthetic shortcomings. The aesthetic failure of Panov's newer images was the result of a momentary lapse in judgment, not skill, which could certainly be amended. Nevertheless, whatever his motivation, Friedland's charges of formalism were validated by his contemporaries, though they were incongruent with his position on formalism in the 1930s.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 32.

As photography editor for the magazine *Ogonek* and frequent contributor to *Sovetskoe foto*, Dmitri Baltermants was one of the best known photojournalists in the Soviet Union. Baltermants' advice to amateurs was simple: they should photograph what they know about Soviet life. "The main object of the shot should be the Soviet person!" said Baltermants, "The person who created symphonies, who created metal, fire. Our Soviet people are builders of communism. Our contemporaries!"<sup>44</sup> Baltermants found that many photographs, both amateur and professional, were uninspiring, dull, and focused too much on heavy industry: "Basically our photographs have become familiar clichés, a steelmaker raising his hand, in the background a bucket, as he looks into the furnace, etc."<sup>45</sup> More than machinery, Baltermants argued that the most important subjects were Soviet citizens.

....To make artistic images is difficult, very difficult, but possible for the enterprising photographer. What, in my opinion, is necessary to do this well? First of all it is necessary to be familiar with the character or subject, and how you will shoot it. The more you know how, where and why, the easier it is... And there a reporter should not be hasty, they should not "appear, shoot a couple of times and disappear." The more you know about people, the more they know about you, the better. Then comes the most desirable time for photojournalists to shoot, when the subject ceases to notice him. Figuratively speaking, he then has found "the natural, original state." That is when they should start shooting .<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Dmitri Baltermants, "Sozdavat' obraz sovremennika," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1961): 42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 42-3.

For the amateur and professional alike, then, capturing the natural behavior of the subject was of utmost importance. Even if the photographer was not staging images, the altered behavior of the subject could lead to accusations of unnatural or unrealistic photographs. This is especially true of amateurs who lack the guidance of a photography editor.

The inability to distinguish the main theme in pictures is a typical weakness of many amateur photographers. Let us take, for example, the photo by G. Taygunova, “Working Hands.” It was a good idea and shows the strong hands of a climber. But the execution was, unfortunately, poor. The hands, which should be in the spotlight, are lost among a mass of unnecessary details. Mittens do not help, and rather hinder the disclosure of the theme. In this respect, looking ahead, let us say there could be more successful images from this amateur.<sup>47</sup>

The removal of the subject’s mittens, however, would be staging. What Baltermants is endorsing is manipulating the content of the image so long that the final project did not *appear* to be staged, whether or not it was in practice. Baltermants’ general advice is that amateur photographers snap pictures of subject matter they know, with equipment they are comfortable with, as it was the only true way, in his opinion, to achieve an artistic photograph.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 44.

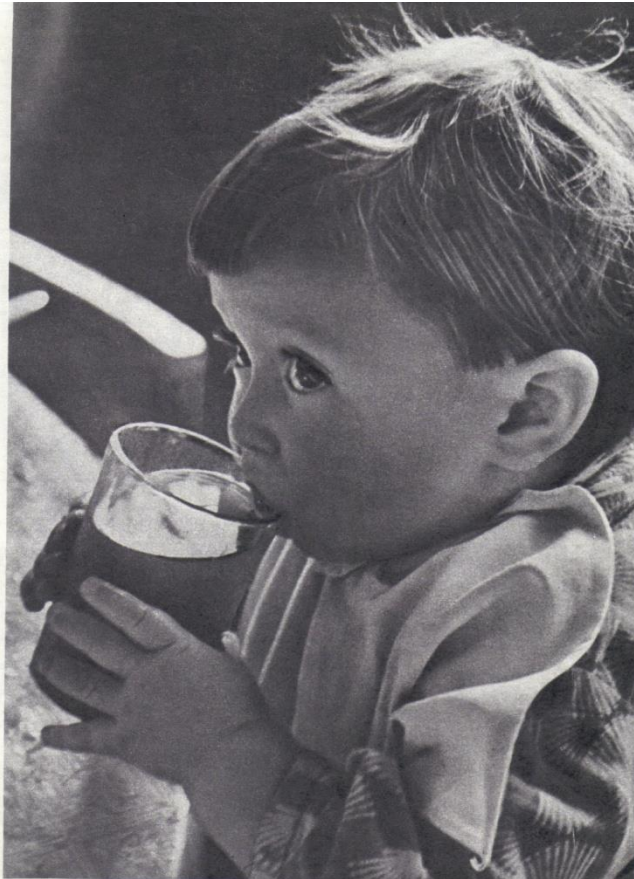


Fig. 52. Aleksandr Gostev, Untitled, black-and-white photograph. *Ogonek* no. 23 (June 1963)

Illustrated journals, and by extension, amateur photographers, took up the cause of creating the new Soviet person of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Unlike photographs published in the 1930s, which documented and praised construction projects, or those published in the 1940s, which were largely about the war and reconstruction, photographs of the 1950s were much more intimate. While photographs of party congresses, diplomatic meetings and ideologically anti-western political articles remained, photography authorities began to focus on representations of the everyday. Photographs depicted women styling their hair, a boy drinking from a glass, or cross country skiers enjoying a winter holiday in the mountains (Fig. 52). Articles in journals like *Ogonek* and

*Sovetskoe foto* about industrial projects and five year plans were replaced by detailed descriptions of a day in the life of a factory or textile worker, focusing as much on their work as their personal life and leisurely activities.

On occasion *Sovetskoe foto* would publish special articles about particular photography clubs. The March 1962 issue of the journal contained a three page article about the photography club “Taganrog” and its devotion to photographic aesthetics and education. The club chairman, Mikhail Petrovich Gromov, held a Ph.D. in philosophical sciences. Though he was an amateur himself, Gromov had participated in the All-Union Exhibition and *The Seven Year Plan in Action 1961* where he exhibited his photographs “The Old Man and the Sea,” “Duet,” and “Met” to positive reviews from critics. What was particularly admirable about “Taganrog” was the club’s interest in amateur education. Club lectures were “devoted to the most significant aesthetic problems [of] photography... ‘On the aesthetic possibilities of photography,’ ‘On a typical photo,’ ‘Socialist Realism - the method of Soviet photography,’ etc.”<sup>48</sup> Gromov himself seemed particularly interested in photographic aesthetics. When interviewed for the article, Gromov stated that the goals of the club were to elevate the aesthetic standards of amateur reportage and photography, very much in line with the goals of *Sovetskoe foto*.

The creative reports of the club members are interesting. We do not try to stir up controversy or condemnation, or to keep to the principle of “like or not like,” and carefully weigh the artistic merits of pictures based on their social significance... The club amateurs learn the figurative representation of reality, and the ability to observe, to interpret the frame creatively. When they come here for the first time, they seldom bring good shots.

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<sup>48</sup> E. Anatoleev and M. Seleznev, “Esteticheskoe vospitanie liubiteli,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1962): 31.

And in a short time there are works of which we seriously talk about. This is the case with almost every new member of the club.<sup>49</sup>

To Gromov, the skills learned in lectures and discussions greatly increased the aesthetic value of amateur images. Aesthetic standards are necessary to serve the ends of social documentation. He and other senior club members encouraged newer members “not just to copy the world, but to seek and find the main characteristics of reality, so that each picture has a certain social value.”<sup>50</sup> As with any professional aesthetic pursuit, according to “Taganrog’s” members, amateur photography was socialist realist and therefore was subject to the same strictures as any other artistic media. For Gromov, “the provisions of the Marxist-Leninist aesthetics of partisanship in art, unity of form and content are related entirely to the art of photography. These aesthetic principles form the basis of theoretical studies...they guide amateurs in their practice. Each image becomes the object of reflection.”<sup>51</sup> For both amateurs and professionals unity of form and content was the priority in photography.

Photojournalist M. Ozerski, who worked for *Novosti*, dispensed similar advice about rural amateur photographers stressing the importance of education. Unfortunately, according to Ozerski, in rural areas and collective farms, amateurs had very little access to examples of successful photographs.

The question is particularly acute, how to improve the skills of rural amateur photographers, provide them with practical assistance on the ground, from the photojournalists at district and regional newspapers, photographer-artists, this is very important at the offices of the photo

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 32.

section of the Union of Journalists of the USSR. Additionally, a wide network of photographers with the collective and state clubs - also pledge allegiance to helping rural amateurs.<sup>52</sup>

The Union of Journalists became involved because in rural areas, amateurs were often commissioned to provide photographs for local newspapers that very rarely had a photojournalist as a full-time member of staff and they sought to improve the quality of these images. Though they did not reach a wide audience, supervising the content and style of these images was of utmost importance because they often were the only photographs that circulated regularly in those areas. Many local papers employed amateur photographers on a part-time basis, but were also then responsible for the circulation of unprofessional images that would have been deemed unsuitable for print in larger cities. According to Ozerski, amateurs employed by the press needed to be properly trained in what to photograph.

Before rural amateur photographers there is a vast sea of interesting topics...It is important that amateurs not pass on all that is newly emerging in the everyday life of the village, the new social relations, new technology....The lens cannot be indifferent to such a remarkable phenomena as the introduction of complex mechanization, the use of automation, further electrification of collective farm production...And what endless possibilities this big topic conceals the emergence of culture on our collective farms.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> M. Ozerski, "Na snimkakh – truzheniki sela," *Sovetskoe foto*, no.11 (1961): 44.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 44.



Professional photojournalists felt bound to amateur photographers. It was their duty not only to provide examples of successful photographs, but also to train and educate amateur colleagues in sparsely populated areas.

*Sovetskoe foto* contained articles about how to photograph certain subjects. Special interest articles outlined how to photograph “machinery,” “patriotic holidays,” and “leisure.” Various articles throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s discussed both technical aspects, such as lighting, and aesthetic topics, such as how socialist realism related to photographing particular subjects, such as those listed. Off center cropping, a very distinctive hallmark of the avant-garde, was unanimously agreed upon as the example to be followed in contemporary socialist realist photography.

Landscape photography was a particularly popular genre for amateurs and was usually discussed in a section of *Sovetskoe foto* titled “Let’s Talk about Your Pictures” (*Pogovorim o vashikh snimkakh*). Each of the photographers submitted a photograph with a title, the location of the photograph, the make of the camera and lens, the shooting speed, and any filters used. The photographs to be discussed were selected and discussed by the editorial committee. For example, the critique of E. Ilyan’s 1961 photograph “Frosty Morning,” yielded the following comments from *Sovetskoe foto*’s editorial staff.

Before us is an ordinary corner of Russian nature and, although in this case it does not hit the viewer with its special picturesque beauty, however, the picture is very lyrical, it feels like light frost at the beginning of the day....The picture is laconic in composition, and is not overloaded with unnecessary figures. A milky haze creeps along the photograph enveloping the branches of bushes, tangled before the circle of the sun,

soft tones transmit perspective - all this makes it an attractive landscape.

The author, apparently, has quite mastered the technique of photography.<sup>54</sup>

For editors, content was key, but the form and technical aspects of the photograph were equally important. The same article chastised a second provincial photographer for his inability to use his camera properly and for lazily cropping his image.

The vantage point of the shot greatly restricts the ability to uncover the plot of this photograph. People “abut” in the edge of the image, they simply “have nowhere to go.” The frame should be far enough away so that the women and girls could be seen, as well as the rails stretching into the distance...B. Soloveitchik’s image was technically weak. Despite the natural lighting, the picture is a sluggish grey. In print there should be more contrast in the picture, it should be more succulent, the sunlight should appear brighter.<sup>55</sup>

B. Soloveitchik, an amateur from Novosibirsk, had not used the appropriate filter for his camera that day, hence the disappointing lack of contrast between the subjects and the background. Even more problematic, however, was that he had cropped his image too heavily, obscuring the subjects of the photograph. This, according to the editors, damaged the content of the photograph and obscured the overall meaning and the documentary style demanded of amateurs. Soloveitchik was not the only photographer whose work was deemed unacceptable. Other photographers were chastised for various other failures, poor shooting locations, uninspired themes, or using the wrong lens or shooting speed.

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<sup>54</sup> “Pogovorim o vashikh snimkakh,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1961): 44.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 44.

Moldovan photographer I. Vasilioglo was accused of relying too much on his camera and not enough on his instinct as a photographer.

The high camera angle shows excavated soil being loaded. But the primitive composition is not given the opportunity to figuratively resolve the “plot” of the photograph and make it artistic. Technically, the picture was shot well. Vasilioglo clearly worked out the details: there is a texture to the metal, machinery and soil. This was largely facilitated by the fact that the shooting was done with a “Moscow- 2” camera, with wide film. The author uses a good positive process, and skillfully selected the paper number. Admittedly, unfortunately, there were some mistakes in technical terms. The sky looks garishly whitish... If it was cloudy the day shooting took place, it would be worth taking pictures with a light filter.<sup>56</sup>

Much like the ROPF’s criticisms of *Oktiabr* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, editors of *Sovetskoe foto* in the 1950s and 1960s demanded that photographs be uniform in form and content, one should not overpower the other. In this way, the same criticisms hurled at Rodchenko and Langman in the early Soviet period continued to dictate what was stylistically appropriate decades later. Photographers should crop their images, but not too radically. They should feature their subject, but not rely too heavily on the documentary features of the medium. Style and subject should complement one another. For the most part, however, these reviews tended to be positive with only a few negative examples, which were used to blatantly demonstrate what was satisfactory as opposed to unacceptable. Those photographers who were chastised were chosen because their images lacked technical skill or, more importantly, had submitted photographs in which

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 44.

style overshadowed the subject or subjects of the image. This applied to professionals and amateurs alike.

### **Amateur Education and *Sovetskoe Foto***

In some issues of *Sovetskoe foto*, the section “Let’s Talk about Your Pictures” was devoted to a particular theme or “lesson,” for amateurs. For example, the February 1962 section focused on the vantage point of the photographer. The author of the piece, photographer A. Komovsky, lamented that amateurs rarely know what angle from which to shoot their images.

Step back, to the side or get closer? Shoot at eye level, squat or climb higher? Unfortunately, the amateur photographer, especially a beginner, does not always ask himself these questions. And after all, many of the right decisions are dependent on the mood of the photograph. A random, ill-conceived point of view, as a rule, does not allow for the creation of an interesting, catchy, lyrical picture...Usually, we are used to seeing objects around us at about the height of a man. And as a result, photographing with this so-called normal point of view is widespread. However, in some cases, these pictures...are too mundane, boring.<sup>57</sup>

Komovsky admits that snapping pictures from this height does not automatically yield a boring or substandard picture. “Of course” he admits “in any case, one should not conclude that it is impossible to create a work of art, using the normal height and a central point in the direction of shooting. It all depends on how it is advisable to apply it to the selected scene.”<sup>58</sup> Komovsky also advised amateurs on the distance between the

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<sup>57</sup> A. Komovsky, “O tochke semki,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1962): 42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

subject and the camera. For photographers like Komovsky, educating amateurs was part of one's job as a photojournalist, the "lessons," appraisals and examples in *Sovetskoe foto* providing the basis for the aesthetic and technical expertise of amateurs across the country.

The following month, P. Rafes published an article in "Let's Talk about Your Pictures" about the importance of lighting in amateur photographs, particularly the variation of light and shadow by season. Though many hobbyists were able to photograph objects or scenes they found interesting, Rafes warned against amateurs who photographed their subjects without taking lighting into account.

Do not rush! Are you satisfied with lighting? After all, depending on the location of the light and dark sides of the photographic object, the picture will change. For example, using light can emphasize depth of the field, highlighting the volume and texture of important objects to achieve a more perfect composition. Finally, the correct use of lighting depends on technical quality of the negative, and respectively, the print.<sup>59</sup>

Rafes concedes that photographers are somewhat bound by nature, but that according to photographic lighting aesthetics there are rules about what and when one can and cannot shoot.

Amateur A. Fuchs, author of the picture "Loading Ships," is apparently interested in powerful port machinery, and spectacularly highlights...the ship. However, the picture could be much better. The fact is that the light at noon photographs badly. It is harsh and leaves almost no shadows. This

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<sup>59</sup> P. Rafes, "Risuet svet," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1962): 42.

is the time of the day photographers call taboo. Unfortunately, Fuchs shot his photograph at noon.<sup>60</sup>

The author's advice to photographers is to take note of where the sun is in the sky. The effects of direct sunlight were also important to the amateur photographer, according to Rafes:

I would like to note in passing that shadows going strictly along or across the frame are usually unpleasant to the eye so shooting into the sun, perpendicular to the rays is not recommended. In addition, photographing against the light, you need to be wary of getting the direct rays in the lens reflecting off of objects in the shot.<sup>61</sup>

On a cloudy day, he recommends shooting objects against dark backgrounds or dark objects against lighter backgrounds so that the colors (or in the case of black-and-white photography, the various shades of gray, white and black) stand out despite the fact that the lighting may appear unsuitable. Rafes concludes by stressing "once again that in full-scale shooting, the photographer has great potential to creatively use light - one of the most important aspects of artistic photography."<sup>62</sup>

In his article, Rafes stresses the importance of creativity. Other than the "taboo" of photographing at noon, he places very few limitations about time of shooting or light sources in general. Instead, the article is designed to make the amateur photographer think about his subject in relation to the light source, predict shadows, and to have an overall idea of what the composition will look like once it has been processed and printed. Rafes reveals the relationship between amateur photographers, professional

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 43.

photojournalists and photography editors at *Sovetskoe foto*. Amateur innovation and creativity was not discouraged, but in fact encouraged by professionals. The aesthetic strictures or rules taught in the pages of the journal were guidelines specifically for publication and exhibition. Furthermore, this distinction points to the difference between the amateur photographer and those who merely point and shoot with a camera. The true photography amateur will follow professional guidelines even for photographs he does not wish to distribute, whereas those who pursue it as a hobby are content with using the photograph as a way to facilitate personal memories or document family events.

Another recurring column in *Sovetskoe foto* was dedicated to amateur questions. Especially in 1957 and 1958, *Sovetskoe foto* devoted special attention amateur questions and letters to the editor, which were featured in almost every issue of the journal. These letters ranged in subject, but many were devoted to calls for education, organization of local clubs, and amateur rights to their photographs. For instance, in August 1957, amateur A. Korenevskii discussed the recent liquidation of his local factory photography club. Much to his dismay, after a few meetings of the club, and after club members purchased or acquired cameras, the factory accountant shut the club down because of expense.<sup>63</sup> According to Korenevskii, it was the duty of the factory to facilitate (and pay for) the initial start-up costs of the club. He questioned why the factory refused to “care about the satisfaction of the cultural needs of workers,” when other clubs and activities received factory subsidies.<sup>64</sup> Another letter to *Sovetskoe foto* aired grievances about amateur photography rights. Yurii Vorob’ev wrote that in 1956, a local journal advertised a photography contest for amateurs who wished to publish their work. By the following

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<sup>63</sup> A. Korenevskii, “Zavkom likvidirobal fotokruzhok,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1957): 76.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

year, not only had Vorob'ev's photographs not been published, but the journal refused to return his prints.<sup>65</sup> While these letters make evident the relatively little official attention paid to amateur photography as a hobby, they also demonstrate amateur initiative and desire to share their work, learn from one another, and participate in local cultural institutions.

Amateur photographers also expressed concern about the availability of books about photography. Amateur Avilov-Valerianov from Nikpol'sk in the Penza region wrote that while there were quite a few books available about photography, many of them repeated information and were "identical to one another."<sup>66</sup> Far from the larger clubs in Moscow and Leningrad, Avilov-Valerianov wrote that he relied on the expertise of photography manuals and books to help him with the technical and creative aspects of photography. "An amateur photographer expects to read" photography books and find "something new and interesting. But very often we find only disappointment."<sup>67</sup> In the recently published manual "Naturalist Photography," Avilov-Valerianov found that two-thirds of the book was devoted basic information about photography, and very little about photographing nature.<sup>68</sup> Photography books, he noted, must cover the topic suggested by the title and "cover not only basic techniques, but also creative issues."<sup>69</sup> I discuss amateur and professional disappointment with photography publications further in chapter five. But because there was no photography institution in place to supervise the relevance of publications related to photography, many amateurs found that books about

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<sup>65</sup> Yurii Vorob'ev, "Verite fotografii," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1957): 76.

<sup>66</sup> Avilov-Valerianov, "O knigakh-bliznetsakh," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1957): 24.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



photography rehashed the same basic information, without covering more advanced or specific skills and aesthetic principles.

This same sentiment was repeated by members of small photography clubs. The gap between recently inducted amateurs and experienced members was palpable. Members of the club Rusakov wrote *Sovetskoe foto*, explaining that while their club worked tirelessly to improve all photographer's work, there was sometimes a "high turnover of new members." "Every year" club members V. Vaneev and A. Nadezhdin wrote "classes begin with the same 'basics,'" and for experienced amateurs who wished for more advanced instruction, these early lessons were "not interesting."<sup>70</sup> They also explained that "Trade Union organizations and worker's clubs views of amateur photography" were "looked at as a tertiary business."<sup>71</sup> Worker's clubs talked only "about how to handle the camera, how to develop the film and to print it. This form of practice, is of course, necessary, but it is suitable only for beginners."<sup>72</sup> Though some worker's clubs provided dark rooms and meeting halls, the spaces provided and times offered were of the lowest priority, some clubs having meetings of twenty or thirty members in store-rooms and closets.<sup>73</sup>

Each month, the journal received thousands of letters from individual photographers, workers' photography clubs, as well as more formally established photography circles. Amateurs who wrote to the journal were not only seeking advice about aesthetics or camera angles and lenses, but also posed practical questions ranging from studio space to the legality of freelance work. For example, T. Grebnee, a

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<sup>70</sup> V. Vaneev and A. Nadezhdin, "Sozdavat' i ukrepliat' fotokruzhki v klubakh," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1957): 33.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 34.

photography enthusiast and teacher from the Kursk region, wrote the journal with the following question:

If you are doing a job or after-hours work as a studio photographer, and took a picture on your own initiative, and your picture is selected and approved by a studio, must it be regarded as an independent work? Along with the pleasant side of being a freelance photographer, must you have an earnings statement? Are you subject to income tax if you are an amateur photographer?<sup>74</sup>

In response, Grebnee received this piece of advice.

Income tax is charged only if there is a fee for the photography session. An amateur photographer who takes pictures commissioned by private individuals or institutions for legal purposes becomes a professional who is subject to income tax in the prescribed manner under Article 19 of the Decree of the Supreme Council of 30 April 1943, as a person engaged in handicrafts. A photographer producing images on the request of individuals or institutions without a registration certificate or earnings statement may be fined. If the amateur's pictures are published in a newspaper or magazine, then his fee is subject to income tax.<sup>75</sup>

Like Grebnee, many amateur photographers had questions about taxes and the legality of publishing non-commissioned amateur images, but also how much photographers were generally paid by television studios, newspapers, for freelance work, and how and where to find studio spaces for factory photography clubs.

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<sup>74</sup> A. Perttsik, "Eoridicheskaia konsul'tatsiia," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1961): 48.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

On average, *Sovetskoe foto* received approximately two thousand photographs from amateur photographers per month along with questions. Many photographers who submitted their work in this manner were curious about angles and cropping techniques. Photographers were encouraged to crop their photographs extensively, as “unnecessary detail” in photographs was highly discouraged. Images were to be clear, concise, and easy to understand. “Therefore, even while shooting” it was important that the photographer “be clear about the boundaries of the future picture, its composition...and cut out everything unnecessary.”<sup>76</sup> Amateurs who did not have access to the same technical and printing equipment as professional photojournalists needed to be particularly careful, and have an idea of the final product before shooting, as reprinting after cropping can damage the negative leading to a substandard image. Photographer I. Seleznev pointed out that amateurs needed to be more mindful than professionals, who can “rely on subsequent trimming before printing.”<sup>77</sup> Amateurs who did have access to more sophisticated camera and printing technology, however, did not necessarily produce better pictures. The photographer should be thinking about the final product while shooting the image, and cropping and framing should be used to finalize an image, not create it. “Framing as a creative process,” said Seleznev, “largely determines the compositional and technical quality and the dignity of a work...It is necessary to try to execute the main part of the process when shooting and finalize it only in print or on the finished picture.”<sup>78</sup> Critics noticed that amateurs had a tendency to either crop their images too closely, or not enough, damaging the overall composition.

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<sup>76</sup> I. Seleznev, “Kadrirovaniye – protsess tvorcheskii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1961): 42.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

The advice sections of *Sovetskoe foto*, despite their varying technical content, reveal an emphasis on creativity in amateur photography. If amateurs did not follow the advice of professional photojournalists and photography critics, there was still the possibility that their image could be aesthetically sound. Articles about techniques for amateur photographers provided general guidelines, which could be broken, emphasizing both the potential for creativity and agency amongst non-professional and amateur photographers. On the one hand, Rafes and Seleznev point out that a true masterpiece is unlikely, though not impossible, if amateurs ignored their advice. On the other, they make clear that this should not discourage amateurs from attempting different points of view, close cropping, or experimenting with light sources.

### **Amateurs, Nudity, and the Birth of Unofficial Photography**

As stated previously, then, most photographers in the Soviet Union remained amateur in status in terms of their education and background even if they were employed by the press. Even though photography unions existed in other Eastern bloc countries like Poland (whose amateur clubs and professional photographs were censored by the Central Photographic Agency beginning in 1951), by and large, Soviet Republics lacked comprehensive photography unions. The only republic to prove the exception to this rule was Lithuania, which in 1972 organized the Photography Art Society of Lithuania (which later became the Union of Lithuanian Photographers), the only official creative union established for photographers after the 1930s. The Society was a grassroots organization, created by locals though recognized publicly by the central government in Lithuania. The Society's aim was to "promote photography as a form of art and organize exhibitions, contact photographers and photography clubs in foreign countries, publish photography

books and offer photography courses.”<sup>79</sup> The photographic club in Vilnius took on the role of Union leader for Lithuanian photographers. Nevertheless, club photographers in the Soviet Republics were both limited and liberated by their location on the periphery. Some of the most acclaimed amateur photographers of the time, came out of the Society of Photographic art (Lithuania’s precursor to the Photography Art Society): Antanas Sutkus, Rimantas Dichavicius, Aleksandras Macijauskas and Algimantas Kuncius were all prominent members of the Society at the beginning of their careers in the 1960s. Their location on the periphery of the Soviet Union as well as the photographic community allowed them opportunities not afforded to amateurs in Moscow and Leningrad: Rimtautas Dichavicius’ nude photographs of women set against Baltic landscape were well-known and published in the Lithuanian Press, even though nude photography itself was largely frowned upon.<sup>80</sup> For these photographers, movement between Republics was more difficult as they lacked professional status, and yet they found inspiration for their art photographs in the unique aspects of their national culture. Because “the freedom of movement available to documentary photographers from the West was simply not possible in the tightly-controlled Soviet society” amateur photographers from the Republics “found sustained inspiration and a ‘goldmine’ of visual content in their own backyards.”<sup>81</sup> This was especially true of photographers in the Baltic countries.

In Lithuania the citizens themselves recognized the value of their ethnicity and set out to record it. The folklore of the countryside, the markets held

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<sup>79</sup> *Through Love to the Truth, Through Freedom to Creativity; Two Masters of Lithuanian Photography*. (Los Angeles; Loyola Marymount University, 1990), 2.

<sup>80</sup> Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Through Love to the Truth, Through Freedom to Creativity; Two Masters of Lithuanian Photography*, 3.

in the public squares of small towns, the traditional religious customs of the faithful, the dignified bearing of ordinary people as they worked in factories, on farmlands, attended schools or simply walked on the streets – all were treated by Lithuania’s photographers with reverence and an intense devotion to truth.<sup>82</sup>

The Baltic countries emphasized local, even pre-soviet customs in their photography. In doing so they tacitly subverted, in a small way, official soviet culture by reaffirming and highlighting their national heritage, privileging their unique cultural past and downplaying their ties to Soviet power.

Lithuanian photographers emphasized the documentary features of photography. But style was not necessarily uniform, either by club or republic. Interaction between clubs could lead to conflict and to open hostility, as was the case in 1969 when the Kaunas Photo Club held an exhibition at Moscow’s Central House of Journalists. Photojournalists in Moscow blamed the Kaunas club members for the “unusually free plasticity” of their photography, which they claimed offered a biased, or overtly nationalistic, version of reality.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, some Moscow photojournalists recalled being perturbed by the Lithuanian’s direct and in some cases, unappealing, approach to depicting life in the Soviet Republics.

According to Stigneev, while Russian amateurs tended towards documenting everyday life, Latvian photographers formed a genre based on attraction to details and exploring their relation to the metaphysical world while focusing on nationalist, even pagan, subject matter. “Their aesthetic discoveries,” Stigneev writes, “consisted of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>83</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 265.

symbolizing the moment and shifting the center of gravity from the dynamic of the occurrence to the dynamic of the internal life.” Gunars Binde, Egons Spuris, and others in Riga’s photo club were “imbued with a romantic atmosphere, which transposed the presentation of reality from the mundane to the philosophical plane.”<sup>84</sup> Much like Lithuanian photographers, Latvian amateur photographers tended to focus on national customs, displaying their largely anti-Soviet, particularly anti-Russian, cultural stance by highlighting their own distinctive national culture.<sup>85</sup> For most Republics in the 1960s, however, amateur photography remained akin to reportage, and documentary photography remained the dominant form.

Generally, however, by the late 1960s and early 1970s amateur photography and photographers from the Baltic Republics were quite well respected in the Soviet Union. The first exhibition showcasing the work of amateur photographers from each of the Baltic Republics was held in 1968 and entitled *Land of Amber*. Antanas Sutkus, Romualdas Rakauskas, and Rimtautas Dichavicius along with a number of photographers were published in *Foto – 70*, the first photographic almanac published in the Soviet Union since World War II.<sup>86</sup> By this time, some amateur photographers began looking

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<sup>84</sup> V. Stigneev, “The Force of the Medium: The Soviet Amateur Photography Movement,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>85</sup> In their 40 years within the Soviet Union the Latvians could never be properly integrated. Latvia (and the Baltic in general) was merely incorporated into the Soviet Union, largely remaining on the periphery of the cultural sphere and resisting Soviet influence. The Latvians generally considered the Soviets (or Russians from the Latvian perspective) as an occupation force, shackling Latvia to the USSR. This manifested itself in quiet conformity but non-participation in Soviet life, and less than 1.5% of indigenous Latvians were Party members from the 1960s. The focus for Latvians was retaining their distinct socio-linguistic heritage and resisting encroaching Russification: Mike Loader, “DeStalinisation’s ‘False Start’: The June 1953 Latvian Party Plenum” (Lecture, British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, UK, 5 April 2014).

<sup>86</sup> *Foto -70* was published by *Planeta* publishing house which was founded in 1969. Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 57.

beyond the documentary features of the camera towards its transformative potential. Some amateurs clearly supported “live” photography, and adhered to the regulations imposed upon photojournalists. But photography offered amateurs the opportunity to depict nature both as it is, or as it appears. As the Bolsheviks discovered many decades earlier, amateur photographers in the 1960s rediscovered the camera’s ability to create and recreate reality. As such, in some circles staged photography became more acceptable. The tone and character of amateur photography ranged from playful, to absurdist, expressing everything from alienation to apathy. “Staged photography” though frowned upon by *Sovetskoe foto* and photography critics “allowed photographers to analyze life situations with the help of characters and turned out to be fruitful for amateurs from the photo clubs Rakus and Tair in the Volga cities of Cheboksari and Ioshkar-Ola.”<sup>87</sup> Some photographers, such as S. Chilikov, “readily used theatricalization, carefully selecting models and props for his photo performances.”<sup>88</sup> According to Alexander Borovsky, Evgeny Likhosherst “created mise-en-scenes in which various roles were played by characters and objects in realistic conditions or used in games with passersby who were not let in on his provocative schemes,” while his colleague “Mikhail Ladeishchikov attempted to show alienation from society by inserting figures in fragmentary compositions of cityscapes with piled-on buildings and metal and construction parts.”<sup>89</sup>

Other photographers, amateur and professional, turned to “new photojournalism.” Rather than embracing the possibilities of staging, as a genre new photojournalism “pursued a programmatic “lowering” of photographic imagery by turning to mundane,

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<sup>87</sup> V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii*, 265.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 265.



unremarkable, and unpleasant subject matter. Its practitioners also rejected the staged quality of official Soviet photojournalism, whose emotional typology of forms conveyed a deliberate severity and lack of pomposity.”<sup>90</sup> Amateur photographers’ forays into the territory of unofficial art also included the use of alteration of positives and negatives. For many of these “unofficial” photographers, exhibiting their photographic art was unacceptable. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that the first unofficial works were exhibited in the capital.<sup>91</sup>

These amateurs were participating in what became known as unofficial art, or non-conformist art, which will be discussed further in chapter five. Unofficial art challenged the status of official artistic reality, questioned it, and treated it with irony. What made amateur unofficial photography different from official photography, was the *apparent* lack of reproducibility, turning the original conception of photography as a mass reproducible media on its head. In a society where mass replication reigned, unofficial photographers, and altered them took mass produced and reprinted photographs to create unique art objects. According to Degot Soviet art was based on distribution, not production and therefore, “was almost completely indifferent to art that was not intended for distribution – let’s call it non-state unique art, which included photography.” This was because Soviet law differentiated between “personal property” which was allowed unless used for profit, and “private property,” which was bourgeois

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<sup>90</sup> Alexander Borovsky, “Closer to the Body,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 83.

<sup>91</sup> “In 1979 the *First exposition of Photographic Art* was held at the exposition hall on Malaia Guzhinskaia Street in Moscow, at which four hundred nonofficial works from all over the country were displayed, representing a wide range of genres and styles and including experimental works. A record number of works were displayed at the 1981 Fifth Inter-Club exhibition *Fotografika* in Minsk, and at the 1981 All-Union art exhibition *We are Building Communism*, photographs were shown, next to such sections as Architecture, Monumental Art, Design, and Set Designs.” Elena Barkhatova, “Soviet Policy on Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 62.

and illegal. Degot asserts that this principle applied to art as well. “As long as the artist was indulging in ‘creative experiments’ not shown to anybody except a spouse, the state was indifferent or even approved, since art needs training... This division was the foundation for the emergence of unofficial art...”<sup>92</sup>

Unofficial amateur photographers turned to techniques such as hand coloring official photographs, or publishing official photographs juxtaposed with poetry. The individuality of each piece fundamentally divorced the item from official culture. For example, Boris Mikhailov’s 1978 series *Sots Art I* contains a variety of images, originally photographed in black and white, and later hand-colored by the artist. The majority of these images could have appeared in a variety of Soviet newspapers or journals before being manipulated by the artist.<sup>93</sup> But the images were unofficial not because they were hand colored per se, but because the process of using photography in this way transformed its political and ideological valence.<sup>94</sup> The parody of official Soviet art, creating a unique item out of one that could be reproduced for mass distribution and consumption, characterizes late Soviet era unofficial photography. But it is the parody of soviet ideology, not the individuality and uniqueness of the item is what that made this work un-publishable and unofficial. Mikhailov said of his own work that he “created irony within the limits of the officially sanctioned...the hand-coloring represented the backwardness of Soviet technology.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ekaterina Degot, “The Copy is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 113.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>95</sup> Boris Mikhailov and Alla Efimova, “Feeling Around,” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 271.



Fig. 53. Rimantas Dichavicius, Untitled, black-and-white photograph with sepia tone filter, c. 1970s.



Fig. 54. Aleksandr Rodchenko, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, c. 1930s

Also of interest to amateur and semi-professional photographers was the prospect of nude photography. The sexualized body in Russian and Soviet photography as a genre was never fully developed before the revolutions of 1917, nor after Stalin's consolidation

of power in 1928. While the 1920s witnessed some experimentation with nudity and photography, generally photographers of the period were disinterested in the prospects of nudity as it had little to do with the revolutionary agenda of their work. After the institutionalization of socialist realism, nudity became all but banned in the arts. The nude or semi-nude bodies that appear in photographs, paintings and sculpture are bereft of all sensuality. According to Borovsky, the lack of sexuality of nudes and nakedness in Soviet art lies in “the existence of a particular Soviet ‘optics,’ or way of viewing things, derived from the prohibitions against individuality that permeated every aspect of Soviet life and culture.” In totalitarian art, the body, although possessing all the qualities of idealized corporeality, was utterly bereft of individuality.”<sup>96</sup> If Soviet “optics” accounted for the incorporeal nature of nudes in art in the late 1920s and 1930s, then the state was responsible for further de-sensualizing socialist realist art.<sup>97</sup> Even after Stalin’s death, nudity remained a contentious issue in all Soviet arts, and most, if any at all appeared in paintings rather than photographs. But “amateur photography in the USSR especially in postwar times, was actively channeled to... areas of intimate life” according to Degot. “Thus, the Soviet authorities unknowingly stimulated erotic photography.”<sup>98</sup> Some have described erotic “photography in the private sphere as ordinarily unartistic. But life under Soviet postwar socialism was so centered on cheap self-expression – gardening, knitting, poetry writing, and photography – that even among personal anonymous photographs of the Soviet era one comes across impressive artifacts focused on exalted symbols of the

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<sup>96</sup>Alexander Borovsky, “Closer to the Body.” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 80.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>98</sup> Ekaterina Degot “The Copy is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography.” *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 113.

private: sex, eroticism, friendship, intimacy.”<sup>99</sup> The emergence of nudity in amateur and unofficial photography became a means not only of exploration of intimate private spaces, but tacit subversion of official culture.

On occasion, *Sovetskoe foto* published nude photographs, but only in very specific contexts. Banya and travel photographs represented the exception to the general rule against nude photography. Republican amateur photographers were also more comfortable shooting nude photographs. A short article about the Tallinn photography club included two nude photographs, one of pioneer youths bathing, though this image was hardly sexualized, instead the girls bathing was presented as a slice of life photograph (Fig. 55). Anything more salacious certainly would not have been published in *Sovetskoe foto*.



Fig. 55. Ain Kimber, *Saturday at Summer Camp*, black-and-white photograph, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (October, 1962)

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 113.



Fig. 56. Aleksandr Rodchenko, Untitled, black-and-white photograph, 1930

Nude photography exemplifies a specific genre, a moment when amateurs split into two groups, or when non-professional photographers split their activity into two spheres: those willing and eager to produce publishable photos, to aspire to attain professional status, and those who produced work that was unpublishable. In working with images that are reproducible, and yet are not reproduced, unofficial photographers explored areas of visual culture which official photographers had been unable to investigate for decades. By the mid-1960s, however, more and more amateur and unofficial photographers moved away from participating in public discourses about photography, turning away from journals like *Sovetskoe foto*, formulating their own ideas about photographic aesthetics.

What we learn about the resurrection of photography in the post-Stalinist USSR from studying the phenomenon of amateurism, is that it mirrored the climate of enthusiasm emanating from the professional photography community. Between 1957 and the early 1960s, amateurs wanted professional guidance, they wanted to not only improve their technical skill, but wanted to participate in aesthetic arguments. They participated in

photography clubs and exhibitions because they wanted to learn about photography and share their work. They read *Sovetskoe foto* because they wanted to know about the latest critical and theoretical articles about photography. By the mid-1960s, however, amateur photographers found themselves in a difficult position for a variety of reasons. Calls for educational opportunities went unanswered from cultural authorities, a disappointment for amateurs and professionals alike. Growing elitism, especially in large photography clubs, reinforced dominant ideas about photographic aesthetics. Some amateurs felt this stifled their creative prerogative. Amateurs found themselves stuck in a sort of creative arrested development, in which they needed to conform in order to maintain club membership and exhibition opportunities. Ultimately, while some chose to attempt to reform this trend from within clubs, others turned to unofficial and non-conformist art photography as a creative outlet. Thus, the climate of enthusiasm emanating from the photographic community was short lived. After 1962, the ways photographers discussed photographic aesthetics and creativity began to shift, arguing that photography was somehow caught between “art” and “document.”

## Chapter Five: Beyond Soviet Journalism: Photography after the Thaw

By the mid-1960s, photography as a genre incorporated a broad spectrum of both professional and amateur photographers who informed each other's work. After the early 1960s, however, a third group of photographers appeared who were neither professional photojournalists, nor amateur photography enthusiasts. This group emerged in part because of the increasing stratification of amateur club activities. These unofficial artists began experimenting with photography as a means of challenging official culture. This chapter addresses the ways professional and amateur groups pushed a small minority of photographers to turn to unofficial art. It also discusses both the structural and institutional changes that occurred after 1962, and the aesthetic and artistic reasons some photographers became disillusioned with official photography by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though *Sovetskoe foto* began as a trend setter for photojournalists and amateurs, it became an enforcer of the status quo. Yet, unofficial artists remained informed by official culture, as well as professional and amateur photography. At the same time, however, unofficial artists distanced themselves from *Sovetskoe foto* and other official illustrated publications.

From March 14 through April 16, 2012, the Lumiere Brothers Center of Photography in Moscow held an exhibition of Aleksander Shchemliaev's work from 1992 and 1993, entitled "Yamal. The Non-Soviet Photo" (*Yamal. NeSovetskoe foto*). The name of the exhibition draws attention to Shchemliaev's first post-Soviet project, as well as the non-industrialized, pre-Soviet existence the Nenets peoples led in the twentieth century (Fig. 48). But the name of the exhibition is provocative in that it both references, yet distances itself from the name it shares with the Soviet photography journal. Perhaps even more telling, was curator Catherine Zuev's description of Shchemliaev's stance



towards official Soviet photography. Shchemliaev “never focused on other peoples’ work...Back in the early eighties, on the advice of his friend, photographer Vladimir Sokolaev, Shchemliaev unsubscribed from *Sovetskoe foto* and never looked at the main photographic journal of the country again.”<sup>1</sup> Shchemliaev began his career in the early 1980s. Born in Komsomolsk-on-Amur, he served in the military at Anadyr (Chukotka) in the far north east, before studying journalism at a university in Vladivostok.<sup>2</sup> He moved around Russia, living in Tver, Novokuznetsk, and Torzhok, before settling in Moscow. But Shchemliaev was uninterested in a permanent position in the Soviet press. He worked as a freelance photojournalist for a variety of publications, but without assignments and only photographed subjects that appealed to him even if it meant his photographs could not be published. He preferred to shoot in places he chose, in the rural areas around Moscow, Lake Baikal, Dagestan, Chukotka, and the Yamal Peninsula, on the periphery and in isolated areas. As he put it, “I was interested in the people, and the farther they live from the capital - the better.”<sup>3</sup>

Shchemliaev’s conscious rejection of *Sovetskoe foto* (which continued publication as *Fotografiia* until 1997 when it was closed), seems logical based on a period shaped by perestroika and glasnost. But more than that, Shchemliaev’s decision reflects the importance of the journal to both amateur and professional photographers and evokes disillusionment with official Soviet photography. Perhaps ironically, his exhibition at the Lumiere Brothers Gallery ran concurrently with an exhibition by Mikhail Markov-Grinberg, a pillar of the avant-garde community of the 1920s, frequent contributor to

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksandr Shchemliaev, *Yamal. NeSovetskoe Foto, Tsentr fotografii im. brat'ev Liium'er*, Moscow, 09 September 2012, <<http://www.lumiere.ru/exhibitions/archive/id-94/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, <<http://www.lumiere.ru/exhibitions/archive/id-94/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, <<http://www.lumiere.ru/exhibitions/archive/id-94/>>.

*Sovetskoe foto* in the 1930s, and whose exhibition photographs were composed mostly of iconic images from the 1930s through the 1950s.



Fig. 57. Aleksandr Shchemliaev, *Five-year-old Girl Leads a Deer by a Harness*, black-and-white photograph, *Lumiere Brothers Gallery*, Moscow (April 2012)

After 1962, which marked the end of the cultural Thaw in photography, photographers in the Soviet Union grappled with their semi-official status, and while they were able to gain the attention of some cultural authorities, such as Minister of Culture of the USSR Ekaterina Alekseevna Furtseva, photography was never officially recognized as an art form worthy of independent unionization. Photographers struggled to explain how their craft related to the established art world. Disappointment with attempts to establish photography amongst the high arts led theorists to argue that photography occupied a middle ground between technical skill and artistic vision. The relationship, however, between official Soviet photography (mostly executed by photojournalists), amateur club photographers, and unofficial artists in the late and post-Soviet period is

inextricably linked. Frustration and anxiety plagued each of these groups, spanning from the upper echelons of the photo section of the Union of Journalists and TASS whose calls for standardized education remained unanswered, to amateur photographers who complained of growing elitism in photography clubs.

Historian of Soviet journalism Thomas Wolfe argues that, by the 1970s, the Party leadership under Brezhnev decided that the Soviet press needed to devote itself to a more coherent ideological program than the “climate of enthusiasm” Khrushchev promoted.<sup>4</sup> This applied to photojournalists, but to amateur photographers as well. Photographs that might have appeared in illustrated journals in earlier years were relegated to art photography exhibitions, largely outside of the Soviet Union itself. In Khrushchev era socialism, the Soviet Union promoted an image not of the Party leading the people, but rather teaching the people to lead themselves.<sup>5</sup> This ended in the Brezhnev era. Wolfe argues that the disappearance Party support for the cultural forms of the 1960s involved the end of the “climate of enthusiasm,” leading to disillusionment not only among those who produced culture, but in society at large.<sup>6</sup> It was also, however, a process that alienated creative amateur photographers, who became more introspective and less willing to share their work with photography clubs, in part because of growing club elitism. The the mid to late 1960s marked a turning point in which photographers who aspired to produce truly creative and artistic photographs pursued an aesthetic outside the realm of official culture, and yet remained intimately tied to it.

### **Professional and Amateur Disillusionment**

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, Thomas C. *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin.*, 98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Despite the fervor emanating from the photography community in the early 1960s, frustration and disillusionment became the overarching sentiment of the years after 1962. In 1966, *Sovetskoe foto* published an article about APN (*Novosti press agentstvo*), the organization which replaced the Sovinformburo in 1961.<sup>7</sup> “The challenges we face are complex” wrote Georgii Petrusov, the creative director of APN’s photo section, “and require all of our creative power.”<sup>8</sup> APN regularly employed around 70 photographers, and yet, Petrusov lamented, “we rarely meet for necessary creative conversations or to share our experiences.”<sup>9</sup> Not everyone, according to Petrusov, was able to keep up with the work loads and editors continued to lack sufficient knowledge about photography and photojournalism. Either they gave photographers too much freedom or they were constantly nit-picking. “Young photographers need creative assistance...they need to be patiently educated in aesthetic taste in order to portray the truth and yet preserve their creative individuality. This should be done, however, without micro-management.”<sup>10</sup> An exasperated Petrusov wrote that in the coming months APN would be organizing a number of exhibitions and stressed the importance of providing photojournalists with the appropriate, up-to-date equipment. But ultimately, he concluded, these were short term solutions to a long term problem. “We need to pay much more attention to meetings with individual photographers and groups of photographers.”<sup>11</sup> “After finishing an assignment” he wrote, “we as a group need to convene, to be held accountable to our team for our work.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>8</sup> Georgii Petrusov, “Tvorcheskoe sodruzhestvo,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1966): 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Bound by his professional position, Petrusov avoided assigning blame to any one organization or person. But his article referenced a number of issues that had irked photographers for years. There was little coordination within departments, much less between government news agencies, journals, and photography clubs. Photojournalists were accountable to their editor for publication, not their peers, even though editors had much less experience with photographic aesthetics. Photography critics did not always see eye to eye with the choices made by journal and newspaper editors. In particular, because of time restrictions and deadlines, press editors often published photographs that photography critics deemed unsatisfactory. The lack of distinction between art and press photography contributed to this confusion as the editor could submit any press photograph for exhibition without the express consent of the photographer. Once photographs entered press circulation, the images were the intellectual property of the photo section of the Union of Journalists *as well as* the photographer.<sup>13</sup> So, fellow photographers, *Sovetskoe foto*, and the photo section of the Union of Journalists judged photographs that the photographers themselves had no intention of publishing or exhibiting. In short, by the mid to late 1960s photojournalists were losing patience with a bloated bureaucracy that was geared only towards output without consideration for discussions about aesthetics in the photography community.

In the same 1966 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, a short article appeared calling for an officially sponsored and permanent photography museum in Moscow. The article admitted that this was, in and of itself, nothing new. And this was certainly the case. In the previous decade, calls for an officially recognized art photography museum were on

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<sup>13</sup> V. Stigneev, *Fototvorchestvo Rossii: Istoriia, razviti i sovremennoe sostoianie fotoliubitel'stva* (Moskva: "Planeta," 1990), 62.

the rise, from critics, photojournalists and amateurs alike. “Many times, the photography community has raised the issue of the establishment of a Museum of Art Photography.”<sup>14</sup> This concern, however, “had yet to be resolved.”<sup>15</sup> In the article, the photo section of the Moscow branch of the Union of Journalists of the USSR and the editorial office of *Sovetskoe foto* appealed to the Minister of Culture of the USSR, Ekaterina Furtseva. She responded favorably to the idea, but did not offer any concrete answers. “I support the idea of creating a photography museum in our country” she wrote, “and the Ministry of Culture is ready to provide any available assistance. We need a photography museum now more than ever. I have no doubt that we will find the support of the Minister of Culture of the RSFSR, A. N. Kuznetsov.”<sup>16</sup> She also vowed to petition the City Administration of Moscow (*Mossovet*) to find a space for the museum.<sup>17</sup> But these calls went unanswered. By the late 1960s, *Sovetskoe foto* ceased issuing demands about founding a photography museum in the capital city. It was not immediately clear which government department was responsible for providing a permanent space for a photography museum, nor was it apparent who would be responsible for curating the museum. Shuffling between The Ministry of Culture of the USSR, The Ministry of Culture of the RSFSR and the *Mossovet*, as well as various other government agencies and departments meant that the museum never came to fruition.

As a result, photojournalists found themselves in a perplexing category. In early 1966, when the Union of Journalists held its sixth plenum, photography was high on the

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<sup>14</sup> “Muzei fotoiskusstva u nas budet!,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1966): 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

list of concerns. Again, Bugayeva went on to explain the grave problems faced by photographers, particularly in relation to education.

Unfortunately, the practice of Soviet art photography and photojournalism are, in general, poorly studied. The plenum of the Union of Journalists of the USSR concerns itself with our photo section's printing reports and figures, but to us this is not the main problem: delegates have said not a single word about such serious and painful problems as the matter of training photojournalists in universities.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, in his report about education and journalism, Bugayeva wrote, delegate "Ivanov made useful conclusions about the training of journalists, but for some reason did not think to address the training of photojournalists."<sup>19</sup> Bugayeva was clearly tired of attempting to have this question acknowledged. She had spent the majority of her career petitioning various government organizations to provide photographers with an adequate education. "It has been" she explained, "since before the war that photography was at all organized, and then it was only in Moscow. The whole framework where staff photographers were trained was reorganized into *Soiuzfoto*, but then it closed...since then we have had nothing."<sup>20</sup> As early as 1926, Anatoli Lunacharskii, who at the time was a member of the People's Committee for Education, wrote that "in the USSR I would, in particular, like to see universal literacy in photographic skills. And it will be much sooner than skeptics think."<sup>21</sup> Bugayeva points out that this article was republished in *Sovetskoe foto* seven years earlier in 1959, along with an appeal for support to the current Minister

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<sup>18</sup> "Ob universitetskoï podgotovke fotozhurnalistov," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1966): 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the USSR, V. P. Eliutinu and the Minister of Education of the RSFSR, Evgenii Afanasenko. “Both ministers supported the issue of the broader development of photographic education,” Bugayeva stated, and “the promises of the Ministers triggered a positive response from *Sovetskoe foto* readers.”<sup>22</sup> “So far, however,” she wrote, “the solution to this problem...has made no progress.”<sup>23</sup>

Due to lack of progress in this regard, Bugayeva put forth a radical proposal. “I think we need to use the experience of foreign countries” Bugayeva suggested.<sup>24</sup> “It would be useful to send young reporters to learn in faculties of photojournalism in, for example, East Germany, France and other countries, where there is considerable experience in such training.”<sup>25</sup> These requests continued without a real answer. In the following years, Bugayeva established a correspondence course through *Sovetskoe foto*, titled *Discussions About the Problems of Photojournalism (Besedy po voprosam fotozhurnalistiki)*, in which she served as the primary instructor. These articles contained theoretical and critical discussions about photojournalism and aesthetics in the Soviet press and for amateur photographers interested in documentary photography.

### **Another Disappointment: *Planeta* Publishing**

At first glance, the exception to this overarching trend came in 1969, with the foundation of the *Planeta* publishing house at the behest of the photo section of the Union of Journalists. In an early interview, Director G. Ia. Kovalenko said that the publishing house was to bring together photographers from various genres and careers.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 28-9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 29.



The main goals and objectives of the publishing house are to use photography as means of showing the economic, scientific, and cultural achievements of our country, the life of the peoples of the socialist countries, and the struggles of the working people of the world against imperialism and colonialism. The task of our publishing house is to promote the best works of Soviet and foreign photography, of master and amateur photographers, and promote the widespread distribution of books, albums, and other publications that contribute to the aesthetic education of our people.<sup>26</sup>

Kovalenko also hoped that *Planeta* would facilitate cooperation between Soviet and East European publishers, as coordination between foreign photography departments was largely left to the SSOD.

*Planeta* and the Bulgarian publishing house “Fotoizdatom” have already signed an agreement, in which both publishers pledged to help each other in the selection of material for publications....we are scheduled to complete similar agreements with photographic publishers in other socialist countries, as well as progressive publishers and organizations in countries around the world.<sup>27</sup>

*Planeta*, then, would hopefully take over some of the duties from other government organizations.

*Sovetskoe foto* supported the project “as a striking example of the care of the Party and government on the further development of Soviet photojournalism and art

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<sup>26</sup> “Novogodnee interv’iu, sozdano izdatel’stvo ‘Planeta: Rasskazyvaet director izdatel’stva G. Ia. Kovalenko,” *Sovetskoe Foto*, no.1, (1969): 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

photography.”<sup>28</sup> It was the only proverbial bone the Soviet government threw to photographers, and officials did so without designs for further expansion or proper funding. As such, *Planeta* would become another disappointment, operating as a publishing conglomerate rather than an organizational backbone for the Soviet photography community, though it initially sought to “bring together leading theorists of photography, photography masters in Moscow, graphic designers, printers, and representatives of APN and TASS.”<sup>29</sup> Its initial plan included the publication of three books, *Mastera sovetskogo fotoiskusstva*, (*Masters of Soviet Photographic Art*), *Mastera zarubezhnogo fotoiskusstva* (*Masters of Foreign Photographic Art*), and *Fotoal'manakh-69* (*Photo-Almanac-69*). Dmitri Baltermants, a supporter of the project, stated that he had “little doubt” that *Planeta* would help in the foundation of a new illustrated photography journal (a project that was never realized).<sup>30</sup> Photography theorist Sergei Morozov harked back to the failed plans of *Goskinoizdat*, a previous attempt at creating a publishing house devoted to the arts, which yielded “no more than a dozen manuscripts about photography” in as many years.<sup>31</sup> He was confident that *Planeta* would rectify this gross oversight. “This must not happen again” he wrote. *Planeta* needed to bring Soviet photography into the “international arena and to that purpose, in the near future, issue at least 10-15 monographs about Soviet photographers immediately.”<sup>32</sup> *Planeta* also needed to establish more rigorous standards for compensating photographers for their work. “In

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<sup>28</sup> G. Chudakov, “Izdatel'stvo ‘Planeta’ segodnia i zavtra: S sobraniia tvorcheskogo aktiva,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1970): 42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

the past,” Anatolii Garanin wrote, “a publishing house offered me only 300 rubles for a project involving 50-60 images. I express hope that this will change.”<sup>33</sup>

Initially, hopes were high. Roman Aleev, head of the publishing house *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* (*Fine Art*), expected *Planeta* would offer a number of opportunities for photographers, including lab space for photographers to develop their work.

One of the first issues of the new publishers is to create state-of-the-art photo lab. But, perhaps, it makes sense to join forces and create a centralized lab to service two or three publishing houses. The laboratory should have all the technical capabilities and a good creative direction that would solve many of the challenges facing our other publishing houses.<sup>34</sup>

Aleev similarly called for the establishment of an “office of photographers and photo editors.”<sup>35</sup> He also stated that *Planeta* should establish close ties with the photography section of the Union of Journalists and *Sovetskoe foto*. In the coming years, *Planeta* attempted to live up to expectations. Ultimately, however, it operated primarily as a publishing house, and was a yet another disappointment in terms of coordinating between various news agencies and departments responsible for photography publication.

### **Photography Between Art and Document**

Despite earlier proclamations that photography was akin to other “high” arts, this argument was no longer convincing to readers of *Sovetskoe foto*, or photojournalists themselves. As late as 1967, photography theorists were still making claims for photography as a documentary media but also as a fine art. Theorist Anatolii Vartanov

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 43.

found that documentary was “inherent in photography. It is both Alpha and Omega.”<sup>36</sup> Vartanov said that as a result “it may seem paradoxical, but photography is different from the other arts because it is used to increase a reader’s interest in the literary genre, in diaries, memoirs, documentaries, narratives and lyrical stories.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, if you rely only on the photograph as a document, it “loses a lot of its power.”<sup>38</sup> “The value of this process is,” Vartanov states “that a work of art photography does not cease to be a document. Such is the power and essence of photography as a fine art.”<sup>39</sup> Though these arguments were still possible in 1967, they were increasingly rare and difficult to support because only photographers and theorists themselves substantiated them.

This rhetoric ceased by in the late 1960s. Bugayeva, now stressing education for photojournalists as her primary concern, was back peddling from some of the stronger claims she and other photography theorists made in the early 1960s, perhaps in an attempt to gain stronger official support for photography studies at the university level. Despite earlier calls to action, photography remained outside of the art world, and as the head theorist of photography in the Soviet Union, Bugayeva needed to explain the lack of real progress made in terms of organizational and educational opportunities for photographers. Her explanation was that photographers, though they did not receive the same prestige afforded to other artists, were *more* than mere artists. Bugayeva explained in an article about photojournalism, that “journalistic photography fills any gaps in visual information, making it a contemporary art form. Journalistic photography, with all the possibilities of artistic expression, combines a wealth of visual facts...the basic trend of

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<sup>36</sup> Anatolii Vartanov, “Dokumental’nost’ i obraznost’ fotografii,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1967): 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

development in modern journalistic photography is mastery of each fact with artistic execution.”<sup>40</sup> The artistic harmony of photojournalism was equal parts journalistic and photographic, and according to Bugayeva, contributed to its primacy amongst literary and artistic forms.

You must admit that the photographer does not “make art.” First of all, the subject of a photograph is alive, and the photographer must capture it in its most comprehensible form, to convey to the reader, the audience, information about the event and their own relation to this event. Photos should help the reader better understand the major challenges of our time, the world of our contemporaries. Requirements for readers of press photos increases from year to year. Illustrated publications, including newspapers, are looking for new forms of presenting the material. So, literary reportage is quite widespread on the pages of our illustrated newspapers. The relationship between pictures and text here is special; they are “equal,” not interchangeable, and complement and enrich one another.<sup>41</sup>

Photojournalists were thus both artist and author, and should be well versed in both aspects of their jobs. Indeed, this corresponded with the growing trend in illustrated journals like *Ogonek*, which increasingly prioritized journalists who could take their own photographs. Still, it was not enough for photojournalists to create an artistic photograph, what elevated their work as art was the interplay between image and text. Finally, and crucially, the photojournalist needed to act as a sort of aesthetic translator, to help viewers identify with their surroundings: “another feature of photojournalism is that one

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<sup>40</sup> M. Bugayeva, “Besedy po voprosam fotozhurnalistiki; Fotoreportazh,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.4 (1969), 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

does not only need to present the facts...but make the reader and viewer understand their thoughts and feelings, as well as the thoughts and feelings of the reporter and their attitudes.”<sup>42</sup> In this way, photography was still socialist realist. It was, however, somewhere between art and document, and sadly, not quite recognized as participating the realm of the fine arts.

A subsequent article written by Bugayeva continued in this vein of argument. The photojournalist should “link facts for the reader so the author’s intent is clear, as is the logical stress which the author wanted to make.”<sup>43</sup> This required the photographer to shoot photographs that acted as a sort of middleman between photographers themselves and the viewer of the image. “It is very important,” Bugayeva wrote, “that any image or report has not been artificially stretched, or clogged with secondary details.”<sup>44</sup> A successful photograph would fulfill each of these requirements.

If the author meets all of these conditions, his shots usually require only minimal additional text or identifiable without his signature. Pictures should convey basic information; at the same time they are intended to convey the author’s attitude to the subject, and to express the social meaning of the events they depict. Our photojournalism should express the beliefs of the author and his position in relation to the topic.<sup>45</sup>

According to Bugayeva, photographs should identify and translate the opinions and attitudes of the photographer, to the point that they no longer needed to sign their work. This may have been overly optimistic on Bugayeva’s part. It is unlikely that the casual

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>43</sup> M. Bugayeva, “Tema – siuzhet-obraz,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1969): 23.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 23.

reader would be able to distinguish a photographer's work based on the work itself, but photojournalists, and perhaps the avid amateur reader of the journal, would most likely be able to accurately identify the work of photography masters like Dmitri Baltermants.

That same year, Bugayeva continued writing about photojournalism and the unique position of photography in relation to art. "Some would argue that the photographic image is always only the technical reproduction of nature," Bugayeva explained.<sup>46</sup> "But if this is the case...our discussion of the issues confronting photographers would be purely technical."<sup>47</sup> In terms of its utility, photography was both artistic and journalistic.

In practice photography is creatively meaningful, the result of a ratio between photojournalists and their close attention to people, their work, and the essence of the world. These qualities are characteristic of both journalism and the art of photography. Photography is shaped by psychology, by social and aesthetic content, and this reflects the current stage of development of our photographers.<sup>48</sup>

Under these circumstances and without official recognition, even Bugayeva, easily the most well respected photography theorist in the Soviet Union, struggled to explain the relationship between the photograph and art.

In 1968, *Sovetskoe foto* published a seven part, year-long series of articles entitled "Aesthetics and Art Photography" by M. Kagin, a professor of ethics and aesthetics at Leningrad State University. The article began as a response to Sergei Morozov's year-long featured theoretical series published by the journal in 1967. It was by far the most

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<sup>46</sup> M. Bugayeva, "O tom, chto vyzivaet spory," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1969): 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 15.

important theoretical work published in the journal that year, and debated the relationship between photography and art. In an initial retort to Morozov's articles, Kagin wrote that Morozov's theoretical analysis of photography was insufficient because it was not comprehensive. Morozov's "discussion must be evaluated: if the main lesson is to dramatically improve the theoretical level of our discourse on art photography, you must first raise questions about the theory of photography and its modern aesthetic."<sup>49</sup> Kagin explained that theorists and critics who argued against the relationship between art and photography based their argument on five underlying assumptions.

1. Photographs are a mechanical reproduction of the real world, while art is not...
2. Photographs are a passive reproduction of an object, whereas art is creative, active, and creates a subjective reality...
3. Photography is limited to the reproduction of an object, but art merges the image of an object with an expression of the relationship of the subject to the artist...
4. The value of a photograph is determined by the fact that it reproduces, purely by means of technical skillfulness, while the value of a work of art is determined not so much by what is portrayed as the way art conceptualized and figuratively portrayed reality...
5. Photography is not a free activity, it is subject to functional and technical specifications, it is talent and skill, whereas art is free, the fruit of the artist's imagination, talent and inspiration...

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<sup>49</sup> M. Kagin, "O khudozhestvennoi fotografii i o khudozhestvennosti v fotografii (k itogam diskussii po stat'e S. Morozova)," *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1968): 27.

<sup>50</sup> M. Kagin, "Teoreticheskie ocherki; Estetika i khudozhestvennaia fotografiia," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1968): 22.



The majority of photography critics no longer subscribed to these ideas, Morozov included. But socialist realist theorists and critics who argued against photography as an art form regularly cited one or more of these assumptions. In each of these points, critics reference the mechanical features of photography, in order to separate it from the creativity of the artist. Kagin finds parts of this argument unsatisfying. Thus, the purpose of the articles he published over the course of the following year was to identify “specific features of artistic photography in comparison with other varieties of fine arts; determine what place photography occupies in contemporary artistic culture; and finally, decide the role of aesthetic education in aesthetic activities.”<sup>51</sup>

Kagin found theorists who employed the argument that photography was not artistic based on its technical qualities, inadequate. “No matter how different the spheres of technical and artistic activity are, throughout the history of world culture, they often closely interact,” he pointed out.<sup>52</sup> Architects use construction equipment, painters use brushes and musicians use technically sophisticated instruments to play music. Even sketch artists used pencils. All of these processes were “much more complex than photography techniques.”<sup>53</sup> What makes photography creative and artistic was that it required “active human participation in the process of production,” Kagin wrote. “It is significant that the photographer does not always choose to rely on remarkable technical innovations, such as automatic or even semi-automatic cameras. While these technologies are optimal from a purely technical point of view, they are not optimal from an artistic point of view.”<sup>54</sup> True, Kagin admits, photography was bound by its documentary nature

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 23.

to record reality, and therefore the camera could not record the imaginary. But, Kagin also notes that Soviet literature and painting also “needed to depict the reality and how it exists in actual form.”<sup>55</sup> To conclude, Kagin could find no reason why “in this respect, photography represented any exception in regards to its relationship with art....This is a theoretical solution to the problem of the correlation of the technical and aesthetic sides of photography.”<sup>56</sup>

Kagin’s subsequent essays questioned under what conditions photography had artistic value, the photographer’s imaginative resourcefulness, form and content in photography, creativity and style, the place of photography amongst the arts, and the historic and aesthetic value of photography. Kagin, however, only goes so far as to say that photography is creative and artistic, rather than placing it alongside other fine arts. Photography fulfilled a “special socio-cultural need, the need for expanding the boundaries of the artistic exploration of reality.”<sup>57</sup>

It is due to this need, one of the special tasks of photography, is to capture not only the physical point of view, but the essence of the objective and material existence of phenomena, and their relation to man, their transcendent significance, their socio-psychological value. An adept photographer has the subjective powers to do this, is which is part of the artistic talent, skill and pattern of thinking.<sup>58</sup>

Much like Bugayeva, Kagin theorized that photography was artistic, and yet there was something about the media itself that precluded it from being a true art form. After 1962,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>57</sup> M. Kagin, “Soderzhanie i forma v proizvedeniiakh fotoiskusstva,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1968): 27.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 27.

theorists and illustrated journal editors expressed repeatedly their reluctance to place photography squarely amongst the other fine arts. Photography was something creative and required imagination. Kagin argued at length why photography as a technology was not different from other artistic genres. And, yet he is unable to pinpoint what exactly about photography made it different. This is not necessarily a failure on his part. Kagin only discussed photography as a unique mixing of technological and creative production processes, and this was the only professed goal of his theoretical articles. It was Bugayeva who theorized that photography's ties to reality made it different from other arts.

### **Photography Clubs in the Late 1960s**

Into the late 1960s, photography remained a favorite pastime and leisure activity for amateurs. This was encouraged by the editorial staff of *Sovetskoe foto*, as was seen in chapter four. Photojournalists, theorists and the editorial board of *Sovetskoe foto* found amateur photography clubs valuable in bringing together groups of people who otherwise might not interact, as well as bringing culture closer to the masses, according to Yurii Olesha.

We are happy because, the fact is that we have a more and more amateur photographers. With a camera on their chest, at their side, or in their hands, you can now see a teenager, a strong worker, and a Colonel united by the camera...Why is this fact pleasing? Because it demonstrates that a growing number of Soviet people are attracted to the world of art and science. In fact, a person engaged in photography is an optician, a geometrist, a chemist, and an artist.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Yurii Olesha, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1957): 37.

In the early 1960s, the Leningrad VDK photography club, collaborating with *Sovetskoe foto* and various photography clubs across the Soviet Union, established the All-Union Photography Club competition, a traveling exhibition that showcased amateur photography. Photography historian V. Stigneev characterizes the 1960s as an era that witnessed the “explosion of amateur photography and extensive distribution of their photos...the largest union and international exhibitions, and the most discussions about photography.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the growth in popularity of amateur photography corresponded with a spike in the number of national and international photography exhibitions. The yearly *Interpress-photo* competition brought together amateur and professional photographers from across the Soviet Union, as well as Eastern and Western Europe. Add to this “club shows, national and regional expositions, and it becomes clear that amateur photographers had ample opportunity to see works by leading photographers, and develop an idea of the different directions in photography.”<sup>61</sup>

The climate of the early 1960s encouraged amateur photographers to think of themselves as creative artists, which was informed and reinforced by *Sovetskoe foto* as well as photography clubs themselves. In their opening remarks about the photography exhibition *Nasha molodezh'* (*Our Youths*) held in Gorky Park in 1960, members of the *Novator* club noted that their inspiration for the exhibition was showing *all* the world around them, even those aspects that were worrisome or unpopular. Furthermore, their goal as a group was to create a “community of people who want to grow, not only by changing the status quo, but to expand creative communication, to improve photographic aesthetics.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> V. Stigneev, *Fototvorchestvo Rossii: Istoriia, razviti i sovremennoe sostoianie fotoliubitel'stva*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 36-7.

Aesthetically, photographs that colloquialized avant-garde deframing techniques became normative to Soviet press photography in journals like *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*. These images, however, were no longer described as imaginative or innovative, and articles instead drew attention to their adherence to aesthetic tradition. This included the veneration of photographers who reinforced this canon. In 1969, Maks Alpert celebrated his seventieth birthday in Beirut, where he was interviewed by a colleague about his career. Though the article described Alpert's experiences in Lebanon, very little discussion was devoted to his present work there. Instead, the interviewer B. Pishchik, was more interested in describing Alpert as an intrepid photographer, who was willing to go to any length to get a good photograph. Upon asking about an upcoming exhibition, Alpert responded that he had been a working photographer for 44 years. "I have a lot of medals and diplomas. But whenever I show my work, I feel excitement."<sup>63</sup> Rather than drawing attention to Alpert's work itself, Pishchik focused on the photographer, even though Alpert's portfolio was well established. Instead, Pishchik tells amateur photographers to look to Alpert's spirit and expertise for inspiration, rather than his creative ingenuity. This is due in part to the "creative mistakes" photography masters made in their past, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s as debates between photography groups were particularly hostile.

That same year, the photo section of the Union of Journalists put on a memorial exhibition of Aleksandr Rodchenko's portrait photographs. Much like Pishchik's article about Alpert, however, very little was said about Rodchenko's work itself. Instead, various writers and journalists described his photographs as respected, but very little else about them specifically. Yakov Khalip, who remembered working with Rodchenko on

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<sup>63</sup> B. Pishchik, "Neutomimyi reporter; K 70-letiiu M. V. Al'perta," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1969), 22.

the album *Dvadtsat' let sovetskoi armii (Twenty Years of the Soviet Army)* recalled that “we were happy if Aleksandr liked our work... It was a great reward for us. We still have a lot to learn from Rodchenko today.”<sup>64</sup> Viktor Shklovskii noted that though Rodchenko’s work was well respected around the world, “we have little written and published about him,” and proposed publishing a compilation of Rodchenko’s work.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the focus was on Rodchenko himself, and not his work. Yet, there is no mention of Rodchenko’s stylistic influence, which was enormously influential in the 1920s and 1930s and defined Soviet photography itself by the 1950s and 1960s.

The Union of Journalists held a personal exhibition of Boris Ignatovich’s work in 1969. The same photographer who in 1935 refused to participate in the *Exhibition of the Masters of Soviet Photography* and expelled Aleksandr Rodchenko from *Oktiabr* in the late 1920s, was presented by *Sovetskoe foto* as a photographer who promoted artistic unity and discouraged factionalism.<sup>66</sup> This is surprising, as Boris Ignatovich had been one of the more contentious avant-garde photographers, promoting radically cropped and angular documentary photography. The exhibition, which featured his famous portraits of artists, politicians, and academics, was held in the Central House of Artists in Moscow. He was described by author Aleksandr Berezin, “as one of the pioneers of Soviet photojournalism” and “a man of great talent and inspiration.”<sup>67</sup> Though the article mentioned Ignatovich as having “passed through a long and difficult stage in life,” alluding to his role in the fractious fighting between avant-garde groups, all descriptions of personal exhibitions of former members of the avant-garde, including Alpert,

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<sup>64</sup> “Tvorchestvo Aleksandr Rodchenko,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1969): 24.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>67</sup> Aleksandr Berezin, “Publitsist i fotokhudozhnik: O tvorchestve Borisa Ignatovicha,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1969): 19.

Rodchenko, and Ignatovich, glossed over the tumult of the avant-garde community in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>68</sup> There was no mention of formalist “mistakes,” instead former members of the avant-garde were presented as part of a single movement. Furthermore, each of these exhibitions focused on portrait photography. More radical factographic and constructivist photography and montage were not shown, nor even mentioned, at the exhibition or in corresponding articles.

The trend of “rehabilitating” the avant-garde persisted in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Yet personal exhibitions glossed over the differences among the work of these photographers, presenting the avant-garde as a neat, precise group that historically shared the same aesthetic ideas and goals. Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, where *Sovetskoe foto* discussed formalism and the arguments between avant-garde artists, by the late 1960s avant-garde photographers were to be venerated, but only certain works and under a drastically rewritten script and historical narrative of their role in the early Soviet period.

The environment of 1962 represented the culmination of the give and take between amateur and professional photographers. By the mid to late 1960s, *Sovetskoe foto* continued to cater to amateur photographers, but the tone of its articles had changed substantially. Amateurs were encouraged to submit their work, yet critics judged their photographs not as creative pieces, but rather as visual documents that were subject to photographic aesthetics dictated by the journal and the photo section of the Union of Journalists. *Sovetskoe foto* continued to tout its devotion to amateurs as an educational tool: “We always want our magazine to be a real school for young photographers, so they work together with photography masters.”<sup>69</sup> In many ways, this was the case from 1957

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Anatolii Sofronov, “Iubileinaia Ogon’kovskaia,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1968), 11.

to 1962, and many amateur photographers requested technical and aesthetic help. By the late 1960s however, the environment was less about promoting professionals and amateurs as peers, but instead, that of the former lecturing to the latter. Some amateur photographers felt like photojournalists were dictating aesthetics, rather than encouraging a dialogue between creative amateurs and professionals.

A 1968 article by Lidia Dyko made this clear. In that year, the journal began publishing a section entitled “The School of Photographic Mastery” where amateurs would learn from “theoretical articles and practical advice to help them master the techniques of shooting and the ‘secrets’ of creating artistic images.”<sup>70</sup> Amateur photographers were given homework assignments which they could send to the journal. In following the instructions set by the author of that month’s article, amateurs would then send pictures that would then receive “comments and guidance from educators, theorists, photography and photographers.”<sup>71</sup> The result, if amateur photographers followed the aforementioned guidelines, would be photographs that were ready for exhibition.<sup>72</sup> In their first homework assignment, amateur photographers received the following instructions, which were designed to encourage future self-censorship. They should include “the three images of the same object to show the various ways of filling the frame of the photograph. On the back of photographs, specify a) which you think is the least successful, b) the most successful and c) the final, completed photograph.”<sup>73</sup> The emphasis of the author was thus about eliminating unworthy photographs though

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<sup>70</sup> L. Dyko, “Shkola fotograficheskogo masterstva; zapolnenie kartinnoi ploskosti,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1968), 30.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 31.



identifying their flaws, producing photographs that were exhibition worthy, and learning to make judgments about quality.

In keeping with the established photographic aesthetics, the following month's article for "The School of Photographic Mastery" addressed composition and lines in photographs. The author, V. Liagalov, explained the importance of various lines in photographs saying that they "can create a certain emotional mood. Straight lines are always reminiscent of symmetry and order. Curved or jagged lines, which, by the way, are common in nature can cause, depending on their combinations and the in which they are used, create different visual sensations."<sup>74</sup> But echoing earlier arguments about prioritizing form over content, Liagalov reminded amateurs "that the use of bold, 'vibrant' perspectives was only justified when they are true to the subject in real life. Angles for angle's sake can very easily turn into a formalistic exercise, a contradiction of artistic logic."<sup>75</sup> Manipulating a horizon of a given image was not necessarily an exercise in formalism. As long as the angle of the camera mirrored the dynamism of the shot, sharp angles were not only appropriate, but obligatory. Liagalov references L. Ustinov's photograph *Lyzhniki (Skiers)*. "Strong bold shapes cut across the picture, here the diagonal ski poles, and lower point of shooting increase the momentum of skiers" and the diagonal composition of the photograph is necessary to make the photograph successful.<sup>76</sup> The homework assignment for that month was to shoot three photographs, one which incorporates "a strong perspective that is justified by the nature of the subject and makes it more expressive, a picture with asymmetrical but balanced composition in

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<sup>74</sup> V. Liagalov, "Shkola fotograficheskogo masterstva; Osnovy kompozitsii snimka," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1968), 29.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

the shot, and a photograph in which diagonal construction facilitates the transfer of motion.”<sup>77</sup>

Lack of formal educational structures, such as university classes, proved frustrating for amateur photographers and photography clubs as is evident in the letters they sent to *Sovetskoe foto* in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>78</sup> Other than the articles and lectures offered by *Sovetskoe foto* and the photo section of Union of Journalists, photography clubs took on the task of educating amateurs. There was one exception to this rule, though it only became available in 1970. Earlier in the year, *Ogonek* began offering twice monthly Friday lectures at the Moscow House of Journalists. Dmitri Baltermants wrote that the courses were a further attempt to rectify “the question of a special photographic education which is so often on our agendas.”<sup>79</sup> Because “there is no institution in our country, which educates and prepares photojournalists, editors and lab technicians,” TASS, APN, *Planeta* publishers, newspapers and journals now offered lectures to prepare a new generation of photographers for beginning careers in photojournalism.<sup>80</sup> There were, of course, problems with this solution. Amateurs who attended the course needed to be in Moscow for the meetings. As a result, the program further prioritized amateurs who already had access to the most advanced education opportunities (lectures by the Union of Journalists and prominent photojournalists). It also contributed to growing elitism between and within amateur photography clubs.

In an attempt to rectify the lack of official organizational hierarchies, by the mid-1960s some clubs had created their own. *Novator* created different sections for its various

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>78</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>79</sup> Dmitri Baltermants, “Schastlivogo puti v fotozhurnalistiku! Sed’moi vypusk lektoriia TsDZh,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1970): 2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 2.

members, each section named after the prominent photographers who led them: The Boris Ignatovitch section contained members interested in photojournalism, while the Ivanov-Alliluev section contained landscape photographers.<sup>81</sup> In addition to articles in *Sovetskoe foto* about the technical aspects of photography, clubs began their own education programs. The chairman of *Novator*, Aleksandr Khlebnikov, offered lectures about applied photography. Lectures about photographic aesthetics were presented by professor and photography critic A. Zis, while Professor of Art History Evsei Iofis regularly lectured on photographic techniques. By 1962, *Novator* had become “a kind of photographic University” in Moscow, conducting upwards of two dozen photography events per month.<sup>82</sup>

Amateur photography clubs, with the help of *Sovetskoe foto*, had become an integral part of cultural life in Moscow and Leningrad in the early 1960s. In 1964, 40,000 spectators visited *Novator*'s annual exhibition, on display in Gorky Park.<sup>83</sup> *Sovetskoe foto* acted as the means of announcing club activities. The back pages of the journal were peppered with advertisements for amateur photography clubs and competitions, announcing calls for membership and competition submissions. In 1962, the VDK photography club announced the first All-Union photography club competition *Nasha sovremennost'* (*Our Present*), in *Sovetskoe foto*. It was the first all-amateur organized competition to appear in over 60 years. Awards were presented to the best pictures, which

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<sup>81</sup> Ignatovich was the former head of the infamous Ignatovich Brigade of the 1920s and 1930s. Though discredited in the 1930s, Ignatovich joined *Novator* and began teaching courses for amateur photographers in the 1960s. V. Stigneev, *Fototvorchestvo Rossii: Istoriia, razviti i sovremennoe sostoianie fotoliubitel'stva*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

were put on display in the Vyborg Palace of Culture before touring amateur clubs across the Soviet Union.

In January 1957, the first issue of the reestablished *Sovetskoe foto* featured the VDK in its section on amateur photography. By far the largest photography club at the time, the VDK already maintained semi-regular contact with photography clubs in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Canada.<sup>84</sup> The article, entitled “Leningrad’s Amateur Club” (“*Klub Leningradskikh fotoliubitelei*”), essentially advertised the VDK’s organization and club activities for *Sovetskoe foto* readers who may be considering founding clubs of their own. At the time, the club’s focus was on promoting amateur participation in the press. Founded in 1952, the initial four members of the VDK organized periodic meetings where photographers could discuss their work. By 1957, the club had grown substantially, to 300 members. Amateurs who wished to join the club needed to attend “novice” lectures given by their more experienced colleagues.<sup>85</sup> To become a candidate member, a photographer needed to provide a five photograph portfolio of their work, which would be reviewed by their peers. In order to advance to full membership, the photographer needed to submit their work to a committee of candidate members. If their application was successful, they would create a small personal exhibition, which would be shown at the Vyborg Palace of Culture.<sup>86</sup> The point of this selective membership, as explained in the article, was to help amateurs produce photographs that were publishable, and this education process allowed VDK amateurs to interact with photographers who “seriously contribute to TASS publications, the

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<sup>84</sup> Fedor Konichev, “Klub Leningradskikh fotoliubitelei,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no.1 (1957): 21.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

magazines *Sovetskii soiuz* and *Ogonek*.<sup>87</sup> Despite its own exclusive membership policies, the VDK readily recognized that the distinction between amateurs and professionals was vague at best. “The boundary which separates club amateurs from skilled photographers is not impregnable,” noted Fedor Konichev. The VDK had an impressive record of amateurs published in Soviet journals and newspapers: Club members were published in *Leningradskaiia pravda*, *Smena*, *Vechernii Leningrad*, and *Neva*.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, the VDK prided itself on being a group open to all levels of amateur expertise. But the club also recognized the deficiencies of Soviet cultural institutions and their relationship to photography. “Isn’t it time” Fedor Konichev wrote, “that the Department of Culture of the Leningrad Executive Committee consider the Leningrad Club Amateurs an independent organization?”<sup>89</sup> But Konichev also noted that there was no current precedent for photography organizations in the Soviet Union. This demonstrates that even in the early 1950s, photography organizations desired structure, organization, and (some form of) censorship, all of which the Soviet government refused to provide outside of established unions. In the absence of outside institutional structures, clubs created their own guidelines. Of course, the VDK was an exception, but indicative of the general trend in club photography, especially by the mid to late 1960s.

Amateur clubs in other regions followed the example set by the VDK, which held its own exhibitions from 1953. In 1965 the Astrakhan Photography Club hosted their first annual amateur photography exhibition, followed by Kaliningrad in the same year. In 1967, photography clubs along the Volga consolidated their individual competitions,

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 23.

creating the *Volga* exhibition. *Volga – 67* was held in Kazan’, and nicknamed the first “Photography Festival” of the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup> Smaller club exhibitions tended to focus on particular themes, landscapes, portraits, etc. In keeping with the general trend towards organization, large club exhibitions as well as All-Union competitions began organizing their submissions by theme but also by club. As a result, “the amateur movement began to recognize consistently ‘strong’ amateur photographers and photography clubs, whose images acquired permanent ‘residence’ at the shows.”<sup>91</sup> In the 1970s, the main amateur photography event was the *All-Union Festival of Amateur Creativity*, an annual exhibition that took place between 1975 and 1977. The festival strengthened the position of the leading photography clubs and the jury awarded the title of “People’s Photography Studios” to the clubs whose work was best received by the panel jury. This entitled them to hire two full-time employees to manage club activities and obtain access to the latest photographic equipment.<sup>92</sup>

These emerging hierarchies supported an urban, Russo-centric, composition of exhibition photography. Similarly, large clubs like *Novator* and the VDK dominated discussions about club photography. Located in the central cities, they had greater access to professional photojournalists for lectures and workshops, cameras, film and development materials, and their members’ images were exhibited and published in *Sovetskoe foto* and other journals more often. Furthermore, while clubs offered lectures and discussions about creativity and photographic aesthetics, many of which were dominated by the opinions of the Union of Journalists and *Sovetskoe foto*, they also questioned what it meant to be an amateur photographer and what role the photography

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 41.

club should play. Increasingly towards the late-1960s, leading clubs pushed to define their purpose and the proper workings of club life. In a way, “the previous decade had developed a model of the contemporary club, which brought together trained people pushing for creativity.”<sup>93</sup>

In most clubs, a board elected by the members of the group adopted a charter that defined the shape of club life and outlined the “rights” of the participants (rules for club exhibitions, rules for future election of board members, etc.). Clubs held periodic meetings, usually once weekly or twice monthly, in which members discussed images and participated in practical exercises. These meetings culminated in an annual or bi-annual exhibitions. Many clubs defined their exhibitions as a sort of “propaganda photography,” which provided an “aesthetic education” for an uneducated audience.<sup>94</sup> This “education” was in many ways similar to what amateurs experienced from professional photojournalists, in which they acted as the middlemen between photography novices and professionals.

### ***Fotokruzhki* and Non-conformist Photography**

The standardization of club activities replicated the process professional photography underwent in the mid-1950s. This “trickle-down” effect was in some ways beneficial: it provided structure for club life and provided a makeshift education for amateur photographers who wished to improve their technical skills. In other ways, however, the modeling of club life on the reemergence of professional photojournalism under the direction of the Union of Journalists and larger clubs proved problematic. *Sovetskoe foto* and the Union of Journalists provided examples of successful photographs

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 40.

and helped advertise amateur competitions, but the contentious status of photography as an art form (or more specifically, an artistic genre that was unrecognized by the Soviet Artists' Unions), meant that the guidance provided was only helpful in recreating photographs that appeared in the press and at exhibitions. Amateur club members who initially turned to *Sovetskoe foto* for guidance were disappointed when photography critics derided their creative efforts.

As a result, the creative environment of the early 1960s gave way to a period of crisis in the latter half of the 1960s and the early 1970s. In some ways, this is hardly surprising. Both professional and amateurs were confronted with a generational rift. The new generation of photographers had not come of age during the Stalinist period, and their early creative endeavors were inspired by the enthusiasm of the cultural Thaw. While the older generation of photographers viewed the Thaw as a period of limited freedom, a new generation of photographers garnered that enthusiasm without trepidation about the incipient threat of policy reversal that the older generation experienced. But they had other concerns. In the early 1970s, vocal amateurs spoke of the “‘diseases’ of the club, in particular, the closed nature of some groups.”<sup>95</sup> How could amateurs perform creative tasks when they were constantly confronted by a row of restrictions regarding what they could and should photograph, as opposed to what they could not? As Stigneev points out, this created anxiety about the role of the amateur club.<sup>96</sup> Some saw the photography club purely as local creative community, while others, like the VDK, sought to draw in more organized and official support. Many club members, however, felt that

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 41.



the overall focus of groups had shifted from artistic issues onto the performativity of following the directives of the photo section of the Union of Journalists.

This contributed to the further bifurcation of photography clubs. If the general focus of club activities in the 1950s and early 1960s was characterized by aesthetic education and the formation of artistic talent, in the 1970s clubs became increasingly exclusive and devoted to assessing photographers' adherence to aesthetic principles. The board of Gorky's *Volga* amateur club, for instance, began screening amateurs much like the VDK. To become a full member, applicants needed to pass a general exam and create a portfolio, which they replenished regularly.

A potential member needs to present several works to the board, five of which needed to receive positive feedback. An interview entailed an assessment of the individual photographer and the 'freshness' of their vision. The second criteria was consistent technical mastery. We consider it a matter of testing the applicant. If the photographer offered only five images in their initial application, they could become a trial candidate and therefore must submit three new works of exhibition quality after a few months. Then their work would be reassessed by the board. And only then can they become full member if their photographs were considered satisfactory. Furthermore each member is required to report a sample of their annual work, otherwise their membership can be transferred to other candidates. For amateurs, the annual reports are taken as seriously as personal exhibitions.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Shahin Yu, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1979), 25.

Of course, these requirements encouraged club members to be much more actively involved. For some clubs and amateurs, this proved beneficial. Smaller, more exclusive photography clubs could focus on exhibition-worthy photographs. For example, amateur photographers of the otherwise minor club *Nord*, based in Murmansk, participated in over 200 exhibitions in 35 countries between 1974 and 1979.<sup>98</sup> The majority of amateurs, however, found that the focus on output, exclusive membership, and technical skill detracted from artistic creativity.

If the focus of the amateur photographer in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the Soviet person, replicating the dominant thematic tone set by photojournalism, by the late 1960s and early 1970s some amateur photographers began documenting the downside of Soviet industrial modernity. Instead of glorifying billowing smoke stacks, some amateurs oriented their work towards showing the destruction of the natural landscape. Photographs showed “cracked ground, black factory smoke or oil slicks on the water, and called out for the protection of the environment.”<sup>99</sup> Photographs featured “dead fish on the beach, bare stumps and concrete slabs, and told a story not of beauty, but instead...the landscape in this case became the mouthpiece of journalistic ideas,” a sort of partisan green movement.<sup>100</sup> In this way, some amateurs contributed to a growing number of disillusioned Soviet citizens, whose dissident activist goals ranged from environmental protection, to human rights preservation and political dissent.

Nevertheless, the topics that dominated amateur activities in the 1960s remained much the same as in previous years. Festivals, exhibitions and sports photography were popular amongst amateurs. The dynamism of organized events, such as football and

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<sup>98</sup> V. Stigineev, *Fototvorchestvo Rossii: Istoriia, razviti i sovremennoe sostoianie fotoliubitel'stva*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 67

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 67

hockey matches, provided exciting opportunities to play with lines and angles, though it required some skill as the subjects were mobile. Other amateurs turned towards pastoral themes. They focused on “the ‘quiet life’ of things, combined with the spatial fragments and components of urban environments.”<sup>101</sup> Home and interior themes became more prevalent. Amateurs turned the camera on themselves, photographing domestic life. This was less about defining personhood, as it had been in the 1950s and early 1960s, and more introspective and personal. As amateurs found themselves unable or unwilling to participate in photography club activities due to increased requirements on their part, their work came to focus on the domestic, private spaces of their lives. Other amateurs turned to photomontage and hand coloring. These images were certainly inappropriate to show at club exhibitions and larger photography clubs tried to combat this trend.

As early as 1966, photography clubs and *Sovetskoe foto* began writing about the dangers of unofficial photography. “Amateur photography by nature, is public, and is essentially collective,” wrote *Novator* club member M. Gromov.<sup>102</sup> “You cannot withdraw and photograph only ‘for yourself’ without showing your works, without discussing or arguing.”<sup>103</sup> Gromov referenced the growing number of photography clubs in provincial cities, and the growing number of “All-Union and Republican competitions, exhibition exchanges, advice and assistance on the ground — all of this has led to notable successes” in interaction between amateurs.<sup>104</sup> He also pointed out that a number of amateurs had won awards at All-Union and international exhibitions. But awards are not everything to Gromov. “The reward is not the purpose of our work,” he wrote.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>102</sup> M. Gromov, “Fotokluby segodnia i zavtra,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1966): 12.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 12.

“Evaluation of a work, of its results,” should be the purpose of amateur photography.<sup>105</sup> The focus on the collective process of evaluation and judgment, based on aesthetic principles dictated by the photo section of the Union of Journalists and large photography clubs, was part of what some amateur photographers found increasingly alienating. But Gromov attributes this to pride.

It comes down to vanity. Amateurs, who are not prepared for the demanding and challenging role of the photojournalist, are drawn to the “quick fix” of becoming reporter-artisans. Their work, of course, has nothing to do with true photography, which does not come without great talent, and without hard work and skill.<sup>106</sup>

Even by the mid-1960s, photography clubs were turning towards rules and regulations, as opposed to fostering creativity. A layman with a camera had no place in photography clubs. A true photography enthusiast would attend all club meetings, follow club rules, follow the examples in *Sovetskoe foto*, become a student of the club, and participate in the sort of self-censorship the club atmosphere promoted.

*Sovetskoe foto* also attempted to combat certain “dangerous” trends in photography. The journal particularly targeted amateurs who were not associated with clubs. Because of its position as an official journal, the editorial staff was loath to mention unofficial photography as a movement, a term which never appears in *Sovetskoe foto*. Instead, the journal attempted to draw what they called “unaffiliated” photographers back into the fold of amateur clubs. Of course, for amateurs like Aleksandr Shchemliaev who actively rejected the journal, this was hardly effective. More importantly, however,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 13.

the journal was attempting to warn amateurs away from entering the ranks of unofficial art, as opposed to trying to “save” those who had already become unofficial artists.

Instead of drawing attention to the issue of “unaffiliated” amateurs, *Sovetskoe foto* preferred to take a theoretical stance against their work (again, without specifying this was an attack on unofficial or non-conformist artists). In “the fight for the right to identify art photography,” critic Anatolii Vartanov wrote that, to the detriment of the genre, some “unaffiliated” photographers “had developed a style that combats the natural role of photography.”<sup>107</sup> Some photographers were trying to “prove that photography is not a copy of reality.”<sup>108</sup>

From this root has grown two phenomena: photographic aestheticism and staged photography. The first ranges from deliberately blurry shots, to abstract compositions. They have sought to overcome photography’s true nature. The second, on the other hand, is widely used and proceeds from the premise that people know better than what is inherent in nature. Both, after all, are a distortion of nature, a retreat from it. This is done under the noble banner of greater expressiveness, because the photograph something that was originally considered passive. The first example seeks to strengthen formal expressiveness of the snapshot, the second is about content.<sup>109</sup>

Vartanov found that these “extremes persist in our photography and everywhere in the media, at exhibitions, and in the works of amateurs at every turn.”<sup>110</sup> This was extremely

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<sup>107</sup> Anatolii Vartanov, “Teoriia fotoiskusstva: Iazykom zhizni,” *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1970): 28.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

problematic for photography critics at *Sovetseko foto*. While Bugayeva and other theorists encouraged modernism in photography, extreme abstraction and overtly staged photographs were techniques employed by unofficial artists, not club amateurs. The move away from the aesthetics established in the early 1960s was symptomatic of official lack of control, especially dangerous because of the availability of cameras and photography equipment.

Amateurs who wished to move away from the dominant genre aesthetics and continued to attend club meetings were either ostracized or undermined. Experimental club members' photographs were still compared to the work of professional photojournalists, even though they attempted to break away from precisely these types of photographs. Amateur photographer Vasiliev wrote to *Sovetskoe foto* about his concerns regarding club activities, which he felt devoted too much attention to new camera technology to the detriment of creative and artistic processes.

The concepts of “modern photography” and “modern vision,” in my opinion, can only have one meaning, to show the originality of the photographer's approach to a photographic subject... This has nothing to do with modern equipment, which is just a tool of the master. Can it not be considered a sign of modernity and passion for some photographers to “fashion” different forms? In my opinion, a truly modern print can be created with a fresh look at the world, owing to our past arsenal of creative work.<sup>111</sup>

As club operations were formalized and modeled on the Union of Journalists, amateur photographers found that their opportunity for creative ingenuity was disappearing. What

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<sup>111</sup> Vasiliev, *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1976), 35.

began as a dialogue between professional and amateurs was increasingly becoming a relationship in which the top (the Union of Journalists, *Sovetskoe foto*, and established photography clubs) dictated aesthetics, and amateurs were tasked with following these strictures. Deviation from the examples provided led to isolation: unable to share their work with other club members, a small number of amateur photographers turned towards unofficial art.

### **Unofficial Photographers in the Late Soviet Period**

Unofficial or nonconformist art as defined in terms of the late Soviet period was a fractious and stylistically diverse movement. As art critic and museum curator Joseph Bakshtein describes it, unofficial and nonconformist art movements stemmed from disillusionment about Soviet society.

The duality of life in which the official perception of everyday reality is independent of the reality of the imagination leads to a situation where art plays a special role in society. In any culture, art is a special reality, but in the Soviet Union, art was doubly real precisely because it had no relation to reality. It was a higher reality.... The goal of nonconformism in art was to challenge the status of official artistic reality, to question it, to treat it with irony. Yet that was the one unacceptable thing. All of Soviet society rested on orthodoxy, and nonconformism was its enemy.<sup>112</sup>

In photography, disillusionment produced a variety of individual solutions. If “orthodoxy” in the late 1960s and 1970s represented a style reminiscent of the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s, nonconformist photographers sought to divorce

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<sup>112</sup> Joseph Bakshtein, “A View from Moscow,” *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience 1956-1986*, eds. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 332.

themselves from that style and approved themes. While some photographers like Boris Mikhailov began manipulating photographic prints, other nonconformist artists, like the Collective Actions group, experimented with photography's perceived reality and truth by documenting bizarre actions in the forests outside of Moscow.<sup>113</sup> Unofficial photography, unlike the various avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s, was thus about working individually or in small groups for photographer's own edification.

Unofficial photography violated the technological and objective ideas about photography made by *Sovetskoe foto* and photography clubs. Unofficial photographers removed themselves from arguments made by professional and amateur Soviet photographers about the nature of photographic realism and its creative or documentary features. Their work challenged the Soviet view of realism, not through framing or geometric abstractionism, but by manipulating realism in photographs.

In the 1970s, unofficial photographers began experimenting with toning and hand-coloring their photographs. This was problematic for the professional community for two reasons. First, hand-colored and montage images allowed the form of photographs to overtake the content of the image, still a taboo for the photographic community. Second, hand-coloring and montage fell, as far as critics of the time were concerned, outside of the photographer's obligation to depict reality. Nevertheless, some photographers who wished to remain outside the official community found these artistic practices appealing and they rejected official discourses about photography of their own volition. Boris Mikhailov's 1978 series *Sots Art I*, contains a variety of images, originally photographed in black and white, and later hand-colored by the artist (Fig. 58). Mikhailov

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<sup>113</sup> The Collective Action group and their activities are outside of the scope of this dissertation, but to read more about the group and Moscow Conceptualism see Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).



was born in Kharkiv, Ukraine in 1938. He attended university to become an engineer, but supplemented his studies with amateur photography. He held his first solo exhibition in the late 1960s.<sup>114</sup> After the KGB discovered nude pictures Mikhailov took of his wife, he was fired from his engineering work, and pursued photography full-time, though not for official publications.<sup>115</sup> It was after his dismissal from his engineering position that Mikhailov produced his most famous work, the *Red Series* and *Lyrics*. Mikhailov employed hand-coloring of official photograph to expose the bombast, ridiculousness and preoccupation with power surrounding Party culture in the 1970s (Fig. 59).

The majority of Mikhailov's images could have appeared in a variety of Soviet newspapers or journals before being manipulated by the artist.<sup>116</sup> The intentionality of this manipulation is summarized in Ekaterina Degot's interview with Mikhailov.

Without the market, as in the USSR, the unique work of art had no flair of "high art." It was often perceived (even by its creator!) as a lamentable, marginal object unworthy of being reproduced. Unofficial artists resolved this problem by transparently feigning mass distribution, but even in their works the unique and handmade is surrounded by irony rather than pride.<sup>117</sup>

The parody of official Soviet art, creating a unique item out of one that could be reproduced for mass distribution and consumption, characterizes late Soviet era unofficial photography. Mikhailov said of his own work that he "created irony within the limits of the officially sanctioned...the hand-coloring represented the backwardness of Soviet

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>116</sup> Ekaterina Degot, "The Copy is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography," *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 104.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 115.

technology.”<sup>118</sup> He also stated that his style was indebted to the cultural atmosphere that developed in the 1960s:



Fig. 58. Boris Mikhailov, *Untitled from Sots Art I*, 1975-1990, gelatin silver print, hand-toned

I think my artistic self was formed in the 1960s. Two things mattered then: first thinking outside of oneself, having a greater worldview. Second, thinking critically. Perhaps in the West, this culture was properly developed within journalism. I channeled it into art.<sup>119</sup>

Mikhailov’s statement sums up neatly the desires of journalists and photojournalists of the 1960s. They spent nearly a decade trying to create critical readers and viewers. Ultimately, however, the Communist Party of the 1970s was interested in stability. A dynamic population of critical readers and viewers was no longer desirable as they had the potential to disrupt the status quo. Intellectuals and artists such as Mikhailov, were

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 278.

thus forced to pursue their aesthetic aspirations outside of official culture, for institutional, political and aesthetic reasons.



Fig. 59. Boris Mikhailov, Untitled from *Lyriki*, 1970-1980, black-and-white photograph, hand-toned

A second example is the work of Aleksandr Sliussarev, whose abstracted experiments with shadow and light express an intense sense of “aleness” (Fig. 60). Sliussarev was born in 1944 in Moscow.<sup>120</sup> He took up photography in 1958 and participated in the 1962 exhibition *Our Youth* in Gorky Park. He graduated from the Maurice Thorez Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages, where he

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<sup>120</sup> Yurii Zelentsov, interview with Aleksandr Sliussarev, *Veseda s Aleksandrom Sliussarevym*. Photo.Picart. Moscow, 2007, Web, 6 September 2007.

studied Italian. Professionally, Sliussarev worked as an Italian translator.<sup>121</sup> His first solo exhibition was in 1979, as part of the *Baltic Photo Festival* in Ogre, Latvia.<sup>122</sup>



Fig. 60. Aleksandr Sliussarev, *Untitled*, c 1960s. gelatin silver print,

<http://www.anahitaphotoarchive.com/Home/Photographs/alexander-slyusarev>

As a teenager Sliussarev went to the offices of *Sovetskoe foto* to share his work and get feedback from professional photographers. His first photograph was published by the journal in 1962. Despite the success of his early work, Sliussarev found himself unwilling to satisfy his aesthetic vision working for a journal.

The problem of Moscow photography always consisted of the fact that all of those who began to work here in photography would sooner or later – mostly sooner- find themselves in newspapers, magazines, and elsewhere, where they were obliged to work for “uncle” [the authorities] and not do

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, interview with Aleksandr Sliussarev.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, interview with Aleksandr Sliussarev.

what they wanted to do but what they had to do. You had to change the way you were doing things according to what the editors wanted. You can create a shot but it's no longer your shot, strictly speaking, because it's already not what you like but what has to be. You as yourself exist on a purely formal basis.<sup>123</sup>

Sliussarev and many artists in the late Soviet period, made the conscious choice not to participate in official Soviet culture because they felt as though they could not satisfy their creativity in such an environment. *Sovetskoe foto* had published Sliussarev's work in the past, and he presumably knew that, overall, his photographs were not the type of material that the journal would publish often (Fig. 61). Sliussarev's familiarity with the workings of the Soviet press made his transition to unofficial photographer necessary in order to create the types of photographs he envisaged as art.

Nonconformist art of this period was generally marked by the incorporation of photography into other genres or media art.<sup>124</sup> This amounted to unofficial photomontage, painting photographs, or the combination of image and text, characteristic of Soviet, particularly Moscow Conceptualism. Ilya Kabakov often used photography in his albums and installations, first utilizing official photography for his works in the 1980s, and later in the 1990s, his own photographs.<sup>125</sup> Kabakov was trained as an artist, graphic design, and book illustration in the 1940s and 1950s, becoming a full member of the Artist's Union in 1965. But the end of Khrushchev's cultural Thaw pushed Kabakov to create

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<sup>123</sup> Mikhailov, Boris and Alla Efimova. "Feeling Around." *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 302.

<sup>124</sup> Ekaterina Degot, "The Copy is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography," *Beyond Memory: Soviet Non-conformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, 120.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 122-3

“private” artwork, working with Collective Actions group members and other unofficial artists.



Fig. 61. Aleksandr Sliussarev, Untitled, 1976, gelatin silver print, <http://sliussarev.com/#>

Nonconformist artists such as Kabakov were indebted to official Soviet photography, as they chose to ironically or parodically reproduce the visual forms of mass produced images to deconstruct socialist realism and subvert clichéd official idioms and narratives. Ultimately, either intentionally like Shchemliaev, or less intentionally in the case of Mikhailov, Soviet photojournalism of the 1950s and 1960s influenced unofficial photographers of the late Soviet period in that their work remained in dialogue with official Soviet culture. Artists like Kabakov and photographers like Sliussarev began their official careers in the climate of enthusiasm fostered by the cultural Thaw.

Ultimately, however, the political program of the late Soviet period alienated these artists. But without the antithesis of official culture, unofficial and nonconformist photography lost its meaning. Even in attempting to escape the hackneyed aesthetics of official photography, unofficial artists' rejection of official culture tied them to the dominant cultural narratives promoted by the Soviet government and Communist Party.

## Conclusions

In many ways, the history of Soviet photography of the cultural Thaw is connected to the professionalization of Soviet photojournalism and amateur photography. The binaries associated with ideas about photography as an aesthetic instrument or documentary tool punctuated the 1920s and 1930s, and resurfaced in the Thaw era. This began with Mikhail Koltsov's establishment of the illustrated journals *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*, which brought avant-garde photography into mass press circulation. At that time, many photographers, especially *Oktiabr* photographers Aleksandr Rodchenko, Elizar Langman, and Boris Ignatovich, believed that photographic art should serve a social purpose and agitate the masses to action. And from the other perspective ROPF critics like Leonid Mezhericher and photographer Semyon Friedland, who believed first and foremost in the documentary properties of photography, conceded that photography necessitated aesthetic principles. All agreed that art was not for museums, instead it should be brought to the people in newspapers, journals, and posters, and propagate the ideas and goals of the new regime. Debates about the role of the camera as a documentary tool or an aesthetic instrument expressed avant-garde photographer's differing ideas about how to convey Soviet identity in the press.

These discussions ceased in the late 1930s. As the Stalinist regime consolidated power and increased its hold on the creative arts, dissent amongst avant-garde groups was silenced and, in the process, discussions about aesthetics were no longer acceptable as they questioned the fabricated monolithic, united front that the government wished to promote within the art world. Photography departments, such as *Soiuzfoto*, were liquidated. Eventually, the government and Party ceased to regard photography as anything other than a (potentially damaging) documentary instrument. This culminated in



the closing of photography journals like *Sovetskoe foto* and *SSSR na stroike*. Though photography was privileged during World War II because of its documentary features, the government silenced arguments about the aesthetic properties of photographs even as the prioritization of photography offered photojournalists a chance to wrest back limited aesthetic agency. Initially, the project of avant-garde photographers correlated with the government and Party projects of deconstructing old elitist hierarchies and leveling the distinction between high and low art. As the aims of photographers “broke rank” with changing government ideas about the role of art in society, they were left by the wayside, relegated to journalism and publishing houses. But the muted arguments about the photograph as document or a work of art shaped the way photographers in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to revitalize the medium and professionalize photojournalism.

Khrushchev’s cultural Thaw offered photographers a means of reopening these discussions. The Khrushchev era promoted dynamism in the press, and photojournalists were eager to actively participate in the reorientation of Soviet life. In this “climate of enthusiasm,” photographers saw opportunity. Rather than passively accepting the changes ushered in by the cultural Thaw, photographers went on the offensive, vocally promoting photography as not only a documentary tool but reinvestigating its aesthetic possibilities. They found the reestablishment of their primary journal, *Sovetskoe foto*, as a promising sign and a step in the right direction. They returned to the silenced debates about the relationship between photography’s documentary and aesthetic properties, asking for courses on photography to be reinstated in higher education, and finally, for the state to provide some sort of comprehensive unionized structure for photographers (be it their own or inclusion in the Soviet Artists’ Union). Hopes were high and *Sovetskoe foto* spearheaded discussions about education, aesthetics and unionization. Between 1957

and 1962, professional photographers reached a consensus about the role of photography in Soviet society and about its aesthetic properties. Yes, photography was indeed a socialist realist art, and furthermore, aesthetically acceptable images should incorporate aspects of the avant-garde, whether they were press photographs or otherwise. Though the form (heavy cropping, angular shots, and abstract use of light) should not overshadow the content of the photograph, this consensus contributed to a normalization of avant-garde aesthetics. This was reinforced by Marina Bugayeva, editor of *Sovetskoe foto* and head of the photo section of the Union of Journalists, as well as the still living members of the avant-garde movement, including Maks Alpert, Mark Redkin, and Semyon Friedland, as well as a younger generation of photojournalists such as Dmitri Baltermants.

Khrushchev's focus on reorienting Soviet life corresponded with photographers' desires to reinvestigate the aesthetic properties of photography. Photographers began to focus less on massive industrial projects and more on the private lives of Soviet citizens. This can be seen in illustrated journals such as *Ogonek*, which devoted itself to special interest stories about individuals and their everyday lives. The magazine coupled pictures of intimate lives of average citizens with illustrated stories about exotic foreign locales, bringing Soviet people closer to an outside world that they otherwise would have very little contact with. *Ogonek* photo essays focused on local customs and cultural heritage, not necessarily urban industrial environments. Cultural exchange programs between Western Europe and the Americas furthered this process. But the images in *Ogonek* also bore the mark of recent discussions about photography and aesthetics, likewise incorporating elements of the avant-garde. Increasing contact between Soviet and foreign photographers was facilitated by the SSOD and various other photography sections, like

the Sovinformburo. Put together, these developments in photography meant that photojournalists were exposed to the work of photographers outside the Soviet Union, and participated in numerous domestic and international exhibitions. For the first time in decades, photojournalists were not only explaining what it meant to be a Soviet person, but how that personhood was constructed and influenced by contact with the outside world. *Ogonek* editor Anatolii Sofronov and head of the photo section of the SSOD Vladimir Shakhovskoi encouraged these developments. As a result, photographers began experimenting with a range of styles that were not necessarily at odds with socialist realism, but were certainly not a part of its original conception. This, however, was short lived. By the mid-1960s and certainly by the end of the decade, photography editors tended to favor journalists who could snap their own photographs, rather than employing full time photojournalists. This corresponded with the death or retirement of photographers who were originally a part of the avant-garde photography movement.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, photography became re-popularized as an amateur hobby, which had been unavailable to Soviet citizens since the early 1920s and the liquidation of original amateur societies. Khrushchev's attention to consumer goods meant that cameras and equipment were affordable for the first time in decades. In lieu of formal educational structures for both professional photojournalists and amateur photographers, *Sovetskoe foto* and the photo section of the Union of Journalists took action. Almost every issue of *Sovetskoe foto* contained approximately twenty to twenty five pages devoted to amateur photography. Articles addressed the technical skills required for amateur photography, and offered lessons in photographic aesthetics, written by the most prominent photojournalists, photography critics and theorists in the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Leningrad, and many other cities, amateurs founded photography

clubs, which offered lectures and workshops for amateur photographers. These clubs hosted their own exhibitions, and participated in national and international exhibitions both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Amateurs also submitted their work to *Sovetskoe foto*, where photography masters like Semyon Friedland critiqued them. After the mid-1960s, however, some amateurs began to develop their own ideas about photographic aesthetics. They experimented with obvious staging (an unacknowledged taboo that was practiced all the time within the established photography community), as well as nude snapshots and manipulating negatives. Though these images could not be exhibited, amateurs were moving beyond the bounds of established photographic practices and aesthetics. Their creativity, ingenuity and experimentation pushed them beyond socialist realism and towards unofficial art.

After the initial enthusiasm in the photographic community between 1957 and 1962, photographers became frustrated with the lack of progress in their push for higher education and established aesthetics. Though professional photojournalists, *Sovetskoe foto*, and the photo section of the Union of Journalists set a particular set of standards, lack of support from cultural authorities led to disillusionment. Bugayeva continued to describe photography as “artistic,” but her theoretical essays began describing the medium as something between art and document, regressing from her stance in the 1950s and early 1960s. Professional photographers expressed disappointment at the fact that they had not yet unionized, and continued to occupy a marginal role within the Union of Journalists. The establishment of *Planeta* publishing in 1969 appeared to be a step in the right direction, promising to publish a number of photography manuscripts within its first year, and photographers hoped it would lead to the establishment of a second photography journal. Yet, despite these plans, *Planeta* became yet another

disappointment. Amateur photographers were likewise becoming disillusioned by the contemporary state of photography. The “rehabilitation” of avant-garde aesthetics continued into the late 1960s and early 1970s, but clubs were becoming increasingly elitist. Though amateurs still participated in exhibitions, and clubs still provided technical assistance, membership requirements became stricter. Some amateurs found the glorification of avant-garde-esque aesthetics creatively stifling and isolating, pushing them towards unofficial art.

In the years between 1957 and 1962, photographers were able to reevaluate previous debates about avant-garde photography. While this resulted in establishing a distinct style based on the previous artistic epoch, Soviet photographers were unable to convince cultural authorities that photography was artistic. But the cultural Thaw did produce some results. *Sovetskoe foto* helped establish the colloquialization of avant-garde photography. The journal sought to educate amateurs (in lieu of formal educational structures), involve them in discussions about aesthetics and photography, and the popularity of photography clubs provided a venue for amateurs to exhibit their work. Press photography proved to be an invaluable resource for Soviet citizens who desired to learn more about the world outside of the Soviet Union. *Sovetskoe foto* never abandoned discussions about photography and aesthetics, normalizing the avant-garde. Ultimately, while some photographers did turn to unofficial and non-conformist photography to satisfy their creative needs, the cultural Thaw helped connect professional and amateur photographers with international art photography movements, and created a distinct, post-Stalinist photographic style.

## Appendix A

Calculated royalties of the photography department of the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo) from 1955 to 1960, and projected earnings for 1965.<sup>1</sup>

	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1965
Amount in Rubles	561,000	684,000	808,000	900,000	945,000	900,000	1,080,000
Number of Photographic Negatives	11,670	15,749	18,492	20,000	21,000	22,500	24,000
Average Cost per Negative	.48	.44	.44	.45	.45	.45	.45
Royalties for the Text of Photographs, Diagrams, and Drawings	18,000	35,000	59,000	70,000	70,000	80,000	85,000
Technical and Artistic Retouching	57,000	67,000	81,000	80,000	80,000	90,000	100,000

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<sup>1</sup> "Raschet avtorskogo gonorara po sovetскому informbiuro," January 1961 (GARF f. 9518r, op. 3, d. 39, ll. 152-3).

of Photographic Prints and Negatives							
Cost of Printing Color Photographs	25,000	28,000	36,000	36,000	40,000	50,000	60,000

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## **Vita**

Jessica Marie Werneke received her Bachelor of Arts from University of Iowa before entering University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation is the result of three research trips to Moscow, Russian Federation in 2011, 2012, and 2013 with the aid of a Title VIII Grant from the U.S. State Department and Fellowships from the University of Texas at Austin History Department. Her current research interests include Soviet visual culture, nudity and eroticism in Soviet photography, and the history of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde.

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